

Driving Success for Adult Learners in Memphis, Tennessee

The Excel Center, Memphis, Tennessee

Learning Solutions

- Courseware
- Exact Path

District Profile

- 428 Students
- Grades 9 to 12
- 93.9% Black
- 4.4% Hispanic or Latinx
- 27.8% Economically Disadvantaged



81%

of students enter into postsecondary education or higher paying jobs

Increased from 42% at intake

Challenge

The Excel Center in Memphis, Tennessee, is a nonprofit, contract, adult high school operated by Goodwill Education Initiatives, Inc. It provides adult learners in the community of Shelby County with the opportunity and support to earn a high school diploma and develop postsecondary education and career paths that offer greater opportunities for employment and career growth—at no cost to the student.

“Pretty much what we do is start the students where they left off,” said Candis Dawson Taylor, school director. “They’re not getting a high school equivalency diploma; they’re not getting a GED; they’re not getting a HiSET. They’re getting a regular high school diploma.”

The Excel Center’s unique school model strives to “meet students where they are” in their education by providing a flexible structure and supportive relationships to help adults manage work, life, and family as they pursue their educational goals. In addition to the transportation, childcare, life coaching, and other whole-student support systems the center offers, it also supports students academically through Edmentum’s online learning programs. The Excel Center utilizes Courseware, Edmentum’s customizable course offerings for grades 6 to 12, to meet the diverse needs of the students it serves and to better align its instructional support to the Tennessee state standards. In 2019, The Excel Center expanded its Edmentum partnership with Exact Path, Edmentum’s K–12 diagnostic assessment and individualized learning program, to provide personalized instruction and support intervention and remediation.

Solution

The needs of students attending The Excel Center fluctuate with each eight-week term. In every cohort, students come from diverse



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CANDIS DAWSON TAYLOR
School Director



backgrounds and various levels of previous education, and they have jobs, children to care for, or other obligations to work around when it comes to completing their classes. To stay flexible to student needs, The Excel Center has molded its Edmentum partnership to identify and address gaps in learning, support instruction, and set up students with the right tools for success.

Identifying Grade Level and Tracking Remediation with Exact Path:

Since implementing Exact Path, The Excel Center has used the adaptive diagnostic assessment to place students at the appropriate grade levels in reading and math. The assessment results allow educators to identify students scoring below a high school grade level in either subject, and target achievement gaps. From there, Exact Path is used to support instruction for response to intervention (RTI) students and special education, as well as to track progress to make sure that students are getting back on grade level.

“Exact Path has really been huge this year,” Mrs. Dawson Taylor explained. “We were finding that, with a lot of the other resources we were using in the past, we just weren’t getting the best results. We didn’t feel like students were getting correctly placed in the remediation class. Exact Path has really helped us narrow that down. We have a better grasp on student growth.”

RTI students are given the diagnostic three times over the term: Upon entering the program, in the fourth week of the term, and during the eighth week of the term. In order to move on to the next course progression, students are required to both pass the RTI class and show at least 10 percent growth on their Exact Path assessment scores. By supporting remediation with Exact Path, The Excel Center gives students who could slip through the cracks again a better chance at success.

“We want to make sure that they’re building those skills,” Mrs. Dawson Taylor explained. “Sometimes, we have students that have been out of school 40 years, and they may come to us on a 4th grade reading level, so we just don’t want to push them through the program. We’re making sure that before they get that diploma, they’ve earned it and that we’re setting them up to continue to be successful.”

Supporting Direct Instruction and Credit Recovery with Courseware:

Educators at The Excel Center primarily use Courseware to support direct instruction in the fast-paced learning environment, and to provide individualized support using the Custom Course Builder if a student is struggling.

Mrs. Dawson Taylor explained that instructors at The Excel Center enjoy having Courseware



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as a tool because of its state-standards alignment and the way it gives students the flexibility to meet course requirements despite scheduling conflicts. Last year, The Excel Center began to use Courseware for credit recovery, which she said helps the school continue to meet individual student needs and keep students on track with an accelerated schedule.

“Using Courseware for credit recovery has been helpful,” Mrs. Dawson Taylor said. “It just helps [students] graduate very close to their cohort because they don’t have to take the class for a whole year over like they would at a traditional school. Or, if they pass one semester but failed the other, we can utilize the credit recovery to allow them to get the other half of credit for their class. It’s been really helpful with helping us maintain high graduation rates.”

Result

Since Memphis opened The Excel Center in 2015, the school has had 631 graduates as of December 2019, placing it within the top five Excel Centers nationwide for graduation rate. While immensely proud of this accomplishment, Chuck Molinski, vice president of The Excel Center, expressed that student graduation is just one piece of the pie when it comes to the program’s success. As a contract school, The Excel Center’s accountability is measured differently by the state of Tennessee than a traditional charter school, focusing on student success outside of graduation, such as students getting jobs earning more than minimum wage, earning industry certifications, or going on to postsecondary education.

“We’re having good success,” said Mr. Molinski. “Right now, we’re tracking at about 81 percent of our students going into postsecondary education or higher than minimum wage job opportunities [compared to 42 percent at school intake]. We’re real proud of that; it means we’re getting them where they need to be.”

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