



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations  
**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**  
Shepard Building  
255 Westminster Street  
Providence, Rhode Island 02903-3400

Deborah A. Gist  
Commissioner

Enclosure 7a  
February 2, 2012

**TO: Members of the Board of Regents**  
**FROM: Deborah A. Gist, Commissioner**  
**RE: Preliminary Approval of Achievement First Mayoral Academies**  
**DATE: February 2, 2012**

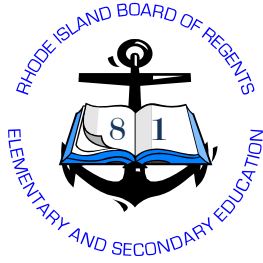
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I present for your consideration a recommendation to grant preliminary approval to the Achievement First Mayoral Academies (AFMA) project.

The initial AFMA proposed charter was submitted on October 17, 2011. RIDE staff reviewed the proposal for technical compliance in accordance with our charter application review process. The application was revised and a final submission was received from AFMA on October 31, 2011.

We have concluded that the AFMA proposal has sufficient merit for preliminary approval. This approval is an endorsement of the conceptual design of the school and does not imply a readiness to begin operation. The school must meet the requirements provided under C-1-4 of the Board of Regents Regulations Governing Rhode Island Public Charter Schools and the statutory provisions relating to Mayoral Academies pursuant to Chapter 16-77.4 in order to receive final approval by the Board of Regents to open in the 2013-14 school year.

**THEREFORE, I recommend that the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education grant preliminary approval for further planning and development to Achievement First Mayoral Academies toward a 2013-14 school year opening, contingent upon final approval to operate by the Board of Regents.**



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## **Achievement First Charter School Application Overview**

January 5, 2012

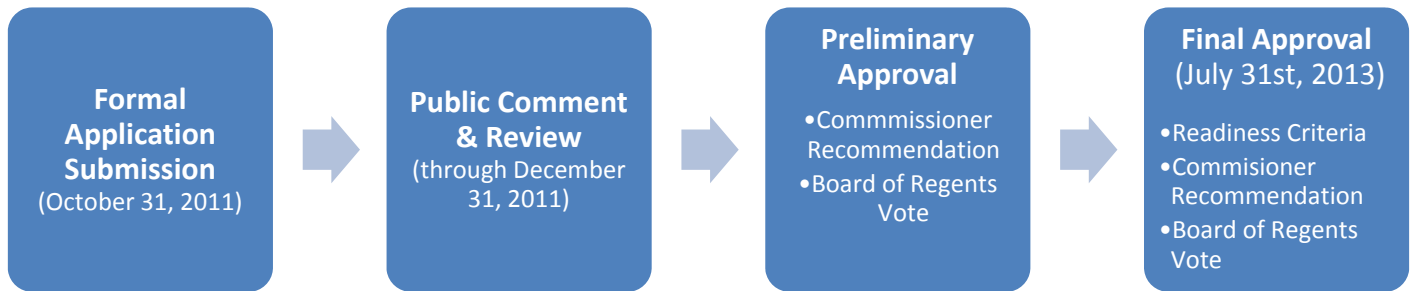
### **Mission Statement**

*There are two primary missions of Achievement First Mayoral Academies. The first is to ensure that our students gain the critical skills and knowledge to enter and excel in high school, college, and the competitive world beyond. The second is to foster positive character development. Success in both school and life will demand not just brainpower but also sophisticated social skills and a commitment to honorable valuables. Students at Achievement First Mayoral Academies will develop as both intellectuals and responsible citizens.*

### **Program Overview:**

- The network of schools will begin with a K-1 elementary school and grow to two K-5 elementary schools, enrolling 920 students. The first school will open in September 2013. Both schools will be located in Providence.
- The AFMA board, led by Mayor Taveras, will contract with Achievement First (AF), a management organization that manages charter schools in New York and Connecticut.
- The school's model is guided by 10 principles or "pillars" across AF's network: unwavering focus on student achievement; consistent, proven, standards-based curriculum; strategic use of performance data from a comprehensive assessment system; extended school day and school year; principal autonomy over all personnel decisions; frequent evaluation and coaching of instructional staff; aggressive talent recruitment and development; disciplined, achievement-oriented school culture; rigorous training for school leaders; and parent and community partnerships.
- Achievement First is currently operating five schools in New Haven. All of these schools serve 97% or more students of color. Between 67% and 77% of their students qualify for free and reduced price lunch. There are similar demographics in the districts to be served by AFMA.

### Approval Process & Timeline:



#### **Application Submission**

Applicants are required to submit applications by March 1, 2012 in preparation for a 2013-2014 school year opening.

→ Achievement First submitted their application on October 31, 2011.

#### **Completeness Review**

Upon receiving application, Office of Transformation staff review applications to ensure compliance with the application content requirements and, to the extent possible, applicable state and federal statutes and regulations. Applications that meet this bar are considered “satisfactory” and released for public comment.

→ Staff found that the AFMA proposal met this preliminary threshold.

#### **Public Comment & Review**

During the public comment period, at least two public hearings are held on the proposed charter in the catchment area where the school is to be located. A thorough, rubric-based paper screen and a capacity interview are also conducted by the Charter Application Review Committee, an ad-hoc, advisory committee.

→ The AFMA proposal was recommended for public comment on October 31, 2011 and will end on December 31, 2011. Two hearings were held for AFMA on December 7 and 8, 2011. A capacity interview took place on December 20, 2011.

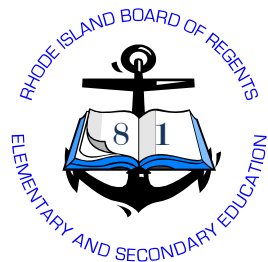
#### **Preliminary Approval**

Based on the evidence from Public Comment and feedback from the Charter Application Review Committee, the Commissioner offers a recommendation to the Board of Regents. By statute, this must occur no later than 90 days after the conclusion of the public comment period. If approved by the Regents, schools are granted a preliminary charter. This charter does not confer approval for the school to operate, but rather a preliminary endorsement from the Regents on the conceptual design of the proposal. In order to obtain final approval, schools must meet specific “readiness criteria.”

#### **Final Approval**

C-1-4 of the Board of Regent’s Charter Regulations outlines the nine readiness criteria that applicants must meet in order to obtain final approval to operate. These include major start-up milestones such as incorporation from the Secretary of State, establishing a full governing board, hiring a school leader, identifying a school facility, securing the commitment of at least 50% of its first year student body, and finalizing a services agreement with an educational management organization if applicable. Schools must also present credible financial and staffing plans that must be approved by the Office of Transformation and the Auditor General. Finally, with Office of Transformation guidance, schools must develop a final charter.

Upon meeting these criteria, the Board of Regents may approve the school’s final charter. According to the regulations, this would need to occur on or before July 31, 2013. An affirmative vote will confer upon in-district charters the legal authority to operate as a public school and to independent charters and mayoral academies the legal authority to operate as school districts (LEAs).



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**OFFICE OF TRANSFORMATION**

**Achievement First Mayoral Academies – Review Committee Summary**

A four-member review committee was assembled to conduct a thorough, paper-based screen of the application and complete an hour-long interview with AFMA’s founding group. Committee members represented range of expertise, including finance, charter school operations, special populations and teaching and learning. The committee consisted of one representative from RIDE’s Finance Office, a principal of a charter school in Rhode Island, a public school special education administrator from Rhode Island, and a university professor in math and science education.

Committee members rated the application using a standardized rubric based on the criteria outlined in the 2011 Charter School Application Guidelines. Ratings are described in the table below:

<b>Ratings</b>	
<b>Meets the Standard</b>	The response reflects a thorough understanding of key issues and demonstrates capacity to open and operate a quality charter school. It addresses the topic with specific and accurate information that shows thorough preparation and presents a clear, realistic picture of how the school expects to operate.
<b>Approaches the Standard</b>	The response addresses most of the criteria, but lacks meaningful detail and requires important additional information.
<b>Does Not Meet the Standard</b>	The response lacks meaningful detail; demonstrates lack of preparation; or otherwise raises substantial concerns about the applicant’s understanding of the issue in concept and/or ability to meet the requirements in practice.
<b>Not Applicable</b>	This section of the application is not necessary for this applicant or the reviewer declines to rate this portion of the applicant’s proposal.

<b>Summary Table</b>			
<b>Mission Statement</b>	<b>Approaches or Meets (3/4) Does Not (1/4)</b>	<b>Support Services</b>	<b>Approaches or Meets (4/4)</b>
<b>Statement of Need</b>	<b>Approaches or Meets (4/4)</b>	<b>Health, Safety and Nutrition</b>	<b>Approaches or Meets (2/4) Not Applicable (2/4)</b>
<b>Accountability</b>	<b>Approaches or Meets (4/4)</b>	<b>Building</b>	<b>Approaches or Meets (4/4)</b>
<b>Educational Program</b>	<b>Approaches or Meets (4/4)</b>	<b>Student Enrollment and Demand</b>	<b>Approaches or Meets (4/4)</b>
<b>School Management</b>	<b>Approaches or Meets (4/4)</b>	<b>School Community</b>	<b>Approaches or Meets (4/4)</b>
<b>Variances and Waivers</b>	<b>Meets (2/4) Not Applicable (2/4)</b>	<b>Timetable</b>	<b>Meets (4/4)</b>
<b>School Calendar</b>	<b>Meets (4/4)</b>	<b>Replication</b>	<b>Meets (4/4)</b>
<b>Special Student Populations</b>	<b>Approaches or Meets (3/4) Does Not (1/4)</b>	<b>Operating Budget and Financial Plan</b>	<b>Meets (4/4)</b>

	<b>Approaches or Meets The Standard</b>	<b>Does Not Meet The Standard</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Summary of Reviewer Ratings</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>

Out of 64 possible indicators, 58 indicators were rated “meets” or “approaches” the standard, and 2 indicators were rated “does not meet standard”.

The committee members were asked, in their advisory capacity, to make a recommendation about the readiness of the proposed charter to open on the timetable proposed in the application. Two of the four reviewers advised that the Commissioner advance the application to the Board of Regents for approval.

**Achievement First Charter School Application**  
***Topics and Feedback Summary***  
***January 5, 2011***

The chart below identifies the topics that were raised both in support of and opposition to the proposed Achievement First charter school application through the public comment process. The public comment process included two public hearings and additional written comments that were collected between October 31, 2011 and December 31, 2011. The formal comment period ends on December 31, 2011. To date, there have been a total of 93 speakers providing public comment at the two public hearings. RIDE has received 27 additional submissions of written comment as of December 29, 2011. We have received 3 official resolutions one from North Providence school committee, one from North Providence Town Council, and one from Warwick School committee stating their opposition to the application for fiscal reasons. There was public comment from professional organizations, community groups, superintendents, school committee members, elected officials and others who shared their support and concerns about the proposed charter school application.

**Public comment sessions were held at the following dates and locations:**

December 7, 2011 Robert F. Kennedy Elementary School; Regents: Betsy Shimberg, Colleen Callahan

December 8, 2011 Dr. Jorge Alvarez High School; Regents: Colleen Callahan, Carolina B. Bernal, Robert Carothers

**The 120 public commenters included:**

Affiliation, when included in the summary, was derived from sign-in sheets or from comments.

34 Residents: PVD 13, W 16, Cran 3, NP 1, Other 1

20 Parents: PVD 9, W 1, Cran 3, NP 0, Other 7

4 Students/Alum

18 CBOs

12 Teachers: PVD 8, W 0, Cran 2, NP 0, Other 2

15 School Representatives

12 Elected Officials

2 Teacher Union Representatives

1 Town Councils (NP)

2 School Committees (NP, W)

*23 of the commenters spoke multiple times or submitted written comment separate from public comment for an additional 23 times; each unique comment was recorded but they were not counted as multiple speakers if their comments were repeated.*

*Speakers*

**Number in Support**

44

**Number Opposed**

47

**Number Uncommitted**

2

*Written Comment*

**Number in Support**

3

**Number Opposed**

24

**Number Uncommitted**

0

Both public hearings were recorded and all of the written comments are available for review if needed for clarification of any of the summary points.

## Summary of Public Comment

Topic	Source of Comments	Feedback
Financial Impact	Residents (6) Parents (5) Students/Alum CBOs (5) Teachers (4) School Representatives (6) Elected Officials (6) Teacher Union Representative	Support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AF’s model would close achievement gap and lead to economic development for our community</li> <li>• High quality education can happen regardless of funds</li> <li>• The funding formula establishes a fair playing field and follows student choice</li> </ul> Concern: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AF will pull needed funds from underfunded school districts</li> <li>• AF would provide gym, recess, music while district schools are having them taken away</li> <li>• Building/structural issues exist in current schools that need addressing</li> <li>• Providence recently closed 4 schools; 8 schools in the last 18 months</li> <li>• Cranston and PVD schools are underfunded</li> </ul>
Need/Choice	Residents (8) Parents (10) Students/Alum (2) CBOs (7) Teachers (2) School Representatives (4) Elected Officials (3) Teacher Union Representative	Support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students and families need school choice and want to support more public school options</li> <li>• Desire to see AF’s best practices disseminated to other schools</li> <li>• Competition promotes development of high quality options for kids</li> <li>• Approximately 5000 students on waiting lists for charter schools in RI</li> <li>• AF’s model addresses growing achievement gap in RI</li> </ul> Concern: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All schools in NP made AYP</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lottery isn't equal to school choice</li> <li>• Existing schools need additional funding and support to improve</li> </ul>
Applicant's Practices	Residents (8) Parents (12) Students/Alum (2) CBOs (11) Teachers (9) School Representatives ( 5) Elected Officials( 5) Teacher Union Representatives (2)	Support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structure is good for kids</li> <li>• School would hold students accountable to high expectations</li> <li>• Extra hours in the school day will help students reach proficiency</li> <li>• Clear college focus</li> <li>• Strong history of partnering with districts</li> <li>• AF's financial records are publically available</li> <li>• AF has outperformed local school districts</li> </ul> Concern: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Misleading practices—behavioral strategies</li> <li>• Several AF schools not making AYP</li> <li>• Not enough public knowledge about AF's application</li> <li>• Demonstrated capacity to meet the needs of ELLs and IEPs</li> <li>• Size and quick growth in model</li> <li>• Complicated governance model</li> <li>• Retention/matriculation/enrollment of all kids with learning differences</li> <li>• "Creaming" practices</li> <li>• Application of "no excuses" model</li> </ul>
RIDE's Regulations/ Practices	School Representative (3) CBO (2) Teacher (1) Elected Officials (1) Residents (1)	Concern: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public hearings should have been held in all catchment areas</li> <li>• The enrollment/lottery policy is not clear</li> <li>• Lottery is chance not choice</li> <li>• Unsustainability of mayoral model with changes in administration and an appointed school committee</li> </ul>