

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA

Opportunity Network

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Excel Academy South Mid-Year Evaluation
December 21, 2016

Provider: The Camelot Schools of Pennsylvania, L.L.C
Contract Term: FY 2013-2017
Program capacity: 400

Site Visit Date: Wednesday, December 7, 2016- 9:00 a.m.
Child Count Compliance: 100%
Average Daily Attendance & Number of Students Present: 72% (288 students present out of 400 enrolled)

Walkthrough Review Team:

Majeedah Scott, Director, Multiple Pathways
Dr. Wanda Jenkins, Director, Operations
Marcus De Vose, Assistant Director, Transition Services
Barbara Cobb, Supervisor, DHS Education Support Center

Program Staff:

Milton Alexander, Vice President, Region I, Camelot Schools
Scott Cruttenden, Regional Director, Camelot Schools
Jarrad Muller, Executive Director
Cassandra Miller, Principal

Domains and Performance Levels:

Programs were rated according to seven domains: Vision for Learning, Family & Community Relationships, School Safety, Positive Environment, High Quality Instruction, Talent Development, and Data. The domains are aligned to the School District's evidence-based "High Performing School Practices" and "Essential Features of Alternative Education Programs", as well as the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Leadership Framework. Each domain includes three to seven components that are individually rated according to three broad performance levels: **Failing**, **Needs Improvement**, and **Proficient**. In general, a **Failing** rating indicates that a program could not demonstrate or did not develop practices identified within a domain component. A **Needs Improvement** rating indicates that overall a program has made some progress or effort toward practices identified within a domain component, but has not sufficiently developed the practice. A rating of **Proficient** indicates that, in general, a program has made adequate progress toward the implementation of practices identified within a domain component.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Vision for Learning

Excel Academy South was rated **Proficient** in all of the five components within this domain: strategy for literacy and numeracy skill building, retention plan implementation, orientation for new students, family engagement plan, and individual graduation plans.

Excel Academy South uses a nationally recognized common instructional framework from Jobs for the Future (JFF), and is a national demonstration school for JFF. The framework's six instructional strategies are used in all of Excel Academy South's classrooms. The strategies support engaging instruction, rich questioning, and literacy/numeracy skill building. The program administers the TABE to all students three times per year to get baseline and growth data. Teachers use test results to develop lesson plans and learning support strategies for students.

Excel Academy South presented its plan for family engagement. Their Campus Improvement Plan (CIP) included a guide for how the program handles parental engagement. The guide or plan identifies the specific staff

responsible for each effort. Family engagement activities include fun events like the Haunted House this past October, family dinners hosted at the program, and regular outreach to parents through positive phone calls. The program discussed its belief in having a lot of events and opportunities to connect with parents as a way to get their buy-in and support.

Excel Academy South introduces the college application process during new student orientation. The program discussed its experience with parents not wanting to provide personal information for FAFSA completion. As a result, the program began introducing FAFSA and financial aid during new student orientation so that parents are aware of the process early on. Excel Academy South uses the “Senior Checklist” as part of its individual graduation planning with students. All seniors also complete the Senior Seminar course, which takes them through the process of college and career exploration, college and job applications, resume writing, mock interviews, the senior project, and other related activities.

Family and Community Relationships

Excel Academy South was rated **Proficient** in all of the five components within this domain: communication logs, partnerships with employers and postsecondary institutions, strategy to improve family engagement, parent/community outreach, and parent surveys.

Excel Academy South has a family engagement plan and reaches out to parents consistently and frequently. However, the program does not have a plan for improving family engagement. The review team recognizes Excel Academy South’s efforts and planning in these areas, but recommends that the program create a comprehensive family engagement strategy to ensure that it continues to grow in this area.

Excel Academy South presented its matrix of partnerships with colleges and trade schools, which included details such as the number of students served, institution contact, nature of the relationship, and outcomes from the last workshop, event, or interaction with the partner. Excel Academy South uses Google Docs as its system for maintaining communication logs. All communications on behalf of students is recorded in the system, and staff are required to update their efforts and use the information in the database to inform their work.

School Safety

Excel Academy South was rated **Proficient** in all of the six components within this domain: average daily attendance (ADA), number of students present in each classroom, attendance policy & truancy plan implementation, use of Scholarship with fidelity, orderly daily routines, and program-wide positive behavior system.

Excel Academy South uses a student ratings system that is standard practice for all of Camelot’s programs. Ratings are displayed in the hallways and are updated weekly based on a student’s attendance, academic achievement, and behavior. Students are ranked “Neutral”, “Pledge”, “Eagle”, and “Executive” based on their ratings. High ranking students receive a number of incentives, including membership in student government, trips and events, and special privileges like dress down day. The program also sets clear consequences for unacceptable behaviors, which was presented to the review team in the Student Handbook.

Excel Academy South provided the review team with attendance documentation for the walkthrough day, which included a report from Scholarship. The number of students observed in classrooms matched the program’s self-reported ADA of 77% (274 students present out of 356 enrolled). The review team observed a smooth morning check-in. However, students do not swipe in using their Scholarship IDs. The program’s Attendance Coordinator takes attendance manually and enters the information into Scholarship. Teachers also take attendance each class period. The review team is concerned that Excel Academy South does not use the Scholarship system in a way

that meets the District's expectation. The program should order student ID cards immediately and have students swipe in or risk receiving a legal notice and related action from the School District.

Positive Environment

Excel Academy South was rated **Proficient** in all four components within this domain: respectful interactions between staff, students and families, staff have a good rapport with students, engagement of students and families in building a positive environment, and team building activities for staff and students.

The review team observed respectful interactions between students and staff throughout the program. Student leaders escorted us throughout the building and talked very positively about their experiences at Excel Academy South. Students expressed their feelings that the staff really care about them, and that they feel valued when they are at school.

Honor roll ceremonies are held for each report period and parents are invited to attend. Excel South offers a number of incentives to students, including special breakfasts, trips, and gift cards. Excel South also presented and discussed its efforts towards team building activities for staff. Each summer, the entire staff completes an outdoor challenge that includes a rope course and scavenger hunt.

High Quality Instruction

Excel Academy South was rated **Proficient** in all seven of the components within this domain: students enrolled in the classes they need to graduate, postsecondary bridging plan, postsecondary exploration and preparation, identifying students eligible for Keystone exams, strategies to prepare students for Keystone exams, early warning system for academic interventions, and students actively engaged in class.

The program's strategy to prepare students for Keystone exams includes a focus on delivering instruction that incorporates standards and language from the tests. Teachers received professional development on Keystones standards and language, and are held accountable for including both in their lesson plans. Excel Academy South's Principal reviews lesson plans and provides constructive feedback to Teachers.

The review team observed that all students were actively engaged in classrooms. We observed classes using all of the six common instructional strategies. The review team talked to a few students in each class and we found that students were very much aware of what they were learning and the reasons why they were learning it. Students also seemed very excited to share their work with the review team. Excel Academy South offers Honors classes in English, History, Science, and Mathematics.

Excel South rosters all graduating seniors for the Senior Seminar class. The curriculum engages students in the activities required to plan for postsecondary opportunities. Students complete career interest inventories, college and job applications, and the FAFSA; they write resumes and cover letters; do mock interviews; they visit colleges; and the program brings in colleges to give admissions presentations.

Talent Development

Excel Academy South was rated **Proficient** in all of the seven components within this domain: staff turnover, professional development calendar, staff selection process, new staff induction, principals conduct regular observations and provide constructive feedback, common planning time for teachers, and differentiated staff supports.

The program's Principal presented their schedule for common planning time. The Principal explained that common planning time is structured the same way that Teachers in the program are expected to structure their class periods (e.g., warm ups, objectives, exit tickets). Excel Academy South staff receive four performance evaluations each year. The program's Executive Director and Principal have one-on-one meetings with staff to discuss performance on a regular basis.

Staff who are new to Excel Academy South go through a week-long orientation prior to the first week of school. Per Camelot policy, all new staff must go through 56 hours of professional development prior to the start of school. The program discussed their new staff orientation and presented related evidence. The agenda for new staff orientation includes training on Engrade, grading and lesson planning expectations, and an overview of the Camelot model. The program also presented its yearlong professional development calendar, as well as agendas and sign-in sheets from completed sessions. The program's Principal maintains materials in a binder from all professional development sessions, and the binder is located in the staff resource room for easy reference by Teachers.

Data

Excel Academy South was rated **Proficient** in all of the four components within this domain: formative and summative assessments, system to collect and analyze data, strategy to track student academic progress and related interventions, and program improvement plans and related data reports.

Excel Academy South presented its Campus Improvement Plan (CIP), which serves as the program-wide improvement plan. The CIP includes goals related to the performance metrics in Excel Academy South's contract with the School District. It also includes goals that were created by staff, as well as goals that were created during the Middle States Accreditation process last school year. The CIP is regularly reviewed with all staff so that all contribute to solutions and all are held accountable for outcomes. The CIP included a summary of the program's progress in reaching each stated goal.

Excel Academy South provided the review team with a demonstration of the Engrade online grading system, which it uses to document and track student academic progress. The demonstration included a look at the actual system in real time, including system-generated reports that staff use to track and monitor students progress. The program provided samples of the formative and summative assessments used in different subject areas. Teachers assess students daily using warm ups and exit tickets. Teachers are required to give midterm and final examinations in all classes, and sample exams were presented.