



**Instructional Visit Summary  
Excel Academy North**

**Provider:** The Camelot Schools of Pennsylvania, L.L.C.  
**Contract Term:** FY 2018 - 2022

**Site Visit Date:** Monday, March 12, 2018- 12:30 p.m.  
**Program Capacity:** 200

**Site Visit Review Team:**

Majeedah Scott, Director, Multiple Pathways to Graduation, Opportunity Network  
Elvis Mucaj, Strategy Analyst, Opportunity Network  
Kevin Feaganes, Case Manager, Re-engagement Center, Opportunity Network  
Jacqueline Jones, Transition Liaison, Opportunity Network  
Brandon Cummings, SDP Director of Leadership Development

**Program Staff:**

Scott Cruttenden, Regional Director, Camelot Schools  
Kevin Marx, Executive Director, Excel Academy North  
Ryan Muller, Principal, Excel Academy North

**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.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

### Academic Success Questions with Leadership

**Academic Outcomes.** Excel Academy North's leadership 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 Academy North aggregated and analyzed its own data as a demonstration of the program's ability to make data-informed decisions for positive student outcomes. Excel Academy North's leadership explained some of the key drivers of their academic outcomes. 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. Excel Academy North's leadership discussed their goal to improve student attendance program-wide. Attendance continues to be a challenge for the program since it moved from Northeast Philadelphia to North Philadelphia. This academic year, Camelot Schools implemented a truancy department for its Opportunity Network programs. The truancy department supports all Camelot programs in this region and accepts referrals from individual program sites. Camelot's truancy staff provide additional support to students and families that are struggling with attendance. The truancy staff also support site-based administrators, including Excel North's leadership. Excel Academy North conducted its own analysis of attendance and found that students who are younger or further from graduation tend to have the worst attendance rates. Excel Academy North gauges student growth in reading and mathematics by administering the TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education) three times per year. The program analyzes baseline skill levels, mid-year gains, and end-of-year gains. The program's goal is for each student to realize at least two years worth of growth every school year. Skill gains are celebrated throughout the program, and students are acclimated to the TABE upon initial entry into the program. Students take ownership over their TABE scores and look forward to demonstrating skill gains.

**Academic Outcomes versus Goals.** Excel Academy North has determined that students who are younger or further from graduation tend to have the lowest attendance rates. The program is working to put targeted interventions in place to support this sub-population of students with coming to school more regularly. This year, the program began grouping students into cohorts by expected graduation date. Excel Academy North's leadership reported that the grouping of students has helped to make students more aware of attendance issues; no other specific interventions were discussed. Excel Academy North continues to celebrate students with good attendance by providing incentives, such as awards, program-wide recognition, special field trips, and lunches. Excel Academy North's teachers and administrators call parents on a weekly basis to provide updates on their children's progress. Teachers are required to make a minimum of 10 phone calls per week. The administration encourages parents to meet with their children's teachers, and teachers make themselves available to meet individually with parents. In addition, parents receive progress reports and report cards throughout the school year. Students are kept up to date on their own progress through data walls located in each classroom and throughout the program's hallways. Teachers update grades at least weekly, and post grades in their classrooms by student identification numbers. Staff meet each week to rate students according to their attendance, academic progress, and behavior for the previous week. Students with the highest rankings become student government members. Excel Academy North's leadership discussed the use of assessment results to drive professional development offerings and teacher evaluations. The program does not use assessment results to evaluate teachers or to determine professional development offerings. The program

uses the Charlotte Danielson Framework for formal observations of teachers. Professional development offerings are determined based on principal observations and teacher input around best practices. **Classroom Observation Preparation.** When asked what we should see in classrooms, the program's principal noted that we should see teachers using the common instructional framework. We should not see all of the instructional strategies from the framework at once, but there should be evidence that the strategies are regularly in use. Each class should have learning objectives posted on the board. Teachers should review the word of the day with students and it should be scaffolded throughout the day in all classes. Students should be engaged with learning, and there should be a significant degree of student voice.

### **Classroom Observations**

Review team members observed a mathematics class for five minutes that was already in progress, and nine students were present in class during the observation. Classroom procedures, student data, and instructional resources were on display in the classroom. All students were on-task and engaged with the lesson. The lesson agenda and learning objectives were posted on the board. Students were learning to evaluate the relationships between different types of angles. The class worked on solving equations as a whole group. The teacher solved the equations on the whiteboard with input from the students. Students used worksheets and calculators during the observation. The mode of instruction observed was lead and assist. The teacher used scaffolding and questioning techniques to help students master the content. Students were challenged to synthesize and evaluate information related to various types of angles. The assessment method observed was questioning and polling.

Review team members observed an English class for eight minutes that was already in progress, and 14 students were present during the observation. Classroom procedures, student data, and instructional resources were on display in the classroom. All students were on-task and engaged with the lesson activity. The lesson agenda and learning objectives were posted on the board. The program's special education teacher worked with the English teacher to support students in completing the lesson activity. Students transitioned to a group activity at the start of the observation. The transition took approximately four minutes for students to organize into groups and to get their questions answered about what to do next. In groups, students were asked to analyze character traits for one of the main characters of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Students used worksheets and books to complete the class activity. Students sat together in groups, but they did not work together to complete the activity. Review team members asked students about the assignment, and they informed the team that they will complete the activity individually and then put all of their answers together. Although the activity was supposed to be a collaborative group effort, the teacher did not assign group roles and students were not working together.

Review team members observed a science class for several minutes that was already in progress, and 10 students were present in class during the observation. Classroom procedures, student data, and instructional resources were on display in the classroom. The lesson agenda and learning objectives were posted on the board. Students were independently completing a worksheet on eukaryotic and prokaryotic cells. All students were on-task and engaged with the lesson. The teacher circulated the room to monitor students and to provide help as needed. Students used textbooks to help them complete the worksheet assignment. Based on the

worksheet activity, the depth of engagement challenged students to demonstrate their understanding of the lesson.

Review team members observed a health class for 10 minutes that was already in progress, and 10 students were present in class during the observation. Recent student work, classroom procedures, student data, and instructional resources were on display in the classroom. The lesson agenda and learning objectives were posted on the board. All students were on-task during the observation. The method of instruction observed was question and answer. Students were working in groups to prepare for an upcoming quiz. They worked in teams to answer questions in a competition style format. Students were excited about the competition and the possibility of earning extra points if their team won.

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

Ms. Duffy (Academic Coordinator and English teacher) and Ms. Gingalewski (History teacher) participated in the Academic Success Questions with Teachers. Ms. Duffy has taught at Excel Academy North for a number of years and Ms. Gingalewski is in her first year as a teacher. The teachers talked about strategies that have been successful for providing targeted support to students following the receipt of data. The teachers discussed the use of literacy groups and collaborative group activities. The teachers discussed the use of modified reading materials for students who are reading at very low levels. Modified reading materials allow low level readers with the ability to access the same content as other students who are reading on or above grade level. Teachers noted that the program's special education teachers push into classrooms often to provide support to students with Individual Education Programs (IEP), as well as general education students who are struggling with certain concepts. Teachers reported collaborating often with their colleagues who teach other subjects. Every week, Excel Academy North sets aside common planning time for teachers. In addition, teachers, operations staff, and administrators meet weekly to discuss the progress of each student in order to update rankings for attendance, behavior, and academic progress. Teachers discussed using data to inform their lesson plans. The entire staff meets to discuss TABE data, course passage rates, and Keystone Exams results. The various datasets help teachers to develop lesson plans that respond to the learning needs of students. The teachers reported receiving a great deal of support from program administrators. The program's newest teacher, Ms. Gingalewski, noted that she has been overwhelmingly supported by her new colleagues with everything from setting up her classroom to planning lessons. The teachers thought that that Excel Academy North is doing great overall.

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

Review team members met with a group of students who were selected by Excel Academy North to participate in the Academic Success Questions with Students. The students all agreed that their teachers at Excel Academy North are the best teachers that they have ever had. They felt strongly that their teachers care about them learning and understanding class work- not just passing. They noted that students who attend Excel Academy North have to be serious about learning and graduating. Teachers and administrators have high expectations for student behavior, which is reinforced through the program's strong cultural norms. Some of the students talked about having their own children, and the difficulties they face as teenage parents. They expressed gratitude for the Education Leading to Employment Career Training (ELECT ) program in their school, which they thought has been very helpful. Students thought that the program's cell phone policy was good, because they believed that

having access to their cell phones in school would keep them distracted. When asked what they would change about the program, students talked about lunch and access to drinking water. They thought the school lunches were not good and they thought that the milk served with lunch is often not cold. They would like to have greater access to water fountains or water coolers so that they can drink water more often. Overall, students love going to school at Excel Academy North and they appreciate the opportunity to re-engage with education in a safe, accelerated school environment.

### **Recommendations**

The review team recommends that Excel Academy North continue to dig deeper into its attendance data and work to develop comprehensive interventions to improve attendance rates for students who are younger or further from graduation. The program should continue to utilize the common instructional framework and provide ongoing support to new teachers who are learning to effectively use the instructional strategies. New teachers should also receive extra help with incorporating instructional strategies into their lesson plans whenever appropriate. Finally, Excel Academy North should continue on its current path of providing a safe and respectful learning environment for students, families, and staff.