

**U.S. Department of Education**  
**2016 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program**

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

For Public Schools only: (Check all that apply) [ ] Title I    [X] Charter    [ ] Magnet    [ ] Choice

Name of Principal Ms. Nikki Bowen

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Excellence Girls Charter School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 794 Monroe Street 3rd Floor

(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Brooklyn    State NY    Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 11221-3501

County Brooklyn

Telephone (718) 638-1875    Fax \_\_\_\_\_

Web site/URL  
http://excellencegirls.uncommonschools.org/    E-mail nbowen@excellencecharter.org

Facebook Page  
https://www.facebook.com/pages/Excellence-Girls-Charter-School/309608439233438    Google+ \_\_\_\_\_

Twitter Handle \_\_\_\_\_    Blog \_\_\_\_\_    Other Social Media Link \_\_\_\_\_

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Principal's Signature)    Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Superintendent\*N/A N/A N/A    E-mail N/A  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Uncommon Schools NYC    Tel. (917) 414-4935

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Superintendent's Signature)    Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name of School Board  
President/Chairperson Mr. David Saltzman  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)    Date \_\_\_\_\_

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

*\*Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, write N/A in the space.*

## Part I – Eligibility Certification

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The signatures on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school's eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.)
2. The public school has met their state's accountability requirements (i.e., avoided sanctions) in participation, performance in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics, and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate) using the most recent accountability results available for the year prior to nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, a public school must meet the state's accountability requirements (i.e., avoided sanctions) in participation, performance in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics, and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate) for the year in which they are nominated (2015-2016) and be certified by the state representative. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
4. If the school includes grades 7 or higher, the school must have foreign language as a part of its curriculum.
5. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2010 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
6. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, or 2015.
7. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award if irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
11. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2015-2016) unless otherwise stated.

### DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 938 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 305 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 438 High schools
  - 72 K-12 schools
- 1753 TOTAL

### SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located:
- Urban or large central city
  - Suburban with characteristics typical of an urban area
  - Suburban
  - Small city or town in a rural area
  - Rural
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2015 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	0	84	84
1	0	90	90
2	0	85	85
3	0	89	89
4	0	86	86
5	0	86	86
6	0	83	83
7	0	74	74
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	0	677	677

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 1 % Asian
  - 84 % Black or African American
  - 8 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 1 % White
  - 6 % Two or more races
  - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2014 – 2015 school year: 13%

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	39
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	28
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	67
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2014	501
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.134
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	13

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 1 %  
4 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):  
Arabic, Bengali, French-Haitian Creole, Spanish

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 78 %  
Total number students who qualify: 528

8. Students receiving special education services: 8 %  
56 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- |                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <u>3</u> Autism                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness              | <u>4</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness        | <u>13</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>35</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment    | <u>1</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>0</u> Mental Retardation    | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |
| <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities | <u>0</u> Developmentally Delayed               |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 2
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	12
Classroom teachers	46
Resource teachers/specialists e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	13
Paraprofessionals	0
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 15:1

12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

<b>Required Information</b>	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012	2010-2011
Daily student attendance	95%	95%	96%	96%	97%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2015.

<b>Post-Secondary Status</b>	
Graduating class size	0
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	0%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.

Yes  No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award.

15. In a couple of sentences, provide the school's mission or vision statement.

EGCS seeks to cultivate in our students the knowledge, skills, and character necessary to embrace responsibility, become honorable citizens and courageous female leaders, and to graduate from outstanding colleges.

16. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

Excellence Girls works with the Uncommon Schools network to recruit students. Uncommon Schools NYC follows all applicable state and federal laws in admitting students. Families interested in enrolling a child at Excellence Girls are required to submit a completed application form. The applications are made available in person at Excellence Girls schools, online at the Uncommon Schools website and schools' websites, and can be mailed home upon a family's request. Application forms are provided in both Spanish and English. There are no fees associated with the filing of an application, nor are there any tuition charges for attending Excellence Girls. Students are selected randomly via a lottery, which occurs every year in April. This lottery is publicly held and is overseen by a disinterested independent organization.

Excellence Girls seeks to serve a population that is representative of the surrounding community, so preferences are applied via weighting, or the number of cards each child receives in the lottery. Students who live in the surrounding district are given one additional card in the lottery. Students who qualify for the free and reduced price lunch program are given three additional cards. Students who reside in a New York City Housing Authority public housing development and/or are enrolled in SNAP or TANF receive one additional card. Students can receive a maximum of five additional cards, or six cards total.

Only kindergarten and 5th grade students are admitted via lottery; however, the school may, at its discretion, admit new students into grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, and 7 from the school's waiting list. EGCS has a policy of backfilling, or filling all empty seats by admitting students on the waiting list as seats open.

## PART III – SUMMARY

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Excellence Girls Charter School (EGCS) was founded in Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, in August, 2009, as part as the Uncommon Schools network. With a student body of 99% minority women, the school was constructed with the mission to build a community that directly address the lack of representation of minority women in leadership roles in society. The school was founded to give young women from the surrounding neighborhood in Brooklyn the tools, skills, knowledge, and the confidence necessary to succeed academically, to be accepted to college, and to become self-motivated and charismatic leaders in whichever career field they wish to pursue.

The school has two campuses, Excellence Girls Elementary Academy (EGCS-EA), an elementary location in New York City School District 16, and Excellence Girls Middle Academy (EGCS-MA), a middle school located in New York City School District 17. The majority (82% and 83%) of students in these districts are economically disadvantaged. In district 16, 78% of students are African American, 18% are Hispanic or Latino, and 2% are Asian. In district 17, 80% of students are African American, 14% are Hispanic or Latino, and 2% are Asian. EGCS works to ensure that its student population is reflective of the surrounding community: 78% of students are part of the free and reduced price lunch program, and 84% of ECGS students are African American, 8% of the students are Hispanic, and 1% are Asian.

While EGCS student populations are similar in demographics to the local community, the Excellence Girls Charter School has a record of academic achievement, consistently outperforming its surrounding districts on annual New York State assessments. In 2015, 55% of EGCS students in grades 3-8 scored either Advanced or Proficient on the ELA State Assessment, while only 22% and 17% scored either advanced or proficient in districts 17 and 16, respectively. Similarly, 76% of EGCS students in grades 3-8 scored either advanced or proficient on the 2015 Mathematics State Assessment, while only 24% and 16% of students scored either advanced or proficient in districts 17 and 16, respectively. This past year, the students at EGCS-EA ranked #15 in math out of 2,500 New York State elementary schools with 94% of students scoring either “Advanced” or “Proficient.” These accomplishments, along with each quarter’s Interim Assessment (“IA”) results, are announced at school-wide assemblies and celebrated on bulletin boards in the school halls. Students who perform well are recognized, as are students who have shown either significant improvements or consistent effort. With a student population similar to the surrounding districts, these scores highlight the rigor, strength, and exceptionality of the curriculum and instruction at Excellence Girls Charter School.

Excellence Girls maintains such high achievement with a rigorous college preparatory education. The school has a clear vision of how scholars will conduct themselves, both when they first enter our school and when they graduate. In service of our mission, teachers commit to consistently and respectfully minding essential classroom details and professional habits because when our girls are not meeting the expectations, we are not fulfilling our promise to students and families that we are preparing their daughter for the rigors and independence of college. In school, we expect EGCS students to be respectful, responsible, and kind and to understand that through their efforts, they will achieve. In life, we expect students to be contributing members of their community and society as readers, writers, mathematicians, scientists, and historians.

As a community, we emphasize that learning is meant to be both rigorous and filled with joy, and have cultivated traditions that are intentionally focused on creating a loving and supportive school culture as well as intellectually curious scholars who have the capacity to reach their full potential. These traditions are strategically scheduled to generate excitement and motivation throughout the year and always include a learning component. For example, EGCS-MA hosts an annual “read-a-thon” in which girls are asked to bring in a book, wear pajamas, and bring pillows and are given a two-hour block of time to read. Both ECGS-EA and EGCS-MA celebrate Pi-day on March 14th with math games and pie eating. State test pep rallies are designed to reduce stress and generate excitement for students to “show what they know” on state exams. We feel our traditions cultivate a curiosity and sustained love of learning in our scholars, and are essential to the success of our mission.

As a school composed of 99% minority women, EGCS deliberately creates a curriculum that will respond to the historical under-representation of minority women in leadership roles. The majority of EGCS scholars will be first generation college students, so there is a clear effort to emphasize that all scholars can and will attend and graduate from college and to help scholars understand what college will be like. The school also reflects high expectations in motivational messages throughout the schools' hallways, in the use of the word "scholar" to address and refer to students, and in the frequent discussion of college attendance in daily routines and lessons. Each advisory, from K-7, is named after a college. This serves as a constant reminder to scholars to keep their sights on college readiness. College Day at EGCS-MA similarly inspires students to get excited about their futures as college students. Students select their "major" in advance of the day, and teachers are asked to teach a seminar-style class in a subject of their choosing. This tradition provides girls with a practical understanding of their futures as college students. As a school community, we seek to redefine expectations for the quality of education possible at an urban public school and for what our graduates can achieve.

As part of the Uncommon Schools network, scholars from Excellence Girls Middle Academy continue their college preparatory education to Uncommon Charter High School (UCHS), a co-ed high school which currently has a 100% acceptance rate to college, offers over 10 AP courses (in which 75% of current juniors and seniors participate) as well as lecture/seminar style classes. Additionally, students at UCHS take 4 years of collegiate prep courses, which focuses on teaching skills for success in college such as time management, note-taking strategies, resume writing, and the exploration of colleges and careers.



## PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

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### 1. Core Curriculum:

The classrooms of Excellence Girls Charter School Elementary Academy (EGCS-EA) and Excellence Girls Charter School Middle Academy (EGCS-MA) provide students with a combination of joy, rigor, and hard work every day. Students are taught that hard work is a pre-requisite for success. At EGCS, we not only have a longer school year, but we also have a longer school day. At the elementary academy, the day begins at 7:10 AM and ends at 3:50 PM, and at the middle academy, the day starts at 7:15 AM and ends at 4:05 PM with six or more hours of instruction every day. Over the course of the school year, this is equivalent to at least 25% more instructional time than the New York City Department of Education’s minimum requirements.

At EGCS-EA, our students receive 3 hours of literacy instruction, 75 minutes of math instruction, 45 minutes of instruction in social studies or science, 10 minutes of grammar instruction, 45 minutes of writing instruction every day; along with 45 minutes of instruction in character development and structured choice time, and 45 minutes of instruction in music and performing arts.

At EGCS-MA, students receive 60 minutes of science, history and writing instruction, daily. They receive 90 minutes of math instruction 4 days a week, and 60 minutes of math instruction one day a week. They receive intensive ELA instruction with 60 minutes of reading and 30 minutes of small group literacy instruction through our guided reading program. Excellence Girls’ program focuses on literacy instruction because we understand that literacy is the key to unlocking all future information, understanding and knowledge. In the early grades, scholars have nearly 3 hours of reading instruction each day, which includes a systematic decoding program (Reading Mastery), a teacher-designed reading comprehension curriculum, and daily read alouds. In the key literacy-building years of K-4th grade, classrooms are staffed with two teachers in order to ensure that the student-to-teacher ratio never exceeds 15:1. Students write in every class, and use the Writer’s Workshop method to cultivate creativity and voice.

We employ a math curriculum that is designed to ensure that our student master both math procedures and problem-solving skills. Our math curriculum uses various methodologies and approaches to move students towards competency in the understanding and application of mathematical computation and problem solving. Excellence Girls implements teacher created math lessons which utilize the Investigations math curriculum, which assures rigor of instruction and incorporates the Common Core learning standards.

Curricula in science and social studies are based on a combination of the NYS Science and Social Studies Standards and the principles of the Common Core. The school meets all New York City and State Standards and will go beyond them in our coverage of some units. Our instruction relies on student-centered inquiry and observation, as students learn new concepts through hands-on lessons. Both social studies and science investigations integrate literacy and research—students communicate their ideas, form and investigate their hypotheses, record their observations (data) through accurate drawings, diagrams, and notebook entries, and think critically to evaluate their results. We provide students with the tools, experiences, and personal motivation to perceive the world as scientists and social scientists. African history and the Black Freedom struggle, important threads in an understanding of world and American history, are central to EGCS students’ understanding of themselves and where they come from. While these topics are addressed as part of the curriculum, each school also seeks to strengthen and enrich students’ understanding of them by supplementing core material with outside sources, placing particular emphasis on the history and culture of their surrounding community.

Excellence Girls employs curriculum guidance from the Uncommon Schools network, including common core aligned scope and sequence documents for each grade and subject, as well as unit plans. All unit plans include days for re-teaching standards on which students are struggling, allowing the scope and sequence to be adjusted by each teacher to fit the needs of his or her individual students. See 3. Instructional Methods and Interventions for a more detailed description of how scholars above and below grade level are supported. Learning does not stop after the school day comes to a close. Each scholar, including each

Kindergarten scholar, takes home at least 20 minutes of homework, which we call Life's Work, as well as 15-30 minutes of independent reading every evening – including weekends and holidays. Parents/guardians review and sign each evening's assignment upon completion.

## 2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Excellence Girls' academic curriculum is supplemented by vibrant co-curricular classes and a strong character development program, which are integrated into learning both inside and outside of the classroom. Aspects of character development are evaluated throughout the year, but themes of social justice and female empowerment are woven throughout the curriculum.

To implement this agenda at the elementary level, each month one of the school's values (optimism, respect, honesty, curiosity, justice, love, hope, courage, and sisterhood) is highlighted throughout the school in a streamlined character development curriculum called "Fierce Females" which is designed by the school's Social Worker. Detailed daily lesson plans around that value are provided to teachers at the start of the month, and allow for flexibility in each classroom. In order to make these values more tangible, a role model is strategically selected to represent that value. Posters of role models line each classroom, teachers incorporate aspects of this value into their classes. Scholars are asked daily to reflect on the creed value as well as how the role model exemplifies this value. The women chosen as role models have had to overcome adversity to achieve success and are all minority women of diverse, multi-cultural backgrounds. We select women who have achieved success in a wide range of professions. For example, this year, Misty Copeland represented the value of Optimism during the month of September, while Aung San Suu Kyi represented Justice during the month of January. No two role models are chosen twice, so girls graduate with dozens of diverse female role models to look to for guidance throughout their lives. It is the aim of EGCS that scholars see themselves in these role models.

Each Friday, the value is highlighted at the school's morning circle, a community meeting led by the principal and an essential part of the EGCS school culture and curriculum. Morning circle is an opportunity for the whole school to come together as a community and highlight material that is essential to the EGCS mission that may not occur in the classroom. During morning circle, scholars who have exemplified that month's value during the previous week are given "shout-outs" by their teachers and are applauded in front of their peers. Scholars also write and perform skits about the month's core value, which solidifies the understanding of the value, promotes creativity, and provides young women with public speaking and performing experience. This practice is intended to encourage scholars to speak in front of crowds at an early age as courageous and confident young women.

At EGCS-EA, specials classes take place four days a week; physical fitness classes twice a week, music once per week, and performing arts once per week. This year, EGCS-EA's physical fitness classes are dance classes, simultaneously providing cardiovascular exercise and creative expression. Performance art classes culminate in a play performance at the end of the year, which is highly attended by families. In music class, scholars are taught to read music, and there are choral performances throughout the year. 4th graders learn how to play recorder.

Each quarter, ECCS-MA offers a variety of enrichment courses from which students can choose. These courses meet once a week and vary each quarter, but classes that have been offered in the past are musical theatre, art, language, crochet, a "girls run the world" track club which culminates in a 5k race, step team, book club, spoken word, and a technology club. This year, one of the clubs will publish a student magazine. At the end of each quarter, parents are invited to an enrichment night where scholars' accomplishments are displayed in a talent show presentation for the community. The enrichment program at EGCS is designed to open as many doors as possible for our students in the future by exposing them to a diverse range of creative, athletic, and intellectual opportunities outside the classroom. EGCS-MA also incorporates a health program into the 5th grade curriculum. When Excellence Girls scholars continue on to Uncommon Charter High school, they are required to take 3 years of Spanish. At the high school level, many Uncommon scholars take and pass the AP Spanish exam.

This year, EGCS-MA is piloting a computer science curriculum as a regular, full-time class for students in which all 6th graders are enrolled. The intention of the program is to introduce girls to coding and computer programming at a young age so they are more inclined to select electives of a similar nature later on in their academic careers. The teacher who cultivated the curriculum, is implementing this program at Excellence Girls specifically to address the scarcity of minority women in the field of computer science as well as other STEM fields, an effort central to the EGCS mission. This teacher's efforts to educate girls about computer programming have caught the media's attention, and stories have been published in both Chalkbeat, an education news organization, and TechCrunch, a technology news group.

### 3. Instructional Methods and Interventions:

Excellence Girls' instructional approach is structured around the belief that without great teaching, little else matters. For that reason, instructional methods are centered around giving teachers the support and skills they need to focus on strong, targeted instruction for all EGCS scholars. School leaders have high expectations for teacher and student performance. Teachers are cognizant of the expectations, which include effective use of assessment data, adaptation of instruction to student needs, regular communication with families, and the application of constructive feedback in daily practices. To ensure that all teachers are adequately prepared to carry out the school's instructional methods, instructional leaders have established a clear and effective teacher evaluation system. These mid-year evaluations, which consist of a self-assessment and a written component followed by a formal meeting, target areas of strength and areas for continued improvement.

Teachers differentiate their instruction in a variety of ways, both to groups and individual students. Teachers ensure that all students' needs are being met through a combination of direct instruction, small group instruction, and the allocation of individual learning tasks. In alignment with our college-prep mission, students across ability levels learn grade-level objectives in their classes. In planning, teachers scaffold their lessons by adding more real-world examples to their direct instruction, integrating manipulatives or visuals into guided practice, providing additional word study opportunities, and explicitly connecting material to students' prior knowledge. For instructional delivery, teachers work with their Instructional Leader in order to tailor their practice for the students in their classes. Teachers submit their class work or assessments to the instructional leader in order to receive feedback on the format, design, and accessibility of materials. Differentiation occurs in all of our classes through the targeted questioning that our teachers provide – even to the extent of scripting who they are going to call on with what questions in their lesson plans.

EGCS has a strong academic program that undergirds its ability to support teachers in promoting high achievement and college readiness for all scholars. All students with disabilities, all students whose first language is one other than English, and all students who enter the school several years behind grade level can and should achieve the school's goals. EGCS offers students support for students below grade level in a variety of formats, which are documented in one or a combination of the following plans: At-Risk Student Support Plans, Section 504 Accommodations, and/or Individual Education Plans. General education classroom supports for students are documented in Student Support Plans, which are written using information from teachers, observations, assessment data, and parent reports. These supports are effective as 15.4% of students with disabilities tested proficient on the 2014-15 ELA state exam, compared to 5.8% of students with disabilities statewide. In addition to the special education services that EGCS-EA provides to 39 students based on their IEPs, an additional 90 scholars receive at-risk academic support, including small-group interventions. EGCS-MA provides services to 17 students based on their IEPs, but an additional 57 scholars also receive small group support.

To ensure the academic success of each student, EGCS prioritizes a safe and structured environment that promotes students' academic and social development and maximizes the amount of time spend learning. Clear consequences for infractions of the school's discipline policy ensure the development of strong study habits and underline the expectation that 100% of students be on task 100% of the time. EGCS uses transparent, visual, grade-level-specific systems of rewards and consequences to manage behavior.

#### 4. Assessment for Instruction and Learning and Sharing Assessment Results:

EGCS administers quarterly interim assessments (IAs), which provide actionable data for instructional staff. These assessments are aligned to Common Core standards for English and Math, and are aligned to state standards for History and Science and therefore provide data that is aligned to the New York state exams. The school uses a consistent norming process to grade assessments and effectively analyzes assessment data to make instructional adjustments in classrooms. Teachers and leaders have access to student assessment data through an online database, and the school communicates student achievement to parents through bi-weekly progress reports and more formal report cards four times a year.

IAs occur four times per year for grades 3-8, and data from these exams are analyzed by network content experts, as well as principals and deans of curriculum and instruction across Uncommon Schools, and then analyzed at EGCS as a full staff and then by grade level and subject matter. Teachers are able to compare their scholars' performance to the rest of the Uncommon Schools in NYC in order to identify areas where re-teach lessons and other interventions are necessary to ensure student mastery.

Though IAs provide valuable data points for school leaders and staff, EGCS also collects data daily so teachers can immediately respond to any skill set that is not fully understood. At the end of each class, students are asked to complete an "exit ticket" which assesses content or a skill learned during class that day. This provides teachers with a daily pulse on their students' comprehension. Teachers are also constantly monitoring student comprehension, checking student work throughout class and "cold calling" students to ensure that they are fully grasping the material. These daily assessments provide valuable checkpoints for teachers, as well as principals who, along with the Dean of Curriculum, observe each classroom once a week.

This data is not only analyzed individually by teachers, it is discussed in grade span team meetings and department team meetings, which both occur weekly. During these meetings, teachers enlist data protocol to examine a specific task from that week where students struggled and determine which content areas need to be re-taught. If a sub-set of the class does not comprehend a concept, they are instructed in smaller "pull-out" or "push-in" groups.

During state exam test preparation period, departments meet twice weekly to ensure that students are on track to be prepared for state exams. These meetings are teacher driven and allow for immediate impact on instruction for the next day, ensuring that students are on track to be prepared for state exams. During the 6 weeks before state exams, hour long after-school tutoring sessions are also provided in small groups to students who are behind or require special attention. In preparation for all assessments, EGCS uses data-driven instruction to maximize teaching time and to ensure that no scholar falls behind, and attributes the high scoring performances on state exams to this practice.

## **PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS**

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### **1. School Climate/Culture:**

The Excellence Girls leaders work with intention to create an atmosphere of collaboration and support amongst the staff and scholars as they believe that a carefully cultivated school culture is essential to scholars recognizing their full potential. To foster such a culture, the EGCS leadership recruits a staff with a deep commitment to collaboration with their colleagues, a high degree of subject area competence, great skill in making instruction both rigorous and joyful, and alignment to the school's mission of preparing students for college. Teachers communicate frequently about student successes and struggles, both informally and at the middle school level during grade-level and subject-team meetings, creating a school-wide investment in the academic, social and emotional growth of every individual scholar. Teachers explain that the best part of working at Excellence Girls is the dedication and commitment of the entire team to the mission of the school.

To facilitate a healthy culture amongst staff, school leaders make a concrete effort to make teachers feel valued. The schools have constructed traditions among staff that create positive professional relationships and an atmosphere of motivation and support. EGCS has at least one fun event for staff per month, and annual gift swaps, staff dinners, shout-outs and recognition to staff create a strong sense of community. Individual accomplishments, both in the professional and personal lives of the staff, are celebrated as a community both in person and in the principals' weekly announcement and motivation email. This atmosphere of collegiality and empathy between teachers is of high priority to school leaders, as it is evident to students that the staff is committed to their work as a team, uniting the school as one community.

Staff aims to lead by example, and sets a model of collaboration for their students. In the EGCS annual fall staff survey, one EGCS-MA teacher explained, "The absolute best thing about working here is the collaborative and supportive culture that has been created among the staff and is also shared with the scholars. I never have to hesitate to ask a colleague for assistance on anything I may be confused about or simply overwhelmed with. This is very different than most other school cultures I've witnessed and have been a part of, and most importantly, it's refreshing and makes for a positive work atmosphere...I also love that this culture of collaboration and support is instilled in the young ladies we work with. I'm never more impressed than when our girls share their perspective on sisterhood and working together to achieve goals."

Beyond serving as a model for collaboration, EGCS staff has created practices that instruct students in collaboration, even from their first day of school. In order to create a student body that is committed to the mission of the school, the first weeks of school are focused on investing students in the schools' culture and customs. For example, new students are assigned a "buddy" in their class to provide reminders about cultural expectations, support with academic questions, and to just be a friend. This allows new students to acclimate to the specific EGCS culture and academic expectations. Scholars see that the entire staff is committed to helping them succeed, which motivates them to reach their potential.

Teachers are constantly thinking of ways to develop students not only intellectually, but also emotionally, creating alumni who are not only academically ready for college, but who are also honorable citizens and courageous leaders of their communities, country, and the world.

### **2. Engaging Families and Community:**

EGCS believes that an effective partnership between the school, parents, and the surrounding community is essential to the success of the school and its scholars. In order to be effective partners, EGCS makes an effort to communicate often with parents, and does so in a multitude of ways.

Before the school year begins, parents attend an orientation as well as a small group meeting with the Dean of Students. At the start of each year, EGCS families are required to sign an agreement which asks them to be an active member of the EGCS community and to reinforce the school's academic and behavioral standards at home. Specifically, EGCS asks that parents help their scholars to establish a daily routine for

students, provide a quiet space for students to study, check that their daughter has completed her homework, and provide positive reinforcement of student progress and success.

EGCS family-school relationships are maintained through a variety of events. Report card conferences, which both students and parents are required to attend, are scheduled three times per year. EGCS also schedules one event per month where families are invited to the school. This includes Family Nights, Family Potluck Dinners, Literacy Night, which is a series of reading games, Math Night, and as well as various other events. There are also volunteer opportunities for parents, re-orientations for returning students and families in each grade prior to the start of school, and frequent teacher-family phone calls and open communication between parents and teachers, which allow for open communication regarding student progress. EGCS also asks that parents volunteer for events and field trips at the school.

As always, the EGCS priority of parent inclusion in the community is reinforced by school traditions. EGCS-EA practices a tradition called “Family Fridays.” While parents are welcome to observe classes and volunteer in classes on a regular basis, Family Fridays provides parents with a concrete opportunity to do so. The first Friday of every month, parents are invited to come to morning circle, do a volunteer activity around the school, and observe classes. Excellence Girls has found that providing families with a monthly opportunity to get involved in the schools’ routine encourages further family engagement and investment in the school culture.

EGCS-MA schedules monthly “coffee chats” between parents and the director of operations, where parents are welcome to come to schools to ask questions and give feedback. The social worker at Excellence Girls also hosts monthly parent involvement committee meetings, which helps to plan monthly parent events and also provides lectures for parents. Recently, EGCS-MA held a financial planning seminar for all parents.

Additionally, all families are encouraged to participate in Families for Achievement (FFA), which connects families to volunteer opportunities at the school, develops and implements special programs for families, sponsors events for the entire school community. FFA also works with EGCS teachers and school leadership to examine students’ academic and social progress and discuss initiatives to improve student outcomes.

In addition to maintaining close relationships with parents, EGCS places a high priority on sharing best practices and collaborating actively with the surrounding community. The principal of the EGCS-EA, regularly meets with the principal of their co-located public school, P.S. 309, in order to share instructional practices. Visitors (particularly those interested in piloting EGCS practices in their own schools) are always welcome to come and observe classes at EGCS, and students are used to being observed regularly.

### 3. Professional Development:

EGCS believes that without great teachers, little else matters. For this reason, EGCS works to ensure that scholars are receiving the highest quality instruction possible are learning from teachers who are masters of their craft, and that teachers feel supported and have opportunities for growth. EGCS employs a rigorous professional development model, ensuring that teachers are always refining their methods to respond to student need.

New EGCS teachers begin with three weeks of professional development (PD) the summer before they begin teaching, and returning teachers participate in two weeks of summer PD. Summer PD covers teaching strategies such as classroom management, data-driven instruction, mission alignment, as well as content-based professional development focused on the common core, curriculum changes, reading taxonomy, and math procedures and problem solving skills. New teachers are also coached in the Teach Like a Champion practices, which are employed in all EGCS classrooms.

EGCS also releases students early one afternoon a week throughout the year for professional development sessions which focus on areas of improvement that are identified as the year progresses. These PD sessions are in direct response to the needs of the students and cover a wide range of topics, from school culture, to academic content, to diversity trainings, to classroom management strategies. Sessions are highly effective

because they are tailored to fit to the areas for growth in the school community. These sessions are planned and run by the school's Principal and Dean of Curriculum and Instruction (DCI).

To identify topics for professional development and to identify strategies needed for general coaching, principals and DCIs carefully analyze data. After reviewing classroom observation and student performance data, the principal and DCI work to create specific professional development activities around working with teachers to identify standards students did not previously master and incorporating those standards into review portions of lessons to increase student mastery. At the start of the year, professional development sessions are focused on classroom management and helping scholars to understand the school's routines and procedures. PD in January is focused on refreshing these routines and procedures after winter break. Much time is invested in ensuring that scholars understand these procedures, as a school-wide understanding of the customs and practices creates a strong school culture and more time for learning. During state testing, PD sessions are used to respond to scholars' areas for improvement, effective tutoring practices, and data-driven instruction.

Teachers are told to see their career as an intellectual pursuit and are encouraged to attend external professional development sessions in their area of subject matter, and are reimbursed for all expenses included in such opportunities.

Teachers are also evaluated and given feedback in a weekly meeting with either the principal or DCI. In this one-on-one session with their mentor, teachers either look at student work, watch a video of a lesson they taught in the previous week, or go over a class that was observed by the principal or DCI. Principals and DCIs provide feedback on strong practices as well as areas for improvement. These individual weekly coaching sessions allow school leaders to track teachers' progress throughout the year, and provide teachers with actionable feedback, allowing them to master their craft. EGCS continually uses assessment data to evaluate teacher, leader, and program effectiveness and to design PD that effectively responds to need.

#### 4. School Leadership:

The leadership teams of EGCS-EA and EGCS-MA are composed of a team of four: the Principal, Director of Operations (DOO), Dean of Students, and Dean of Curriculum and Instruction (DCI). Responsibilities for these four roles are clearly defined and explained to staff at the start of the year. These responsibilities are bucketed strategically to maximize the time and effectiveness of each leader and allows for each leader to focus entirely on the responsibilities within their defined role. Leaders communicate regularly to share information, both informally throughout the day and formally in a weekly leadership team meeting. The Principal oversees, continually evaluates, and is accountable for all of her school's programs, serves as the instructional leader of her school, and oversees curriculum development and assessment for her school.

To ensure that principals can focus exclusively on instructional content and truly serve as the school's educational leader, EGCS is operated on a dual leadership model. The Director of Operations helps manage the facility and administrative operations, including managing all non-instructional staff. The DOO also manages day-to-day issues and operations for her school, develops and implements operational systems, processes and procedures, ensures compliance with federal, state and local regulations and policies, and ensures that all school accountability data is being kept, revised, and recorded regularly and accurately.

The Dean of Students helps promote and manage school culture, student discipline, and family outreach. The Dean of Curriculum and Instruction, in conjunction with the Principal, helps direct the instructional program, focuses on curricular and assessment issues, and supervises and coaches teaching faculty and staff.

Leaders emphasize that their leadership philosophy is “grounded in the why.” It is a priority that the entire staff is aligned to the mission, and that all decisions are made with the intention that they will prepare scholars for college. For this reason, leaders ensure that both staff and students understand the rationale behind each decision, creating community-wide investment in school policies and leadership decisions. In the NYC Department of Education School Quality Survey, 100% of teachers at EGCS responded that “the principal communicates a clear vision of the school,” displaying the effectiveness of such practices.

School leaders are deeply involved in the scholars’ learning as well as the professional development of the staff, and maintain an approachable demeanor to allow for feedback and input from the entire team. To ensure that staff feels like they are being heard and to make sure that leadership understands the effects of their decisions at every level, leaders send out a weekly survey with specific, targeted questions regarding recent initiatives the school has employed. Leaders respond to this feedback both individually and with the whole staff. As a result, staff have reported that they feel both heard and valued by their school leaders. This survey has resulted in some of the school’s most powerful programs, and truly exemplifies the spirit of collaboration that defines Excellence Girls.



## Part VI – INDICATORS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

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At Excellence Girls we strive to create a community of empowered and kind young female leaders who are the architects of their own lives. The school’s intentional curriculum and school culture surrounding female empowerment is the most critical contributor to student success. The Excellence Girls student body is 99% minority women, a group that is historically under-represented in leadership positions throughout society and across sectors. For this reason, the school’s mission to develop young women of confidence who are not only prepared for college, but also prepared to be thoughtful, kind, empowered citizens of the world is what makes the school so successful.

This emphasis on self-empowerment - cultivating the habits, skills, and confidence that will ensure success - is carefully interwoven throughout every aspect of the school. Both in and outside of the classroom, scholars are taught at a young age to be empathetic and supportive of their classmates, and are taught to speak out and share their opinions. They are taught to be engaged citizens of the world, who think not only about their success, but the success of their classmates.

EGCS has strategically developed a curriculum, traditions, and a school culture that will empower young women with the character traits that will allow them to persevere along the road to and through college. Each tradition is engineered to cultivate character traits in our scholars that will set them up for future success. For example, the “Fierce Females” curriculum (explained in Part IV, Section 2) works to ensure that girls are receiving instruction that helps them to envision their success in the future. At EGCS-MA, in response to staff feedback, leaders created a weekly working group called “Discovery Groups”, which provides time for students to discuss social justice issues as well as issues relating to female empowerment. Topics and questions for discussion are selected in advance, and scholars meet with advisers in small groups to discuss social justice issues, as well as to provide feedback and create an outlet for students to express and feelings they have about the school. This ensures that scholars are informed and curious citizens, but are also learning to articulate their feelings about such issues eloquently, guaranteeing that they will be able to advocate for themselves once they leave Excellence Girls.

Initiatives such as “Fierce Females” and “Discovery Groups”, a staff and school culture that is committed to ensuring the long-term success of scholars, paired with rigorous, data-driven academic instruction, results not only in impressive test scores, but also in the education of powerful young women.