



**Mid-Year Evaluation  
Excel Middle Years Academy**

**Provider:**

The Camelot Schools of Pennsylvania, L.L.C.

**Site Visit Date:**

Monday, November 13, 2017- 8:00 a.m.

**Contract Term:**

FY 2018 - 2022

**Child Count Compliance:**

100%

**Program Capacity:**

100

**Percent of students attending at least 85% of school**

**days: 86%**

**Site Visit Review Team:**

Majeedah Scott, Director, Multiple Pathways, Opportunity Network  
Dr. Wanda Y. Jenkins, Director, Special Projects, Opportunity Network  
Marcus De Vose, Assistant Director, Transition Services, Opportunity Network  
Rachel Holzman, Deputy, Student Rights and Responsibilities  
Lisa Mesi, Director, New Principals Academy, Leadership Development and Evaluation  
Jacqueline Jones, Transition Liaison, Opportunity Network

**Program Staff:**

Milton Alexander, Vice President of Operations, Camelot Schools  
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

**Domains and Performance Levels:**

Programs were rated according to **seven domains**: 1) **Vision for Learning**, 2) **Family & Community Relationships**, 3) **School Safety**, 4) **Positive Environment**, 5) **High Quality Instruction**, 6) **Talent Development** and 7) **Data**. The domains are aligned to the School District's evidence-based High Performing School Practices and the 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 rated according to **three performance levels**: 1) **Failing**, 2) **Needs Improvement**, and 3) **Proficient**. **Failing** indicates that a program could not demonstrate or did not develop practices identified within a domain component. **Needs Improvement** indicates that a program has made some progress or effort towards practices identified within a domain component, but has not sufficiently developed the practice. **Proficient** indicates that a program has made adequate progress towards the implementation of practices identified within a domain component.

**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

### Vision for Learning

**Rating:** PROFICIENT [5 of 5 components met]

**Strategy for literacy and numeracy skill-building** (Yes). Excel Middle Years Academy's leadership discussed the strategy they use to increase students' reading and mathematics skill levels. Students are administered the TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education) upon entry into the program. TABE results provide program staff with each student's grade level in reading and mathematics. The program's academic staff meets weekly to discuss TABE data, interventions, and students' overall academic progress in class. The staff also work together to develop accommodations that are incorporated into daily lesson plans. These accommodations support as many students as possible with skill gains. In addition, each student has a Student Learning Plan (individual graduation plan/personalized learning plan) that documents their academic goals, progress and strategies for skills improvement. Teachers use TABE data and class assessments to determine common deficiencies among students, which they address using accommodations that are woven into their lesson plans. Students at Excel Middle Years Academy take the TABE three times per year: upon admission; mid-year; and at the end of the school year. Mid-year TABE results provide staff with initial evidence of growth, which they use to adjust accommodations and enrichment classes. The end-of-year TABE scores provide staff with each student's skill growth for the year. The goal for staff at Excel Middle Years Academy is to improve each student's skill levels by two grade levels each school year. **Retention plan implementation** (Yes). The staff at Excel Middle Years Academy closely monitors student attendance, ensures that students have extra-curricular activities that will keep them engaged with the program, and provides parents with ample opportunities to engage with the program as well. Excel Middle Years Academy follows the School District's "3-5-7 attendance rule", which requires the program to contact parents via telephone and certified mail when students reach three (3) to seven (7) absences. The program will make referrals to truancy court for any student with 10 unexcused absences. The program's staff does not wait until a student's third absence to contact their parents. Instead, the staff contacts parents via phone each day that a student is absent. The program offers a number of different clubs for students to join, and students are also encouraged to create their own clubs. Two examples of the program's various clubs are The Young Ladies Club and The Brotherhood Club. **Orientation for new students** (Yes). Excel Middle Years Academy staff discussed the importance of engaging with each family at the start of a student's enrollment. The first engagement occurs during new student orientation, which is mandatory for parents to attend. During orientation, the program's staff explains their high expectations for attendance, academic achievement, and behavior. The program's school policies are discussed at length, and families are given a school handbook that they can use to reference various policies and expectations whenever needed. The program holds orientation sessions every Tuesday and Thursday. Excel Middle Years Academy works collaboratively with the District's Transition Liaisons to recruit students for the program. Excel Middle Years Academy enrolls students in middle school who are struggling to succeed academically, need a more structured environment, or those who are behind in grade level (i.e., overage). Staff noted that their main goal for the program is to help students succeed academically in middle school so that students can attend their high school of choice. **Family engagement plan** (Yes). Excel Middle Years Academy has created a parent engagement program called The Village, which encourages parents to visit the school on any Thursday to discuss their

concerns and meet with staff. The program also has a functioning Parent Advisory Board. Additionally, Excel Middle Years Academy has helped a number of families with securing various resources, such as internet service at home, in order to build a strong sense of community between school and parents, and to support overall student retention by removing certain barriers that can have a negative impact on a child's academic success. All teachers at Excel Middle Years Academy make contact with parents via telephone every week to communicate not only academic challenges, but also any academic improvements that students have made. **Individual graduation plans** (Yes). Results from the TABE are used to develop individual academic plans for each student. Students with very low level skills (3<sup>rd</sup> grade or below) are rostered for an enrichment class. Enrichment classes provide students with small group instruction and targeted interventions to address skill deficiencies.

### **Family and Community Relationships**

**Rating:** PROFICIENT [5 of 5 components met]

**Parent surveys** (Yes). Excel Middle Years Academy leadership discussed and presented their parent surveys. The program administers surveys to parents during The Village events that are held on Thursday evenings. The school leadership team analyzes parent survey results, and uses that data to develop school wide initiatives and to make improvements to the program. The school plans to administer parent surveys each quarter. The first round of parent surveys focused on learning about triggers for students and how the program's staff can best support and serve students with certain triggers. **Parent/community outreach** (Yes). The school discussed and presented evidence of its specific efforts to reach out to parents. For example, Excel Middle Years Academy has a spaghetti dinner for parents to guide them through the high school selection process. During the high school selection spaghetti dinner, staff provided materials, answered questions, and gave support for completing the application. The program also conducted specific meetings face to face and/or by telephone to parents who could not attend the dinner event. **Communication logs** (Yes). Excel Middle Years Academy presented its communication logs, which documented their daily outreach to parents. These communications consisted of positive phone calls about student achievement, attendance calls when students are absent, as well as concern calls when students have challenges. **Strategy to improve family engagement** (Yes). The program presented its school calendar, which included a plan to improve family engagement through a series of events and outreach efforts that encourages parents to visit the school, talk to staff, and express any concerns or give feedback about the program. The staff conducts home visits when they cannot communicate with parents over the telephone. Excel Middle Years Academy leadership expressed that it is important for them to get to know their parents and to build a good rapport with them to support student success. **Partnerships with employers and postsecondary institutions** (Yes). Excel Middle Years Academy discussed the relationships that they have built and continue to build with the community and the program's surrounding neighborhood. Staff utilize their personal networks to invite speakers for career days. The program coordinates community service projects, such as the Book Bag Giveaway and trips to feed less fortunate community members in homeless shelters. The school works with organizations such as Great Philly Schools and Temple University's Cradle to the Grave program. The program has built partnerships with a number of citywide admission high schools and charter schools in order to give their students high quality options for ninth grade. The program has taken students on tours of high schools,

and also has invited high school representatives to visit the program and speak directly to students about what their high schools have to offer.

## **School Safety**

**Rating:** PROFICIENT [6 of 6 components met]

**Average daily attendance** (Yes). On the day of the site visit, 91% of students were in attendance. **Use of Scholarchip with fidelity** (Yes). Excel Middle Years Academy presented its Scholarchip report for the day of the walkthrough and for the previous week. The program experienced technical difficulties with its School District-issued Scholarchip machine through the end of October, which prevented students from being able to swipe in using their school identification cards. Nevertheless, the program maintained attendance in Scholarchip by inputting the data manually each day. The Scholarchip report on the day of the site visit showed that the program's technical difficulties with the system were resolved because all students had swiped in. **Number of students present in each classroom** (Yes). Review team members' count of students present in classrooms was consistent with the Scholarchip report for that day. **Attendance policy and truancy plan implementation** (Yes). Excel Middle Years Academy discussed and presented their plan to address attendance and truancy. The program follows the School District's "3-5-7 attendance rule", which requires staff to make contact with parents via telephone and certified mail when students hit a certain number of absences. The program will make referrals to truancy court for any student with 10 or more unexcused absences. Excel Middle Years Academy does not wait until a student's third absence to contact parents. Instead, program staff make telephone calls daily to the parents of students who are not in attendance. The program's staff also makes home visits when they are unable to reach a parent via telephone and certified mail. A major component of the program's attendance and truancy plan is to partner with students' individual stakeholders, such as probation officers and social workers. The program establishes relationships with these individuals to support the whole student and to remove poor attendance as a barrier to their academic achievement. Students with poor attendance enter into attendance contracts through which they pledge to attend school more regularly. **Orderly daily routines and transitions** (Yes). Review team members observed student transition between class periods. All students behaved appropriately during transition, and students settled into their next class periods without engaging in any disruptive activities. **Program-wide positive behavior system** (Yes). Excel Middle Years Academy presented and discussed its plan for program-wide positive behavior supports. The program plan for program-wide positive behavior support is founded upon five basic norms that are taught during orientation and reinforced through visual cues around the school and in each classroom. The five basic norms set high expectations for students to respect themselves, their peers, and the entire school community. On a weekly basis, Excel Middle Years Academy ranks students according to their academic progress, attendance, and behavior. The rankings group students into "concern", "neutral", "pledge", and "knight" designations. "Concern" students receive one-on-one meetings with program staff to discuss challenges and to devise plans for improvement. Students with the highest rankings enjoy a number of incentives, including special lunches, leadership roles (e.g., taking visitors on tours of the school), and decision-making power as it relates to school policies and activities. The highest ranking students become members of the program's student government. The staff at Excel Middle Years Academy is trained in the program's tiered behavior intervention system. Staff use: friendly non-verbal warnings, concern non-verbal- stern facial gestures, helpful verbal warnings, and concern verbal warnings. The program's student leaders also provide support to their peers through friendly confrontation. If these interventions and de-escalation techniques do not work for a student who is behaving inappropriately, behavior support staff escort the student out of class to have a conversation with the program's operations team leader or another staff designee.

## Positive Environment

**Rating:** PROFICIENT [4 of 4 components met]

**Engagement of students and families in building positive environment** (Yes). Excel Middle Years Academy has a well articulated plan to engage students and families in building a positive environment in the school. As discussed in the “Family and Community Relationships” section of this report, the program consistently and frequently connects with parents in support of their children’s academic success. The program initially engages families and students in building a positive environment during orientation. At that time parents are provided with the school handbook, receive introductions from key staff members, and learn more about the program’s expectations for learning. Families are welcomed to the school every week during The Village Thursdays. This is an opportunity for parents to freely express any concerns or feedback. The Excel Middle Years Academy Parent Advisory Board helps the program to make school-wide improvements, and members provide an important parental perspective for school leaders who need to make decisions for the program. **Respectful interactions between staff, students, and families** (Yes). Review team members observed respectful interactions between all students and staff. Staff engaged students in small talk as they transitioned to the next class, and students greeted staff respectfully. Students also acknowledged the site visit review team as visitors to their school, and greeted us with handshakes as they transitioned. **Team building activities for staff and students** (Yes). Excel Middle Years Academy engages in team building activities for staff and students. These activities were evident in the program’s school year calendar. Program leadership also showed evidence of events that have already occurred, including a spaghetti dinner and team building activities during staff orientation to kick off the new school year.

## High Quality Instruction

**Rating:** PROFICIENT [7 of 7 components met]

**Students actively engaged in class** (Yes). Review team members observed an English class and a health class. Class objectives, lesson plans, class rules, and norms were posted in both rooms. All students were actively engaged in the lessons. In addition, instructional resources were posted throughout the classrooms (e.g., word walls in the English class). During the observation, students in English were finishing up reading a story and transitioned to completing a worksheet on pronouns. In health class, students were learning about eating disorders and were discussing facts and myths about eating disorders as a group. **Early warning system for academic interventions** (Yes). Excel Middle Years Academy implements its own system of early warning indicators in order to catch challenges early on and provide interventions to resolve those challenges. Teachers enter class grades weekly, and they analyze student achievement data to determine which students are facing academic, behavioral, or attendance challenges. Using weekly grades data, teachers are able to identify “red flag” students who are in need of an intervention. “Red flag” students meet individually with their teachers, and parents are notified of the challenges. Students with academic challenges receive extra help and their individual academic plans are adjusted to reflect specific accommodations and strategies to support students. Students with continuous behavior challenges are put on a daily report that requires parental signatures. Those with attendance challenges receive a parental conference, attendance contracts, and home visits when necessary. **Students enrolled in the courses they need to meet graduation requirements** (Yes). The program presented

student rosters and the school's master schedule. All students are rostered for the classes they need to promote to the next grade level. **Program has identified students eligible for PSSA Exams** (Yes). Excel Middle Years Academy educates students in grades six through eight. Eighth grade students take the PSSA, and program staff provided the review team with a list of students who are required to take the exam based on grade and test content. **Strategies used to prepare students for PSSA Exams** (Yes). The program develops a testing plan for teachers and students to prepare for the exam. PSSA style of questions are incorporated into class-based assessments and writing occurs across the curriculum in all classes. Excel Middle Years Academy teachers focus on student mastery and understanding of concepts rather than just basic recall. Lesson plans often require students to explain and demonstrate their understanding of the concepts they learned. **Postsecondary bridging plan/postsecondary exploration and preparation** (Yes). Students enrolled at Excel Middle Years Academy are given numerous opportunities to explore their career interests and to also learn about high priority/high growth careers in our region. Each student completes a career interest survey to help narrow down their career interest areas. Once a student's career interest areas are identified, they receive a career evaluation, which further narrows down their career interest areas to specific careers. Identifying their career interests is an important part of students selecting the high school they will attend after graduating from Excel Middle Years Academy. The program implements the Motivation Mondays program in which guest speakers talk to students about their careers and the path they took to get to where they are in their careers. Students are encouraged to select the guest speakers that they would like to learn more about.

## **Talent Development**

**Rating:** PROFICIENT [7 of 7 components met]

**Common planning time for teachers** (Yes). Excel Middle Years Academy sets aside time each Wednesday for collaboration and common planning among teachers. The program's administrators presented the schedule and focus areas for Wednesday common planning time. The program's most recent Wednesday common planning time focused on classroom management and the review of actual case studies to support students who are struggling academically. The Wednesday common planning time is not solely focused on teachers; behavioral staff also participates and contributes their expertise in the area of positive behavior management.

**Differentiated staff supports** (Yes). Teachers at Excel Middle Years Academy conduct peer observations (instructional rounds) in order to learn from each other and to provide constructive feedback to their peers.

**Principals conduct regular observations and provide constructive feedback** (Yes). The program's academic administrators (the Principal and Academic Coordinator) observe classrooms on a daily basis. Professional development topics are created based on each teacher's strengths and weaknesses. Teachers are required to self-identify two areas in which they need to improve, and those goals are documented and worked on throughout the school year. Teachers receive four formal observations each school year, and informal observations are written up weekly by academic administrators. **Professional development calendar** (Yes). Excel Middle Years Academy presented sign in sheets from past professional development sessions, as well as a calendar of upcoming topics. The program's leadership noted that topics for professional development are subject to change based on the needs of the staff. **Staff selection process** (Yes). Excel Middle Years Academy posts open positions on typical job posting websites such as Indeed.com. The program's parent company, Camelot Schools, does the first line of vetting candidates and then sends those resumes to Camelot's local

leadership to further narrow down candidates. Candidates undergo a series of panel interviews and are required to solve a case study scenario and to present a sample lesson if they are interviewing for a teaching position. **Staff turnover** (Yes). Excel Middle Years Academy is in its first year of operation and all staff have been retained thus far. The program's leadership noted that 10 of the program's 14 staff are Camelot Schools veterans, in that they were transferred to the new program from existing schools in order to ensure a continuity of the organization's norms and culture. **New staff induction** (Yes). New staff undergo two weeks of orientation in which they learn about the program's norms and culture, professional expectations, behavioral management techniques, and expectations for lesson plans and classroom instruction.

## **Data**

**Rating:** PROFICIENT [4 of 4 components met]

**Strategy to track student academic progress and provide interventions** (Yes). The program utilizes Google Docs to track grades and attendance on a weekly basis and staff are required to enter data into the Google Doc each week. **System to collect and analyze data** (Yes). Program administrators aggregate and disaggregate the data to understand program-wide and individual student-level trends for attendance and grades. Data are discussed weekly during the program's Wednesday common planning time. The data allows staff to easily see which students are progressing and which students are off-track. Staff monitor data trends to develop interventions for struggling students and to also determine how well interventions are working and whether or not efforts need to be adjusted. **Program improvement plans and related data reports** (Yes). Excel Middle Years Academy presented and discussed the program's Campus Improvement Plan (CIP), which is a performance document required of all Camelot's school programs. The CIP includes performance expectations set by the School District, as well as those set by Camelot. The CIP also includes strategies for meeting performance goals outlined by the School District and Camelot. Similar to Camelot's other programs, Excel Middle Years Academy's CIP will serve as a year over year performance report by referencing previous years' outcomes, which are used to set targets for the current school year. **Formative and summative assessments** (Yes). Excel Middle Years Academy uses the TABE to gauge student growth and to provide targeted interventions for skill growth. Teachers are required to administer classroom-based assessments on a daily basis, such as an exit ticket to demonstrate a student's level of mastery with new concepts. Teachers are also required to administer unit exams, midterm exams, and final exams.