APPROVED

Excel Academy Massachusetts

Minutes

Board of Trustees - Academic Oversight Committee Meeting

Date and Time
Monday June 9, 2025 at 1:30 PM

Location
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Meeting Notice Posted Publicly by 6/5/25.

Please note: All items listed on the agenda are subject to a possible vote by the Board of Trustees or its subcommittees.

Committee Members Present
B. Rodriguez (remote), S. Zrike (remote), T. Griffith Walker

Committee Members Absent
None

Guests Present
A. Kaynor (remote), F. Reyes (remote), N. Keough (remote), O. Stearns (remote)

I. Opening Items

A.

Record Attendance

B. Call the Meeting to Order

S. Zrike called a meeting of the Academic Oversight Committee of Excel Academy Massachusetts to order on Monday Jun 9, 2025 at 1:35 PM.

C. Public Comment

No members of the public provided comments at this meeting.

D. Approve Minutes for prior Academic Oversight Committee Meeting

S. Zrike made a motion to approve the minutes from Board of Trustees - Academic Oversight Committee Meeting on 03-24-25.
B. Rodriguez seconded the motion.
The committee **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.
N. Keough and S. Zrike expressed gratitude to the Committee for their time during the busy period at the end of the school year.

N. Keough previewed the agenda for the meeting today. We'll discuss and take action on the Alternative Pathways Proposal, review the latest updated academic data, and discuss priorities for next year.

II. Academic Oversight

A. Vote to recommend Board approval of Alternative Graduation Pathway Proposal

N. Keough summarized the Alternative Graduation Pathway proposal as detailed in Academic Update Slides and a proposal document that was provided to the Committee.

S. Zrike asked whether this in addition to passing coursework, and N. Keough confirmed that it is.

B. Rodriguez asked who will support the student to curate their portfolio. N. Keough clarified that the student's teacher will help them with this and noted that it is similar to the MCAS Alt. process.
S. Zrike made a motion to recommend Board approval of the Alternative Graduation Proposal as presented.
T. Griffith Walker seconded the motion.
The committee **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

B. Update on State of the Schools, Academic Data, and Priorities

N. Keough summarized ACCESS data that is showing very encouraging growth. This data point has not moved much for us over the past couple years. In this round, we are seeing systemic growth across every campus and every school that we have not seen

since N. Keough started in the Chief Schools Officer role, including 20+ point improvements and SY24-25 performance scores far exceeding our internal goals and our DESE-set performance targets. It is exciting that this growth is consistent at every campus and every level and is consistent in the scale of growth.

S. Zrike commended the team for very strong results. He cautioned that sometimes the results change from preliminary to final, and F. Reyes clarified that we typically do not see much change due to the relative size of our district.

N. Keough noted that we are optimistic but not yet able to share MCAS data which is embargoed. The academic team looks forward to reviewing this data comprehensively with the Committee and Board in the fall.

N. Keough summarized progress with our high school stability metrics. Chronic Absenteeism and Average Daily Attendance show significant improvements. From SY22-23 to SY24-25 Chronic Absenteeism decreased from 36.4% to 19.1%. We have not quite reached our goals for suspension, and we are still seeing concerning disparities for MLLs and SWDs in suspension data. Middle school stability metrics have also improved and are close to our goals for SY24-25. The suspension rate has declined from 17% in SY22-23 to 7.4% in SY24-25. Average Daily Attendance across our high school and middle school campuses is on track to exceed pre-COVID metrics. There are no significant disparities in attendance for the first time in three years. There are still disparities in suspension rates.

The Committee also reviewed staff retention data, and N. Keough summarized that Excel is effectively retaining staff during the year and meeting its retention goals.
N. Keough reminded the Committee about the work we did last year and throughout this year to establish a new priority framework focused on Excellent Teaching. Feedback from school teams is that we have rolled out a lot of change over the past two years, we feel good about it, and we want to sit with it for another year and keep digging in more deeply.

N. Keough noted that - to support priorities at the school level - we are very focused at the leadership and CMO level on improving our systems and practices for leader development and evaluation. A team of school- and network-level leaders have worked together to help shape the improved framework.

We are also highly focused on data-driven instruction and leadership. We have been working on this for several years and are continuing that work to increase staff usage and fluidity with strong data systems that are already in place.

Looking ahead, we are working on some areas of growth and forward planning, including: AI policies and practice, developing a multi-year plan for academic program investment and codification, and continuing to develop and recruit talent for school and CMO leadership roles.

S. Zrike noted that the leading indicators are impressive and look good and thanked the team for their excellent work. S. Zrike noted that he appreciated the feedback we heard from school teams related to continuing to deepen the work we already started and not adding more changes for the sake of change. This should help broadly with retention, culture, and student outcomes to deepen investment in these new practices and systems that appear to be working.

S. Zrike thought this presentation was a good length and depth to share with the full Board but encouraged that we focus on what comes next (e.g., steps we are taking to improve on MLL and SWD suspension disparities).

T. Griffith Walker thanked the team for their work and emphasized the importance of digging into and catching up on AI policies and practices given the pace of change in our sector and more broadly. T. Griffith Walker noted that her team is experimenting with use of Claude to provide feedback to students on their writing, and we're seeing some positive outcomes for MLLs and SWDs. Her team is uploading content and clear guidelines to train the AI and attending conferences about the topic and leaning into developing ethical use guidelines. T. Griffith Walker noted that there is a lot of open source curricula available. Illustrative Math just AI-optimized through Play Lab. It's a one-hour PD and then you can experiment with it. S. Zrike agreed with this recommendation.

T. Griffith Walker encouraged being critical consumers given the number of products out there right now. F. Reyes and T. Griffith Walker will connect further to share useful resources and best practices.

III. Closing Items

A. Adjourn Meeting

S. Zrike made a motion to adjourn the meeting.
B. Rodriguez seconded the motion.
The committee **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.
There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 2:17 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
S. Zrike
List of documents used in the meeting:
- Agenda
- Prior meeting minutes
- Alternative Graduation Pathway proposal
- Quarterly Board Academic Data Dashboard
- Academic Update Slides

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