Achievement First is committed to constant professional growth and reflection for our teachers—and we want to share that learning with the broader education reform community.

Achievement **First**

HONE YOUR CRAFT

This document is from an exciting new section of the Achievement First website with hundreds of free classroom and professional development resources found in our public charter schools.

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The Essentials of Effective Instruction

(1) GREAT AIMS: Rigorous, bite-sized, measurable, standards-based aim(s) are written on the board and reviewed with scholars; the aims clearly drive the activities, not vice-versa.

(2) EXIT TICKET / ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT MASTERY OF THE AIMS:
   a. Exit Ticket / Assessment: There is a systematic way at the end of class to assess every student's mastery of the aim(s) and to diagnose areas of student misunderstanding (most of the time, assessment is through an exit ticket).
   b. Student Mastery: A very high percentage (at least 85% of students) master the aim.

(3) MOST EFFECTIVE & EFFICIENT STRATEGIES to teach the AIM:
   a. Content Knowledge / Right Strategy: The teacher demonstrates strong knowledge of the relevant standards/concepts and uses the most effective and efficient strategy to guide students to mastery; all information conveyed to students is factually accurate.
   b. Pacing & Urgency: The teacher moves students briskly from one part of the agenda to the next; there is a palpable sense of urgency and purpose in the room. Time is held sacred; the teacher spends the appropriate amount of time on each activity and maximizes each minute spent. The teacher sets clear guidelines for how long activities should take and uses timers, time reminders, and countdowns effectively. The class is set up to maximize efficiency, and the teacher is fully planned and prepared to maximize each moment.

(4) MODELING/GUIDED PRACTICE (I/We or We):
   a. Mini-lesson: The lesson includes a clear "think aloud", explicit modeling, heavily guided practice or other form of clear mini-lesson; examples and step-by-step processes are thoughtfully planned and tightly delivered.
   b. Guided Practice / Declining Scaffolding & Guidance: The teacher then leads students through guided practice with declining scaffolding / guidance so that students eventually provide both the answers and the thought process.
   c. Visual Anchor: The mini-lesson is captured (on whiteboard, butcher paper, overhead, and/or scaffolded notes) so that students can reference it during independent practice.
   d. Check for Understanding: The teacher regularly checks for understanding during GP so that students transition to independent practice when they are ready. (A small number of students may need more guided support during independent practice, and this should not hold up the entire class.)
   Note: Although I/We - You is the bedrock of the vast majority of lessons, there may be times when the teacher chooses to start with a short discovery activity, activation of prior knowledge, or some other strategy to lay a conceptual foundation (often in a You - I/We – You format; lessons should end with the We-You and include ample time for successful You time.)

(5) SUSTAINED, SUCCESSFUL INDEPENDENT PRACTICE (You):
   a. Many successful "at bats": Students have ample, successful "at bats" so that they get to practice the aim independently (at least 15-20 min of independent practice). The YOU activity should be at the same difficulty level as the WE activity so that complexity doesn't increase while support decreases. The teacher MOVES around the classroom constantly during independent practice to assess mastery and provide individual help.
   b. Read, Baby, Read: In reading classes, teachers make sure that "nose in text" time is very high and that independent work time has at least a 7:2 ratio of reading to activity/writing/discussing.

(6) CLASSROOM CULTURE

    a. High Expectations, Clear Routines: The teacher sets (with clear *What to Do* statements) and reinforces clear expectations and routines for high standards of behavior consistent with our common picture; with a *Strong Voice*, the teacher sweats the small stuff (e.g. SLANT, no call outs, no laughing at other students' mistakes) and insists students *Do it Again* if not great.

    b. *Joy Factor:* The class is a fun, joyful place where kids are enthusiastic and excited about learning

    c. Positive-Corrective Ratio: The teacher uses *Positive Framing* to correct behavior and narrate class activity; there is a high ratio of positive to corrective comments; the classroom feels like a place where students want to be; students are nice and respectful to each other, and the teacher is nice and respectful to the students.

    d. Students Own It: Students are given the responsibility, tools, and strategies to fix problems they have or created. The teacher resists the temptation to be the sole problem-solver; students who make mistakes must own and fix them.

    e. Teachable Character Moments: The teacher uses key moments in class to explicitly talk about, celebrate, and reinforce character skills; these moments flow naturally from the lesson and are quick and high-impact; the teacher strategically picks examples, texts, and activities that, when appropriate, reinforce the key messages (e.g. going to college, REACH values, etc.).

(7) STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

    a. *100%:* The teacher insists on 100% of students on task with hands consistently in the air (students are either asking or answering questions)

    b. Engagement Strategies: The teacher uses high-engagement strategies (e.g. *Cold Calling*, rapid-fire *Call-and-Response*, mini white-boards, frequent choral responses, non-verbal responses, and/or "everyone writes") to ensure that all students are accountable for engagement; makes it impossible for students to be desk potatoes and simply copy from the board; the teacher limits use of round-robin reading or questioning strategies that engage only one student at a time.

(8) ACADEMIC RIGOR

    a. Teacher Talk–to–Student Work: There is a high ratio of student work to teacher talk with students doing most of the "heavy lifting" of doing the work and explaining their thinking.

    b. Planned, Rigorous Questioning: The teacher plans his/her key questions in advance with a range of questioning – both lower-level (knowledge recall and basic comprehension) and higher-level (application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation); the teacher regularly uses the *Stretch It* technique – WHY? What does that relate to? How would you apply this?

    c. Top-Quality Oral Responses: The teacher knows that *Right is Right* and refuses to accept low-quality student responses (insists on correct grammar, complete sentences, use of appropriate vocabulary and sufficient detail/rationale (don't settle for so-so); the teacher is a *No Opt Out* champion -- no students are allowed to "opt out" because the teacher cycles back to students who didn't answer.

    d. Top-Quality Student Work: The teacher sets clear expectations and has an accountability mechanism for ensuring all students complete top-quality work; examples of top-quality work are posted for reference and to celebrate great student work.

(9) CUMULATIVE REVIEW: As a part of the lesson and homework routine, students get fast, fun opportunities to systematically and successfully review and practice skills that they have already mastered; standards included in cumulative review are truly review, and the teacher has a clear method of using data to inform which standards to review.

(10)   DIFFERENTIATION: The teacher works to ensure that the needs of every student are met. Especially during independent practice, the teacher can work with some students to provide extra support or enrichment and/or can otherwise vary the volume, rate, or complexity of work that students are asked to complete. (In classes that are grouped homogenously by skill level, pronounced differentiation may be less necessary.)