Honing Trail Skills

New staff training, content experts, coaching and continuous professional development ensure that teachers and school leaders are growing in their craft and prepared for the work ahead.

Prior to the school year, new Achievement First teachers and school leaders spend three weeks together learning the “Achievement First Essentials” of effective instruction. New teachers collaborate and learn in subject- and grade-specific training sessions around lesson and unit planning, the “joy factor,” academic rigor, classroom management and engagement, long-term planning, school culture, and more—forming a cohesive picture of instructional excellence across Achievement First.

Network-wide content experts in math, English, science, history, music and PE find, create and share top-notch curricular resources for teachers, while allowing for flexibility and creativity in the classroom. These experts meet with school leaders and teachers to diagnose student and teacher needs, and to implement school-specific and network-wide training to improve the quality of instruction. Experts also oversee the creation of interim assessments, ensuring that they yield the best possible data on the skills that students have mastered and the skills that still need work.

Achievement First teachers are constantly supported, challenged and inspired to take their skills to the next level. We recognize that the number one factor impacting student achievement is teacher quality, so every teacher at Achievement First—whether a 10-year veteran or a recent college graduate—has an instructional coach. Principals, deans and master teachers all serve as coaches who provide teachers with individualized support to help achieve their professional learning goals and maximize student achievement. The pair meets regularly to reflect on instruction, debrief lesson observations, and co-plan lessons and units.

All Achievement First teachers come together twice a year for a day of network-wide professional development to learn from master teachers and each other. In addition, every Achievement First school releases early on Friday afternoons so that teachers can participate in school-based sessions. School leaders structure these Friday afternoons to support teachers in analyzing video, data and/or student work, in planning upcoming lessons and units, and in sharing instructional best practices.

We also know that teacher effectiveness and satisfaction are heavily influenced by the quality of school leaders. Achievement First works hard to select outstanding school leaders, many of whom now come from the ranks of our great teachers through our Leadership Fellows Program. After serving as an instructional coach or grade-level chair, some teachers become deans focused either on teacher coaching and professional development (academic deans) or school culture and parent engagement (deans of students). If an Achievement First dean or top external candidate is ready and interested in becoming a principal, they have a full additional year of training as a “principal in residence.” During this residency year, the aspiring principal receives additional training, spends time observing great schools both inside and outside the Achievement First network, and performs many of the tasks that they will be required to handle as principal—all while receiving feedback from their mentor principal and Achievement First’s director of leadership development.

Nancy Livingston
Director of Math Achievement
I am passionate about math, and I want all Achievement First students to feel that way too, but I know that math can be a challenging subject. I work hard to create curricular materials and professional development sessions that support our teachers in teaching math in a way that is rigorous, clear and fun. At Achievement First, we believe that ALL students can learn, and an important part of my job is making sure that we explore and use a variety of instructional approaches to help all students achieve mastery of math content and develop critical thinking skills.

Sara Keenan
Director of Leadership Development
It is absolutely rewarding to witness a talented teacher develop into an effective leader. Many of our principals and deans began their Achievement First careers as teachers, giving them unique insight into the challenges their teachers face and helping them become respected and empathetic leaders.