



**Instructional Visit Report  
Excel Middle Years Academy**

**Provider:** Camelot Schools of Pennsylvania, LLC  
**Contract Term:** FY 2018 - 2022

**Site Visit Date:** Tuesday, March 13, 2018 - 9:00 a.m.  
**Program Capacity:** 100

**Site Visit Review Team:**

Christina Grant, Assistant Superintendent,  
Opportunity and Innovation Networks  
Majeedah Scott, Director, Multiple Pathways,  
Opportunity Network  
Dr. Wanda Y. Jenkins, Director, Special Projects,  
Opportunity Network and Innovation Networks  
Jacqueline Jones, Transition Liaison, Opportunity  
Network

**Program Staff:**

Scott Cruttenden, Regional Director, Camelot Schools  
Sadiqa Lucas, Executive Director, Excel Middle Years  
Academy  
Jaleeca Jacobs, Director, Student Services, Excel Middle  
Years Academy  
Kendra Guber, Academic Coordinator, Excel Middle  
Years Academy  
Sam Johnson, Operations Team Leader, Excel Middle  
Years Academy

**Overview of Instructional Site Visits:**

Instructional site visits consist of four main parts: **Academic Success Questions with Leadership; Academic Success Questions with Teachers; Academic Success Questions with Students;** and **Classroom Observations**. **Academic Success Questions with Leadership** includes standardized questions that focus on: data and academic outcomes; academic outcomes versus goals; and preparation for classroom observations. **Academic Success Questions with Teachers** includes standardized questions that focus on: the use of academic assessments; academic outcomes versus goals; and the school's overall academic performance. **Academic Success Questions with Students** includes standardized questions that focus on: student backgrounds and previous educational experiences; academic expectations set by Teachers; tests, grading procedures, and supports from Teachers; overall level of satisfaction with the program; and recommendations for improvement. **Classroom Observations** was guided by a standardized Classroom Observation Form that assessed elements of: the classroom environment; instruction; and assessments.

**Comments/ Considerations:**

Excel Middle Years Academy is a new program in its first year of operation. The Camelot Schools of Pennsylvania was awarded a contract to operate a Continuation program via the Request for Proposals 520 competitive bid process for Alternative Education Programs. Excel Middle Years Academy offers alternative education services to middle school students in a contract school setting.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

### Academic Success Questions with Leadership

**Academic Outcomes.** Excel Middle Years Academy presented and discussed the program's key academic data, including literacy and numeracy growth, retention rate, graduation rate, percentage of students attending at least 85% of school days, and Special Education data. Excel Middle Years Academy aggregated and analyzed its own data as a demonstration of the program's ability to make data-informed decisions for positive student outcomes. The program's leadership explained some of the key drivers of their academic outcomes. The staff at Excel Middle Years Academy worked together to identify students with very low level skills in order to provide interventions and skill-building opportunities to address their learning needs. The staff overlaid TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education) results with student classroom grades, and was able to clearly see where students are struggling and need additional help. This extra help is infused throughout the program in regular education classes, in small enrichment classes, and through co-teaching strategies. The program utilizes an evidence-based common instructional framework in all classes. The common instructional framework includes six instructional strategies that support student engagement and differentiation for diverse learners. Students who enter the program reading below the third grade level are rostered for an enrichment course with the program's Special Education teacher. The curriculum for the enrichment course is designed based on the individual needs of students who are assigned to it, and it is also designed based on PSSA reading and mathematics test content. Each student at Excel Middle Years Academy has an individual learning plan that sets goals for academic improvement. Students develop their individual learning plans in a one-on-one setting with a teacher. Students gain an understanding of their academic strengths and weaknesses, and develop specific action steps that they will take throughout the school year to improve. Progress towards academic goals established in the individual learning plan is frequently reviewed with students, and also among staff during common planning times. The program's leadership team partly attributed their retention and attendance rates to parental outreach and involvement. Excel Middle Years Academy has a parent advisory board that supports the program's leadership with effectively reaching out to parents. The parent advisory board members also serve as ambassadors for the program by communicating concerns, feedback, and solutions from a parental perspective. Excel Middle Years Academy reaches out to each student's parent or guardian on a weekly basis to provide progress updates.

**Academic Outcomes versus Goals.** Excel Middle Years Academy's Operational Team Leader, Academic Coordinator, and Executive Director conduct operational and instructional walkthroughs in classrooms. Walkthroughs are conducted at least once per week to ensure that lesson plans, materials, and class activities are well-planned and meet the administration's expectations for high quality instruction. The program's Academic Coordinator conducts focused walkthroughs depending on a teacher's needs, recent or upcoming professional development, and formal or informal observations. Each teacher in the program receives four formal walkthroughs every school year using the Charlotte Danielson Framework. The program's administration meets with teachers within the week after a walkthrough to discuss the observations, provide feedback, and develop any action steps for improvement. Professional development is typically led by the program's teachers. A number of teachers are currently enrolled in graduate school to advance their pedagogy. Teachers are often excited to turnaround what they have learned to their colleagues. The teachers at Excel Middle Years Academy all go through the residency program at Camelot's Excel Academy South, which trains them on how to effectively utilize the common instructional framework in their classrooms. The program's Academic

Coordinator and Director of Student Services also determine and lead professional development sessions. All professional development sessions are approved by the program's administration, and topics must align with the program's academic goals and mission. **Classroom Observation Preparation.** When asked what we should see in classrooms, the program's leadership noted that we should see lesson objectives and warm-up activities posted. We should also see teachers using one or more of the six instructional strategies from the program's common instructional framework. The Academic Coordinator stated that she is working with her teachers to infuse more collaborative group work into each lesson, and that she is encouraging them to take a step back from direct instruction to allow more time for gradual release and student voice. The program has several new teachers on staff, and leadership has been working closely with them to build their confidence as teachers.

### **Classroom Observations**

Review team members observed an enrichment class for five minutes that was wrapping up, and two students were present during the observation. The enrichment class was held in a classroom used for social studies and English. Recent student work, classroom rules, student data, and instructional resources were prominently displayed throughout the classroom. The program's Educational Support Teacher was working with the two students. The learning objective for the enrichment class was posted, and it focused on students answering text-dependent questions using comprehension. The teacher worked one-on-one with each student, and rotated between the two. Students used worksheets to answer questions about a video game article. The teacher used questioning, scaffolding, and modeling to support the students. The depth of engagement observed challenged students to synthesize and evaluate text. The assessment method observed involved students self-evaluating their own writing using a four-point scale rubric.

Review team members observed a mathematics class for approximately eight minutes that was at the start of the lesson. Five students were present in class and all were on-task during the observation. Recent student work, classroom procedures, instructional resources, and student data were on display in the classroom. Students worked on the warm-up activity independently, which included algebraic equations, word problems, and percentages. Two teachers were present in the classroom. The mathematics teacher worked with all students to review answers to the warm-up activity. The other teacher worked with one particular student to provide push-in support. Students used notebooks and calculators, and the mode of instruction observed included lead and assist, as well as independent practice. The depth of engagement challenged students to synthesize and evaluate mathematical problems.

Review team members observed a social studies class for approximately five minutes that was already in progress, and 11 students were present in class. All students were on-task during the observation. Recent student work, classroom procedures, instructional resources, and student data were prominently on display throughout the classroom. The lesson objective and agenda were posted on the whiteboard. Students were learning to identify South American countries on a map. Students worked together in groups to learn about the countries using a competitive activity. Review team members talked with one group that was excited to explain the lesson, and they expressed really wanting their group to win the competition. Although no assessment was observed, the lesson agenda required that students complete the mapping activity with 80% accuracy.

Review team members observed an English class for six minutes that was wrapping up, and nine students were present in class. Classroom walls displayed recent student work, class rules, instructional resources, and student data. All students were on-task during the observation. Students used worksheets and workbooks during the lesson. The class agenda and learning objectives were posted on the whiteboard. The class was finishing a discussion that compared hip hop music to William Shakespeare's work. There was a significant degree of student voice during the discussion. Students transitioned to completing the exit ticket assessment, which asked them to summarize what they had learned during the lesson.

### **Academic Success Questions with Teachers**

Ms. Perry and Ms. Smith participated in the Academic Success Questions with Teachers. Ms. Perry is a veteran instructor who serves as the program's Educational Support Teacher. Ms. Smith is a recent college graduate in her first year of teaching. Ms. Perry and Ms. Smith discussed the assessments that they use to monitor student learning. They use TABE results to determine students' baseline reading and mathematics levels. The TABE is also used to gauge skill growth at mid-year and at the end of the school year. The teachers talked about frequently referring to TABE results in order to plan their lessons and to provide students with targeted academic interventions. The teachers also use classroom-based assessments daily, including warm-up activities, exit tickets, and questioning. In addition, teachers administer unit tests and quizzes. Teachers talked about how they use academic data to inform their lessons. The entire teaching staff meets together weekly with program administration to review student outcome data, including attendance, course marks, and behavior. Teachers expressed that all of the program's systems are based on data. The staff use data weekly to rate students. Students with the highest ratings become members of the student government. Those with the most concerning ratings receive intervention plans that are developed by the student, teachers, and parents/guardians. Teachers talked about using individual learning plans to develop learning objectives and goals for each student. Individual learning plans are accessible by all staff, and all staff are expected to update plans using evidence to show progress towards objectives and goals. Teachers considered individual learning plans to be a really useful tool for documenting student outcomes, accommodations for Individual Education Plans (IEP), outreach made to parents, and even behavior. The teachers discussed the support that they receive with making instructional shifts and analyzing student data. Both teachers agreed that the entire teaching staff supports each other through common planning time, classroom rounds, and delivering professional development. Teachers also expressed gratitude for the support they receive from Ms. Gruber, Academic Coordinator. Ms. Smith specifically discussed the overwhelming support she has received as a first year teacher. She recalled getting help in a number of areas, from setting up her classroom to having veteran teachers model lessons for her. Overall, the teachers thought that Excel Middle Years Academy is doing well, and that there is room for growth in some areas. They are working hard to build academic confidence among their students. They believe that their students can achieve great academic success regardless of their previous academic backgrounds.

### **Academic Success Questions with Students**

Excel Middle Years Academy selected five students to participate in the Academic Success Questions with Students. Students previously attended traditional middle schools, and one was previously enrolled in the Camelot Academy transition program. Students talked about the positive aspects of attending Excel Middle

Years Academy. They described staff as being very energetic in the morning, which helps students to get excited about learning even when they do not feel like it. Students expressed how their teachers make them feel special because they are the first students to enroll in the program. As a result, students were very clear that Excel Middle Years Academy is not a disciplinary program and that it is a continuation program. When asked about the program's discipline policies, students thought that they were very fair. They discussed the program's norms and how students are respectfully redirected by staff when they get off-task. They also discussed how they are encouraged to confront their peers if they see behaviors that go against the program's cultural norms. Students expressed feeling safe and cared about at Excel Middle Years Academy. Some students mentioned that drugs and guns were brought to their old schools, and they overwhelmingly thought that the teachers from their previous schools did not teach them anything or care about their success. The students spoke about their interests in various high schools. Since attending Excel Middle Years Academy, they now feel like they can go to the high school of their choice. Students talked about leaving behind some of their old habits since attending the program. They now take more pride in their school work and they no longer want to skip school or misbehave in class. Students were optimistic about their futures and they felt that Excel Middle Years Academy is giving them the tools to do well in high school.

### **Recommendations**

The review team recommends that Excel Middle Years Academy continue on its current path of providing engaging instruction in a safe and caring learning environment. The review team also recommends that the program continue to strengthen its high school selection process for students, which includes working closely with Opportunity Network leaders to develop partnerships with high quality high schools across the city.