

# CHARTER LEADERS OF COLOR **MATTER.**

## Raymond Ankrum

Superintendent  
Riverhead Charter School



I was the first in my family to go to college. While working toward my Master's degree, I was a substitute teacher in an affluent white school district, much different than the neighborhood I grew up in. Experiencing this school setting made me think about all the kids in less affluent schools, who receive less from their schools. This is what made me really want to be an educator.

I became a Sociology and history teacher in Baltimore City Public Schools. It wasn't long before I realized that I wanted to help define school culture, set behavioral expectations, and select curriculum—I wanted to be a school leader. So I received three master's degrees that would help me toward my goals, from Stonybrook, Morgan State University, and Columbia University. I am currently pursuing a doctorate in educational leadership at Manhattanville College, with a focus on preparing school staff to be successful in an urban environment.

### **A WARM WELCOME**

2012–2013 was the first year of Common Core testing in New York State. In the 2012–2013 school year, Riverhead Charter School (RCS) third graders performed 9% proficiency in English/Language Arts (ELA) and an 11% proficiency rate in math. In the 2018–2019 school year, our third graders performed at over an 80% proficiency rate in ELA and 75% proficiency rate in math.

RCS continues to show consistent growth and outperform local districts and state averages on all standardized assessments. In 2019, RCS ranked in the top 2% of all New York State Public Schools in growth between the 2018 and 2019 state assessments. We very rarely advertise, but our waiting lists are higher than they've ever been. In 2020–2021, we will incorporate ninth grade into our school program, because parents advocated for us to expand our programming.

At RCS, our entire staff prioritizes a culture of welcome. 60% of RCS students are Latinx, and seeing the discrimination and physical threats that their families face outside of school echoes for me the experience of Black people in the 1960s and 1970s. It is so important to me to create that safe space where young people can just come and be students.

RCS is a place where students can learn from different cultures—and they do so with joy and lightness. We host cultural nights, in which parents and students come out and celebrate the culture and identities of their families. What is especially exciting to me about these nights is that the whole school community comes out to support! On LatinX night, it wasn't just Latinx—nearly everyone came out to support! Same for African American Night, Polish Night, and our other cultural nights. We celebrate everybody! My own children attend my school, and I am grateful that they have the opportunity to learn from diverse cultures.

A culture of welcome and embrace of diversity also applies directly to academic matters. The first phone call from an RCS staff member to parents of a student must be a positive call. It must set the tone of love and celebrate good qualities of that young person, and then from this basis we can work together to help the student address challenges. We also create individual learning plans for every student, based on the student's RCS interim assessments and nationally normed assessments. We know each child's strengths and challenges, and if on any standard a student doesn't reach at least 80% proficiency, they'll receive more small-group instruction in this area until they reach at least 80% proficiency.

## KIDS FIRST

African Americans have been silenced for so long in the United States. It is time for our voices to be heard in terms of how we educate our kids and what is going to be that route to success for them. As a black school leader of a very diverse school, I feel a deep responsibility to make sure that all of my students and families are heard and represented. There have been moments when I've put my career on the line to ensure that all students are reflected in a top-notch staff. It is so important for kids to see people who look like them in leadership positions. They need to see that that space at the table is a space they can one day occupy.

# Riverhead Charter School

**"A school that accepts and embraces cultural diversity."**

Location	Calverton, NY
Year Opened	2001
Student enrollment	600
Grades served	K-8
Website	<a href="http://riverheadcharterschool.org">riverheadcharterschool.org</a>



### Student Demographics

Asian	1%	Homeless Youth	1%
Black/African-American	26%	At Risk Students	34%
White/Caucasian	12%	Students with Disabilities	18%
Hispanic/Latino	60%	ESL Students	45%
Two or More Races	2%		



CHARTER  
LEADERS  
OF COLOR  
**MATTER.**