



**Mid-Year Evaluation  
Excel Academy North**

**Provider:**

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

**Site Visit Date:**

Tuesday, December 5, 2017- 12:00 p.m.

**Contract Term:**

FY 2018 - 2022

**Child Count Compliance:**

100%

**Program Capacity:**

200

**Percent of students attending at least 85% of school days:** 46.2%

**Site Visit Review Team:**

Christina Grant, Assistant Superintendent,  
Opportunity Network  
Elvis Mucaj, Strategy Analyst, Opportunity Network  
Rodreen Howell, Transition Liaison, Opportunity  
Network  
Jacqueline Jones, Transition Liaison, Opportunity  
Network  
Brandon Cummings, SDP Director of Leadership  
Development

**Program Staff:**

Milton Alexander, Vice President of Operations, Camelot  
Schools  
Scott Cruttenden, Regional Director, Camelot Schools  
Kevin Marx, Executive Director, Excel Academy North  
Ryan Muller, Principal, Excel Academy North

**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.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

### Vision for Learning

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

**Strategy for literacy and numeracy skill-building** (Yes). Excel Academy North administers the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) in the beginning and end of each school year. Baseline TABE results are used to develop lesson plans and targeted interventions to address specific skill deficiencies. All teachers have access to TABE data and are required to incorporate skill-building into their lessons based on results from the TABE. Excel Academy North's goal is to increase students' reading and mathematics skills by two grade levels each school year for students who are behind at least two grade levels for their age-appropriate grade. Progress towards the two-year skills growth is measured weekly during the program's common planning time for teachers on Wednesdays. **Retention plan implementation** (Yes). Excel Academy North's leadership noted the connection between attendance and student retention. A major component of their retention plan is to ensure that students are attending the program regularly. The program follows the School District's "3-5-7" rule for attendance and truancy, which requires program staff to reach out to parents via telephone and postal mail when students are absent. In addition, Excel Academy North has a truancy team that makes home visits for students who are chronically absent and whose parents are unreachable. **Orientation for new students** (Yes). Excel Academy North hosts new student orientation for both parents and students. New students and their parents are introduced to key program staff during the orientation and receive a comprehensive overview of the program. Program staff go over the student handbook with all new students and their parents. The student handbook contains all of the academic, behavior, and attendance expectations for Excel Academy North. At orientation, students are also introduced to postsecondary exploration and the expectation that all students will continue to pursue education after high school. **Family engagement plan** (Yes). Excel Academy North's leadership presented communication logs and documentation of outreach to parents. The program hosted an open house event at the start of the school year, as well as report card conferences. Program staff reach out to parents via telephone at least once per week to provide updates on their children's progress. In addition, the program offers a "Family & Community Drive-Thru" every Wednesday afternoon. During those afternoons, students and their families can receive progress reports and support from staff related to attendance, grades, extra help in all subject areas, and postsecondary planning, including financial aid application assistance. **Individual graduation plans** (Yes). Each student at Excel Academy North has an individual graduation plan. Program staff conduct a credit analysis for each student and meet one-on-one with students to map out when they will take the remaining courses needed for graduation.

### Family and Community Relationships

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

**Parent surveys** (Yes). Excel Academy North presented its parent survey and results from the parent survey. Parents overwhelmingly feel that their children's class lessons are "quite motivating" or "extremely motivating".

**Parent/community outreach** (Yes). As mentioned in the Vision for Learning section of this report, Excel Academy North reaches out frequently and consistently to parents. Program staff are required to contact the parents of each student every week. The program hosts events for parents to give them the opportunity to talk with teachers and program administration. **Communication logs** (Yes). Excel Academy North maintains a comprehensive communication logs of all contact with parents. The program also maintains sign in sheets from all parent events. **Strategy to improve family engagement** (Yes). The program articulated strategies to improve family engagement which include frequent and consistent outreach via telephone, social media, postal mail and home visits, as well as numerous opportunities for parents to visit the program and talk with staff about any concerns. **Partnerships with employers and postsecondary institutions** (Yes). Excel Academy North presented evidence of its partnerships with employers and postsecondary institutions. Partnerships exist with city government agencies, colleges and trade schools, Greek organizations, and philanthropic organizations.

### **School Safety**

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

**Average daily attendance** (Yes). The program was able to calculate attendance on the day of the site visit. Fifty-six percent) of the student population was present on that day. **Number of students present in each classroom** (Yes). The number of students present in each classroom aligned with the program's reported attendance. **Attendance policy and truancy plan implementation** (Yes). Excel Academy North reaches out to parents each day that a student is absent from the program. The program does not wait until a student's third absence to make contact with parents. In addition, the program makes home visits for students who are chronically absent and their parents are unreachable via telephone. **Orderly daily routines and transitions** (Yes). Review team members did not observe any transitions between class periods. However, review team members did observe classrooms and noted the consistency in routines across different classrooms. All classes at Excel Academy North have the same lesson plan structure so that students become accustomed to the learning environment regardless of different subject areas and teachers. **Use of Scholarchip with fidelity** (Yes). Excel Academy North was having technical difficulties with Scholarchip at the time of the site visit. However, the program's leadership was able to provide a report from Infinite Campus that showed attendance had been taken using Scholarchip. **Program-wide positive behavior system** (Yes). Excel Academy North sets clear expectations for members of its learning community, and also clear consequences for unacceptable behaviors. Expectations and consequences are articulated in the program's student handbook. Program staff rate each student every week according to attendance, academic progress, and behavior. Ratings are displayed in the hallways and are updated weekly. Students are ranked "Neutral", "Pledge", "Eagle", and "Executive" based on their rating. High ranking students receive a number of incentives, including membership in student government, trips and events, and special privileges like dress down day.

### **Positive Environment**

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

**Engagement of students and families in building a positive environment** (Yes). Excel Academy North's leadership discussed efforts to create a positive learning environment for students and their families. Efforts include: honor roll luncheons for students, writing contests, student government, parent events and outreach, comprehensive orientation for new students, young men's and young ladies' clubs, and newsletters that highlight the program's points of pride. In addition, the program has created a culture in which students hold

their peers accountable. This system allows students to walk through the hallways together and correct a student's actions when they are behaving outside of the program's five behavior norms. Parents are always welcome to visit the school and to provide feedback on their children's progress. **Respectful interactions between staff, students, and families** (Yes). Review team members observed respectful interactions between staff and students. Students were observed speaking to each other in a polite manner, and students were respectful when teachers redirected them in class. **Staff have a good rapport with students** (Yes). The program's leadership noted that teachers often eat lunch with students in an effort to get to know students better and to build rapport. **Team building activities for staff and students** (Yes). Staff attend weekly common planning meetings and daily meetings at the end of the school day in order to promote team building. Teachers work together to plan and co-facilitate professional development offerings. In addition, the program sponsors off-campus team building activities for staff, including an outdoor challenge that includes a rope course and scavenger hunt.

### **High Quality Instruction**

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

**Students actively engaged in class** (Yes). Students were engaged in all classes observed during the site visit. **Early warning system for academic interventions** (Yes). Teachers at Excel Academy North are required to update and review grades weekly. During the Wednesday program-wide meetings, teachers rate each student according to their academic progress for the week. Students who are not progressing are therefore easily identified. Those students receive one-on-one counseling meetings with staff to discuss their challenges and to develop a plan to get back on track. Teachers provide extra help to students who are struggling, and the program's special education teacher pushes into classrooms to provide extra support to all students who need it. **Students enrolled in the courses they need to graduate** (Yes). Review team members examined rosters and credit profiles for a group of students and all were rostered in the correct courses that they need to fulfill graduation requirements. **Program has identified students eligible for Keystone Exams** (Yes). The program's leadership presented a list of students eligible for Keystone Exams by subject area and test administration date. **Strategies used to prepare students for Keystone Exams** (Yes). Excel Academy North prepares students for Keystone Exams by ensuring that all eligible content from the exam is taught in Algebra, English, and Biology classes. The program's principal reviews and approves lesson plans, and standards attached to the Keystone Exams must be imbedded in class lessons. In addition, teachers provide students with test-taking strategies and tips, and the quizzes and exams they create include prompts that a student would typically see on Keystone Exams. **Postsecondary bridging plan** (Yes). Excel Academy North rosters all seniors for the Senior Capstone class. Students in Senior Capstone are guided through the activities necessary for planning their next step after high school. Students complete resumes, draft cover letters, and apply for full-time employment, college, trade school, and financial aid programs such as the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). **Postsecondary exploration and preparation** (Yes). Students at Excel Academy North visit college campuses and participate in mock job interviews. The program brings in college admission representatives to recruit students. Staff at Excel Academy North keep track of students' efforts toward securing postsecondary placements (i.e., employment or higher education).

## Talent Development

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

**Common planning time for teachers** (Yes). Teachers at Excel Academy North meet daily to plan together and to discuss interventions for individual students. The entire program meets every Wednesday to review each student's progress and to assign ratings to students based on their behavior, attendance, and academic progress.

**Principals conduct regular observations and provide constructive feedback** (Yes). The principal of Excel Academy North has the primary responsibility of supporting teachers and conducting classroom observations. The principal observes classrooms daily and reviews lesson plans weekly. The program's leadership team analyzes classroom-level trends for attendance, behavior, and course marks. **Differentiated staff supports** (Yes). The principal uses classroom observations and classroom-level data to determine specific areas of support that individual teachers need. The principal then holds conferences with teachers to develop action plans that articulate steps for improvement and the support structures that need to be in place from the principal.

**Professional development calendar** (Yes). Excel Academy North presented its professional development calendar for the school year that includes topics on instructional strategies, lesson planning, and classroom management. The program's professional development calendar is subject to change based on newly emerging teacher needs or program outcomes. **Staff selection process** (Yes). Excel Academy North 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). The program has had some turnover in staff since last school year. Five new teachers have joined the program. The program's leadership noted that most of the turnover they see is the result of staff moving to other regions or staff leaving to pursue different opportunities outside of the classroom. **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. Camelot Schools, the program's parent company, requires that all new staff undergo at least 56 hours of professional development prior to starting the job.

## Data

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

**Strategy to track student academic progress and provide interventions** (Yes). Excel Academy North's leadership noted that their strategy to track student academic progress begins with holding teachers accountable for updating lesson plans and student grades on a weekly basis. Teachers discuss student academic progress as a group during weekly team meetings, and school leadership monitors grades on a bi-weekly basis. If any student is falling behind in class, teachers will then work to modify and enhance the curriculum based on the student's areas of weakness. The program intentionally groups students in classes by pairing higher skilled students with lower skilled students. In this way, students with lower level skills can see the work through a different student lens and they can also receive peer support. **System to collect and analyze data** (Yes). Excel Academy North presented its data collection system, which directly addresses accountability standards outlined in their contract with the School District. The data is housed in a comprehensive spreadsheet and is updated frequently with data collected by teachers and data leveraged from School District reports. This information is

used to create both student-level and program-level reports on a monthly, quarterly, and yearly basis. **Program improvement plans and related data reports** (Yes). Excel Academy North presented its Campus Improvement Plan that details program-wide performance goals for the current school year, as well as their performance on goals from previous school years. The Campus Improvement Plan is also linked to the School District's accountability standards by including metrics from the contract. **Formative and summative assessments** (Yes). Excel Academy North gives teachers autonomy to develop their own formative assessments, which are customized based on the student population. Teachers often engage in cross-curricular projects designed to give students the opportunity to collaborate with students in other classes. The program implements formative assessments such as peer reviews, quizzes, and small group assignments. Teachers administer comprehensive exams at the end of each lesson unit that serve as summative assessments.