



Excel Academy Charter Schools

School Opening Plans

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A Note from our CEO



Dear Excel Families,

I want to express my deep gratitude to all of you for maintaining your commitment to the Excel Academy community. I know I am not alone in feeling anger, sadness, and frustration at what we are being asked to take on this year, but I am also eager to be able to provide more support for our students and grateful to have such a strong team to work with. And I am so appreciative of how our community is persisting through all of this – with such intelligence and insight and bravery and empathy and generosity.

Over the past weeks, we have made some key decisions around reopening for our schools, and so I want to pass those on. First, we are **pushing back our Middle School opening to September 14th and our High School opening to September 15th**, as DESE recently allowed schools to do so in order to provide more time to prepare for the start of school.

For all schools, we are **committed to maximizing the number of students that are able to be on campus safely, while also providing a high-quality, structured remote option we are calling Remote +Plus.**

Please note that we are aware of the recent recommendation from the Superintendent of Chelsea Public Schools to open the school year remotely, given the rising infection rates there. We will take that into consideration and closely monitor as we finalize our plan.

While school will look quite a bit different than in normal times, we will still offer students full day access to the highest-quality education we can deliver, with as close to a normal school day schedule as possible.

With Gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Owen".

Owen Stearns

Excel Academy will reopen in the fall in conditions that are causing many to experience trauma and loss, especially our children and our communities of color.

Schools closed due to an unprecedented pandemic, resulting in learning loss, significant stress and anxiety, and, for some, the illness and loss of loved ones.

In addition, we are in the midst of months of heightened national discourse and protests related to our country's long history of institutional racism and the harm and death it has caused to Black people.

The pandemic's disproportionate impact on communities of color and the impacts of institutional racism and police brutality will reverberate long after we return to school.

Our children need to **learn** and they need to **heal**. Our work, this year more than ever, must ensure that all our children feel **safe, known, challenged, and loved**.

Excel Academy gathered feedback from staff, parents, and families through family and staff surveys. Nearly 550 parents and 200 staff weighed in. Here is what we heard:



*Survey data was collected two weeks ago and since then cases have gone up. The positivity rate in Chelsea is currently 4.93% and Boston 2.14%.

Core Values

Our planning and implementation of learning models for the school year are centered around these key values:

- **Health and safety for students and staff**, both physical and mental, is our number one priority.
- **Maximizing choice** for families and staff to engage based on their comfort level being on-campus.
- **Prioritizing support for students and families** who face the most obstacles to accessing and engaging in remote learning.
- **In-person delivery provides the most equitable access to learning opportunities** for our students and we want to offer as much in-person access as is safely possible, as soon as possible.

Excel Academy has developed a plan to deliver quality education during the upcoming 2020-2021 school year while ensuring the health and safety of our students, families and staff. For all schools, we are **committed to maximizing the number of students that are able to be on campus safely, while also providing a high-quality, structured remote option we are calling Remote +Plus.**

Excel Academy Middle and High Schools will begin the year in a Remote +Plus Learning Model.

Much like the reopening of the state, we want to take a **phased approach to bringing more students and staff back to campus over the course of the year** as we feel we can do so safely. There is still so much we are learning about COVID-19, and we want to do everything we can to keep students and staff safe. To that end, we feel it is better to start conservatively so that we build our confidence in how (or whether) to bring more people into our buildings safely.

2020 – 2021 Reopening Timeline

August 18: Middle School - New staff report virtually for professional development and in-service

August 25: High School - New staff report virtually for professional development and in-service

August 25: Middle School - Returning staff report virtually for professional development and in-service

September 1: High School - Returning staff report virtually for professional development and in-service

September 14: Phase 1: First day of Middle School (Remote +Plus Model)

September 15: Phase 1: First day of High School (Remote +Plus Model)

October 13: Phase 2: Subject to change based on COVID-19 conditions across the community and guidance from local, state, and federal health officials)

June 25: Last day of school for students and staff

Phase 1: Beginning September 14/15

- Students will continue to have access to the same course load (i.e. no decrease to electives, AP classes, or college prep support) with in-building opportunities to provide services to students, with extra attention paid to providing daily support services to students with IEPs and ELLs.
- The majority of students will receive remote instruction. Instruction will be delivered through both live virtual instruction and virtual on-demand instruction.
- At this time, only a limited number of students will have the opportunity to access in-person supports on campus -- including first our highest needs students.

Phase 2: Will begin no sooner than October 13 (Subject to change based on COVID-19 conditions across the community and guidance from local, state, and federal health officials)

- Increase the number of students who have access to campus to receive in-person supports on campus.

Remote +Plus Learning Model: This means that most learning will happen remotely - teachers will teach virtually and students will learn via their Chromebook computers. We call it Remote +Plus because some students will be able to come to school in-person to receive support and or to extend remote learning opportunities, even though their lessons will still be conducted via computer.

Live virtual instruction: This includes classes, live online meetings when the whole class or smaller groups get together in real time.

On-demand Instruction: Learning that can occur in different times and spaces particular to each student, as opposed to at a same time and place as other students and or their teacher.

Middle Schools

- Teachers will deliver instruction virtually both live and on-demand.
- Students will complete their assignments via Google Classroom and other online platforms and will be able to receive teacher feedback on their assignments and give and receive peer feedback virtually.
- Students will continue to have English, Math, Science or Social Studies, Fitness, and Art classes throughout the week.
- Students will also have access to virtual community-building and social-emotional learning.

Middle School Sample Student Schedule (Cohort A, HR A)

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:30-9:00	Pre-AM HR 1: Prep for Day				
9:00-9:30	AM HR: Advisory	AM HR: MindUP/Journaling	AM HR: Community Circle	AM HR: Teambuilding	Period 1: English
9:30-10:00	Period 1: Math	Period 1: Science	Period 1: Math	Period 1: Science	
10:00-10:45					Period 2: Science
10:45-11:00	Break				
11:00-11:15	Period 2: Art	Period 2: English	Period 2: Fitness	Period 2: English	Break
11:15-12:15					Period 3: Math
12:15-12:45	WIN				Lunch
12:45-1:30	Lunch				
1:30-2:30	Period 3: English	Period 3: Math	Period 3: English	Period 3: Math	
2:30-2:45	Break				
2:45-3:45	Period 4: Science	Period 4: Focus/Tutoring	Period 4: Science	Period 4: Focus/Tutoring	
3:45-4:15	Advisor Check-Ins				

 = Live virtual instruction (note: all other classes are On-Demand with suggested times, Lunch and Breaks are on-own)

This is an example of the schedule we may follow. The actual schedule has yet to be finalized.

High School

Access to teachers daily from 8:00 - 3:30 for a combination of live virtual instruction + additional on-demand programming

3.5-4.5 hours of live virtual instruction daily (with increased hours for students with high needs or IEPs). Examples of live instructional content:

- Zoom classes
- Advisory meetings
- College preparatory programming (1-on-1 meetings and small group learning about college process, preparation for SAT)
- Office hours/extension time for students to get small group or individualized support of work
- Case manager or special education teacher check-ins and support with on-demand assignments for highest needs students

2.5-3 hours of additional on-demand content daily

- Recorded, on-demand lessons from teachers guiding students through assignments to be completed independently

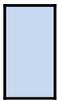
High School

1-2 hours of live instruction with in-person options for support and extension of learning. This could include:

- Tutoring for students with high-needs
- Conversations groups for ELL students
- Extension activities delivered (Science labs, Workshops on Art Skills, Library book pick-up for independent reading, Social distancing coffeehouses for sharing poetry/theater/music)
- Social-emotional development opportunities
 - Student affinity groups (e.g., Pride Association of Excel for LGBTQIA?+ students, Band of Brothers, Young Women's 19)
 - Extracurricular: Intramural, no-contact sports (i.e. cross country, running club, baseball/softball, yoga, dance), Portuguese language club, Model UN
 - Community-building Advisory activities
- Family meetings
 - College and post-secondary process
 - IEP/504 meetings and support
 - Academic support and coaching

High School Sample Student Schedule

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:00-9:00	HW Due for 4,5,6	HW Due for 1,2,3		HW Due for 4,5,6	HW Due for 1,2,3
8:00-10:00	Teacher office hours + opt-in Science Lab		Faculty meetings	Teacher office hours + opt-in library time	
10:00-10:30			In-person extracurriculars		
10:30-11:00	Advisory			Advisory	
11:00-12:00	Period 1	Period 4	Club Meetings (in-person/off-site)	Period 1	Period 4
12:00-12:30	Lunch break/office hours		Advisory	Lunch break/office hours	
12:30-1:00	Period 2	Period 5	Period 1	Period 2	Period 5
1:00-1:30			Period 2		
1:30-2:00	Period 3	Period 6	Period 3	Period 3	Period 6
2:00-2:30			Period 4		
2:30-3:00	Support period (highest needs students)		Period 5	Support period (highest needs students)	
3:00-3:30			Period 6		

 = Live virtual instruction (note: all other classes are On-Demand with suggested times, Lunch and Breaks are on-own)

This is an example of the schedule we may follow. The actual schedule has yet to be finalized.

Based on the Department of Education guidance, we will follow all required safety and health standards for reopening schools.

In addition to the standard guidance, we will take extra precautions to increase the safety of our students, employees, and community.

Physical Distancing protocols

- 3 feet or greater distancing between student seats
- 6 feet or greater distancing during lunch or mask breaks
- Staggered arrival and dismissal (and passing times, where applicable)
- One-directional hallways
- In areas people may need to wait, signage and visual cues to help maintain distancing

Student Cohorts

- Excel students will be grouped into cohorts that attend classes together. There may be some limited mixing of students between cohorts where needed to provide the full academic program.
- Siblings and other students who have close contact outside of school will be grouped together within a student cohort where possible.

Supplies

- Each Excel student will receive a school-issued Chromebook to use at school and at home
- Avoid sharing supplies; if sharing supplies is necessary, wipe them with disinfectant between uses
- PPE is provided for nurses and staff who work in close physical contact with students (occupational therapy, etc.)

Air Quality

- Masks are required for students and staff (unless for documented medical or disability-related exceptions)
- All Excel school buildings have mechanical ventilation systems (HVAC). Excel is working with HVAC contractors to ensure the systems are moving the maximum air throughout the building and reducing or eliminating recycling of air.

Surfaces and Hand Hygiene

- Increased cleaning protocol, including sanitation of bathrooms and frequently-touched surfaces multiple times per day
- Non-contact door openers installed on bathroom doors
- Additional time in school schedules for hand-washing
- Hand sanitizer available throughout the schools
- Sanitizer spray available in classrooms for students and teachers to wipe down desks

Infection protocols

- Educate families, students, staff and all community members to stay home if sick
- Medical isolation space designated in each school, in case a student has symptoms while at school
- Excel schools will develop response protocols in line with DESE recommendations for instances in which a community member is ill

Closure protocols

- Adherence to community spread from DESE - the positivity rate in Chelsea is currently 4.93% and Boston 2.14%.

Teacher expectations

- Staff are expected to work a typical school day. Teachers schedules will include delivery of instruction, student support, services, and opportunities for collaboration and planning.

Attendance

- Teachers will take attendance daily and students can be marked as present by either attending their live virtual class and/or completing the work for class that day. Attendance will not be used directly as part of grades but will be used to identify students and families who may need more support in engaging with remote learning and will continue to be reported to the state.

Grading

- Teachers will grade students on their live virtual instruction and on-demand assignments as well as any assessments, including quizzes, tests and projects. Teachers will use flexible and multiple means of assessing student mastery, including exit tickets, student discussion, verbal, visual and written responses. Teachers will provide students feedback on their work on a weekly basis and will provide students with opportunities to revise their work based on the feedback.
- Grades will continue be reported in PowerSchool, families will have access to monitor grades, progress reports, report cards, conferences, etc.

Special Populations Support and Services

- Students with disabilities will continue to receive special education and related services in the least restrictive environment
- Excel Academy will - if possible and in line with health and safety guidance - continue to prioritize in-person instruction for students with the most complex and significant disability needs. Students who are English Learners (ELs) or Former English Learners (FELs) will continue to receive frequent, small-group instruction in a consistent daily schedule to support both student and family engagement and support so that it is easier for students to attend live virtual instruction and maintain their schedule to access services. That schedule will include the academic intervention and enrichment block and opportunities for community-building, including the social-emotional learning program. To support Economically Disadvantaged (and all) students, Excel's Student Support Teams will work to ensure that all students have continuous access to internet, meals, and social supports from Excel or via referral from another agency as needed.

Socioemotional Support

- Students will continue to have access to universal supports which include social emotional learning program, academic intervention and enrichment block, and student support team who works to connect students with resources such as counseling, housing support, and SNAP/WIC insurance benefits.

Postsecondary Support

- CAPS will continue to provide individualized college and career counseling to all 12th grade students and their families to support students to achieve their post-secondary goals. This year will prove to be unlike any other as we determine how to provide high quality programming that is dependent on our still to be determined reopening model, as almost all schools have gone test optional (save several of our state schools), families' financial situations have been turned upside down, and the majority of our alumni all experiencing all virtual models of their college education to name just a few. What will always remain constant is our unshakeable commitment to provide the best possible support to our students and their families.

Technology

- Teachers will use Google Classroom as the primary means of communicating and disseminating assignments and class materials to students.
- Teachers will use Zoom as the primary means of holding live virtual instruction to students.
- Along with traditional classroom resources and tools teachers will use other instructional tools, such as Desmos and CommonLit to support our curriculum.
- We will continue to use Illuminate and Edulastic to assess students in their core content classes. We will also use Illuminate to progress monitor students who are in interventions throughout the year.
- We will continue to use PowerSchool to communicate grades to students.

How will we provide nutritious meals for our students?

- Excel Academy will serve school breakfast and lunch, regardless of learning remotely or in-building.
- For students learning remotely, students or their parents may pick up “grab and go” meals at any of our meal sites.
- For students learning in the building twice a week, students will be able to pick up a meal for the following day of remote learning.
- For students present in-person: Students will be seated at least six feet apart during meals. Students will eat lunch either in their classroom, in a cafeteria or Community Circle/common space, or outdoors. Extra care will be taken in delivering food to maintain distancing and avoid frequent touching.

How will we safely transport our students?

Students are encouraged to find alternate methods of transportation (walking, biking) to school if possible.

Bus Transportation:

- Students attending school in person who qualify for bus transportation will receive it. Only one student per bench will be allowed (unless students are from the same household). All students will be required to wear masks. Hand sanitizer will be available at the entrance to the bus. There will be strict entering and exiting procedures to ensure social distancing when entering or exiting the bus. A monitor will be on the bus to maintain social distancing and mask wearing.

MBTA:

- Students who qualify for an MBTA pass will receive it. They will be encouraged to wear masks on the MBTA and to wash hands or use hand sanitizer after riding.

Additional Opportunities for Input

- Over the coming week school leaders and staff will be reaching out to families gather additional input and feedback on our plans.
- Please note that we are aware of the recent recommendation from the Superintendent of Chelsea Public Schools to open the school year remotely, given the rising infection rates there. We will take that into consideration and closely monitor as we finalize our plan.