

MINUTES
Excel Academy Massachusetts Board
Academic Oversight Committee Meeting
Monday, June 12, 2023 – 8:00 am
Location: Zoom

Committee Members in Attendance: Steve Zrike, Ben Howe, Bernabe Rodriguez

Committee Members Not in Attendance: N/A

Staff Attending: Owen Stearns, Nina Keough, Ferny Reyes, Arthur Kaynor

Members of the Public Attending: N/A

1. Call to Order

Zrike called the meeting to order at 8:03am and presided over the meeting. Kaynor kept the minutes.

2. Approval of Minutes

Zrike motioned to approve the Academic Oversight Committee meeting minutes from 5.18.23, Howe seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously.

All those in favor: Ben Howe, Bernabe Rodriguez, Steve Zrike

Opposed: None

Abstain: None

3. Update on Academics

Keough provided a summary of slides that the Network Academic Team plans to present at the Board meeting on June 16, 2023, including the School's approach to thinking about academic outcomes pre- and post-COVID, bright spots in the school year as well as challenges, and the School's strategies to continue to improve student outcomes moving forward. The School and kids were significantly impacted by COVID, and we are continuing to see that impact. We are also seeing this impact with our entering 5th graders and the loss of learning that occurred before they started at Excel. The School has also made progress and growth from the past low point in student performance. The School is in its first year of MAP implementation as a predictive tool and also in its first year of new, standards-aligned curriculum implementation across the middle school campuses. It is expected to take longer than one year to start to see student growth as a direct result of the new curriculum implementation, as it will take time for students and teachers to adapt, but the early signs are encouraging. The curriculum adoption has been embraced by the team. Some other notable updates:

- The School is observing strength in our 5th grade classes as indicated by results of the student survey and also early ELA test results, which show strong growth.
- The School has experienced no major disruptions to school culture, despite two new Heads of School and also one Head of School parental leave this year.
- The Network Academic Team's capacity has been stretched this year due to challenges with the launch of a new school in Rhode Island.
- The School has experienced great loss this year, with the passing of a student, an alum, and a High School Dean.

As the School looks ahead to next year, the following are some areas of focus:

- The School is not implementing many new initiatives next year, given that the School has just worked through many new implementations and changes for the last couple years, and is now wanting to dig into and refine what has already been started.
- We are making some important structural investments to improve the Team's capacity moving forward, including hiring Stephanie Patton as Deputy Chief Schools Officer. Patton was the founding Head of School at Excel Academy Chelsea and then the Senior Director of the BES fellowship before returning to Excel, where she will now manage Excel's Middle School Heads of School.

- The All Means All initiative is being implemented, to grow leadership capacity across schools and the Network to better serve all students.

The Committee discussed plans to increase Board engagement on the topic of academic oversight this year. One goal this year is to ensure the Board has a deeper understanding of current and historical academic data for the School, the impact of COVID on student performance at Excel, the progress the School has made over the past 2-3 years, and the areas where there is still more work to do. The Committee reviewed a draft data dashboard and also previewed the historical and current academic data that will be presented to the full Board at its next meeting. The Committee also reviewed peer benchmarks and comparison data, which show that – while we want to do better – Excel is also outperforming many other charter districts.

The Committee further discussed goals for the use of mid-term assessments. The school is not seeing false positives with these assessments. The majority of students improved, and we were given an early look at students who may be in need of more focused academic intervention. The goal of practice testing in January is to identify if there are standards that the whole group would benefit from looking at more deeply and also to identify individual students who need more targeted intervention. That’s why we observed students performing better than the predictive test. The assessment is functioning as an intervention tool. The Committee encouraged the use of MAP data as a tool to assess progress and discussed including this as one of the data points that the Committee will work into its quarterly report and meeting schedule next year. The school is also working to ensure consistent standardizing test conditions across campuses when administering MAP testing. The Committee also would like to review the school’s data periodically in the context of comparison/benchmark data from other schools such as Boston and Chelsea Public Schools, the state as a whole, and other charter schools in MA.

The Committee discussed methods of teacher performance assessment as well and approaches to data review and classroom observations. The Committee and staff then discussed teacher performance observations related to the influx of new, relatively inexperienced teachers post-COVID and the broader talent challenges that are now facing the education sector as a whole.

4. Public Comment

None

5. Adjourn

Howe moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:42am, seconded by Rodriguez, and the meeting was adjourned.

List of Documents Presented at the Meeting:

1. Agenda
2. Minutes from 5.18.23
3. Template data dashboard & data
4. Draft Academic Update Slides for June Board Meeting