

*FINAL - Approved 12.4.23*

**MINUTES**

**Excel Academy Massachusetts Board  
Academic Oversight Committee Meeting  
Monday, Sept. 18, 2023 – 12:00 pm  
Location: Zoom**

**Committee Members in Attendance:** Steve Zrike, Bernabe Rodriguez

**Committee Members Not in Attendance:** N/A

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

**Members of the Public Attending:** Shirley Verónica Cardona

**1. Call to Order & Welcome**

Zrike called the meeting to order at 12:02pm and presided over the meeting. Kaynor kept the minutes. Zrike welcomed everyone to the first Academic Oversight Committee meeting of the new school year and reminded the group about how the Committee's new structure and priorities for this year, including maintaining a more effective, roughly quarterly Committee meeting schedule and implementing new tools and processes to ensure an appropriate level of Board and Committee engagement in reviewing and responding to academic data throughout the school year. Cardona introduced herself as a member of the Friends of Excel Academy Charter Schools Board, who will be regularly participating in Academic Committee meetings and Board Academic updates in Massachusetts and Rhode Island throughout the year as a member of the public and then keeping the Friends Board up-to-date on academic outcomes and priorities in each region.

**2. Approval of Minutes**

Zrike motioned to approve the Academic Oversight Committee meeting minutes from 6.12.23, Rodriguez seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously.

All those in favor: Steve Zrike, Bernabe Rodriguez

Opposed: None

Abstain: None

**3. Update on Academics**

Representatives from the Network Academic Team, Keough (Chief Schools Officer), Patton (Deputy Chief Schools Officer), and Reyes (Director of Data & Assessment) introduced themselves to the Academic Committee.

Keough presented highlights from the Academic Update slides that were provided to the Committee in advance and facilitated a group discussion, and Reyes reviewed the latest academic data dashboard with the Committee and answered questions.

Keough started with a brief reminder about the context from last school year and the challenges the school was facing, including new curricula implementation, staff turnover and leadership transitions, and multiple tragedies within the school community.

This year, the school is not introducing many new structures and systems and is instead focusing more on deepening the quality of implementation of the improvements that have already been put in place over the past 1-2 years. Schools have been focused on improving the quality of teaching across schools by aligning on a common bar of excellence. Schools have also been focused on improving data and assessment systems organization-wide, including with these improvements to increase Board and Academic Committee visibility into academic data throughout the year. Stephanie Patton has joined as Deputy Chief Schools Officer to provide additional support and coaching to middle school Heads of School. Leaders have also been participating in the All Means All leadership development program, which was discussed in the last Committee meeting.

Keough then provided an update on the start of the school year so far. The schools had a very successful New Staff Orientation and Summit. From an academic data perspective, Excel is moving toward a cohort model for

***FINAL - Approved 12.4.23***

data organization and collection, which is appropriate due to the widely varying starting points between different 5th grade cohorts at the time they enter Excel. Additionally, schools are participating in a series of 8-week goal exercises throughout the year to sustain and build upon progress.

Reyes and Keough summarized the key academic and accountability data for the Excel Academy middle school and high school programs that was included in the Academic Update slides and data dashboard and provided to the Committee in advance, and the Committee asked clarifying questions.

Cardona asked for more information about the observed increase in middle school suspension rates. What are the drivers, what interventions have we put in place in the past for SPED/MLL students, and what have we done historically? Patton and Reyes provided context about this data. 2-3 years ago, students weren't always being held to consistent behavior expectations across all Excel campuses. Last year the school implemented more rigorous systems to ensure consistent expectations and accountability. This led to an increase in consequences in some areas, but it also led to more students meeting the threshold for expectations overall, and a more consistent and balanced approach across all campuses. The school has been working hard to find the right balance of accountability for kids and also rebuilding school culture at each campus post-pandemic.

Zrike noted that high school data looks roughly on par with what he is observing statewide. The MLL data is striking and important to flag and continue to monitor. This is where we would like to double-down to really move the needle on MCAS performance.

The Committee asked to hear more about the 8-week goals/8-week wins process. It has helped to create a space for more effective, strategic decision-making and alignment of priorities and best practices in teaching across the network and to identify where more support/resources are needed.

The Committee also discussed chronic absenteeism as a top priority for this year, in addition to increased support for MLLs. The Committee would like to continue to monitor MAP data this year with particular attention to these two topics. Zrike commented that these are the two highest-leverage strategies he believes we should focus on – getting kids into the classroom and providing targeted support to subgroups. The Committee would like to focus on these areas in the next Committee meeting.

#### **4. Public Comment**

None

#### **5. Adjourn**

Zrike moved to adjourn the meeting at 1:01pm, seconded by Rodriguez, and the meeting was adjourned.

List of Documents Presented at the Meeting:

1. Agenda
2. Minutes from 6.12.23
3. Academic data dashboard
4. Academic Update Slides for Excel MA Sept. Board & Academic Committee Meetings