

**MINUTES**  
**Excel Academy Massachusetts Board Meeting**  
**Friday, February 2, 2024 – 8:30am**  
**Location: Zoom**

**Board Members in Attendance:** Caitlin Brumme, David Stolow, Pam Klein, Bernabe Rodriguez, Dave Sachs, Traci Griffith Walker, Maher Colaylat

**Board Members Absent:** Steve Zrike, Nery Castro, Rob Lytle, Devon Petersmeyer Johnson

**Staff Attending:** Owen Stearns, Laura Goldworm, Arthur Kaynor

**Members of the Public Attending:** Tim Weller, Frangely Rojas, Liza Cariaga-Lo, Liz Giordano, Seth Reynolds

**1. Call to Order & Welcome**

Brumme called the meeting to order at 8:34 am and presided over the meeting. Kaynor kept the minutes. Brumme welcomed the group and noted that this is a public meeting and that members of the Excel Academy Rhode Island and the Friends of Excel Academy Boards are attending today as members of the public, to participate in the CAPS Update agenda topic.

**2. Public Comment**

None

**3. Board Business**

Brumme motioned to approve the 12.7.23 meeting minutes, and Sachs seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously.

All those in favor: Caitlin Brumme, David Stolow, Pam Klein, Bernabe Rodriguez, Dave Sachs, Traci Griffith Walker, Maher Colaylat

Opposed: None

Abstain: None

**4. CAPS Program Update**

Goldworm briefly summarized highlights from the enclosed College & Post-Secondary Success Program (CAPS) Update slides that were shared with the Board in advance and invited discussion and questions from the Board.

Brumme asked a clarifying question about ratios of student choices about various post-secondary path choices and to what degree the shifting trends are a result of COVID directly or cost calculation. Goldworm reflected that it is still too early to tell whether the trend is a reflection of a broad change of hearts among families or if it is a more direct and potentially temporary consequence of COVID and/or economic factors

Giordano noted that in the community college space, there is also an observed shift in demographics with incoming students and a more competitive group of students in general, many of whom would have typically been pursuing 4-yr programs rather than community college in past years. Giordano asked a clarifying question about how the CAPS Team is currently thinking about standardized tests in this admissions context.

Goldworm noted that many colleges have moved away from standardized test requirements, but not entirely, which means that Excel's CAPS Team cannot move away from these tests entirely. Currently Excel's programming has all students take the SAT on a set day. Students can opt in or out of an SAT prep. class. But Excel would not want to create a system that moves away from the SAT entirely while it is still required in some admissions contexts, thereby potentially creating an unintended additional barrier for some students. Goldworm also noted that the SAT is still useful as a potential differentiating factor for students who are pursuing admission to the most selective schools, and that 15-20% of Excel students are matriculating to highly selective schools. Goldworm also noted that the SAT is useful in other ways, such as as a replacement for a placement exam at some schools. In other settings, the SAT may provide an admissions officer with an additional external validation of the academic rigor of Excel's program - especially schools that may not know Excel as well already. Goldworm noted that Excel also offers a very robust Advanced Placement program which also supports this need.

Colaylat requested more information about the resources Excel provides students about prospective college choices. Goldworm noted that Excel uses the Score college database and also invites representatives from colleges to present their program at Excel. Goldworm and Stearns also noted that Excel offers a NextGen Talent program for supporting students with career development, and with generous support from a Wellington Foundation grant, they have developed a career program search platform for students. Goldworm also noted that they utilize a wide range of resources that are accessible via Google Classroom - including topics such as “How to get your license” and “How to fill out an I-9 form.”

Goldworm also noted that Excel has launched a new program called LEEP: Local Excel Employment Program. The vision of LEEP is to develop students to be prepared to enter the workforce upon graduation from high school in order to serve as productive members of their community. The goals of the program are:

- To develop essential skills that 12th graders need to be successful in a place of employment in line with their post-secondary goals.
- To expose students to career opportunities within their specific articulated area of interest.
- To increase work experience to make students more competitive upon graduation for employment within their articulated field.
- To provide coaching through regular feedback and evaluation(s) to develop students professionally to meet the articulated needs of local employers post-graduation.

Through LEEP, we currently have job placements in a local restaurant, autobody shop, mechanic shop, and the Excel Academy staff daycare. Excel is grateful to the Hayden Foundation for support that has made innovative new programming like LEEP possible.

Brumme asked for more information regarding the team’s level of optimism about long-term opportunities from some of these trade program opportunities that more and more students are pursuing. Goldworm noted that the job prospects for these students tend to be highly promising in general, but vary by field. Opportunities in computer science and medicine are still extremely competitive. However Excel alums in programs such as electrical apprenticeship, plumbing, and carpentry are finding six-figure salaried positions within a couple years and high employability wherever they would like to live. Goldworm also noted that, from a counseling perspective, the team tries to be mindful of students who may not always have had a positive academic experience and therefore feel pulled toward a trade program route instead – and the importance of ensuring those students understand that those programs will still include rigorous classroom components that they need to be equipped for. We seek to ensure students have options open to them and are choosing their path affirmatively and going for it 100%, rather than going in one direction as a ‘fall-back.’ Goldworm also noted that many of the trade programs have application cycles as early as November, in sync with early decision timelines for colleges.

Goldworm provided the Board with an update on how the Class of 2024 is trending so far. 34% participated in on-the-spot admissions and all gained at least one spot. 39% submitted early applications. 67% so far have applied to four-year programs. A major headline concern is that the financial aid process nationally and locally has been disastrous for the Class of 2024. The new FAFSA application is simpler, but students with mixed citizenship status families cannot even click “submit” right now because the application coding is broken. Colleges won’t be receiving FAFSA info until mid-March for many students, which means they will not be getting offers until maybe mid-April, with May deposit deadlines. This is just one more way that middle- and low-income families are being disadvantaged systematically. Students who do not need financial aid are not impacted in the same way; but essentially 100% of Excel students need financial aid to be able to attend college. The college decision process for them will be compressed from 6 weeks to just 1-2 weeks. The inflation factor was also not factored into FAFSA calculations and will need to be fixed. The entire situation is creating a very challenging lived experience for students this year who are trying to navigate an already stressful process.

Rojas noted that she and her team are experiencing the same challenges in working to support high school students in Rhode Island this year.

Reynolds asked whether the CAPS Team supports students who start in the trades and then need a college degree later, in order to progress to a manager-level position. Goldworm responded that the CAPS Team focuses a lot on

the idea of cultivating ‘on and off ramp’ options and resources for Excel alums, to ensure they have the info and support to navigate life changes and new career trajectories. The CAPS Team does provide re-enrollment support as well for alums.

Brumme expressed gratitude to Goldworm and the rest of the CAPS Team for their exceptional work and also thanked the Board for engaging so thoughtfully in this important topic.

## **5. Board Goals - Mid-Year Progress Report**

Stearns and Kaynor summarized the FY24 Board Goals - Mid-Year Progress Report that was provided to the Board in advance. Stearns noted that the Board is largely on track with respect to its goals this year, with the exception of fundraising, and reminded the Board of efforts to engage prospective new connections to Excel. Stearns asked Board members who have not yet provided a list of names to please do so, and also to consider inviting prospective new connections to one of the school visit opportunities that are planned for the coming months. We are planning roughly one visit per month to both the MA and RI schools. We are asking each Board member to attend at least one visit this year and ideally also to invite guests to join them. Kaynor asked the Board for input regarding any materials or resources that would facilitate outreach and welcomed feedback on the one-pager and invite card that were distributed via email. Stearns also reminded the Board that we are eager to broaden the Excel network in many ways - not just fundraising - and would be delighted to meet prospective future Board members, staff, families, and community members.

Klein noted that, although the Board has met key recruitment goals this year, the Governance & Nominating Committee would now like to prioritize building up a new pipeline for future membership needs. Sachs and Colaylat echoed this reflection on membership pipeline planning, and Sachs also noted that the Governance & Nominating Committee will ask for the full Board to engage on implementation of BoardOnTrack as a tool to support the Board with pipeline planning and other priorities in the future.

Stolow noted that he would like to ensure that Excel’s three Boards are actively prioritizing their shared, core responsibility for succession planning, as the organization is currently benefiting from outstanding leadership at the CMO and school level, and the three Boards need to be attentive to succession planning needs in a collaborative way. Stolow asked that this be incorporated into the Board goals explicitly. Stearns noted that he is exploring a potential resource for the three Boards on this topic and will report back.

## **6. Adjourn**

Brumme motioned to adjourn the meeting at 9:35am, and the motion was seconded by Stolow, and the meeting was adjourned unanimously.

List of Documents Presented at the Meeting:

1. Agenda
2. Minutes from 12.7.23
3. CAPS Program Update Slides
4. MA Board Goals - Mid-Year Progress Report