

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA

Opportunity Network

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Excel Academy North Mid-Year Evaluation
December 21, 2016

Provider: The Camelot Schools of Pennsylvania, L.L.C
Contract Term: FY 2013-2017
Program capacity: 200

Site Visit Date: Monday, December 5, 2016- 12:30 p.m.
Child Count Compliance: 100%
Average Daily Attendance & Number of Students Present: 53% (105 students present out of 200 enrolled)

Walkthrough Review Team:

Christina Grant, Assistant Superintendent
Majeedah Scott, Director, Multiple Pathways
Marcus De Vose, Assistant Director, Transition Services
Frances Burns, Chief Operating Officer
Barbara Cobb, Supervisor, DHS Education Support Center

Program Staff:

Milton Alexander, Vice President, Region I, Camelot Schools
Scott Cruttenden, Regional Director, Camelot Schools
Ryan Muller, Principal
Sadiqa Lucas, Executive Director

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

Excel Academy North administers TABE and SRI to assess students' baseline reading and math levels. Assessment data is used to differentiate instruction, and lesson plans are rooted in the District's core curriculum. The program uses Google Docs to track student levels so that all Teachers can access the data and use it to differentiate instruction and plan lessons.

The program discussed and presented its retention plan as part of the school's formal Campus Improvement Plan. The program's positive behavior system serves as a major strategy for retention. Students are rated weekly based on academics, behavior and attendance, and high ranking students enjoy a number of benefits discussed elsewhere

in this evaluation. The program also discussed its attendance procedures as supporting retention strategies. Attendance is tracked everyday and the program makes daily phone calls to the parents of absent students. Excel Academy North also conducts home visits for parents who they cannot access via telephone. The program's Campus Improvement Plan laid out goals for retention, regular reviews of retention data through SAR (self-assessment reports), progress towards goals, as well as steps to adjust strategies as needed.

Excel Academy North discussed and provided evidence of its efforts to engage parents and maximize their involvement with the program. The review team found that the efforts discussed and presented were sound and demonstrated the program's commitment to involving parents at every level of the program. The program presented its list of parent engagement activities and intended outcomes. Examples include Open House with pizza, a Parental Advisory Board, and newsletters mailed home. The program uses Google Docs to track all communication with parents; all staff have access and are expected to update their communications daily. Excel Academy North has an open door policy for parents, who can visit the school anytime and meet with the program's Executive Director.

Family and Community Relationships

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

As discussed in the Vision for Learning section of this evaluation, Excel Academy North has a family engagement plan and reaches out to parents consistently and frequently. However, the program does not have a plan for improving parent engagement. The review team recognizes Excel Academy's North's efforts and planning in these areas, but recommends that the program create a comprehensive family engagement strategy (similar to that created for retention), to ensure that it continues to grow in this area.

Excel Academy North uses the aforementioned Google Docs as its system for maintaining communication logs. All communications on behalf of students is recorded in the system and all staff are expected to update their efforts and use the information to support their work. On the day of the walkthrough, the school was in mourning after losing one of their students who was killed the prior evening. The program informed that review team that they had already taken calls from parents whose students were absent due to grieving. The tragic loss the school endured and any related communication and efforts are documented in the program's Google Doc system.

Excel Academy North 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.

School Safety

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

Excel Academy North provided the review team with attendance documentation for the walkthrough day, which included reports from Scholarchip. The number of students observed in classrooms matched the program's self-reported ADA of 53% (105 students present out of 200 enrolled). The review team is concerned about the low attendance. We recommend that the program continue to analyze attendance data and develop aggressive solutions that incorporate promising practices from successful local and national programs. The review team acknowledges the program's ongoing challenges with attendance in recent years after its move from Northeast

Philadelphia to North Philadelphia. Excel Academy North was located in the Northeast for nine years and then moved to its current location in 2013. The program presented evidence of its attendance plan implementation via attendance contracts; approximately 35% of students enrolled in the program are on an attendance contract.

Excel Academy North 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.

Positive Environment

Excel Academy North 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.

Excel Academy North holds Town House every morning and afternoon. Town House serves as a reflection time for students and a time to make program-wide announcements. All students and staff gather for Town House, which is facilitated by both staff and student leaders. The topics discussed vary and range from Year Book announcements to students expressing themselves about losing classmates to gun violence.

The program engages students and families in building a positive environment. Honor roll ceremonies are held for each report period and parents are invited to attend. Excel North offers a number of incentives to students, including special breakfasts, trips, and gift cards. Excel North 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 North was rated **Proficient** six of seven components within this domain: identifying students eligible for Keystone exams, students enrolled in the classes they need to graduate, postsecondary bridging plan, postsecondary exploration and preparation, strategies to prepare students for Keystone exams, and early warning system for academic interventions. Excel Academy North was rated **Need Improvement** in one of seven components within this domain- students actively engaged in class.

The review team did not observe all students actively engaged in every class. In almost all classrooms observed, there was at least one student who, though not disruptive, was disengaged and appeared apathetic toward the lesson or activity. The review team noted that the overall level of rigor in classrooms was low and that students were not pushed to fully engage with lessons.

The program issues interim reports and holds report card conferences each marking period. Students' grades are reviewed weekly; Teachers review their own students and Administrators provide aggregated reports for all Teachers during the Wednesday common planning time. During that time, staff work together to identify struggling students and create strategies to support students. Teachers are required to make a minimum of 10 phone calls home to parents each week; calls are a mixture of positive and negative comments regarding student performance. The program presented related documents as a demonstration of its early warning system for academic interventions.

Excel North rosters all graduating seniors for a Senior Capstone course. 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 North was rated **Proficient** in six 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, and common planning time for teachers. Excel Academy North was rated **Needs Improvement** in one of the seven components within this domain- differentiated staff supports.

Excel Academy North and its sister school, Excel Academy South, expanded the capacity of its student population this school year. The expansion unavoidably caused disruptions in staffing. Some Teachers were promoted to leadership positions, and some leaders were promoted to senior leadership positions. Staff who are new to Excel Academy North 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 presented classroom observation forms and Teacher evaluations. The Principal's focus is to ensure that the program's common instructional strategies are implemented in every class, students are on-task, lesson plans are adequate, and Teachers receive timely feedback and supports. Although Excel Academy North demonstrated a satisfactory system for evaluating Teachers, the review team noted obvious disparities in Teachers' experience levels and overall ability. The review team recommends that the program ramp up support to lower performing teachers according to their individual needs (differentiated staff supports). This will require a comprehensive analysis of each Teacher's strengths and weaknesses, which can be determined from frequent classroom observations and analyses related to student achievement and engagement.

Data

Excel Academy North 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.

Teachers meet each Wednesday to review student data and to develop strategies to support students. Data sources include TABE scores (administered three times per year) and classroom grades (summative/formative assessments and attendance). The program presented its database of student interventions, which showed regular updates on student progress and the effectiveness of related interventions.

Excel Academy North presented samples of its school-wide performance data, which it reviews regularly with staff. The program tracks its performance in relation to the standards set forth in its contract with the School District. This data is shared with staff so that all contribute to solutions and all are held accountable for outcomes.