

***U.S. Department of Education***  
***2023 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program***

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name Stamford Charter School for Excellence  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 1 Schuyler Avenue  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Stamford      State CT      Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 06902-3709

County Fairfield

Telephone (203) 989-0000      Fax (203) 323-1422

Web site/URL  
<https://www.excellencecommunityschools.org/stamford-excellence>      E-mail kfisher@stamfordexcellence.org

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\* Dr. Charlene Reid      E-mail creid@excellenceschools.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Stamford Charter School for Excellence      Tel. (203) 989-0000

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 Ms. Debra Logan-Rabb  
(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, leave blank.*

## **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. All nominated public schools must meet the state's performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2023 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
3. The school configuration must include one or more of grades K-12. Schools located on the same campus (physical location and mailing address) must apply as an entire school (i.e. K-8; 6-12; K-12 school). Two (or more) schools located on separate campuses, must apply individually even if they have the same principal. A single school located on multiple campuses with one principal must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2018 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for at least the three years prior to September 2022.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 or 2022.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as "persistently dangerous" within the last two years.
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. The nominated school has, or is subject to, a nondiscrimination policy (provide either a link to the policy or submit a text of the policy), is committed to equal opportunity for all students and all staff consistent with applicable law and does not have any outstanding findings of unlawful discrimination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's nomination and/or rescind a school's award if unlawful discrimination is later discovered.

12. 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.

**The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's nomination and/or rescind a school's award if one of these eligibility requirements is later discovered to have not been met or otherwise been violated.**

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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**Data should be provided for the current school year (2022-2023) unless otherwise stated.**

**DISTRICT** (Question 1 is not applicable to non-public schools. For charter schools: If a charter school is part of the public school system, information should be provided for the public school district. If a charter school is considered its own district or part of a charter district, the information provided should reflect that.)

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

**SCHOOL** (To be completed by all schools. **Only include demographic data for the nominated school, not for the district.**)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located. If unsure, refer to NCES database for correct category: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/> (Find your school and check “Locale”)

☒ Urban (city or town)  
☐ Suburban  
☐ Rural

3. Number of students in the school as of October 1, 2022 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school. Include all students enrolled, in-person, participating in a hybrid model, or online only. If online schooling or other COVID-19 school issues make this difficult to obtain, provide the most accurate and up-to-date information available:

Grade	# of Students
PreK	60
K	59
1	59
2	59
3	59
4	56
5	57
6	53
7	54
8	44
9	0
10	0
11	0
12 or higher	0
Total Students	560

\*Schools that house PreK programs should count preschool students **only** if the school administration is responsible for the program.

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 25.3 % Asian
  - 48.4 % Black or African American
  - 25.4 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 0.9 % White
  - 0 % 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 2021 - 2022 school year: 7%

If the mobility rate is above 15%, please explain:

N/A

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, 2021 until the end of the 2021-2022 school year	0
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2021 until the end of the 2021-2022 school year	35
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	35
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2021	505
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.07
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	7

6. Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):

Albanian, Creole-Haitian, French, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Portuguese, Spanish, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 8 %  
47 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 51 %

Total number students who qualify: 288

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP: 5 %  
Total number of students served 27

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. All students receiving special education services with an IEP should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

<u>3</u> Autism	<u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities
<u>0</u> Deafness	<u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment
<u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness	<u>8</u> Other Health Impaired
<u>2</u> Developmental Delay	<u>12</u> Specific Learning Disability
<u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance	<u>2</u> Speech or Language Impairment
<u>0</u> Hearing Impairment	<u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury
<u>0</u> Intellectual Disability	<u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness

9. Students receiving special education services with a 504: 1 %  
Total number of students served: 3

10. Number of years the principal has been in the position at this school: 8

11. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	21
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	4
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	8
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	1

12. 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 26:1

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

Required Information	2021-2022	2020-2021	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018
Daily student attendance	95%	98%	96%	96%	95%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

14. **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 2022.

Post-Secondary Status	
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%

15. 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.

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

The Stamford Charter School for Excellence will prepare young people in Stamford, Connecticut to compete for admission to and succeed in top public, private, and parochial high schools by cultivating their intellectual, artistic, social, emotional, and ethical development. The Stamford Charter School for Excellence will accomplish this by offering a challenging and rigorous academic curriculum – which at the earliest grades will have an eye toward college preparation. The Stamford Charter School for Excellence will accomplish this in a supportive and caring environment that has high expectations for all students.

17. Provide a URL link to the school's nondiscrimination policy.

<https://www.excellencecommunityschools.org/stamford-excellence/apply>

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

Stamford Charter School for Excellence (Stamford Excellence) maintains an open enrollment policy and does not discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity, sex, gender identity or expression, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation. Stamford Excellence accepts applications from legal guardians of all age- and grade-eligible students. All incoming pre-kindergarten students must be the age of four years on or before December 31st of the year in which they first attend pre-kindergarten. A lottery process is used to determine admission to the school.

The annual application process begins in January and continues through April 1st for the lottery, and continuously for our waitlist. Applications may be submitted electronically or in hard copy. Applications are available in English and Spanish and can be translated to prevailing languages by request. Returning students and their siblings receive enrollment preference. The lottery takes place in mid-April for all vacant seats. The lottery is broadcasted and generated by an independent, third-party software program in accordance with state regulations and authorizer requirements. Public notice of such lottery is provided conspicuously and with sufficient notice. The lottery is not weighted.





## PART III – SCHOOL OVERVIEW

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Stamford Charter School for Excellence (Stamford Excellence) launched in September 2015 to 168 scholars in grades PK-1. Under the leadership of the founding principal, the school has since received a full-term charter renewal and was approved to expand to serve 560 scholars in grades PK-8. Within three years of opening and by our inaugural year of state testing, Stamford Excellence became one of the highest-performing schools in Connecticut and has consistently evidenced notable performance annually on statewide exams. In a state with the country's second highest wealth gap and a community with persistent achievement gaps, with more than half of our families qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch and 99% of our population identifying as scholars of color, Stamford Excellence has had a demonstrative impact on scholarly achievement and our surrounding community.

Stamford Excellence was the first elementary and now the only charter public school in Stamford. Now in its eighth year of operation, our programs reflect the mission and vision of its founders to transform the educational landscape of the Stamford region with a school that elevates every child, family, and community. Baked into our DNA is the firm belief that every child, particularly those who enter disadvantaged, can reach his or her maximum potential with the appropriate support, challenges, resources, and learning environment. With an eye toward college and career readiness, Stamford Excellence utilizes a holistic approach to cultivate scholarly habits and offers a broad liberal arts curriculum to promote students' intellectual, artistic, social, emotional, and ethical development. We forge lasting partnerships with our families and community organizations so that all stakeholders are firmly invested in the future of our scholars. Staff uses a common vocabulary to inculcate our core values, including Responsibility, Citizenship, Teamwork, Honesty, and a College-Bound Attitude.

Stamford Excellence cultivates a close-knit learning community with a rich and rigorous curriculum, high expectations for all children, data-driven individualized instruction, and effective best practices. Modeled after our affiliate school, the highly successful 2012 National Blue Ribbon Award recipient, Bronx Charter School for Excellence, our school's program is reflected in twelve key design elements, which summate the school's model and serve as the cornerstones of its quality instructional program. They are High academic standards; Data-driven instruction and flexible groupings; A broad liberal arts program; Foundational academic and critical thinking skills that expand to a 21st century global perspective; A longer school day; Performance-based compensation for staff; Clearly articulated standards for students that encourage holistic growth; School uniforms for students; A commitment to academic performance accountability; Parent engagement; Open collaboration with the community of educators and external stakeholders; and, an Organizational commitment to lifelong learning and to professional development of all staff.

The instructional program is designed to challenge every scholar with highly supportive and sophisticated differentiation. Flexible instructional groupings uniquely tailored for every child's needs are availed daily and based on ongoing real-time data. Principals and instructional support specialists work intensely with teachers to analyze data, improve strategies, and target students' needs. Stamford Excellence also nurtures the whole child, including physical and social-emotional development, with enrichment and co-curricular programming that has included art, music, physical education, computer science, theater, student government, coding, and step.

To date, Stamford Excellence has two years of state testing results to evidence our trajectory of success, in addition to one year when state exams were canceled (2019-20) and two for which accountability was waived due to the onset of the pandemic (2020-21, 2021-22). Each year, Stamford Excellence scholars have outperformed their district and statewide peers by more than forty to fifty percentage points and remained one of the highest-performing schools in the state. Stamford Excellence was designated a School of Distinction for High Performance for the 2017-18 school year and again in 2018-19 for High Growth. During his senate confirmation hearing, then incoming U.S. Secretary of Education, Dr. Miguel Cardona, cited Stamford Excellence as an exemplary high-performing charter school. Stamford Excellence was also recognized as the #3 Elementary School and #1 Charter School in the state of Connecticut by the U.S. News and World Report.

As our scholars have advanced to eighth grade, the school provides extensive assistance in navigating the high school admissions process, which includes admissions test prep, financial planning, internships, high school fairs, essay writing, interviewing skills for parents and scholars, school visits, and a dedicated high school placement team. This year, the school will graduate its first cohort of eighth graders. With our successful track record and strong ties within the community, Stamford Excellence is beginning to realize its mission as we support our scholars for admission into high-performing and competitive high schools. As the years progress, our continued work in education will begin to manifest in acceptances into more top high schools, colleges, and chosen careers. For the families who are seeking a better option for their children, particularly those in high need, Stamford Excellence offers a high-quality educational program with the capacity to exemplify the transformative power of education.

## **PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

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### **1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.**

#### **1a. Reading/English language arts curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:**

Stamford Excellence implements a comprehensive English Language Arts curriculum that is aligned to state standards for PK through 8th grades. The reading program provides students the foundation needed to become proficient readers, including skills and knowledge to understand how phonemes are connected to print; the ability to decode words; the ability to read fluently; background knowledge and vocabulary to foster comprehension; development of active strategies to construct meaning from print; and development and maintenance of a motivation to read. We chose this curriculum approach because it allows us to facilitate a literacy approach that incorporates multiple genres, flexibility to differentiate, and use direct instruction to teach foundational skills prior to moving onto more complex content.

The elementary program is grounded in techniques that support explicit and systematic instruction and offers a platform for ongoing professional development for teachers in the critical elements of instruction for phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension strategies. This program is supplemented with guided reading and literature circles based on student learning needs. Students are regularly exposed to authentic texts and provided guided instruction at their frustration levels. Teachers use multiple levels of Bloom's Taxonomy question stems to promote critical thinking. All instructional staff participates in workshops and ongoing modeling throughout the academic year to enhance their skills and optimize their use of curriculum resources.

The middle school program continues this work as scholars progress into departmentalized instruction. Ninety minutes are allocated for ELA (English Language Arts) each day, with a minimum of 50 minutes devoted to reading using a published program in concert with award-winning novels. The program provides a wide variety of genres, word study/vocabulary enrichment, differentiated material, and connections to writing. In addition, each unit begins with essential questions that usher students from knowledge and understanding to synthesis and evaluation. Award-winning novels are directly tied to broader themes taught in other disciplines. Therefore, we are able to increase reading engagement, stamina, and the connections that allow scholars to make better meaning and sense of the world around them.

Stamford Excellence utilizes the writing workshop model for scholars to experience processed and craft writing. Students improve writing fluency; learn to communicate effectively; develop knowledge of the English written language system, with an emphasis on syntax and discourse; understand the connections between reading and writing to develop writers; understand and can write across various fictional and non-fictional genres; and develop a love of writing, culminating in publishing parties where written work is celebrated.

The implementation of our reading program is effective because of the instructional strategy of uninterrupted, consistent, daily flexible reading groups that focus support in a smaller group for struggling readers while offering enrichment activities for students who are proficient and advanced readers. Scholars receive small group instruction that crosses grade-level classrooms. Teachers gather extensive assessment data to determine students' learning levels and provide individualized support to target needs. Assessments include a combination of formal and informal measures such as daily checks and anecdotes; quarterly benchmarks; annual state assessments; interim tests; and curriculum-based assessments administered at the conclusion of the six- to eight-day instructional cycle. All assessment data is used to inform lesson planning, establish targeted small group mini-lessons, monitor progress, and evaluate the efficacy of our programming. Moreover, it helps to drive differentiated professional development by strengthening areas of vulnerability and leveraging assets to optimize instruction.

#### **1b. Mathematics curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:**

Stamford Excellence uses a math curriculum that was designed to address instructional shifts and support the implementation of Common Core learning standards. This program sequences mathematical progressions into modules. The curriculum aligns well with the school's approach to learning and provides a foundation of knowledge, skills, and competencies upon which to build as students advance in content and grade level. We selected this curricular approach because it allows students to engage with exciting, intriguing, and animated content that provides enhanced opportunities to explore, expand upon, and broaden the depth of mathematical discourse, real-world connections, reasoning, critical thinking, and problem-solving. This includes computational, procedural, and conceptual knowledge that supports and builds success in mathematics with authentic problem-solving. The program centers on teaching with a concrete-pictorial-abstract learning progression through real-world, hands-on experiences. It encourages students to use various mental strategies to solve problems and to focus on the process of finding solutions. It builds conceptual understanding rather than rote memorization, with an emphasis on critical thinking and problem-solving and focuses on deep knowledge building to understand mathematics conceptually.

Our math program also uses key concepts as building blocks for more complex treatments in articulated, logical, modular progressions using a narrative approach to build coherence. Students are encouraged to use math talk to build mathematical vocabulary to discuss concepts in context. The program is research-based and provides robust professional development for teachers, inclusive of teacher-led instructional videos and tools to target instruction based on student needs.

Math is taught daily for a minimum of 60 minutes for elementary school and 90 minutes for middle school. During the class, content is introduced to the whole group. The teacher uses real-time data collected throughout the lesson, such as checks for understanding or questioning methods, along with unit quizzes and tests, and informal performance assessments. Additional assessments include formal and informal measures such as exit tickets, performance tasks, interim and state exams, and unit quizzes and tests. Data garnered from these measures is used to formulate small group interventions, assess curriculum efficacy, inform lesson planning, and guide professional development.

Based on the data, teachers provide scaffolded small group and individualized targeted instruction as students practice work independently. This way, interventions are provided in real-time, particularly for scholars who are not immediately mastering content. Our program also allows differentiation with advanced sections and groups created to enrich the math experience for scholars who are accelerated. While scholars are expected to master both content and mathematical processes appropriate for their age and grade, our goal is to support scholars so they can complete Algebra by the end of eighth grade.

### **1c. Science curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:**

The science curriculum is based on state standards and focuses on three dimensions of learning – Science and Engineering Practices, Disciplinary Core Ideas, and Crosscutting Concepts. Under the direct guidance of the standards, key ideas, and performance indicators, the science program has an inquiry-based approach to learning. It also provides students with opportunities to build connections that link science to technology and societal impacts. The content provides the foundational skills and knowledge our students need to become scientifically literate citizens of the 21st century. This approach aligns with our commitment to inspire conscientious, inquisitive, knowledgeable, and lifelong scholars. Students develop skills needed to investigate and then explain the world that surrounds them. Students learn to practice solving problems creatively, thinking critically, working cooperatively in teams, using technology effectively, and developing positive science attitudes.

Science instruction at Stamford Excellence is differentiated for all learning styles and incorporates several methods of instructional delivery and assessment. Instruction emphasizes active, hands-on explorations in the early grades that help students build their own understanding of key concepts. It invites students to develop and explain concepts in their own words orally, through writing, and drawing. Students are provided with options and projects that will allow them to demonstrate mastery of content. When young learners are actively engaged in the discovery process effectively, their natural curiosity leads them to explore, discover, and learn about the natural world.

The middle school science program is also governed by the Next Generation Standards. Key ideas and performance indicators are used to prepare our students to further develop and cultivate science abilities and understanding. The goal is for students to be able to explain, both accurately and with appropriate depth, the big ideas. Guided by teachers, students continually learn content to complete hands-on scientific investigations, blended with literacy-rich activities and interactive digital tools. Moreover, they learn to develop hypotheses and provide reasoning using evidence. With practice, trial, and error, students in grades 5-8 demonstrate their understanding of scientific processes, skills, and procedures. They learn to think, read, write, and debate like professional scientists and engineers. Varied opportunities allow students to demonstrate appropriate scientific language, procedures, and proficiency, culminating in the state examinations. Assessments include classroom assignments, discourse, experiments, quizzes and tests, and presentations. Data is used to inform instruction, evaluate program efficacy, and differentiate professional development.

#### **1d. Social studies/history/civic learning curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:**

Public education is historically rooted in civic education. This commitment to the academic preparation and holistic development of young citizens is at the heart of our mission. Content is aligned to state requirements, works backward from standard to lesson, and represents the most precedent-setting events that students must know and apply to their lives outside of school.

The elementary social studies program uses trade books, primary sources, and relevant activities that introduce important concepts and generalizations from history, geography, and other social sciences through an integrated study of children and their communities. In the early grades, children develop a foundation for the entire social studies program and an emerging sense of themselves, beginning with their familiar environment and advancing to families, neighborhoods, and communities in other environments. This approach enhances students' abilities to examine the perspectives of children in other places and times. Students learn to work in groups, to share, to respect the rights of others, and to care for themselves. They acquire knowledge of history to understand the present and plan for the future. Social studies at this level provides students with the skills needed for problem-solving and decision-making, as well as for making thoughtful value judgments. As scholars progress in their studies, they develop an appreciation for history through factual presentations, autobiographical and biographical studies, and historical fiction. The integration of reading and writing in social studies evolves to Humanities during the middle school grades. Assessment data is primarily derived from daily exit tickets, unit quizzes and exams, projects, and participation in community events. All of this data is used to inform lesson planning and guide interventions.

The middle school program serves to increase in-depth study of topics in each social studies discipline. This occurs in four main ways: 1) using essential questions; 2) using an interdisciplinary approach; 3) integration of content and skill instruction; and 4) rigorous, evidence-based thinking and discussion. Social studies and ELA combine in a study in Humanities to create synergy through high-quality novels chosen to illuminate historical content. Students participate and engage in beginning civic duties with student council elections and meetings, participation in focus groups, speaking with elected officials, and undertaking civic projects.

#### **1e. For schools that serve grades 7-12:**

In accordance with our mission, Stamford Excellence is committed to ensuring that each scholar has the access and opportunity to compete for admission to a high school of their choosing. The school promotes college and career readiness in multiple ways. Every classroom is named after a college or university so students learn about and become affiliated with an institution of higher education. The halls are decorated with university pennants to support a college-bound mindset. Scholars also benefit from Career and Technical Education, business, and entrepreneurial coursework.

Beginning in 7th grade, our High School Placement (HSP) Coordinator works with families to teach them about the mechanics of the application process. During their 8th-grade school year, our Coordinator supports each scholar throughout the entire admissions process, guiding each family to select a school that best fits each student's needs, talents, and aspirations. This process includes trips to prospective high schools and attending informational events alongside families. Families also receive significant support in navigating the

financial aid process and preparation for high school entrance exams, which are necessary for admission into competitive schools. The Coordinator tracks acceptance rates and provides continued guidance to our alumni after they graduate from our school.

During the summer, our rising 7th-9th-graders travel to Hamilton, New York to participate in our Summer Institute at Colgate University. They stay on the grounds to experience life on a college campus. Here, they participate in various educational and team-building activities centered around STEM, social-emotional learning, and projects, culminating in a final presentation aimed at promoting career explorations and public-speaking skills. This past year, our scholars delved deeply into what it means to be a citizen in an ever-changing and constantly evolving global stage.

The school will continue to monitor the success of each scholar through high school and guide families through the college admissions process when they are Juniors in high school. Scholars will be supported by a growing Student Advancement Department, which provides dedicated resources for continued access and success in high school, college, and careers. We will connect alumni with opportunities for internships and civic engagement, and provide services including navigating financial aid programs, applying for scholarships, internships, and workforce opportunities. It is this level of support that sets Stamford Excellence apart from other providers as we remain connected and dedicated to serving historically underserved youth to and through matriculation at our school.

#### **1f. For schools that offer preschool for three- and/or four-year old students:**

Stamford Excellence offers an accelerated, full-day pre-kindergarten program. Pre-K scholars engage in foundational concepts aligned to the Early Learning Developmental Standards and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), whose accreditation we earned in 2018. Our pedagogical approach applies developmentally appropriate but rigorous instructional strategies that incorporate active, creative, and exploratory learning that adapts the framework of our K-4 model to early learning. The year begins with rudimentary content and by the end of the year, scholars have engaged in kindergarten content. Our Pre-K scholars finish the year able to read and engage in mathematical concepts, placing them on an accelerated pathway for elementary school content. Instruction for Pre-K is organized into themes for developing language and early literacy skills. Its comprehensive and integrated approach connects ELA with concepts across disciplines. The program includes Big Books for shared reading, oral language development, skill modeling, listening comprehension, interactive digital resources, and building vocabulary. Teachers also use pre-decodable and decodable books for high-frequency and phonics instruction, as well as leveled readers to practice fluency and decoding. The Pre-K curriculum was designed to promote significant growth, particularly for high-needs children, English learners, and students with disabilities, with added support in the Essential Domains of School Readiness. Because the curriculum resources used at the Pre-K level are designed by the same publishers as the elementary program, there is a seamless articulation in preparation for Kindergarten-third grade content.

Scientific concepts are delivered through exploratory learning that introduces young learners to the natural world around them, teaching foundational concepts such as daily weather, the five senses, and basic taxonomy and categorizations (e.g., animal/plant, hard/soft, rough/smooth, etc.). Social studies is taught through integrated lessons where children learn about themselves, their community members, and the world.

Stamford Excellence strives to ameliorate the achievement gap for students who have been historically underserved. Therefore, early education, recognition, and intervention are critical. This is particularly crucial when targeting students who have suffered from an academic, social, or emotional poverty prior to entering school. By identifying students' needs and employing interventions early, Stamford Excellence has the potential to prevent barriers at a later stage when a student might have otherwise already developed unproductive work habits. For a child who is at-risk, this could be the difference between a lifetime of academic, social, and emotional damage, and no longer requiring special services for success.

## **2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

## **2a. Arts (visual and/or performing)**

Stamford Excellence believes in the value of co-curricular programming, which has been shown to support core instruction through integrated themes, as well as reinforce valuable social-emotional traits, such as teamwork, empathy, reflection, and appreciation. Our scholars have engaged in a variety of artistic endeavors. The school has offered instruction for all grade levels in visual arts, vocal and instrumental music, and theater. Through the visual arts, instruction can reinforce concepts such as patterns, which can translate to pre-algebraic reasoning, history by learning about the arts in chronology, and cultural appreciation by teaching the arts of the world. Theater invokes and requires an understanding of self, which amplifies the ability to reflect and gain knowledge of the emotions of self and others. Vocal and instrumental music can span across the world and traverse time, reinforcing the value of multiple genres, storytelling, and diversity in culture. Additionally, components of the visual and musical arts also require an understanding of parts to a whole, which intersects with mathematical fractions. At Stamford Excellence, we refer to these other curriculum areas as “cocurricular” versus extra-curricular programming, because we deem them as the essential complement to core instructional learning.

## **2b. Physical education/health/nutrition**

The health and wellbeing of our scholars is critical to ensuring a healthy learning environment. In addition to daily recess and classroom breaks, scholars at every grade level participate in twice-weekly classes for physical education (PE). Health and nutrition are also integrated into instruction with greater focus during set intervals throughout each trimester. The kinesthetic portions of the PE classes support the healthy development of gross and fine motor skills, hand-to-eye coordination, balance, and strengthening. It also reinforces social skills such as sharing and team dynamics, while also supporting classroom learning, as in the cases of calculating points during a game, creating patterns with movement, learning the history of a particular sport, and basic counting during jumping jacks. Health and nutrition have clear correlations with learning concepts, including cause and effect, nutritional proportions and ratios, and self-care. Teachers at Stamford Excellence use every opportunity for teachable moments that can enhance the learning experience for every child.

## **2c. Foreign language(s), if offered (if not offered, leave blank)**

## **2d. Technology/library/media**

Technology has played an increasing role in the learning environment. The school offered Computer Science as one of the specials classes for all grades. In this class, scholars were able to learn about various applications and coding. During the pandemic, a group of third and fourth-grade scholars competed in a statewide contest to design a virtual application. Our scholars won the competition with an application concept they created titled “Crowd Check”. The purpose of the app was to inform users of the number of people who might be in a particular location, such as the park or the beach. Through the app, the user could, then, determine if it was safe to visit the location. This was particularly compelling and significant in the era of social distancing and capacity restrictions and correlates with health and scientific learning. Stamford Excellence also uses technology to support learning. Teachers use a Smartboard to provide visual aides to lessons and scholars use devices to supplement learning. For example, a student might view a video on a Chromebook that takes them on a journey to the African safari, create a PowerPoint presentation about an historical figure, or play a game that matches letter sounds to pictures. In this way, technology is used to augment the learning experience.

## **2e. Any other interesting or innovative curriculum programs you would like to share**

Throughout the pandemic when face-to-face interactions and activities that resulted in exerted breathing were discouraged, our scholars were able to participate in a unique opportunity. When Broadway shows and art venues shuttered, several artists were left without work. Stamford Excellence was able to benefit from this tremendous resource to offer a robust series of virtual courses led by a dynamic group of esteemed

creative professionals and guest artists. We named this collaboration Club Excellence. This inspirational collaboration allowed our scholars to engage in exciting courses that include spoken word, dance, musical theater, fashion history, and African drumming. The program was designed to increase cultural capital and cultivate artistic creativity through expression, engagement, and connectedness. Through Club Excellence, our scholars were able to participate in creative outlets and healthy physical activity despite the necessary health and safety restrictions. Of additional note, Stamford Excellence also added a business class to build a foundation for financial literacy.

### **3. Academic Supports**

#### **3a. Students performing below grade level:**

The curriculum was developed and refined to diversify learning experiences to meet the needs of all students on a wide spectrum of development. All teachers maintain records of every student's performance, as well as documentation of achievement on assessments. Teachers use this ongoing data to modify and differentiate instruction for all students. They provide small group instruction in flexible groupings daily during reading and math to facilitate activities and lessons tailored to students' needs. Therefore, every student benefits from Tier I interventions that take place throughout the core instructional day. With support from additional teachers and education associates, the school provides reduced student-to-teacher ratios to offer more personalized interactions and opportunities to engage student learning at deeper levels. This means that every student is supported by a team of 3-4 grade-level teachers. The principal and instructional specialists provide the team with valuable feedback, guidance, and resources during weekly grade-level meetings, particularly related to strategies to support students who are struggling.

Strategies that teachers employ for students who are struggling or have specific learning differences include repetition and drill of facts and procedures; explicit instruction in procedures; multisensory instruction, including the use of manipulatives, oral and visual presentations of directions; multi-step directions and procedures that are broken down into incremental steps; allowances for breaks and movement; additional time for assessments and classwork; explicit instruction (i.e. modeling) of reading strategies and skills with sufficient time for guided and independent practice; individualized checklists and rubrics for writing; checklists for organization; flashcards for procedures; signed homework planners; color-coded materials; and assistance with organization (peer buddy, teacher, etc.). It is important to note that, while teachers implement a variety of strategies, accommodations, services, or supplemental curriculum resources, every student has equal access to the same rigorous curriculum with differentiated levels of support and scaffolding. In this manner, all students receive instruction that is supportive and challenging without dilution of instructional content or lowering of standards.

#### **3b. Students performing above grade level:**

Although many schools focus only on the student who is on or below grade level, Stamford Excellence recognizes the importance of addressing the needs of more accelerated learners as well. Once students have mastered basic concepts, the curriculum opens doors to more complex treatments of content. Students are able to embark on studies of greater depth and breadth within smaller groups creating enrichment activities that access more critical thinking and higher-order levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. These activities may include inquiry- and project-based extensions that cross into other subject areas.

Technology is also integrated into all core subjects for all learners, providing further vehicles for augmentations. For example, an accelerated scholar may be assigned to a more advanced, authentic literary text while fostering proficiency in a particular close reading skill. Therefore, the scholar is still required to process information garnered from the text by using more advanced techniques and applications.

In middle school, we offer more advanced coursework in preparation for high school. Thus, we provide instruction that is diversified based on where students are in their development. For example, scholars who demonstrate proficiency within grade-level mathematical content may be offered more advanced classes in Algebra and Geometry. Rather than limiting our scholars to a single course of instruction, the process that



we use to differentiate based on data allows us to offer a wider stratification of course content and complexity to meet the needs of our accelerated learners.

### **3c. Students with disabilities:**

Stamford Excellence scholars are all held accountable to the same learning standards as their statewide peers. Therefore, all students at the school are held to the same high academic and behavioral standards to promote excellence for all children. The school does understand that a student's disability may be reflected in their performance and will take into consideration that the scholar has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Section 504 plan. Rather than lowering the standards for scholars with disabilities, Stamford Excellence utilizes these documents as guidance for supporting children to attain excellence by way of differentiation, individualized scaffolding strategies, and accommodations pursuant to IEPs/504 plans. This strategy of holding students to the same high expectations and providing the intensive supports they need to achieve the standards has resulted in success at the school, including declassification from requiring special services.

The school achieves these goals for students with disabilities in an inclusive, least restrictive environment in compliance with their IEPs or 504 plans. Stamford Excellence provides comprehensive services that include Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT); Special Education Teacher Support Services (SETSS) with direct and indirect instruction; Resource room as indicated in IEPs; Implementation of testing modifications; and School health services. Counseling, Speech, Occupational, and Physical Therapies are outsourced for provision. The principal is the main point of contact with district personnel particularly as it relates to the Planning and Placement Team (PPT), and assumes responsibilities such as compliance monitoring, student observations, and consultation with general education teachers. The school collaborates with the students, families, specialists, and PPT for each identified child in the design and implementation of the IEP. Teachers provide intensive individualized instruction along the spectrum of services provided in the three Response to Intervention (RTI) tiers and closely monitor individual, cohort, and school-wide progress to ensure students are making adequate progress toward IEP goals. IEPs are reviewed annually in cooperation with the PPT. Stamford Excellence will continue to close achievement gaps through intentional strategies that have historically proven successful. They include additional personnel to provide targeted and individualized instruction to more students, integrated instruction to reinforce learning across content areas, and one-on-one and small-group tutoring.

### **3d. English Language Learners:**

Stamford Excellence focuses on supporting English Language Learners (ELLs) in the general education classroom so they are not isolated from their peers, general activities, or content courses. The school utilizes Structured English Immersion (SEI) to ensure that ELL students have equitable access to the comprehensive RTI program, rigorous curriculum, and strategic instructional programs. The school maintains high expectations for ELLs and provides the individualized and differentiated support they need for linguistic and academic achievement through the school's three-tiered RTI program. The level of support and intensity is determined on a case-by-case basis based on a student's performance on identification criteria and ongoing monitoring assessments. As with all students, ELLs benefit from the school's smaller learning environment and reduced student-to-teacher ratio to promote increased and personalized interactions.

Structured English Immersion is based on the theory that children learn a second language best when they are integrated with other children who speak that language with native-speaker ability. The model requires daily English Language Development (ELD). ELD instruction focuses on phonology (pronunciation - the sound system of a language), morphology (the internal structure and forms of words), syntax (English word order rules), lexicon (vocabulary), and semantics (how to use English in different situations and contexts). The school uses a combination of curriculum resources and practicable strategies within the three-tier intervention system to promote language proficiency. Instruction is primarily delivered in English, however, the level of English used for instruction - both verbal and written - is modified appropriately for any ELL student. ELL students are not forced to stop using their primary language while learning English.

As with all students, ELLs are assessed continuously to determine academic and linguistic progress. In  
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addition to the state's assessment to measure language proficiency, ELLs are also assessed with informal observations and interviews, curriculum-based assessments, internally developed measures, and reading benchmarks to measure progress. As with all students, teachers analyze data and its implications weekly to adjust and inform classroom instruction and flexible groupings. Based on outcomes from these multiple measures, Stamford Excellence ensures that students receive the resources and interventions they need for successful achievement and language acquisition.

### **3e. Other populations, if a special program or intervention is offered:**

Stamford Excellence recognizes that learning does not cease when a scholar leaves our classroom. Our families play a vital role in their children's educations and parents are a child's first teacher. Our school encourages parent engagement in the learning process to support and reinforce learning at home, whether through homework completion, bedtime reading, weekend trips, or additional interventions. In addition to ongoing communication, our families participate in school-wide initiatives aimed at strengthening the partnership between the home and school. These include events such as multicultural days, curriculum night, conferences, and family chats, which allow parents to gain insight into the learning content and processes. More importantly, Stamford Excellence has facilitated several parent workshops that provide strategies to support learning at home. Specific workshops have included literacy trainings and strategies to support at-risk learners, language development to support ELLs, and learning to advocate for students with disabilities. The workshops help parents to avoid conflicting messages so they can support and reinforce learning at home with consistent strategies and verbal cues that are used in the classroom. In this way, we train and leverage our parents as an additional layer of support for learning and interventions.

The school also began a Community Learning Partners (CLP) initiative. Our CLP program was established in part as a response to staffing shortages during the pandemic. Our schools recruited and hired qualified individuals from within our community, including parents. Our CLPs provide support for our schools in various ways, including classroom aides, hall and bathroom monitors, and office assistance. Our parents help to ensure that our buildings remain focused on learning and even support instruction in the classroom. We provide ongoing coaching and training to CLPs to support their success.

Stamford Excellence also provides intensive guidance for families as they navigate the high school admissions process. This is particularly important as we support our scholars to attend high-performing, competitive, and selective schools. The region is home to several highly competitive schools, each with its own admissions criteria. For families seeking to advance their children to opportunities beyond zoned feeder schools, this process can be confusing, frustrating, and challenging. Our high school placement team works closely with each family to ensure they understand and are able to astutely navigate these challenges. We help families remove barriers to access, including potential language, financial, and knowledge gaps. At Stamford Excellence, we aspire to promote the achievement of all students through the active partnerships and relationships we build with our families and the community. This is particularly significant as our families strive to provide opportunities for our children to which they themselves did not have access. In this way, we teach and empower families to be advocates and torchbearers as they usher their children into competitive and selective secondary schools.

## **PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE**

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### **1. Engaging Students:**

When scholars enroll at Stamford Excellence, they not only enroll in our school, they become a part of our family. The school maintains an inclusive environment that upholds high expectations for our scholars. We promote a college-bound attitude throughout daily discourse and strategies that include naming classrooms after colleges and universities and decorating our hallways with college banners. Scholars research their classroom university monikers, have spirit rallies, and meet and speak with university alumni. We provide a rigorous and challenging academic environment, that is made possible through nurturing and a culture of caring. Staff provides a clear structure, framework, and expectations that allow our classrooms to operate safely. Children are engaged in purposeful and joyful learning and understand that the expectations derive from a place of respect, love, and understanding. Our scholars become our Ambassadors, they participate in focus groups, they join the student council, and learn to gain agency to advocate for themselves.

The school has established a common vocabulary and behavior management plan so that scholars receive consistent messaging and are held to the same high expectations throughout their years at the school. Students recognize key phrases, signals, and procedures that are implemented in every class, articulated through each grade, and ubiquitous among all teachers. As students advance in grade level, expectations for conduct evolve appropriately with age to ensure developmental appropriateness. With these strategies, Stamford Excellence advances student achievement by creating a culture that inculcates positive work habits, develops lifelong scholars, and allows students to feel safe, interconnected, and empowered.

For middle school grades 5-8, Stamford Excellence promotes the Habits of Mind, which are an identified set of 16 problem-solving, life-related skills necessary to effectively operate in society and promote strategic reasoning, insightfulness, perseverance, creativity, leadership, and craftsmanship. The understanding and application of these 16 Habits of Mind serve to provide the individual with skills to work through real-life situations that equip that person to respond using awareness (cues), thought, and intentional strategy to gain a positive outcome. They teach the essential skills, habits, and positive attitudes that cultivate lifelong scholars and success in middle school, high school, college, and chosen careers.

Students feel empowered to take educational risks to stretch the boundaries of their learning. The school fosters character development and encourages students to continuously “RISE UP” and demonstrate the virtues of Respect Integrity, Success, Etiquette, Unity, and Pride. The school also emphasizes the values of Responsibility, Citizenship, Teamwork, and Honesty with a College-Bound Attitude. These virtues and values provide a common vocabulary for school-wide expectations and permeate the daily nurturing interactions and teachable moments within the school community. The school’s uniform policies remove socio-economic barriers and pressures that detract from an academic focus and provide a visible and public symbol of the school community and pride. Our smaller school setting, reduced student-to-teacher ratios, and close professional relationships help to strengthen the bonds between stakeholders and establish a school-wide family/community atmosphere.

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

The relationships we forge with our families begin with a “family chat”, which takes place upon the child’s registration with the school. During this meeting, we introduce our programs, policies, expectations, and resources. We discuss the significance of the parent and school partnerships, and provide a forum for families to ask questions, express their ideas, and share their needs. In this space, we also thread the needle to begin a longstanding exchange of communication that families have come to expect.

Throughout our short history, we have offered extensive training for families and scholars to foster empowerment, advocacy, and agency. Some of the trainings have been conducted by our staff, while others in partnership with community organizations. This work became paramount throughout the pandemic. As scholars learn and grow at our school, they learn the power and meaning of becoming a citizen of the community. Our scholars, families, and staff have participated in several activities, which include:

advocating for our schools at the capital; served grab-and-go meals during the pandemic; collaborating with a local state official to provide a nutritious meal to support a senior living center struggling in the midst of the pandemic; hosting the mayor, state representatives, and the governor; inspired by a novel read in school, compelling the city to improve city sidewalks for safer passage, particularly for those with disabilities; purchasing groceries for food insecure families; and competing in and winning a statewide contest to design a virtual application they titled “Crowd Check” that informs users of the crowdedness in any public spaces so they can determine if it is safe to visit during the era of social distancing. Additionally, the school hosts a Parent Association and maintains a reserved seat on the Board for the president. Notably, the school trained, empowered, and mobilized families to engage with policy and elected officials. For example, our Parent Association, alongside our Community Engagement Manager and Director of Advocacy and Policy, began its advocacy work in 2015 where families volunteered in 2-month cycles once a year for external advocacy events and internal school initiatives that would enhance school culture and the learning environment.

Another distinguishing feature of our relationship with our families and communities is the visibility and availability of our school leaders. Our principals begin each morning by greeting every scholar and parent to the building. They ensure that every scholar starts the day on a positive note. These brief but essential exchanges between parents and the school leader can make the difference in establishing a parent’s peace of mind. They are opportunities to ask questions, express concerns, develop interpersonal relationships, and build upon the thread that began with the family chat. This is especially crucial to our goal of promoting community development so that our scholars can learn and thrive in a safe environment.

### **3. Creating Professional Culture:**

Stamford Excellence maintains high expectations for professional conduct and performance, and provides a professional learning community where all stakeholders are dedicated to the growth of our scholars. Ongoing professional development is vital to ensuring that students benefit from improved instructional practices. Every school year begins with a two-week pre-service training program, followed by continual coaching and development throughout the year. All teachers have their own professional growth plans to ensure that professional development is differentiated and individualized for maximal growth. Teachers meet individually with the leadership team at the beginning of the school year to establish professional growth plan goals. In addition to school-wide goals, teachers also develop specific and individuated instructional and learning goals. Goals and progress are carefully monitored and documented on each teacher’s growth plan and compiled into a portfolio. As the year progresses, the teacher and leadership team meet formally to review portfolios, assess the teacher’s progress toward established goals, and formulate a plan to ensure success. Teachers’ progress toward goals in the professional growth plan adds to their summative evaluations. The school utilizes a data warehouse to store all achievement data, and a software program to document formal and informal staff observations and feedback. Together, these programs allow the leadership team to monitor correlations between student achievement and teacher effectiveness to inform individualized professional development.

Stamford Excellence does not rely on a series of isolated workshops that will have little to no sustainable effects on instructional practices. Instead, the school promotes continual improvement through ongoing professional development, coaching, mentoring, modeling, feedback, and subsequent assessments. Teachers have common planning periods built into their daily schedules, which allow time for collaborative planning, sharing of resources, informal peer reviews, lesson critiques, inter-visitations and observations, data analysis, and other key exchanges to facilitate effective teaching. These planning periods also provide time for lead teachers to consult with grade-level colleagues and administrators for ongoing feedback for improvement. Each grade-level team receives continual feedback from the school’s leadership. The leadership team guides grade-level teams to maximize the curriculum resources and utilize data to inform instruction. As the staff leaders visit classrooms daily, teachers benefit from informal observations with real-time feedback that can be immediately implemented. This ongoing exchange and delivery of professional development helps to ensure that Stamford Excellence delivers an instructional quality of the highest standards.

The school also maintains an open-door policy. Leaders are fully accessible to staff for coaching, questions, and concerns. Stamford Excellence also implements activities for team building and takes special care to

protect the health and wellbeing of the staff. Often in collaboration with the Parent Association, Stamford Excellence has provided staff appreciation initiatives, reserved days for celebration such as the 100th day of school, provides support for continuing education, and resources through the school's benefits programs that support mental health and wellness.

#### **4. School Leadership:**

When Stamford Excellence opened in 2015, the administrative team was comprised solely of a single principal and office manager. Since the school has grown in scale, the school leadership team is now composed of a Principal, an Assistant Principal, and a Director of Finance and Operations (DFO). Together, these individuals set the tone for the culture and expectations of the school. The principals oversee the instructional program while the DFO ensures that all resources such as transportation, nutrition, and curriculum purchases are allocated towards supporting student achievement and healthy development. The leadership structure was revised to ensure a more rigorous and data-driven approach to promoting student achievement with targeted individualized development for our staff. Professional development focuses on cultivating skills and behaviors that drive scholarly achievement and creating a culture of community. Critical to their success is the principals' progression through the leadership development program.

Our Leadership Development program supports leaders' quests to understand the resonant leaders in themselves (McKee, Boyatzis, & Johnston, 2008). It helps them negotiate the layers of adaptive and technical skills required for successful school leadership in the excellence model. A three-phase and five-module curriculum engages leaders in their sensemaking of work contexts, personal histories and legacies, the leader-follower dynamic, and their dexterity in managing technical and adaptive challenges. It requires leaders to develop emotional intelligence to navigate through the trials of leadership and promote a sustained growth mindset. They meet regularly with leaders of affiliate schools to troubleshoot any vulnerabilities and strengthen their own development. An added benefit of this program is that it allows more novice leaders to gain proficiency within the model while working collaboratively in their own professional learning community.

Our principals meet weekly with staff to discuss data, review lesson plans, observe practice, and provide immediate feedback. They conduct formal and informal observations daily to coach and support teachers in optimizing resources and practice. Because the model has demonstrated the capacity to propel student achievement, principals ensure that the instructional program is implemented with fidelity, and that each teacher is continuously honing their skills and improving in their craft. A large portion of this is measured in their ability to increase student achievement. The level and depth of intervention and coaching varies and adapts to each teacher to provide differentiated professional development.

The Board of Directors is the steward of the school's charter and is currently composed of six dedicated volunteers, including one parent representative. They are the governing body of the academic, organizational, and fiscal programs and policies of the school, while delegating the school's day-to-day decision-making and supervision to the school's leadership team. The Board remains vigilant of the school's academic performance, as well as our overall health and act responsively to any potential areas of vulnerability. The Board remains committed to providing effective and ethical governance to safeguard the school's fidelity to its mission, vision, and high-quality model that will continue to advance our scholars to Excellence.

#### **5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:**

Embedded in our mission is the belief that our scholars will experience an academic journey that cultivates intellectual, artistic, social, emotional, and ethical development. Our motto, RISE UP, and the core values we uphold speak to the emphasis we assign to appreciating and taking pride in diversity while respecting others. Stamford Excellence scholars and staff embody the diversity and cultures represented within our community.

Stamford Excellence emphasizes the importance of cross-curricular, integrated classes where scholars can be taught content in context. For example, when students explore literature within a historical context, topics

can be seen as interdependent rather than isolated subject areas. Teachers can, then, guide and reinforce meaningful instructional content for a deeper and broader real-world understanding. Our instructional pedagogy provides opportunities for historical explorations with literary context and culturally relevant discussions designed to spark curiosity, build empathy, and deepen inquiry into the human condition.

Our school integrates civic instruction into core learning as a tool to foster students' understanding of how people have created the world, and how they, in turn, are created by it. This understanding can be gained through exploring individuals and societies using a curriculum rooted in comprehending and interpreting the human experience. Our students learn through multiple perspectives and are introduced to literature that reflects the diversity of our global community.

Our program increases the scope of what students are reading by challenging them to ask essential questions about why a book was written and how such a story might affect their community or family. This includes the use of literature that reflects the diversity of our families and community. In doing this, our students begin to think critically about history, ethics, and literature while drawing connections to their own lives. We can, then, have meaningful conversations and approach topics such as voting, racism, and what it means to be a good global citizen. At the end of each unit, our scholars participate in culminating events and projects so that they have an opportunity to share their understanding of the work with their peers.

The middle school humanities curriculum takes a project-based approach, which encourages scholars to explore literature, history, religion, the arts, modern and ancient languages, philosophy, media, and other related subjects to understand the foundational tenets that inform our current reality. Scholars are learning to approach our complex and imperfect world with a willingness to explore the possibility of multiple truths and varied perspectives due to different experiences. Understanding the people in our world through languages, histories, and cultures helps to foster empathy, social justice, and equality. Our scholars will begin their secondary journey with skills and experiences that will give them a sense of agency, lead to long-term academic success, and cultivate citizenship and community.

## **PART VI - STRATEGY FOR EXCELLENCE**

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One distinguishing feature of the Stamford Excellence program is the Grade Cohort Model, which is most clearly illustrated during our sacred reading block. During this daily instructional period, a grade-level team of teachers and specialists are collectively responsible for all students on that grade level. While each teacher is assigned a classroom of students, they also engage with scholars outside of their homeroom roster since a large percentage of instruction occurs via small groups. Students benefit from individualized instruction that fosters deeper levels of understanding through intensive discussions and interactions. Because our collaborative approach ensures that each grade level is accountable for the achievement of the entire grade level cohort, differentiation occurs not only within one classroom, but across classrooms to address a broader spectrum of needs. These flexible instructional groupings are uniquely tailored for every child and availed daily based on ongoing real-time data. Teachers also utilize technology, cooperative learning, and multisensory, hands-on, differentiated strategies, and inquiry-based activities to support varying modalities of learning.

The pedagogical tool of the grade cohort model and the inherent, intense teacher collaboration are key ingredients to our academic success. With support from the leadership team, teachers work in a tight unit to mentor each other, improve the curriculum, analyze data, and address each child's individual needs. Faculty participate in common planning periods at least three times each week. The leadership team works together with grade-level staff to ensure scholars are making adequate gains throughout the school year. Through this methodology, remediation is offered in real-time with rapid response based on ongoing data collected from a robust assessment program. The teaching staff and instructional leadership work collaboratively to carefully analyze data and lesson plans, and ensure the effectiveness of targeted interventions. Teachers also confer with special education teachers and learning specialists to ensure every child's needs are met.

The implementation of our reading program is effective largely due to the school's uninterrupted, consistent, daily flexible reading groups that focus support in smaller groups with remediation for struggling readers and enrichment activities for more proficient and accelerated learners. Small group instruction allows teachers to design versatile, daily guided activities that augment the larger scope of the curriculum uniquely tailored to students' needs based on a data-driven model. Our pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers establish a solid foundation allowing scholars to achieve reading goals that support advanced studies in future grades. Teachers incorporate authentic and complex texts to develop comprehension strategies, build vocabulary, illustrate habits of good readers and writers, and inculcate an appreciation for literature.