

Each morning, students are greeted with a handshake as they enter the school. Through the main doors, students walk along hallways decorated with pictures of former students who have since gone onto college. College pennants and letters from corporate partners adorn the walls in classrooms and other offices, reminding students of the opportunities ahead after graduation. The building, opened in 2006, resembles many other schools in middle and upper class communities across the country—spotless floors, sunlit classrooms, and a community of friendly adults and students.

This school, however, is located near some of the poorest neighborhoods in Newport News, Virginia. Its student body reflects the surrounding community; 92% of students qualify for free and reduced lunch. Unlike other urban high schools with similar demographics, however, An Achievable Dream (AAD) Middle and High School is taking advantage of a longer school year and an expanded school day to produce remarkable results. In 2010, 82% and 81% of all students scored proficient or above in English and math, respectively, on Virginia's Standards of Learning assessment (VSOL). The school also outperformed the district's scores among low income students and nearly matched or exceeded state VSOL averages in English, math, writing, history, and science. Founded in 1992, An Achievable Dream (AAD) Middle and High School is one of two AAD schools in the Newport News Public Schools (NNPS) system today—the other, An Achievable Dream Academy, is an elementary school that feeds into AAD Middle and High School. Both schools are in session more than eight hours each day for 210 days a year, compared to six hours for 180 days per year at surrounding public schools. The additional time allows AAD schools to implement a rigorous curriculum that prepares students for success in college and beyond.

**AAD Middle and High School Basic Info**

<b>Address</b>	5720 Marshall Avenue Newport News, VA 23605 Tel: 757.283.7820
<b>Started</b>	2007 (one 9 <sup>th</sup> grade class in 07; additional class added each year)
<b>Grades served</b>	6 – 12 (2010-2011 is the first year of 12 <sup>th</sup> grade)
<b>Principal</b>	Marilyn Sinclair-White
<b>Students</b>	436
<b>Teachers</b>	~20
<b>School Day</b>	8:00 – 4:10
<b>School Year</b>	210 days
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.achievabledream.org">www.achievabledream.org</a>
<b>Performance</b>	<a href="#">2009-2010 VSOL Results</a>

Period	Sample Grade 10 Schedule
<b>8:00 – 9:37</b>	English
<b>9:41 – 11:08</b>	History/Biology*
<b>11:12 – 12:40</b>	SAT Math/SAT Verbal*
<b>12:40 – 1:10</b>	Lunch
<b>1:14 – 2:43</b>	Spanish/Driver's Ed/What It Takes*
<b>2:47 – 4:10</b>	Algebra/Geometry**

*\*Alternates daily*

*\*\*Varies by student*

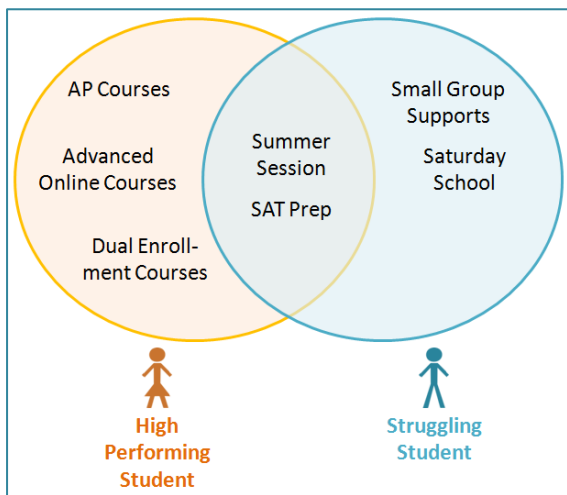
**Additional Time for Academics**

The longer school year and expanded school day allows AAD to cover more material than traditional public schools. Each day, students receive 90 minutes of English and math instruction, and social studies and science every other day. “Because of the extra time and our great teachers, we’re able to cover more material in the same number of days [as other district schools],” says Lee Vreeland, AAD’s Director of Education and Student Services. The additional time spent on core academics prepares students for more challenging courses in later grades, including AP Calculus, advanced online courses, and dual enrollment courses.

For struggling students, AAD also provides daily 40 minute support classes throughout the day,

during non-core academic classes (e.g. physical education, art, or technology). Though these supports occur daily, each student receives tutoring every other day, alternating with his/her non-core academic class. Support classes typically range between three to eight students, and are led by retired teachers, student teachers, or work study tutors, who provide individual tutoring to students on skill needs identified by classroom teachers. During a 40 minute session, students complete and review a 'Do Now' exercise for ten minutes, and then practice specific skills on computerized practice VSOL tests.

**Individualized Instruction for ALL Students**



**Preparing for College and the Workplace**

“Our goal here is not merely to get students to pass state tests,” says Amy Runge, AAD’s Assistant Principal, “We want all of our students to be successful after their time here, whether it’s in college or the workplace.” In preparation for college entrance exams, every 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade student is required to take SAT math and verbal classes each day; all AAD teachers have been trained by Kaplan in SAT test prep. These classes are taught using curriculum provided by Kaplan, and feature an online component for additional practice.

The school also provides opportunities for students to become more familiar with colleges, scheduling campus field trips and bringing in college representatives to speak at the school. The school also provides various supports to both students and families throughout and even after the application process. For each student, AAD staff members read through every application—including essays—before they are sent off. Additionally, the school assists families in completing financial aid forms and finding sources of financial aid. For every student, AAD provides a \$2,000 yearly scholarship to help students pay for tuition as well as room and board. Furthermore, any AAD student

**Getting Students into College**

An infographic with a yellow border. At the top, icons of a calculator, microscope, globe, and books are above the text 'Rigorous Academic Curriculum'. Below that, icons of a torch, a classical building, and a school bus are above 'Campus Field Trips and College Speakers'. Next, icons of a stack of papers and a pencil are above 'Assistance with College Applications and Essays'. A large grey plus sign is to the left of icons for various college pennants and stacks of gold coins, with the text 'Financial Aid and College Partnerships' below. A horizontal line separates this from the bottom section, which features icons of a school building and three celebrating figures, with the text 'Students Accepted and Admitted into Colleges' below.

admitted into Norfolk State University, Old Dominion University, or Virginia Tech receives a financial package that covers tuition, room and board for four years. As of February 2011, AAD's senior class had submitted nearly 200 college applications. "We communicate to all our students that they can go to college," says Vreeland, "Through our academics, SAT prep, the help we provide students during the application process, and the financial supports we're able to offer, we try to help our students achieve that goal."

In addition to college readiness, AAD also prepares students for the workplace. "We sat down with corporations and asked them what it was that they wanted young people to come into work with," says Quentin Jackson, AAD's Assistant Director of Student Services, "They all came back to us and said it was the soft skills, things like working with people and how to act in a professional manner." Through these

### *Nine 'What it Takes' Core Soft Skills*



#### **Achievable Dream**

1. **Demonstrating a strong work ethic**
2. **Demonstrating a positive attitude**
3. **Maintaining satisfactory attendance**
4. **Participating as a team member**
5. **Demonstrating reasoning, problem solving, and decision making skills**
6. **Demonstrating independence and initiative**
7. **Demonstrating listening and speaking skills**
8. **Demonstrating self presentation skills**
9. **Understanding the big picture**

conversations, AAD developed nine core soft skills, and collaborated with nine corporate partners to design the 'What it Takes' curriculum; each corporate partner developed one two week session focused on one of the school's core soft skills. During the school year, each middle and high school student receives two to three 'What it Takes' classes weekly, led by corporate partners, that alternate daily with non core academic classes (e.g. driver's education and Spanish).

'What it Takes' also provides internship and job shadowing opportunities for 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students outside of school. Approximately 90% of all high school juniors and seniors are involved in an internship or job shadowing experience at some point in the school year; students typically have two to three internship or job shadowing opportunities each year. "Having corporate partners actually going into classrooms and teaching students has been beneficial for both them and our students," says Jackson, "Our students get exposed to a variety of different career possibilities from the people who are actually working in those fields, while our partners get to interact with and build relationships with the great young men and women at our school. It's been good publicity for us and gives them an opportunity to connect with the community."

### **The Longer School Year: Summer Session and Saturday School**

Beginning three weeks after the school year ends, all 3<sup>rd</sup> through 10<sup>th</sup> grade students participate in the school's four week summer intersession. This four week session provides opportunities for struggling students to review the prior year's content and higher performing students to prepare for the year ahead, particularly in math, ELA, science and social studies. Each session is four hours long, beginning at 9:30 a.m. and ending at 1:30 p.m. every day.

Teachers are assigned students whom they will instruct in the upcoming school year. This allows teachers and students to familiarize themselves with one another before the beginning of the school year. During the summer session, teachers create their own lessons as they would during the school year, though summer session lessons place a greater emphasis on project-based learning. In addition, the school provides students with field trips and outreach activities throughout the summer session. Students are grouped into classrooms of 19 to 21 students based on their most recent VSOL performance.

In addition to supports provided through the summer session, AAD also provides a three hour Saturday school for students in need of additional academic support, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Approximately half of all students are required to attend, based on VSOL scores and grades. Saturday school is led by AAD classroom teachers, who teach both their content area and students.

### **Staffing the longer school day and year**

All AAD teachers are contractually required to teach the extended day, which includes four instructional periods with one planning period each day. Furthermore, all teachers in grades three through ten are obligated to staff the summer intersession. The school compensates each teacher an additional \$4500 for the extended day, and a rate of \$30 per hour for staffing the summer intersession as well as Saturday school.

Unlike charter schools—which Virginia did not allow in 1992—AAD Middle and High School must comply with all district and state obligations, and receive financial support from NNPS in the same manner as other public schools. However, AAD also relies on outside donations to fund the additional \$2200 required to provide the expanded school time, supports, and opportunities each student receives. “Our ultimate goal and the mission of Achievable Dream,” says Vreeland “is to use education to break the cycle of poverty. We are committed to doing whatever we can to close the achievement gap and ensure that our students contribute positively to society during their time here and afterwards.”