



Marie-Claire Ohman and Leslie Orellana Fuentes take partner work-time seriously during a sixth grade English class. According to a state report, Excel students improve faster than their state peers.

EXCEL ACADEMY RANKED FIRST IN STATE FOR IMPROVING STUDENT PERFORMANCE

Excel Academy has built a reputation for fostering high student achievement, as demonstrated on annual Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) examinations. A recent report, however, reveals that Excel Academy does more than generate high absolute results. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) ranked Excel Academy first in the state for English and fourth in the state for math for improving student performance over time.

The new DESE growth model measures a school's ability to drive academic gains for all students. The model tracks the achievement of students across a three-year period and compares a student's academic attainment against that of their peer group. In the aggregate, Excel Academy students grew at the 86th percentile in English language arts, meaning Excel Academy students progressed at a faster rate than 86 percent of their peers statewide. In math, Excel Academy students grew at the 83rd percentile, outpacing the improvements of their statewide peers by a rate of 83 percent.

"The DESE growth model represents a significant shift in the dialogue about student achievement and it's a conversation we've been having at Excel Academy for a while," said Rebecca Cass, Excel Academy's Interim Executive Director. "We're proud of our annual MCAS results, yet we know that we best serve our students by pushing excellence year after year. Our growth model rankings demonstrate that we place students on a sustained trajectory of achievement."

Excel Academy's program pairs rigorous academics with tailored remediation programs such as Literacy, Writer's Workshop and Saturday Academy. "Our high achievement, high growth designation comes from our focus on continual improvement and our commitment to meeting the needs of every child who walks through our doors," said Komal Bhasin, Excel Academy's Principal. "We're here to close the achievement gap and that has to be about more than absolute test scores. It's about setting our students on a path that will bring them success in high school, college and beyond."

A NOTE FROM OUR LEADERS

In the weeks leading up to Boston's mayoral election, we watched as Mayor Menino and contenders Michael Flaherty and Sam Yoon debated a number of important issues. Key among them: education. The candidates agreed that the city's schools are not adequately meeting the needs of all students, as too often they come up short in their ability to drive achievement in low-income, minority and special education student populations. They disagreed, however, on how to solve this problem; they disagreed on the root causes of underachievement and where the responsibility should lie for addressing it.

At Excel Academy, we are effectively serving traditionally underserved students because we believe that high expectations and shared responsibility are essential drivers of high academic achievement. We embody our philosophy of high expectations by always examining what we can do better and how we can take students to the next level. We live our value of shared responsibility by working collaboratively with students, families, teachers, volunteers and friends to provide every student with the supports he or she requires to succeed. Student achievement is not about one student or any one moment in time. We believe the dialogue should be about *all* students setting out on a trajectory of achievement *for life*.

We hope that you'll take some time to learn more about how Excel Academy approaches student achievement and get involved our efforts to address educational disparity in Boston and beyond. Thank you for your ongoing support of Excel Academy Charter School.

Rebecca Cass
Interim Executive Director

Komal Bhasin
Principal



Students in the Williams 6 homeroom demonstrate Excel Academy's value of collaboration while playing a team building game.

EDUCATING ALL STUDENTS: SPECIAL EDUCATION AT EXCEL ACADEMY

Students enter Excel Academy through a blind lottery system where the only preferences expressed are for siblings of current students and students residing in East Boston or Chelsea. This random admissions process means that our student population reflects the neighborhoods the school was established to serve – East Boston and Chelsea. Excel Academy believes that every child who attends the school, regardless of his or her prior academic record, can and will achieve at high levels. To ensure that all students, even those with diagnosed disabilities, can flourish in our rigorous program, the school devotes significant resources to its special education and support programs.

For the 2009-10 school year, Excel Academy added a Student Support Fellow position to expand the capacities of the school's Learning Support Team (LST), consisting of two Learning Specialists, an English Language Learner Program Manager as well as part-time Tutoring Specialist, Counselor, Speech and Language Therapists, and Occupational Therapist. The LST enables Excel Academy to utilize a full inclusion model by providing instructional support to students with disabilities within the general education classroom. The team also works with students in small groups during non-instructional times helping to ensure that all students live up to their full potential.

New this year, the LST, in collaboration with the fifth grade team, has created a guided reading program for fifth grade students requiring additional support during regularly scheduled Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) time. They have also expanded their afterschool Literacy program to serve twice the number of students than served in prior years.

“Our students face a range of learning challenges, and our job is to support students, teachers and families to ensure that every child has the instruction, tools and remediation necessary to overcome academic obstacles,” said Marcy Long, the head of the LST. “We’re excited by the growth we’ve seen in our students over the first three months of this school year, and we look forward to seeing our students make even greater academic gains in the future.”

Seventh grade student Ariana Caraballo displays some of the food she harvested at The Food Project on Community Service Day. Ariana and her classmates discussed the issue of local poverty and hunger and learned about how The Food Project is working to provide food to local shelters and individuals in need. →

STUDENTS EXPLORE SOCIAL ISSUES THROUGH SERVICE

Excel Academy students are more than just scholars, they are engaged citizens. During Community Circle and core academic classes, Excel Academy students examine critical social issues and identify possible solutions. During two recent Community Service Days, Excel Academy students had the opportunity to turn their ideas into action while volunteering at a number of organizations across the Greater Boston area.

Following a discussion of domestic poverty and hunger, Excel Academy seventh and eighth graders had the opportunity to see firsthand how local non-profit organizations are making a difference. The students traveled to a site of The Food Project, a Lincoln, MA based organization, to help harvest sustainable, locally grown food. Half of the food harvested by The Food Project is donated to local shelters. “We talk about getting our hands dirty to help solve problems and at The Food Project we did, literally. It was hard work, but it was nice to know that we were helping get food to people who really need it,” said Carolyn Lopez, a seventh grade student.

Excel Academy sixth graders also got down in the dirt for their Community Service Day activity. The students of Harvard 6 traveled to Cambridge to get involved in environmental cleanup efforts at the Alewife Reservation. Students picked up trash and recyclables while discussing the need for protected spaces in urban environments. “I was surprised by how much trash there was to pick up,” said Joe Dubon, a sixth grade student. “We were able to help on one day, but I learned that it is important for us all to try and help out every day by taking care of the environment around us.”



OUR COMMUNITY OF SUPPORTERS

On Thursday, November 5th over 150 friends and supporters of Excel Academy Charter School gathered at the Foundation Lounge in Kenmore Square for our fourth annual Evening to Excel. Guests celebrated Excel Academy's first place rankings on the 2009 MCAS examinations and learned about how they could support our efforts to close the achievement gap as volunteers. They also raised over \$7500 to support student programs at Excel Academy Charter School.

Our volunteers and friends make it possible for us to fulfill our critical college-preparatory mission. We hope that you'll visit Excel Academy and see firsthand how you're making a difference!

For information about visiting Excel Academy contact apeek@excelacademy.org.

Established in 2003, Excel Academy Charter School currently serves over 200 fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students from East Boston, Chelsea and surrounding cities. The school's mission is to prepare middle school students to succeed in high school and college, apply their learning to solve relevant problems and engage productively in their communities.

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