

FINAL APPLICATION REVIEW 2010-2011

Proposed School Name:	Proposed School Location:		
Excel Academy Charter School – Boston	Boston		
Excel Academy Charter School – Boston II	Boston		
Excel Academy Charter School – Chelsea	Chelsea		
Network of Schools with Excel Academy Charter School			
	Boston	Boston II	Chelsea
Grades Served at Full Capacity:	5-8	5-12	5-8
Number of Students Served at Full Capacity:	448	448	224
Proposed Opening Year:	FY2013	FY2013	FY2012

Public Statement:

Excel Academy Charter School - Boston will be a new middle school located in Boston serving grades 5 – 8 with a maximum enrollment of 448 students. Excel Academy Charter School - Boston II is a proposed new charter school option for Boston students and families. We seek to serve grades 5 – 12 with a maximum enrollment of 448 students. Excel Academy Charter School - Chelsea will be a new middle school located in Chelsea serving grades 5 – 8 with a maximum enrollment of 224 students.

Our mission will be to prepare students to succeed in high school and college, apply their learning to solve relevant problems, and engage productively in their communities.

Excel Academy Charter Schools – Boston, Boston II, and Chelsea will be governed by the Board of Trustees of the Excel Academy Charter School, a highly successful middle school located in East Boston. Each Excel Academy Charter School will operate within the Excel Academies network and will utilize the operating model developed by Excel Academies' existing school in East Boston.

Mission Statement:

Excel Academy Charter School – Boston, Boston II, and Chelsea prepares students to succeed in high school and college, apply their learning to solve relevant problems, and engage productively in their communities.

Proposed Growth Plan for First Five Years of Operation:

Boston I School Year	Grade Levels	Total Student Enrollment	Boston II School Year	Grade Levels	Total Student Enrollment	Chelsea School Year	Grade Levels	Total Student Enrollment
First	5	112	First	5	56	First	5	56
Second	5, 6	224	Second	5, 6	112	Second	5, 6	112
Third	5 - 7	336	Third	5 - 7	168	Third	5 - 7	168
Fourth	5 - 8	448	Fourth	5 - 8	224	Fourth	5 - 8	224
Fifth	5 - 8	448	Fifth	5 - 9	380	Fifth	5 - 8	224

Mission, Vision, and Description of the Community(ies) to Be Served

Primary Strengths

- The mission statement is succinct and clear about the purpose and values of the

Primary Weaknesses

- The applications indicate that the waitlist for the existing school and feedback from

<p>school. (Section I.A.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The vision was compelling, meaningful, and reflected throughout the applications. (Section I.B.) • The applications describe the achievement gap experienced by African-American and Hispanic students nationally and in Boston. The applications emphasize that these are the same groups of students presently being served at the Excel Academy. (Section I.C.) • Boston City Councilor J.Connolly voiced support for these charter applications. See public comment. (Section I.C.) 	<p>parents of Excel students provided sufficient evidence of community demand for their programming. (Section I.C.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While the Chelsea application described student performance at the national level, it did not provide data specific to the student populations within Chelsea. (Section I.C.) • Reviewers expressed concern that the applicant group has limited experience with the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) student populations they intend to serve at the proposed Chelsea school. (Section I.C.) • The Chelsea Superintendent, T. Kingston, does not support granting a charter to this application for the Chelsea proposal. See public comment. (Section I.C.) 		
<p style="text-align: center;">Educational Philosophy, Curriculum and Instruction</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <p><u>Primary Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The educational philosophy encompasses three core beliefs: urgency, high expectations, and no excuses. The beliefs are aligned with the proposed schools’ mission and vision. (Section II.A.) • The applications cite research that supports the ‘no excuses’ approach as a strategy to close the achievement gap. (Section II.A.) • During the interview, the applicant group provided additional information about how their educational philosophy is integrated into their educational program through school-wide processes and procedures. (Section II.A.) • The applications provide a clear curriculum outline for the proposed schools. (Section II.B.) • The applications provide a strategy to develop non-academic goals and implement a consistent behavior management system. During the interview, the applicant group provided information regarding present practices. (Section II.B.) • The applications provide a clear sense of the processes used by teachers for the </td><td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <p><u>Primary Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applications provide extremely limited information about the instructional methods that will be used though each emphasized that a variety of techniques are encouraged and the multiple opportunities for teacher training. (Section II.B.) • The applications did not clarify the types of ability groupings (heterogeneous or tracking) that will be used at the high school and the applicant group acknowledged at the interview that this had not been decided yet. (Section II.B.) </td></tr> </table>		<p><u>Primary Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The educational philosophy encompasses three core beliefs: urgency, high expectations, and no excuses. The beliefs are aligned with the proposed schools’ mission and vision. (Section II.A.) • The applications cite research that supports the ‘no excuses’ approach as a strategy to close the achievement gap. (Section II.A.) • During the interview, the applicant group provided additional information about how their educational philosophy is integrated into their educational program through school-wide processes and procedures. (Section II.A.) • The applications provide a clear curriculum outline for the proposed schools. (Section II.B.) • The applications provide a strategy to develop non-academic goals and implement a consistent behavior management system. During the interview, the applicant group provided information regarding present practices. (Section II.B.) • The applications provide a clear sense of the processes used by teachers for the 	<p><u>Primary Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applications provide extremely limited information about the instructional methods that will be used though each emphasized that a variety of techniques are encouraged and the multiple opportunities for teacher training. (Section II.B.) • The applications did not clarify the types of ability groupings (heterogeneous or tracking) that will be used at the high school and the applicant group acknowledged at the interview that this had not been decided yet. (Section II.B.)
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development, improvement, and refinement of curriculum as well as the curriculum and teacher evaluations performed by the Principal. (Section II.B.)

Assessment System, Performance, Promotion, and Graduation Standards

Primary Strengths

- The applications contain clear performance, promotion, and graduation standards that are based on high expectations. All standards are aligned with the schools' mission and education program. (Section II.C.)
- The applications describe a comprehensive assessment system that utilizes internal and externally developed assessment tools that provide multiple and frequent measures of student performance. (Section II.D.)
- The applications describe a reporting system that provides frequent and varied feedback on student performance to students and families. (Section II.D.)

Primary Weaknesses

- No primary weaknesses.

School Characteristics

Primary Strengths

- The applications describe targeted methods and strategies for supporting students with a wide range of needs and the rationale behind these selected approaches. These strategies are integrated during the school day, such as Focus, and outside of the school day, such as Saturday Academy. (Section II.E.)
- The applications describe a middle school programming experience that focuses on relationship building among peers and faculty. (Section II.E.)
- The applications describe a clear plan to build and maintain family-school partnerships that involve educating parents about Excel and initiating frequent and meaningful communication and participation, such as parent advisory

Primary Weaknesses

- Reviewers expressed the concern that the high school model being proposed within the application was unclear. During the interview, the applicant group stressed that all of their schools will share core principles, though certain operational decisions specific to the high school model have not been decided, such as ability groupings within courses. (Section II.E.)

groups. (Section II.E.)

- The applications described a Friday Enrichment component that provides artistic, cultural and athletic experiences for students. (Section II.E.)

Special Student Populations and Student Services

Primary Strengths

- During the interview the applicant group described Excel's present staffing to address the needs of special student populations and indicated that the hiring plan for the proposed schools would be responsive to the enrolled student population. (Section II.F.)
- It is evident based on past student performance that the applicant group, Excel Academy Charter School, has the capacity to successfully work with students in need of special education services as well as English language learners. (Section II.F.)

Primary Weaknesses

- The applications provide an incomplete description of the identification of English language learners (ELLs.) The description of services for English language learners was confusing and incomplete. There was no information about instructional methods or the Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) category training necessary to serve ELLs in the general education classroom. With the limited information provided, it was difficult to evaluate whether English Language Development instruction would meet the state requirements. (Section II.F.)
- While the applications provide specific information about the classroom supports provided by specialists to students with special needs, the processes and procedures used to identify, assess and serve students in need of special education services was not addressed. (Section II.F.)

Enrollment and Recruitment

Primary Strengths

- The applicant group explained that the sizes of the proposed schools are modeled after the existing Excel Academy for ease of replicating resource delivery systems. The rationale for the 'double size' middle school proposal is to generate efficiencies in central operations to allow for additional resources to drive school improvements. (Section II.A.)
- The applications contained a clear and succinct enrollment policy. (Section III.A.)

Primary Weaknesses

- While the individual proposals appear to be slow growth models with one grade level added each year of operation, two of the proposed schools open simultaneously during FY13 with approximately 168 students between the two campuses (not including the 56 students being added at the same time at the Chelsea site.) (Section III.A.)

Capacity and School Governance	
<p><u>Primary Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Excel Academy board of trustees has extensive expertise in organizational growth, law, education, management, real estate, finance, marketing, and strategic planning. (Section III.B.) • The applications provide a clear description of the board of trustees' roles and responsibilities as opposed to school administration. (Section III.B.) • The applications provide a clear description of the structures and procedures in place for policy development. (Section III.C.) 	<p><u>Primary Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No primary weaknesses.
Capacity for Network of Schools	
<p><u>Primary Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Excel Academy board has added members to its ranks to increase the capacity and expertise at the board level in organizational growth and created the position of Chief Executive Officer to oversee and lead the growth of the proposed Excel Academy network. • Board members have access to professional networks that will provide additional expertise and resources for charter school expansion including the NewSchools Venture Fund and the Parthenon Group's Education Center for Excellence. (Section III.B.) • The applicant group recognizes the benefits of creating a network of schools and some of the potential challenges. In the interview, the group discussed their aspirations to ramp up and become a successful charter management organization in their own right. They also indicated that as they grow, they will need to balance rigorous performance management with innovation. (Section 	<p><u>Primary Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The degree of difficulty facing the applicant group is significant. The applications propose three different schools: one exact replication located in Chelsea, one double sized middle school in Boston, and another middle/high school in Boston.

III.B.)

Management

Primary Strengths

- The application describes frequent opportunities for faculty professional development. Training and curriculum planning occur during the summer while collaborations and professional development occur throughout the year during staff, grade level, and departmental meetings on Friday afternoons. (Section III.D.)
- The existing school has developed a “Principal in Residence” program to facilitate training principals for the new schools. The proposed school leader for the Chelsea school is in training at Excel Academy. A core component of the residency is the mentorship relationship between the resident and the principal of the existing school. The mentor relationship will continue during the start-up phase of the new schools. (Section III.D.)

Primary Weaknesses

- Reviewers wanted more clarification about the central office staff and were confused by the slight differences in administrative staff positions among the three proposed schools and lack of information about these different roles within the application narrative. (Section III.D.)

Facilities, Transportation, and Finances

Primary Strengths

- The applications describe a viable process for conducting a facility search in Chelsea and Boston. (Section III.E.)
- The applications describe a plan to receive transportation services from the districts where their school facilities are located (Chelsea and Boston). (Section III.E.)
- The applications describe a structure and process for managing school finances with appropriate fiscal controls. (Section III.F.)

Primary Weaknesses

- No primary weaknesses.