

U.S. Department of Education
2017 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [] Non-public

For Public Schools only: (Check all that apply) [X] Title I [] Charter [X] Magnet [] Choice

Name of Principal Mrs. Grace Moriarty
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Academy I Middle School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 209 Bergen Avenue
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Jersey City State NJ Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 07305-1524

County Hudson

Telephone (201) 915-6500 Fax (201) 435-9224

Web site/URL http://www.jcboe.org/boe2015/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=422&Itemid=1039 E-mail gmoriarty@jcboe.org

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent*Dr. Marcia Lyles E-mail mlyles@jcboe.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Jersey City Public School District Tel. (201) 915-6000

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date _____

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board President/Chairperson Mr. Joel Torres
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date _____

(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

**Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, write N/A in the space.*

Part I – Eligibility Certification

The signatures on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school's eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.)
2. All nominated public schools must meet the state's performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group and all subgroups, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2017 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
4. If the school includes grades 7 or higher, the school must have foreign language as a part of its curriculum.
5. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2011 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
6. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, or 2016.
7. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award if irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state.
8. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as "persistently dangerous" within the last two years.
9. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
10. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
11. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
12. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2016-2017) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 27 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 4 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 9 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 40 TOTAL

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located:
- Urban or large central city
 - Suburban with characteristics typical of an urban area
 - Suburban
 - Small city or town in a rural area
 - Rural
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2016 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	79	81	160
7	77	89	166
8	72	103	175
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	228	273	501

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 44 % Asian
 - 23 % Black or African American
 - 16 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 1 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 15 % White
 - 1 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2015 – 2016 school year: 5%

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	8
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	16
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	24
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	482
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.050
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	5

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 0 %
0 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 50 %
Total number students who qualify: 250
8. Students receiving special education services: 11 %
54 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- 9 Autism
- 0 Deafness
- 0 Deaf-Blindness
- 0 Emotional Disturbance
- 0 Hearing Impairment
- 44 Mental Retardation
- 0 Multiple Disabilities
- 0 Orthopedic Impairment
- 1 Other Health Impaired
- 0 Specific Learning Disability
- 0 Speech or Language Impairment
- 0 Traumatic Brain Injury
- 0 Visual Impairment Including Blindness
- 0 Developmentally Delayed

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 10
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	27
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	9
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	13
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	3

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 19:1
12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

Required Information	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012
Daily student attendance	99%	97%	97%	97%	96%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**
Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2016.

Post-Secondary Status	
Graduating class size	0
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	0%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.
Yes No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award.

15. In a couple of sentences, provide the school's mission or vision statement.

We provide students with the skills and exploratory experiences that enable them to reach their fullest potential as independent thinkers and innovative problem solvers.

16. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

Admission to the Accelerated and Enrichment Program (AEP) is by application. Points are given for the application, student essay, teacher recommendation, grades, attendance, test scores, and the OLSAT Ability Test which is administered during the first week in March. Students are only accepted into the sixth and seventh grade. By the eighth grade, our curriculum has advanced to the high school level, prohibiting entry to the program at this point.

PART III – SUMMARY

A melting pot of cultures and people, Jersey City was the first destination for many immigrants entering the United States through Ellis Island. Jersey City still reflects the flavors and influences of the international populations that call the city home. Among the 30,000 plus students in the Jersey City Public School district (JCPS), over 40 different languages are spoken. At Academy I more than half of the students speak a language other than English at home.

participate in school-wide activities and keep abreast of their children's academic commitment, not waiting for progress reports or report cards. Literature is disseminated routinely to assist parents in overseeing their child's journey as a life-long learner. Academy I continually strives to establish processes that foster improvement for all persons involved in schooling.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

The core curriculum at Academy I is aligned to the New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLS) and designed to focus on conceptual and procedural learning, progressing towards the application of knowledge to real world situations and problem solving. While the curriculum and resources at the middle school level are rigorous, they also provide teachers with materials to scaffold instruction for students who require greater support. Technology and the use of digital devices are infused into the curriculum to engage students and prepare them for the 21st century.

The eight Mathematical Practice Standards are interwoven throughout daily instruction and can be identified in all daily assignments and activities. Through the implementation of the curriculum, individual student interests and learning styles are considered in the lesson planning process. Large classroom and small group learning are the main practices used by teachers, creating an environment that fosters peer discussion and allows the teacher to act as a facilitator in the classroom. Instructional strategies vary depending on the students' needs and interests as well as the pedagogical style of the teacher. Teachers employ the use of manipulatives and project-based learning to link mathematical concepts to real world applications, such as stock market and economy, sports statistics, and engineering.

The curriculum in English Language Arts (ELA) grades 6-8 requires teachers to use a balanced literacy model of instruction. This practice includes a whole group mini lesson which models key comprehension strategies or a writing skill, followed by independent and small group practice. Students are expected to build upon prior knowledge to utilize thinking strategies used by proficient readers and writers to interpret sophisticated literature and advanced informational text in preparation for college and career readiness. In addition, students must be able to identify and utilize a variety of literacy devices, increasing in complexity as they move through the grades.

The middle school social studies curriculum specifically highlights cause and effect relationships that are demonstrated throughout the course of study to help students identify the significance of historical events. Moreover, the curriculum heightens students' awareness of how maintaining a deeper, holistic understanding of the past enables individuals to participate more productively within their communities today. The knowledge and skills to think analytically and systematically enable students to make informed decisions as socially and ethically responsible world citizens in the 21st century. Students engage in discussions, debates, and presentations based on the exploration of historical accounts, current events, and film analysis to better understand the role, rights, and civic duties of living in a democracy. They analyze the text of the Constitution, and use it as a lens to examine specific problems in society and how they might be addressed. Students think like historians as they engage in activities provided by Cicero, Stanford's Reading like a Historian curriculum, Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, and The Document-Based Questions (DBQ) Project. Each unit culminates with an authentic activity that places students in a real-world scenario and is tailored to the interest and intelligence styles to a diverse set of students.

The goal of science instruction is for students to be able to explain real-world phenomena and to design solutions using their understanding of the Disciplinary Core Ideas. Students can accomplish this goal by engaging in the Science and Engineering Practices and applying the Crosscutting concepts. The NJSLS for science provides students with continued opportunities to engage in and develop a deeper understanding of each of the three dimensions of science. Building on the knowledge and skills gained from each grade, students have multiple opportunities to revisit and expand their understanding of all three dimensions. The science curriculum provides students with the tools they need to succeed in a rapidly and continuously changing world, and allows students to think of science as a cohesive understanding of integrated and interrelated concepts. The standards also connect science with mathematics and English Language Arts. This meaningful and substantive overlapping of skills and knowledge affords all students equitable access to the learning standards.

All students are given access to online adaptive assessments and individualized learning plans to target areas

in need of intervention as well as enrichment. Students are also given access to district online assessments that are designed to continually assess prior skills and whose results aid teachers in making data-driven decisions that best meet the needs of their students.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

The Visual & Performing Arts program successfully integrates art and music with the study of the history of the arts, the diverse cultural nature of the arts, aesthetics and art criticism. The department offers general elementary music, instrumental/band music, vocal/choral music, drama, general visual arts, and elementary artistically talented program. Students' experiences grow each year as more complicated concepts are added to the student's artistic repertoire. Academy I engages in partnerships with museums and theaters in the tri-state area including Newark Museum, New Jersey Performing Arts Center, Shakespeare Productions, New Jersey City University, and Little Kids Rock. The Visual & Performing Arts also enjoys varied activities such as the Annual Permanent Student Art Collection Exhibition, Jersey City ARTS annual art expo, concerts, and theater productions.

Academy I's World Language curriculum builds upon previous elementary exposure to the Spanish language. Students engage in spontaneous conversation in Spanish and generate visual and written text to extend topics discussed in class. Demonstrating a growing awareness of cultural differences and showing an understanding of how beliefs, traditions, and perspectives are the basis of each country's culture are learning goals. Through their studies, students grow to recognize the advantages of professionals who speak a second language within a linguistically diverse society and appreciate that speaking more than one language gives them an advantage to participate fully in economic, political, and social life, meeting the increasing demands of a global society.

Academy I holds the contemporary view of health and physical education (PE) that focuses on taking personal responsibility for one's health through an active, healthy lifestyle that fosters a lasting commitment to wellness. Knowledge of health and physical education concepts and skills empowers students to assume lifelong responsibility to develop physical, social, and emotional wellness. Students learn the basic skills and rules of play during the regular PE periods to gain the confidence to enhance those skills at a higher level. Moving beyond the gym class, Academy I promotes wellness through an extensive offering of extended day and Saturday enrichment programs. Students can choose from several team sports such as basketball, soccer, track, etc. and/or partake in yoga, team building, fitness club, cooking class, and even boot camp and cheerleading. We are currently extending our offerings through a grant, which funds a Hip Hop dance class and nutrition awareness program.

Technology is evolving at an amazing rate, with both frequent advancements of existing technology and the creation of new technologies. Computer and information literacy, which supports skills in information-gathering, information-organizing, and problem solving, has become critical for every student. To ensure that students are computer literate, a separate standard that defines rigorous, in-depth learning is included at each grade level. The computer and information literacy standard is designed to be integrated and applied in all the content areas of the NJSLs. Technology is infused into each content area affording students the opportunity to understand and be comfortable with the concepts and application of technology in order to thrive in today's complex society and become informed, productive adults. To ensure access to all students our media center is available daily before, during, and after school. Each classroom is equipped with a Smart Board or Promethean Board, and Chrome Books and lap tops are accessible for classroom use. We are in the initial process of creating Google classrooms in preparation for transitioning to secondary and post-secondary education.

Each of the aforementioned curriculum areas are scheduled twice per week for all students. Due to scheduling restraints Academy I has created extended day programs as an alternative to electives and provides an inclusive environment for all students. Staff members offer their expertise in a variety of academic activities presented in an entertaining format. Students can refine leadership skills in City Wide Student Council; be creative in poetry, writing class, and graphic novels; and apply STEM in Drone, Lego Robotics, and Sports Statistics. The extended day courses are driven by student choice and occur one time per week.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

Academy I uses a variety of assessment data to analyze and improve student performance. Formative assessments include state assessments such as Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK) in Science, Alternate Proficiency Assessment (APA) in science, and Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) and district assessments such as Diagnostic Online Reading and Math Assessments (DORA and DOMA), Adaptive, Diagnostic Assessment of Mathematics (ADAM), quarterly assessments, Technology Literacy, and iReady. Data is disseminated through the Data Team. Teachers further analyze data in Professional Learning Communities (PLC), which are grouped by grade level, content area, and program to allow for greater collaboration and identification of trends.

DOMA, DORA and ADAM are administered three times per year to assess progress. The data develops an individualized prescriptive plan for the student, targeting skills in need of improvement. PARCC scores are also used to create action plans to drive instruction as well as address individual needs. For our special needs population we implement the DLM and APA as the alternate assessment for PARCC and NJ ASK Science. iReady is the alternative for DOMA and DORA. Data is used to drive the goals and objectives, choose intervention tiers and select accommodations and modifications.

In order to meet the diverse and individual needs of students, Academy I utilizes a three-tiered framework of academic and behavioral supports and interventions to improve student achievement. Tier 1 provides high quality instruction of scientifically researched core programs. Instruction is inquiry driven, project-based cooperative learning. Participatory teaching methods are implemented to elevate retention and understanding of concepts.

Tier 2 provides supplemental supports and interventions for struggling students within our Bridges alternative education program. Based upon the review of data during regular progress monitoring intervals, the Intervention and Referral Services (I&RS) team evaluates student achievement and initiates interventions and accommodations accordingly.

Tier 3 provides intensive supports and interventions based on an individual student's performance. This may include adaptations to the core curriculum. These services may be delivered as an extension of the regular classroom experience. Supports available include Mission Read, Daily Living Skills, counseling, extended day classes, including homework help and test preparation, peer tutoring, and conflict resolution.

All classes utilize the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model. Through this model the teacher acts as facilitator; connecting concepts, using explicit teaching of skills, higher order questioning, and modeling academic vocabulary with the intent of creating independent learners.

Although performance levels of each program differ, Academy I strives to unite the programs through high expectations and rigorous instruction for all. Teachers use data to create lesson plans that will provide corrective instruction and enrichment activities. Teachers share best practices and turn-key resources.

Assessment data is also used to determine course offerings for the extended day program. Students have the option of several STEM courses, such as Lego Robotics, Drones and Sports Statistics. They also have the opportunity to engage in creative writing, drama, film history and comic books, as well as ELA and math test preparation.

The Visual and Performing Arts offers Creative Arts Therapy. Therapists service both general and special education students utilizing the tool of the arts as a modality to help students develop emotionally, socially, psychologically, and academically.

Academy I is a high performing school and strives to maintain high levels of achievement through an accelerated and enriched curriculum. Students in the AEP program receive an adapted curriculum beginning in sixth grade. By eighth grade the students will be enrolled in high school courses, receiving credit for Algebra I Honors, English I Honors, Physics Honors and Ancient World History Honors. As of September

2016, Academy I offers an Honors Visual Arts course that is available to AEP and Bridges students. It is a newly developed curriculum for gifted visual arts students fostering portfolio development in essential skills needed for early acceptance in the Jersey City ARTS at the high school level. Addressing curriculum through project-based activities allows teachers to present skills and concepts from multiple grade levels and content areas, thereby advancing students three grade levels in two school years. Students are then prepared to successfully engage in high school level courses.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

Together with strong parental support, the dedicated leadership team and staff members of Academy I cultivate a collaborative, nurturing environment with high expectations for all students. Academy I promotes continuous growth in student achievement, emphasizing career and college readiness and challenging all students to be life-long learners. Students' talents and abilities are nurtured, pursuing their dreams is encouraged, and contributing positively to the world is a shared goal. Students, teachers, and families are jointly vested in ensuring that goals are successfully achieved and meet regularly to assess progress.

Teachers feel valued through the support of the principal, and an environment is created where teachers feel confident to bring fresh ideas. The administration provides resources and professional development to bring ideas to fruition. All staff members are given the opportunity to share their academic and individual talents while working the Extended Day and Saturday Enrichment programs. Through such programs and morning, lunch, and dismissal assignments, it is not long before all staff members become familiar with students from all programs.

Students receive community service hours when tutoring peers, helping those who are having difficulty. This helps to build the self-esteem of all students involved, fostering a sense of community. Students can also receive community service hours by assisting during the Jump Start program which provides the incoming sixth grade students with a snapshot of the middle school day, offering the experience of changing classes and easing their transition to middle school. A big brother/sister program pairs new students to upper classmen to ensure the presence of a friendly face and a helping hand. The Buddy Up program is a collaborative venture meant to enhance social and communication skills through an interactive recreational period, pairing students with Autism together with peers from AEP.

Throughout the year integrative assemblies, dances, fundraisers, community projects, and competitions generate a cohesive school community that focuses on supporting each other and striving for improvement. We celebrate achievement through art competitions, instrumental and choir recitals, oratory competitions, spelling bees, science fairs, Pi Day celebrations, essay contests, Academic Olympics, and many athletic team games, including district Unified Sports and Special Olympics.

We have a tradition of excellence at Academy I and believe every child can succeed. Nurturing the confidence of the students and staff affords everyone the courage to face challenges and thrive.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Academy I strives to partner with families to promote student success and school improvement. Opportunities for open communication and participation are offered throughout the year, beginning with Back to School night during the first week of September. Families meet with their children's teachers, tour the school, and learn about the curriculum and expectations. Communication between families and teachers is ongoing and conferences concerning student progress are held quarterly.

Academy I also schedules Parent Information sessions and Family Nights during the year. These events strengthen the home and school connection and support student learning. Families are exposed to the curriculum and participate in lessons to increase understanding of what and how their children are learning. Workshop topics such as study skills, goal setting, technology, test-taking strategies, and interpreting test results are offered.

Parent involvement has continued to increase over recent years. The Parent Teacher Partnership (PTP) plays an active role in the school's effort to support students and staff. Parent leadership is present on the School Leadership Committee (SLC), as well as the data team. Monthly PTP meetings are held to communicate Academy I's vision and yearly goals, provide information and foster parent interaction.

Academy I also utilizes the community as a valuable resource. The guidance counselor, Crisis Intervention Teacher (CIT), Child Study Team (CST) and school nurse act as liaisons between school and community resources. Families are referred to community agencies and programs that assist with health-care and human services. Community agencies are also brought into the school to present programs to students and families on topics such as drug awareness, gang violence, and internet safety as well as career choices, college readiness, and motivation. Community members also volunteer their time and expertise in the classroom. Academy I has sponsored career days, shadowing days, and reading events.

Community service is an integral part of the culture at Academy I. Students are expected to participate in a required number of service hours each year. Partnerships are developed with local agencies enabling students to volunteer their time to aid homeless shelters, food pantries, animal shelters and children's services. Academy I partners with local businesses to beautify the school grounds and through a joint effort we have been able to create and maintain a school garden.

Academy I is involved in a district initiative - JOINT Activities. Students have the opportunity to interact with other students and teachers of diverse backgrounds and to participate in learning and volunteer activities, such as cleaning local parks and coastal areas.

3. Professional Development:

Professional development (PD) opportunities focus on district curriculum to assist teachers in effectively implementing content area knowledge, process, and integration of subject areas. The use of turn-key presentations, consultants and district supervisors provide expertise to instructional staff through lesson demonstrations, and offer in-class follow up and support.

Teachers are given the opportunity to improve the delivery of instruction, become proficient in subject matter and build confidence in order to increase student achievement in the classroom and via standardized tests. Professional Development is essential to implement the NJSLs with increased rigor to achieve advanced proficiency on state assessments.

Professional Development opportunities are offered based on teacher needs to enhance student learning. School-based performance data, needs assessment surveys, as well as teacher evaluations and classroom observations are utilized to determine professional development. There is strong focus on improving student achievement in math and language arts. The different programs are tracked through participation in school, district, and state assessments. Data is collected by teachers and compared within class, grade level, program, and subject area during PLCs. Expectations are high in all programs while being respectful of unique needs.

Our PLCs are tailored to integrate our programs so that the best practices from each specialization are shared throughout the school creating a more cohesive academic environment. Peer groups in content areas and across grade levels foster increased collaboration and development of common goals and action plans for achieving expectations through data-driven instruction. Teachers are given the opportunity to assist one another to better implement curriculum, refine teaching strategies, and address specific needs of students. Morning meeting time is devoted to peer groups working collaboratively to help foster a community of goal-minded, outcome-oriented professionals.

In both grade level and content PLCs our teachers from AEP, Bridges, and Special Needs Programs along with various stakeholders including CST, Data Team, SLC and CIT review and compare data, analyze student work, and design lessons affording all programs a comprehensive and holistic view of the students' performance. Groups are subsequently formed from this data analysis.

Student achievement at Academy I encompasses the development of the "whole student," preparing students academically and socially to become college and career ready, responsible members of society. Teachers and support staff are continually being challenged to collaborate and share ideas for developing

effective lesson objectives aligned to the NJSLS, while fostering healthy social and emotional development.

4. School Leadership:

Academy I maintains a vision for academic excellence and a commitment to providing a dynamic learning environment in which all students can achieve their maximum potential. Academy I is dedicated to serving a richly diverse student population while creating a culture of learning that actively promotes and embraces the values of acceptance, respect, and personal affirmation in its pursuit of excellence.

The leadership philosophy at Academy I encompasses a belief that all members of the school community are lifelong learners. The leadership creates a climate of open communication and collaboration to empower and encourage teachers to initiate change and growth. Monthly staff meetings involve the entire staff at Academy I, where discussions focus on setting and evaluating priorities that are aligned with the school vision. The principal establishes a clear direction and fosters a sense of community within the school. Teachers then meet in PLC's to develop a plan based on the school's shared goals. Grade level, content area and program meetings are planned to identify areas of need through data analysis, student work, instructional practices and surveys. Staff members are invited to provide feedback, set goals and develop a plan of action. An environment of respect is evident.

The leadership of Academy I consists of one principal who, with the assistance of content supervisors, supports teachers' efforts in the classroom. The principal provides expertise, resources, and professional development to ensure teachers are delivering lessons that are aligned with NJSLS. The principal makes certain that teachers of all programs are incorporating participatory teaching methods and elevating critical thinking to maintain high levels of achievement.

The School Leadership Committee acts as advisory council to the school. The SLC is a collaborative group of stakeholders comprised of the principal, teacher representatives from each program, support staff members, and parents or community members. The SLC meets monthly to discuss data, school budget, and participate in collaborative decision making.

Working closely with school support staff, including counseling, the crisis intervention teacher, and the Child Study Team, the principal encourages an environment that addresses the needs of the whole child. Behavior plans are created, referrals to community resources are made and programs within the school are developed. The actively involved Parent Teacher Partnership (PTP) has a strong presence at Academy I. Together with the principal, activities for the students and informative programs for parents are offered using monies collected through the PTP's fundraising efforts.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Research supports that all students benefit from lessons that actively engage them in the learning process and develop high intellectual performance – practices that close the gap between students’ potential and their achievement. A practice at Academy I that has been the most influential in the school’s success is the fostering of self-directed learning through the gradual release model. With this practice teachers model the learning process, transition to guided practice, facilitate cooperative groups, and ultimately secure independent learner application. Stepping into the driver’s seat of their learning inherently requires students to be engaged and employ higher order thinking skills. Moving away from the traditional direct instruction model and focusing on an inquiry driven, project-based, cooperative learning style that self-directed learning affords has brought much growth and success to Academy I.

The gradual release to self-directed learning is fluid. For example, students in one class may require more modeling or prompting from the teacher in order to engage in discussion, decision making, or executing a specific skill. In another class a teacher may be fading prompts, allowing students to move toward cooperative practice. The gradual release happens through careful observation, on-going assessment, and student conferencing and reflection. Some indicators of readiness for self-directed learning are: level of active participation within a group, use of academic vocabulary, higher level questioning in peer to peer discussion, and the presentation/sharing of concepts and methods.

Implementation of the self-directed learning practice has allowed for a varied and in-depth exploration of curriculum and concepts as they relate to specific subject areas. Students adopt academic vocabulary, exchange ideas, and pose higher order questions that drive this exploration. Academy I learners take on more of a leadership role by viewing content through their own lens and sharing individual discoveries with peers, teachers and the school community at large. School-wide events that showcase student learning happen frequently, providing memory making moments for the entire Academy I family. The effectiveness of our practice is evident by events such as these, and by our test scores that surpass district and state benchmarks. Academy I students build confidence in themselves as learners. It is this kind of confidence that ensures success in high school and beyond, one that takes our students on to some of the best academic institutions in the country.