

Date: December 16, 2016

For ACTION _____

For INFORMATION X

Board Brief: Yes X
No _____

FROM: Theresa Werner, M.ED., J.D., Executive Director of Specialized Instruction

THROUGH: Terri Mazingo, Ed.D., Chief Academic Officer
Clinton Page, Ed.S., Chief Accountability Officer
Alvin L. Crawley, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

TO: The Honorable Karen Graf, Chair, and Members of the Alexandria City School Board

TOPIC: Excel Academy Program Review and Division Response

BACKGROUND:

The Excel Academy at T.C. Williams High School began in the 2013-2014 school year. Excel Academy was created to support select students with disabilities utilizing instructional strategies that include pre-teaching and re-teaching of skills and academic content in a Resource for Academic Purposes (RAP) course. Additionally, a co-teaching model was implemented across the core academic areas and common planning time for teachers to use for collaborative planning, in a Professional Learning Community (PLC) format, for Excel Academy students. A formal external review of the Excel Academy at T.C. Williams High School was initiated during the 2015-2016 school year. Hanover Research was utilized as the external evaluator to conduct the review in collaboration with the Department of Accountability and the Office of Specialized Instruction.

In order to assess Excel Academy's implementation and effectiveness, Hanover Research utilized a multi-methods research approach, where data were collected via teacher focus groups, interviews with school-based administrators and other relevant staff (i.e. counselors, deans, etc.), student surveys, interviews with parents, and a review of student data outcomes. All data sources were then analyzed with results synthesized to identify key themes and recommendations.

Key themes and their corresponding recommendations were:

1. **Selection Transparency** – ACPS should formulate *clear standards* for making decisions about *student eligibility* for enrollment in the Excel Academy.
2. **Leadership & Support** – ACPS should *clearly articulate and assign* leadership and support responsibilities to *specific personnel* for program oversight and management.
3. **Alignment** – ACPS should give greater consideration to *program alignment* in an effort to create more *consistency in program practices across teacher teams*.
4. **Connections** – ACPS should *continue to encourage strong connections* between and among the program's students and teachers.

5. **Evaluation** – ACPS leaders should develop a *clear set of standards for monitoring program delivery and the evaluation of student outcomes.*

These themes and recommendations are discussed in full in the attached “Excel Academy Executive Summary” document which provides an Executive Summary as well as appendices containing more detailed reporting on results from a literature review on small learning communities, student survey results, focus group and interview results, and student outcome data analyses.

Based upon the Hanover recommendations The Office of Specialized Instruction, in collaboration with administration at T.C. Williams High School, instituted a revised structure of the special education continuum of services at the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year. Many of the recommendations made by Hanover Research in the Excel Academy Evaluation report have been addressed through this revised structure, in which the division expanded availability of the key components provided through the Excel Academy.

Specifically, additional Resource for Academic Purposes (RAP) classes were added, allowing any student who would benefit from the constructs of RAP and co-taught classes to participate. The RAP class is now a full block period and will be represented in the ACPS Program of Studies next year. During the RAP class, students receive direct instruction in building executive functioning skills as well as pre-teaching and re-teaching of core content subject matter. Additionally, this block allows for a 45-minute targeted reading and/or math intervention. A single administrator was identified who would be the point of contact, supervisor, and evaluator of all special education staff at both T.C. Williams Campuses. ACPS has contracted with Dr. Marilyn Friend to provide training, consultation, and coaching on co-teaching practices for co-teachers. These revisions, as well as additional training and materials for teachers, have allowed for applying and enhancing the use of Excel Academy strategies for students with disabilities at T.C. Williams High School.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Superintendent recommends that the School Board review the report.

IMPACT:

Service delivery model for Students with Disabilities’ was modified and the number of students receiving RAP and co-teaching services was significantly expanded.

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ATTACHMENTS: 1. *Excel Academy Recommendations & Next Steps PowerPoint*
2. *Excel Academy Executive Summary (with Appendices)*