

## 1.1 Targeted Community Research, Feedback, and Fit

### a. Background of the Targeted Community(ies)

*What are the targeted community(ies) within the intended recruitment boundary of the proposed school or program?*

#### **Washington Heights:**

Number of residents: 30,146  
Number of school-aged children: Undetermined  
Demographics: White – 0.7%, Black – 97.6%, Hispanic – 0.4%  
Average level of educational attainment: Undetermined  
Average family income: \$44,217  
Average housing cost: \$154,672  
Unemployment rate: 18.3%

#### **West Englewood:**

Number of residents: 47,133  
Number of school-aged children: 18,523  
Demographics: White – 0.7%, Black – 96.4%, Hispanic – 1.9%  
Average level of educational attainment: Undetermined  
Average family income: \$27,193  
Average housing cost: \$102,795  
Unemployment rate: 34.7%

#### **Bronzeville:**

Number of residents: 22,028  
Number of school-aged children: Undetermined  
Demographics: White – 13.2%, Black – 77.4%, Hispanic – 1.9%  
Average level of educational attainment: Undetermined  
Average family income: \$32,426  
Average housing cost: \$311,852  
Unemployment rate: 16.7%

#### **Belmont Cragin:**

Number of residents: 79,271  
Number of school-aged children: Undetermined  
Demographics: White – 18.6%, Black – 6.0%, Hispanic – 72.4%  
Average level of educational attainment: Undetermined  
Average family income: \$43,581  
Average housing cost: \$233,939  
Unemployment rate: 11.5%



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Each of these neighborhoods was chosen due to the significant gap in school seats available to the youth in these areas. Many parts of these four communities have a 501+ seat gap per the October 2014 Options Schools Seat Gap Map.

## b. Community Research

### Initial Research

***Do any members of the design team have ties to the targeted communit(ies) within the recruitment boundary? When first planning to conduct outreach in the targeted communit(ies), with whom did the design team connect to enhance its understanding of the targeted communit(ies), and develop an outreach plan? What existing community meetings, events, or volunteer opportunities have members of the design team attended to make additional connections and enhance members' understanding of the targeted communit(ies)?***

Yes. For greatest specificity in identifying those parties in each community with whom the design team's outreach targeted and connected, please see Appendix, 1.2.b *Community Meeting Attendees*, 1.2.c, *Table & Record of Community Feedback*, 1.3.a *Letters of Support From Elected Officials*, 1.3.b-d, *Letters of Support From Organizations, Stakeholders and Partners*.

Further, multiple members of our team have direct ties to the neighborhoods targeted. For example, one of the many members of our team with ties to the neighborhoods—our Manager of Advocacy and Recruitment—is a native Chicagoan with deep and life-long ties to the targeted communities. Further, she has spent her entire working life in the arena of community organizing around social justice issues. She helped fill charter schools on both the south and west sides of the city. It was her recommendation that she and members of our team meet with the faith-based organizations and like-minded community activists to deepen interest in—and understanding of—the work we do in the most underserved areas of Chicago.

The desire to substantively alter life options for youth in these communities—coupled with a profound understanding of the educational barriers confronting them—is the driving force behind the work we propose to engage in within these neighborhoods. Chicagoans with roots in these neighborhoods are striving to alter the current trajectory of many of the young lives they interact with in these neighborhoods.

### **1.1.c. Community Fit**

*Acceleration Academies* recognizes that the communities/neighborhoods we seek to serve have within them strong religious influencers; leaders and congregation members whose convictions and social justice energies are virtually unmatched. *Acceleration Academies* believes in building a strong network of mentors through partnering with leadership and members of these congregations. We believe that these partnerships will serve our Graduation Candidates in a truly unique fashion, unparalleled by other providers in this space.



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## 1.2 Notification to the Community of Proposed New School or Program

### a. Elected officials

*Provide evidence of having conducted (or describe plans to conduct) outreach to all of the aldermen, state representatives, and state senators within the proposed recruitment boundary:*

- *Requesting a meeting (if meeting(s) have already taken place, list the dates, times, and person(s) with whom the design team met)*
- *Attending the elected officials' Ward or District nights*
- *Sending formal notification of the proposed school or program either by email or letter*

Please see Appendix 1.2.a. *Correspondences* for detailed data responding to this inquiry.

### b-c. Community Organizations and Stakeholders and Community Feedback

*List the key individuals or organizations in the neighborhood with whom your design team has met to discuss the educational vision for the proposed new school/campus.*

*In your design team's various interactions with elected officials, community organizations, and stakeholders, what were some of the reactions to the proposed school or program? What suggestions did community members have for the proposed school or program?*

### Notification to Families and Community of Proposed New School or Program; Community Feedback and Community Forums

(Please see Appendix 1.2.b for detailed data relating to community forums in which Acceleration Academies provided information and solicited feedback). Acceleration Academies has held community forums in each of our target neighborhoods to solicit information and measure the interest levels of its constituencies. Strategic planning meetings were held with community stakeholders that included multiple faith-based organizations, elected officials and community partners (e.g., the West Side Minister's Coalition, Austin Coming Together and Circle Urban Ministries).

On March 25, 2015, Acceleration Academies attended Alderman Roderick Sawyer's Town Hall Meeting in West Englewood. Each attendee at the meeting received a flyer about our program and how it will impact the community as a whole. On April 4, 2015, Acceleration Academies held a community forum in the West Englewood neighborhood. Once again, public reaction to a program that will get young women and men off the streets and back on a path to earning a diploma was overwhelming positive. Pastor Bryant Jones of Samaritan Bible Baptist Church has been an outspoken proponent of Acceleration Academy, and has offered to house one of its sites inside his church on south Halsted St. At this point, however, compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act specifications may render the church site inappropriate—yet a site near the church is a distinct possibility.

In the Belmont Cragin neighborhood, Acceleration Academies' Advocate has briefed the staffs of Alderman Margaret Laurino, State Representative Luis Arroyo, State Senator William Delgado



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and U.S. Congressman Luis V. Gutierrez. Alderman Laurino has provided—in writing—her full support for Acceleration Academies. On Wednesday, April 1<sup>st</sup>, a community forum was held to discuss the proposition of bringing an alternative high school to the Belmont Cragin neighborhood. Reaction of those in attendance was positive and a request for both English *and* Spanish recruitment materials was notable and provided. Participants voiced the importance of getting the kids off the street and doing something productive. They also identified the need for some young adults to have positive role models; individuals who can influence their lives, and who can be found in an alternative learning environment.

Acceleration Academies has been in discussion with Bethesda Church on West Fullerton Avenue about sharing some space on their premise to open an academy. Pastor Ray Berryhill is very interested in this partnership and attended a luncheon at the Acceleration Academies Chicago office to outline next steps in designing a space that will allow students to thrive.

Acceleration Academies held a community forum on April 2, 2015 in the Washington Heights neighborhood of Chicago and addressed the high school dropout crisis in Chicago. Attendees at the meeting were given flyers to take home to neighbor and friends. Alderman Howard Brookins has pledged his full support and stands ready to assist in mobilizing folks to canvass and contribute in any way to raise awareness for the program in his ward. Members of the Acceleration Academy staff met with Rev. Otis Moss of Trinity Church of Christ on West 95<sup>th</sup> Street, who indicated that his congregation has many members who could benefit from the Program. Trinity is very interested in entering an actual partnership to channel their out-of-school youth into an Acceleration Academy.

Due to scheduling conflicts, Alderman Pat Dowell of Bronzeville was unable to meet in late March, but is scheduled to meet with Acceleration Academies now on April 9, 2015. A community forum was held in his neighborhood on March 31, 2015. Further, Acceleration Academies' staff was able to canvass door-to-door in the area to raise awareness of the issues confronting the neighborhood's dropouts, and to disclose the alternatives it is seeking to provide. Apostolic Faith Church on South Indiana Avenue has expressly offered to rent space to Acceleration Academy if we are able to open a learning center in their neighborhood.

We believe that by working together through our faith-based partnerships, we will jointly establish and empower a larger support system for individuals in these neighborhoods who—for a multiplicity of reasons—have abandoned education, and have abandoned hope for a meaningful future.

### **c. Record of Feedback**

Over the last several months, *Acceleration Academies* has interacted with hundreds of Chicagoans about the need for alternative opportunities for young adults to re-engage in education and ultimately earn their high school diploma. Reaction to partnering with faith-based organizations and community interest groups has sparked substantial interest among stakeholders and civic leaders from Belmont-Cragin to Washington Heights. During conversations with potential Acceleration Academy Graduation Candidates, feedback has been



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consistently positive, with vocal encouragement to proceed with urgency. Notably, whether we're making a presentation in a CEO board room or talking with a young person on the street corner, the expression of support and interest remains consistently strong, and frequently there is a desire to learn even more about what we do in other locations—and in what we propose to do in the affected neighborhoods.

## 1.3 Community Support

### a. Elected Officials

*List any elected officials who support the proposed school or program. If the applicant included a table in Section 2.1.a., the applicant may choose to add a column entitled Letters of Support to indicate whether or not the elected official supports the proposed school or program.*

A sampling of elected officials who support *Acceleration Academies* includes:

Howard B. Brookins, Jr, Alderman of the 21<sup>st</sup> Ward  
La Shawn K Ford, State Representative of the 8<sup>th</sup> District  
Robert Steele, Commissioner of the 2<sup>nd</sup> District

### b. Community Organizations and Stakeholders

*List community-based organizations or stakeholders (required), or citywide organizations (optional), that support the proposed school, or program. Attach letters of support that explain the basis for their support for the proposed school or program.*

*(For greatest specificity and detail relating to organizations and stakeholders, please see Appendix 1.3.a-d.) Acceleration Academies has reached out to multiple organizations throughout the targeted communities, including Metropolitan Family Services, the Chicago Urban League, the Grand Boulevard Federation, Circle Urban Ministries, the Boys and Girls Clubs of Chicago, Public Aide and Public Housing Authorities, the Juvenile Intervention Support Center of Chicago, LEAP Innovations, Distinctive Schools, Bridge to Freedom and a host of elected officials that have written letters of support.*

### 1.3.c. Partnerships

*Describe the coalition of partners and collaborators that your design team has formed in the targeted communit(ies) who can provide support services for the school's students and families once in operation. Describe any community-based partnerships you are proposing for the new school (required) and partnerships with citywide organizations (optional). Provide letters of support from these organizations. Explain whose responsibility it will be leading up to school/program opening and once the school or program is in operation to oversee these partnerships.*

Acceleration Academies has built a strong relationship with multiple parties, including:

- Juvenile Justice leadership
- Leaders of the Urban League
- Leaders of multiple faith-based organizations within each community/neighborhood.

*Acceleration Academies is committed to partnering with as many individuals and organizations influencing the lives of affected youth—and their families—as possible.*



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## **d. Family and Community Members**

*Please provide signatures of support from individuals residing within proximity to the school site.*

Please see Appendix 1.2.b for signatures and related information.

### *Key Community Supporters*

Several Alderman and civic leaders have endorsed Acceleration Academies. Please see the Appendix for letters of support.

## **1.3.e. Risk Factors**

*Based on your design team's interactions with elected officials, community organizations, and stakeholders, families, and community members, who in the community is opposed to the proposed school or program? What is your understanding of why they are opposed to the proposed school or program?*

Based on conversations with community leaders, a major concern proven to be erroneous was this: the potential for Acceleration Academies' work to ultimately cause a traditional school in the neighborhood to close. Residents and civic leaders were assured of the following:

- a) We do not compete with existing schools. We never have and we never will. Our work is solely with dropouts—those who have already abandoned education, no longer attend school (traditional or otherwise), and no longer impact activities at the traditional school they may have once attended.
- b) We do not serve students who have *not* dropped out of school.
- c) The tremendous number of dropouts to be served negates any possibility of our interfering in any manner with the operations of existing traditional schools.
- d) Further, our partnership with CPS wholly would prevent any risk of a traditional school's closings due to our dropout reengagement work.

## **1.4 Continued Family and Community Engagement**

### **a. Continued Outreach**

*What is your design team's continued community engagement plan from the time of submission of proposal materials leading up to the opening of the school?*

First and foremost, the pivotal community engagement component of our design team's plan is this: deep, intensive and continuous relationship-building with our students and their parents, grandparents and life influencers. We recognize that building and maintaining these relationships and commitments remain paramount if we are to be in any manner effective. Strategies include substantial personal/direct communication, invitations to share information and concerns, electronic record keeping to timely identify trends/concerns, immediate home visits when a student fails to appear, and discrete probing into causality when a student falters. Further, our design team is committed to building momentum during the application process by presenting at Alderman Town Hall meetings, community and civic organization-



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meetings, and by serving as a strategic partner with our faith-based organizations.

Acceleration Academies believes a strong relationship can be built with churches on both the south and west side of the City to appeal to parents and grandparents of those who have disengaged from their traditional high school. We will also continue to place our marketing and informational materials inside Boys and Girls Clubs, public libraries, community centers, laundromats and public service offices throughout the city.

**b. Community Support:**

*How will the proposed school or program contribute to the community? What services will it provide to families of students and/or community residents more broadly?*

By providing opportunity for youth to re-enroll in an education program unlike any that they had rejected or abandoned (or any that they perceive as having rejected or abandoned them), Acceleration Academies believes it can serve as a significant weapon against poverty, crime and hopelessness within segments of the City; segments in which substantial numbers of young people are underemployed or wholly unemployed. Each community and neighborhood in which Acceleration Academies has worked to explain its mission and purpose has responded with significant interest, encouragement and inquiries on how they can assist to make it happen.

**c. Community Input:**

*What formalized mechanism(s) will the proposed school or program have for families/guardians and the community to be involved in the governance of the school and/or to provide regular feedback to the Board of Directors?*

Acceleration Academies recognizes that this work cannot be done independently, and that it cannot achieve maximum effectiveness without deep, trusting and sustained relationships with members of the communities it serves. Consequently, part of its mission includes the building of relationships with individuals and organizations through extensive interactions, transparency, and clear communications. It involves the recruiting of community members to speak directly to the individuals we serve, to serve as role models, and to connect the work of achieving a diploma to “real world” options that are otherwise foreclosed to our graduation candidates. Acceleration Academies recognizes first and foremost that there is no “silver bullet” to reaching young people who have given up on education. It does not pretend that it can do this work alone. What its research tells it is that each community it serves *must* be an integral part of the process; in recognition of this reality, it works—neighborhood-by-neighborhood, block-by-block—to connect, maintain and nurture the engagement of those whose lives and businesses affect our graduation candidates. This connection is paramount. And a fundamental component of our success.

## Section 2: Academic Capacity

### 2.1 Mission, Vision, Culture

**a. Mission and Vision**

*State the mission and vision of the proposed school or program. The mission and vision statements should provide the foundation for the entire proposal and be reflected*



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*throughout all sections.*

The Mission of Acceleration Academies, LLC is to serve the educational and career needs of youth who have abandoned education; to provide them a realistic, engaging, opportunity filled route to a college and career-ready diploma; to make a difference in their lives by providing innovative instruction, substantial supports and individualized coaching tailored to their life needs.

Our vision is to alter the life trajectory of those who have abandoned education, and to do it through individualized outreach, instruction and highly-nuanced supports tailored to meet individual needs.

## **b. Educational Philosophy and Program Overview**

*Briefly describe the educational philosophy of the proposed school or program. Identify the design team's core beliefs and values about education, and explain how these priorities inform the school or program's key program and design components. Provide a clear rationale for these design components, and cite research that demonstrates these components are successful with similar student populations.*

Acceleration Academies' educational philosophy is straightforward: Student needs can be met—once they are wholly assessed and understood—through carefully calibrated blended instruction; instruction that must include intensive, sustained and respectful face-to-face interaction.

### About the proposed program: *Acceleration Academies*

With the help of several partners and school districts, *Acceleration Academies* has developed its model using a *blended learning* approach, as defined by the Christensen Institute for Disruptive Innovation:

*The definition of blended learning is a formal education program in which a student learns:*

- 1. at least in part through online learning, with some element of student control over time, place, path and/or pace;*
- 2. at least in part in a supervised, brick-and-mortar location away from home; and*
- 3. the modalities along each student's learning path within a course or subject are connected to provide an integrated learning experience.*

For the online components of the model, *Acceleration Academies* has partnered with a well-respected and established technology and content partner, *Edmentum*. With more than 50 years of experience, *Edmentum* offers one of the most comprehensive, engaging and effective online curriculums available: *Plato Courseware*.

Online learning was invented in 1960 at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Shortly thereafter, PLATO (Programmed Logic for Automated Teaching Operations) was created as an answer to a pressing need for greater access to high-quality education. Initially funded by a



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number of grants that supported science and engineering education, including a National Science Foundation grant, PLATO became the first computer-assisted learning system. Early on, learners accessed PLATO through stand-alone computer systems.

Today, *Plato* courseware has high-quality, rigorous courses can be accessed anytime and from anywhere, and have been adapted to integrate the latest mobile device technology for even greater accessibility. *Acceleration Academy* program makes use of *Plato Courseware's* media-rich, customizable content and management system to provide a highly individualized curriculum tied to all relevant content standards.

The *EdOptions Academy* portion of our program is a fully accredited by the Northwest Accreditation Commission and AdvancED as a virtual provider. It is aligned with the 58 INACOL standards for course content, instructional design, student assessment, technology, course management and 21st century skills. Further, it and our curriculum are NCAA approved course.

For CPS, the *Academy* program will operate as a specialized district option for recovered students. Students will be enrolled in Chicago Public Schools as participants in a customized educational program supervised and delivered by *Acceleration Academies*. Upon securing a contract, *Acceleration Academies* will design and coordinate a district-wide recruitment effort, beginning with a geo-mapping process to identify those areas in the county with the highest concentration of dropouts.

*Edmentum* and *Acceleration Academies* will furnish a data analysis system, the *Edmentum Sensei*, allowing the district and *Acceleration Academies* to seamlessly access and interact with data from the online learning products, content and assessments. The system allows educators and administrators to easily explore onscreen data from student interactions, progress and feedback, as well as make faster and more informed decisions through user-friendly apps.

All partners in this program will be able to visualize and monitor student progress, addressing individual needs with customized learning pathways. By easily accessing and analyzing data from students both individually and collectively, educators can improve performance at the individual learner and classroom levels. The powerful partnership of *Acceleration Academies*, *Edmentum* and Chicago Public Schools will result in a best-of-breed reengagement program for at-risk student populations.

### **Empirical evidence of program efficacy**

Prior to designing its *Acceleration Academies* program, *Acceleration Academies* completed an analysis of available research on the national dropout crisis. Its aim was to identify and understand:

- a. The underlying factors that lead students to drop out of school
- b. The cognitive/behavioral signs that a student is at risk for dropping out
- c. The precise ways in which a traditional school setting fails to meet the needs of at-risk students, and how to address those shortcomings



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### d. Techniques and supports that are most effective in recovering students

Data was compiled from sources including the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics, MIT Press Journals' *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, the Alliance for Excellent Education, the U.S. Census Bureau, the American School Counselors Association, the Center for Labor Statistics, and dozens of others.

In compiling this research, *Acceleration Academies* noted a distinct lack of student voice. Its research team was especially interested in hearing student narratives, first-hand, about what led them to drop out of school. To achieve this, *Acceleration Academies* surveyed over 1,100 students across 12 states who had dropped out of high school, and were now pursuing a diploma through alternative means. One-on-one interviews were also conducted with a substantial number of these students.

The following substantive findings are reflected in *Acceleration Academies'* Success Academy approach:

- a. Most respondents indicated that the traditional classroom set-up was not meeting their needs in one way or another. Many cited too many distractions, too many students per classroom, and not enough communication with teachers in the traditional large-class, "sit-and-get" set up.
- b. Over 60% of respondents said that school lacked "real-world relevance."
- c. Many students indicated problems communicating with teachers as a primary reason for dropping out of schools.

These and other findings are outlined in a 2013 report by *Acceleration Academies* entitled *Dropping Out: Stereotypes, Reality and Recovery*. (available at [www.accelerationacademy.org](http://www.accelerationacademy.org); these findings became the foundation on which the *Acceleration Academies* program was built.)

In light of its research, *Acceleration Academies* conducted an investigation into various curriculum options, and selected *Edmentum* as its curriculum partner and provider of online learning solutions. The program outlined in this proposal will make use of *Edmentum's Plato Courseware*, a highly customizable system of online courses and learning and assessment tools. *Plato Courseware* is built on a rich base of research, which is outlined in a White Paper entitled *The Research Base of Plato Courseware* (2010), available at [www.edmentum.com](http://www.edmentum.com). The standards-based *Plato* curriculum is described in detail in the following section F: Curriculum Description.

*Plato Courseware* has been subject to several third-party evaluations and case studies. In 2012, Marzano Research Laboratories completed a thorough analysis of *Edmentum's* programs, including the *Plato Courseware* platform. The findings of this analysis were published in a report entitled *A Study of Best Practices in Edmentum Online Solutions*,



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and demonstrate empirical evidence of *Edmentum's* efficacy. The following is an excerpt from the report:

*Across all categories of teaching strategies, teachers reported frequent engagement of instructional behaviors and practices that have been found to positively impact learner outcomes up to 99% of the time. Student perceptions of teaching strategies corroborated the self-reported practices of teachers, reporting that teachers frequently implement effective instructional strategies using Plato Courseware up to 88% of the time. Regardless of instructional setting (pure virtual, blended, classroom/lab) or course purpose, teachers consistently and frequently implement effective instructional strategies. (Marzano Research Laboratory, 2012)*

A number of case studies have also been performed to evaluate the quality of the *Plato Courseware* content and systems. To assess the program's impact in the nation's lowest-performing schools, *Edmentum* performed a study of 17 Tier I and Tier II School Improvement Grant recipients in ten states. The findings offer compelling evidence of *Plato's* impact in the country's most underperforming districts:

- a. Upon adopting the *Plato* platform, graduation rates at participating schools improved an average of 24%; in some schools, graduation rates doubled.
- b. Participating schools showed an average increase of 30% in students meeting reading proficiency standards; some schools experienced growth of over 100%.
- c. Participating schools experienced an average increase of 43% in the number of students meeting mathematics proficiency standards.

The Acceleration Academy program is based on core principles, which are supported by the *PlatoCourseware* resources:

- 1.) **Flexible scheduling:** The National Dropout Prevention Center lists flexible scheduling as one of eight key elements for successful alternative schooling programs (National Dropout Prevention Center, 2014). Each *Acceleration Academy* Program will be open 13 hours daily, with licensed staff who are specialists in serving recovered students. Sites will offer early morning and evening instruction, to accommodate students with jobs, children, or other potential scheduling barriers. With assistance from program staff, students will be able to customize their own schedules.
- 2.) **Blended delivery:** A combination of in-person and online instruction ("blended learning") allows students to progress at their own pace, without sacrificing the social and intellectual benefits of face-to-face instruction.

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills advocates for educational systems that integrate a variety of delivery methods and spaces: "...a learning environment can be virtual, online,



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remote; in other words, it doesn't have to be a place at all. Perhaps a better way to think of 21st century learning environments is as the support systems that organize the condition in which humans learn best -- systems that accommodate the unique learning needs of every learner and support the positive human relationships needed for effective learning." (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009)

In a peer-reviewed article in *The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, researchers from Regent University set forth evidence that blended learning environments actually "produce a stronger sense of community among students than either traditional or fully online courses." (Rovai & Jordan, 2004) For many dropouts, it is precisely this sense of community that is lacking in the traditional classroom setting, as evidenced by comments from the students surveyed by *Acceleration Academies*.

*Acceleration Academies* and its curriculum provider, *Edmentum*, adhere to best practices for blended delivery as recommended by Marzano Research Laboratories (MRL). To maximize the efficacy of its curricula, *Edmentum* contracted with MRL in 2012 to complete an evaluation of its online instruction components. MRL's findings and recommendations are outlined in a report entitled *A Study of Best Practices in Edmentum Online Solutions*. The full report is available at [www.edmentum.com](http://www.edmentum.com).

**3.) Emphasis on the benefits for students, families and communities:** The compelling data regarding the economic status of high school dropouts vs. graduates can be a powerful tool for motivating students, who should be made aware of what they stand to gain by staying in school. The Alliance for Excellent Education has determined that, on average, those with high school diplomas earn over \$10,000 annually more than those without diplomas. Graduates also have significantly lower rates of incarceration and/or recidivism. As participants in the *Acceleration Academy* program, students create 10-year career plans designed to help them achieve stable, desirable careers. By helping students visualize the concrete, tangible benefits that they and their families will reap, the *Acceleration Academy* program helps them understand the actual, personal impact of obtaining a diploma.

**4.) Highly engaging instructional models:** The *Plato Courseware* curriculum is media- rich and interactive, designed to engage those students who are alienated by the traditional classroom setup. Concepts are presented in a variety of ways, to reach learners through the delivery methods they respond to. Brief, embedded videos, mobile accessibility, read-aloud and translation tools, enhanced learning applications, maps and charts and complementary offline activities all help to add variety to education and keep students engaged. Additionally, the *Edmentum Sensei* analytic platform includes tools to regularly assess student engagement and share the data with fellow educators.

**5.) Wraparound supports:** A comprehensive slate of behavioral, social/emotional, career planning and health services are coordinated for *Acceleration Academy* students and families.



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These will include:

- Licensed social worker(s)
- Guidance and career counselors
- Special education instructors
- Mental health providers
- Behavioral consultants

Providers will be selected and engaged directly by *Acceleration Academies*, unless the state or district has already identified preferred providers. All staff will be trained in Positive Behavior Support. Additionally, they will be trained to recognize the behavioral indicators of students who are at-risk for dropping out again, and to respond with appropriate interventions.

In a study by the social policy research nonprofit MDRC, commissioned by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, researchers evaluated a number of dropout recovery programs across the country. Their findings confirmed the importance of wraparound services as part of strategies to recover students who have dropped out of school. Across different states, the most successful programs had commonalities including multifaceted, 360-degree wraparound supports: “Young people are actively involved in establishing a set of goals and identifying the supports they will need to reach them. A unique roster of services is then developed for each young person based on their specific needs and goals.” (Bloom, Thompson & Ivry, 2010)

**6.) Proof of concept and continuous improvement:** *Acceleration Academies* is committed to the continuous improvement of its *Acceleration Academies* program. Continuous improvement requires ongoing action research and prototyping to study the educational environment, student engagement and student attainment.

*Acceleration Academies* conducted a detailed Proof of Concept (POC) in 2013-2014 to test the efficacy of the *Acceleration Academy* instructional methodologies, technology platform and assessments, and to determine student achievement, engagement and progress. The POC was conducted with students from Distinctive Schools, a network of nonprofit schools serving at-risk populations in Chicago.

It was determined that 67% of students using the core principles outlined in this proposal outperformed their peers, while the remaining 33% achieved at the same level of progress as their peers. 92% of participating students self-reported their engagement as “higher” or “significantly higher” than their engagement prior to the program. All students selected were determined to be “at-risk” based on their prior academic progress and achievement.

**7.) State of the art technology:** The *Acceleration Academies* program makes use of cutting-edge educational technology to engage and accommodate the needs of the recovered student. Examples include:



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- *Mobile-friendly courseware:* with *Edmentum's Plato Courseware* platform, students can access mobile-friendly courses anytime, anywhere, on any mobile device.
- *Media-rich content:* Lesson tutorials integrate video, interactive learning applications, data, maps and charts to reach and engage students with a variety of learning styles
- *Mobile teacher applications:* Teachers are able to manage their Edmentum courses away from the confines of their desks.
- *Interactive data analysis:* With the *Edmentum Sensei* management system, educators are able to visualize individual and collective student progress at the touch of a screen. The quality and availability of data help teachers make faster, more informed decisions for their students.

To minimize student frustration, a 24-hour help desk will be available to them for any questions they have regarding the courseware.

**8.) Project and competency based learning:** *Acceleration Academies* uses a competency-based method of learning, which allows students to progress as they demonstrate mastery of academic content, regardless of time, place, or pace of learning. The U.S. Department of Education notes that competency-based systems “create multiple pathways to graduation, make better use of technology, support new staffing patterns that utilize teacher skills and interests differently, take advantage of learning opportunities outside of school hours and walls, and help identify opportunities to target interventions to meet the specific learning needs of students. Each of these presents an opportunity to achieve greater efficiency and increase productivity.” (U.S. Department of Education)

Competency based learning models provide a complex mechanism with which to differentiate content for students who have disengaged from traditional models. The *Acceleration Academies* model places the student at the core of decisions about what supports s/he receives along his/her own personal learning pathway.

In order to ensure that students connect their learning to their career aspirations, project-based learning is implemented to help students see the outcomes of their learning. Project-based learning is helpful for addressing one of the most common complaints reported in *Acceleration Academies'* survey of recovered students: “school is not relevant to the real world.”

The National Education Association endorses project-based learning (PBL) as a way to help students make connections between learning and life: “This model helps make learning relevant to students by establishing connections to life outside the classroom and by addressing real world issues. In the classroom, PBL gives teachers an opportunity to build relationships with students by acting as their coach, facilitator, and co-learner.” (National Education Association, 2014)

*Acceleration Academies'* competency-based learning design is based upon the following five principles:



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- **Students advance upon demonstrated mastery.** As students move through the program they are advanced to higher-level work *upon demonstration of mastery, not age*. They work at levels that are appropriately challenging and are evaluated on performance.
- **Explicit and measurable objectives, along with choice, empower students.** Our courses are organized into measurable learning objectives that are shared with each student. As individual learning pathways are designed, students take responsibility for their learning, thereby increasing their own levels of engagement and motivation. The relationship between the students and *Acceleration Academies* instructors is fundamentally different from traditional relationships: the unit of learning becomes modular, and learning expands beyond the classroom.

As students demonstrate success, their number of choices for program design increases.

- **Assessment is meaningful and a positive learning experience that informs next step and mid course corrections.** In *Acceleration Academies'* model, the traditional approach to assessment and accountability "of learning" is turned on its head with assessments "for learning." Formative assessments are aligned with learning objectives. Students will receive immediate feedback when assessment occurs. This is used to encourage students to return to difficult concepts and skills until they achieve mastery. Assessments are student-centered and focus on material with which they are familiar. *Acceleration Academies* instructors utilize assessment data to instantly guide instructional decisions.
- **Students receive rapid, real-time, differentiated support.** At its core, *Acceleration Academies* believes that all students in the program will master the desired competencies. This requires a rapid response capacity on the part of instructors to support students when they are stuck, or begin to disengage due to frustration. To minimize frustration, instructors develop students' own capacity to seek out help, enhanced by technology-enabled solutions. Pacing matters: as students progress at their own speeds, students that are proceeding more slowly will need and receive more help. *Acceleration Academies'* Learning pathways capture knowledge on learning styles, context, and interventions that are most effective for individual students. Much of this essential information is captured in the initial student interview, so that plans for each student complement his or her learning styles and preferences.
- **Learning outcomes emphasize application and knowledge creation.** Competencies and learning objectives in the *Acceleration Academy* model are designed so that demonstration of mastery includes application of skills and knowledge. Assessment rubrics are explicit in what students must be able to know and do to progress to the next level of study.

**9.) Transcript and learning style review:** Before beginning the program, each student's transcript is carefully reviewed to determine academic needs and an appropriate "learning



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pathway” to graduation. Where credit recovery is necessary, learning pathways include plans to provide both remediation and rigorous traditional coursework. *Acceleration Academies* embeds remediation into its approach to every course, so that students proceed with content and instruction while receiving specific remediation in areas identified as deficient.

As noted above, *Acceleration Academies* conducts student interviews as part of the process of creating learning pathways. This allows instructors to assess learning styles, past obstacles to success, and preferred methods of receiving instruction.

*Acceleration Academies* has extensive expertise in providing staff development and training for work with special education students, and retains one of the nation’s foremost ESE specialists, Tom McDowell (see bio under Tab 2) as its Special Education Consultant. The provider’s past work serving the ESE student population will ensure a specialized, supportive learning environment for students with disabilities. *Acceleration Academies* will provide a special education teacher and staffing specialist, and will contract with a local agency to provide assistance in other areas for ESE students, including occupational therapy, speech therapy, etc.

**10.) Personalized learning through customized pathways:** Each student’s customized learning plan includes multiple opportunities for him/her to customize coursework based on personal needs and interests. All courses are designed to help students advance along the pathway to college or career success. A list of the nearly 100 courses that will be offered through the *Acceleration Academies Academy* program is available in the Appendices to this proposal.

**11.) Career and college ready supports:** Students are engaged in career and college ready supports that include interest inventories and active career and college planning programs. Students take career and life planning sessions to develop a 10-year plan that aligns career interests, opportunities, inventories, supply/demand, training and median salaries. The process helps students visualize the impact of their choices on long-term outcomes. Students will develop a digital portfolio of their work and credentials, to be used for later employment purposes. Students’ career exploration process will be facilitated by the *Plato* career and Technology Library.

**12.) Formative and summative assessments:** All required formative assessments (e.g., NWEA) are implemented and used to monitor student achievement with regard to state standards. Additional assessment tools are used to create targeted intervention programs for students using individualized, data-driven instruction. Instructors select from a variety of formative assessment tools offered as part of the *Edmentum Sensei* system to create custom assessments or series of assessments. These can be used to identify students’ strengths and needs against state and district standards.

Through *Sensei*’s assessment tools, instructors can instantly generate curricula based on



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individual or collective results, and provide targeted instruction to a whole group, in a small group setting, or one-on-one. Ongoing professional development based on instructional best practices will be provided for all student-facing staff.

To ensure the greatest chance of success in FCAT and EOC, *Acceleration Academies* will deploy of Study Island, a leading provider of test-preparation software and part of the *Edmentum* suite of solutions. Students will have round-the-clock mobile access to Study Island's award-winning test preparation and standards mastery software, to supplement in-person tutor support for all students preparing for FCAT or EOC assessments.

### c. Culture

*Describe the culture of the proposed school or program. What are the systems, traditions, and policies that the school or program will implement to achieve this culture? Who is responsible for overseeing the implementation of these systems, traditions, and policies? Any responsibilities assigned to staff members with regard to promoting and monitoring positive school culture should be cited in the attached comprehensive organizational chart and job descriptions.*

We recognize that the students we serve have abandoned education for a multiplicity of reasons, and that their commitment to returning to *any* educational environment is often tenuous, guarded and skeptical. To overcome those realities, we recognize we must first demonstrate respectfulness and genuine concern for each student as an individual. Consequently, the culture of our program is one of flexible, highly personalized/individualized instruction focused on respect, and providing the supports for establishing individual mastery and competency—one step at a time. Positive Behavior Intervention Supports are the backbone of our interventions and personalization is the backbone of our instructional model.

Further, we embrace and implement the *Work Keys* culture for our graduation candidates to aspire to school and workplace success; further, we use *Keys to Success* to optimize our graduation candidates' hope, engagement and persistence – the antecedents for success.

### KEYS TO SUCCESS FOR THE GRADUATION CANDIDATES SUMMARY:

- Every day is a clean slate.
- Don't give up...even when you've had a tough day the day before.
- Be accountable to yourself for the goals you've established.
- Take this work seriously; it's the difference between a difficult life path and a meaningful one.
- A diploma *does* matter. Hugely.
- Ask for help. We're here to benefits you—your success is our success.
- Help us to create and maintain a meaningful environment: *academic language, collaboration, concentration, and reflection.*
- Show up. Just like a job or career . . . attendance matters. And, it increases your chances of success when the going gets tough.
- Treat others the way you wish to be treated. We're in this together.



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## INDIVIDUALIZED LEARNING PATHWAY

Another significant portion of our success pathway and program goals and philosophy is to develop an Individualized Learning Pathway for each Graduation Candidate.

Because *Acceleration Academies* is focused on meeting each individual student where he or she is, we establish an *Individualized Learning Pathway (ILP)* to address specific academic, social, and emotional needs.

In order to complete the ILP for a student we complete a thorough analysis of the best path for a learner to become a graduate. This includes a review of the learner's transcript and an assessment of their academic needs and skills. It also includes a learning style and career interest assessment.

All our learners have a clear pathway—not just to a diploma—but to careers that fit their interests and skills (we do this through deployment of National Career Readiness Credential protocols). Focus is on developing a deep understanding of what employers need and want from their employees—and what they don't want. Our learners take one course at a time for a distinct reason: it works best with learners who have struggled in the past. Research evidences that mastery and competency are best attained when content is perceived as manageable, and supports are in place to assure success. This mastery and competency-based philosophy is at the core of our work.

Transitioning away from measured seat time, in favor of a structure that creates flexibility, allows students to progress as they demonstrate mastery of academic content, regardless of time, place, or pace of learning. Further, more than 51% of their coursework is delivered face-to-face, and this delivery method is purposeful; it empowers the development of trust. Additionally, competency-based strategies provide flexibility in the way that credit can be earned, and include, in part:

- Personalized learning opportunities.
- Online and blended learning.
- Dual enrollment
- Project-based and community-based learning,
- Credit recovery.

These diverse approaches statistically lead to more intensive student engagement, primarily because they are tailored to each student's unique needs. They also result in better student outcomes because the *pace* of learning is also customized for each student.

By enabling students to master skills at their own pace, competency-based learning systems help to save both time and money. Depending on the strategy pursued, competency-based systems also create multiple pathways to graduation, make better use of technology, support new staffing patterns that utilize teacher skills and interests differently, take advantage of learning opportunities outside of school hours and walls, and help identify opportunities to target interventions to meet the specific learning needs of students. Each of these presents an opportunity to achieve greater academic growth and commitment to learning.

So for every learner, experience-by-experience, lesson-by-lesson and course-by-course, we design a customized pathway to success. Our learners have career Internships and Advisors to



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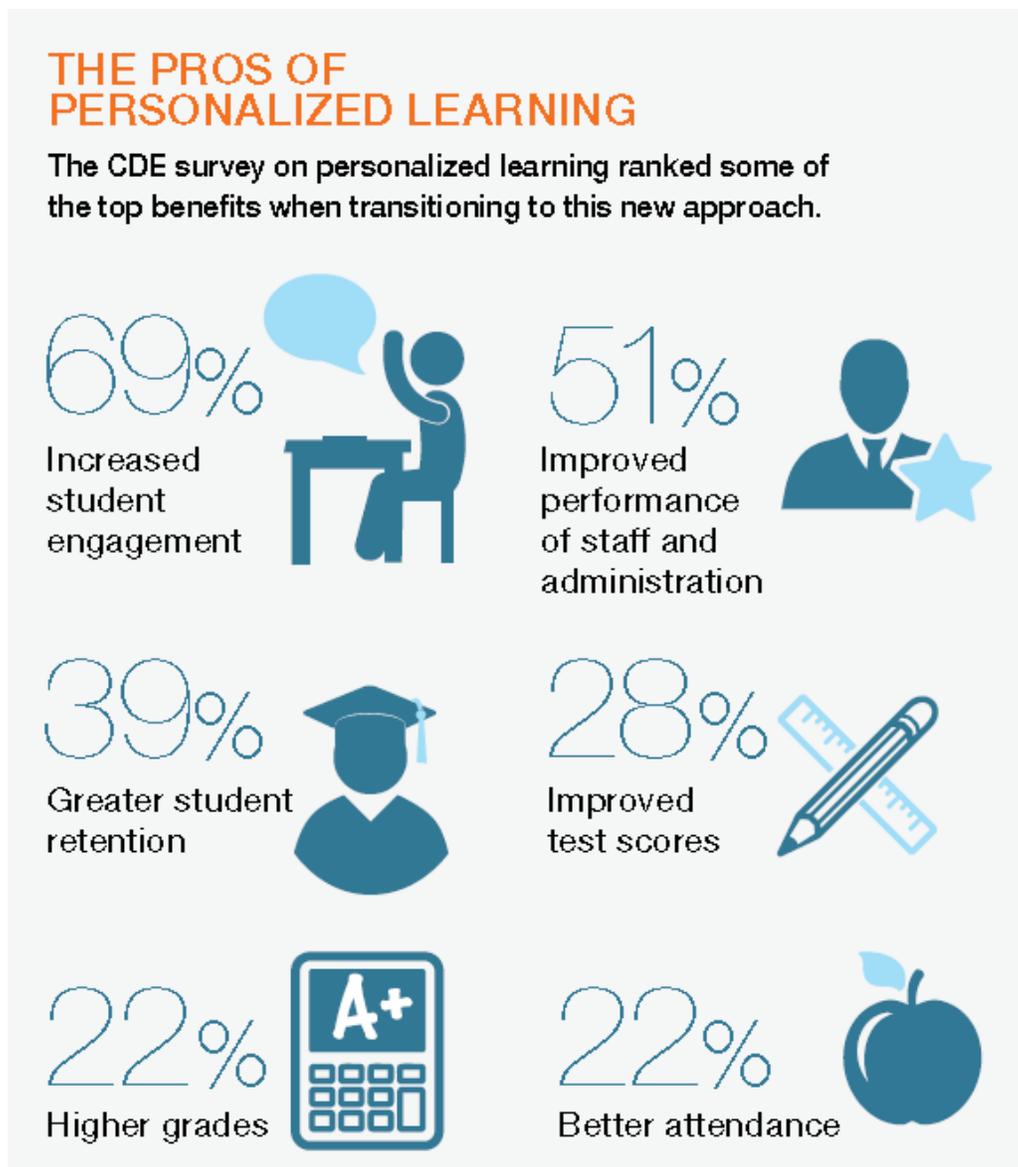
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gain real work-life skills . . . and also an enhanced awareness of work-life culture.

We don't just create an individualized learning pathway—we continue to support and monitor and update each student's plan. A life coach and a career coach assist in conquering the "bumps" on each student's educational path; they provide supports to address *non-academic* barriers to success.

This isn't high school; this is a start toward a great life; one that each learner controls and builds based on their goals and aspirations.

The graphic below shows the evidence of why each learner deserves and needs an individualized learning pathway.





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## **d. Post-Secondary Opportunity Readiness**

*Describe the specific programs and supports, beyond academic curricula, that the proposed school or program will provide to expose students to college. Describe how you will ensure students are successful in college, both academically and emotionally. Describe how the school will work with students to apply, enroll, and persist in college after high school graduation. Who is responsible for overseeing the implementation of college readiness supports? Which staff members will support these efforts? Any responsibilities assigned to staff members with regard to promoting college readiness should be cited in the attached comprehensive organizational chart and job descriptions.*

### Supports for College

The Acceleration Academy program's multiple supports for college include:

1. Personalized instruction
2. Degreed Graduation Candidate Advocates to assist students as tutors and mentors
3. Career Coaches with rehabilitation counseling training
4. Fully licensed educators
5. A test-preparation program that is accessible 24/7 for ACT/SAT and ISBE requirements
6. A Common Core aligned rigorous curricula
7. Regular progress monitoring
8. Life coaches to provide for assistance in the non-academic barriers to success
9. Career coaches to assist individual students in "mapping" their route to college or career.

### Supports for Career Readiness

1. Personalized instruction in career exploration and the development of a five phase career plan
2. Degreed Graduation Candidate Advocates to assist students as tutors and mentors
3. A plan to gain accreditation to allow the issuance of career credentials, certificates and degrees.
4. Regular career exploration, mentoring and shadowing opportunities
5. Full Naviance licenses for students to explore skills, careers, interests and assure their readiness for Career success
6. Career Coaches with rehabilitation counseling training
7. A full Work Keys instructional program
8. A test-preparation program that is accessible 24/7 for ACT/SAT and ISBE requirements
9. A Common Core aligned rigorous curricula with over 40 CTE option

### Tracking

*Acceleration Academies* utilizes the National Student Clearing house to monitor and track the progress of its alumni. The Clearing House has a longitudinal system to track students in their post- secondary programs.



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### **e. Social, Emotional, and Physical Health**

#### Student Profile

The students served in the program are out of school youth. Typically these students have intensified social and emotional barriers to education—barriers that ultimately persuaded them to abandon education entirely. *Acceleration Academies* provides a life coach to assist with the non-academic barriers to success. Further, a nurse is provided at sites to assist in monitoring and assisting with students' physical health.

#### Monitoring

As specified above, *Acceleration Academies* utilizes a system of supports for college, career and life readiness. Students are frequently monitored and appropriate interventions supplied by licensed clinicians. The school has a written policy addressing homeless youth and follows the McKinney Vento Act to ensure document compliance and fee waivers as well as notification through handbooks and regular parent and student newsletters. All students are provided the opportunity to participate in all school programs and activities regardless of living, financial, social or cognitive conditions. Please see Appendix for our McKinney Vento intake form.

#### Supports

Having a licensed social worker on staff at each *Acceleration Academy* will help in addressing multiple non-academic barriers to success for our students. Further, this individual will schedule regular meetings with juvenile justice departments to best meet the needs of those of our students who join our program during or after being in the juvenile justice system.

#### 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

With all of our curriculum online, we will train our students to use technology being used in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century which will increase their ability to use tools such as the Microsoft Office suite, Adobe and other key programs being used in the workplace today.

Our seven academies currently serving students in Florida and Washington State have invited professionals from their communities to engage our students in discussions about their careers and how our students can take courses that will put them on similar paths. Providing mentors to our student population will allow them to discover new technologies and opportunities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### **2.1.f. Behavior Management and Safety**

As specified above, *Acceleration Academies* supply academic and restorative justice programs to ensure student behavior management and safety. Further, because all *Acceleration Academy* graduation candidates are part of Chicago Public Schools, our programs have adopted Chicago Public Schools' Code of Conduct as well as its truancy and absentee policies.

Our restorative justice model and Positive Behavior Intervention Supports are utilized to ensure optimal learning and behavior management philosophies that are student centered.



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## 2.1.f Behavior Management and Safety

### Approach

Student discipline methods entail the creation of safe and inclusive learning environments in all schools. The methods include student supports and interventions, and a strategic design to prevent exclusion from school. (Note: with over 1,000 students currently, Acceleration Academies has never excluded a student from its programs to date). Acceleration Academies strives to ensure that discipline consequences are fair and consistent, and notably—despite the harsh complexities in many of our students' lives—serious disciplinary issues have not to date arisen. However, our guidelines establish clear procedures governing disciplinary issues, and include provision for law enforcement intervention if it is ever warranted. We provide training to give teachers and administrators the tools necessary to manage our sites in a safe, effective and positive manner; and maintain building monitoring and accountability systems.

Statistically significant evidence establishes that School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS), Restorative Justice, and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) provide effective alternatives to traditional exclusionary models of school discipline.

### Behavior Management

Alternative interventions or interventions that align best with the culture, values, and goals of the schools include Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Restorative Justice (RJ), Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), among others.

Each intervention requires a school-wide commitment to an alternative approach to school discipline that emphasizes prevention, restoring community, or teaching explicit social skills, instead of punishment. Thus, effective implementation of School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS), Restorative Justice (RJ), and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) often starts with a committed leadership team charged with choosing appropriate programs, gathering resources, and leading implementation.

### School Wide Positive Behavior Instructional Supports (PBIS)

School Wide Positive Behavior Instructional Supports (SWPBIS) focuses on creating and maintaining school and classroom climates that positively enforce good behaviors school-wide, and then respond to children engaging in problem behaviors with a tiered structure of intervention and support. This approach builds on local capacity and is designed to ensure that interventions are adapted to local conditions (i.e. schools). SWPBIS also involves systematic collection of discipline data that can be summarized by student, grade level, referring teacher, location, type of infraction, and time of day or year. Once collected, the SWPBIS leadership team uses this data to design additional intervention plans, adjust existing ones, and provide feedback to teachers.

Under SWPBIS, school staff members acknowledge good behaviors, often with tickets or tokens that students accumulate to purchase prizes or participate in a raffle. In addition, a clear continuum of consequences exists for rule violations. If the school-wide systems (or Tier 1 interventions) are ineffective for a child, SWPBIS responds with specialized group systems where children engaging in mild to moderate behavioral problems have additional regularly scheduled



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opportunities to learn and practice adaptive social skills, and often involve daily or weekly feedback and self-reflection (or Tier 2 interventions). School counselors, psychologists, special education specialists, and community mentors typically identify, coordinate, and engage students in these Tier 2 activities. For example, Check-In Check-Out (CICO) programs may hire “monitors” to check in with students identified with chronic attendance problems or emerging behavioral issues, develop relationships with the students and their families, and coordinate support among school staff. Other examples are homework clubs, increased supervision, or behavior logs. Students engaging in severe or high-risk behaviors, individualized supports and intervention generally begins with a functional behavior assessment to identify the environmental factors, that causes the student’s behavior and create a comprehensive behavior intervention plan (BIP). The BIP may include mental health counseling, new skills instruction, parent-teacher conferences, coordination with social welfare programs, and assessments for special education (or Tier 3 interventions). Tier 3 interventions require coordinated and robust mental health and student support systems and the specialized human resources and specialized institutional capacities (e.g., mental or behavioral health experts and student identification and service delivery systems) that these interventions imply.

### **Restorative Justice**

Restorative Justice Practices emerge from a commitment to restorative visions of justice and to rebuilding relationships. Restorative Practices are a framework for building community and for responding to challenging behavior through authentic dialogue, coming to understanding, and making things right. Restorative Practices in the classroom build community and can help set things right when the integrity of the community is challenged by harmful behaviors. Circle dialogue is a fundamental element of restorative dialogue. Classroom circles support the two main goals of restorative practices: building community; and responding to harm through dialogue; for restorative interactions individuals [students] sit in circles.

Restorative practices in schools are based on restorative justice principles instead of punishment. They aim first to build classroom communities that are supported by clear agreements, authentic communication, and specific tools to bring issues and conflicts forward in a helpful way. They provide specific pathways to repair harms by bringing together those who are affected by misbehavior in a dialogue to address concerns, achieve understanding, and come to agreement about setting things right. In addition to serving the cause of fairness and justice, restorative approaches make safer schools and contribute to social and emotional learning.

### **Social and Emotional Learning**

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) provides physical, social, and emotional supports and services for children and families at school sites. SEL will be incorporated into school and classroom-level practices to teach a range of social skills, including understanding emotions, showing empathy, maintaining positive relationships, and making responsible decisions.

SEL programs focus on teaching self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making, so that students learn to effectively manage emotions, set and achieve goals, understand and appreciate other perspectives, build and maintain healthy relationships, and make healthy decisions in their lives. SEL helps the student integrate thinking, feeling, and behaving to achieve important life tasks.



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## **Supports**

Working in concert with the faculty, staff, graduation candidate and family students will be identified and suggested for additional educational, emotional and educational services. This involves the development of a leadership team within the school or school district to identify effective research-based intervention practices, garner monetary and political support, train and coach staff, and monitor progress. These supports include school building personnel, community leaders, school counselors, psychologists, special education specialists, and community mentors.

## **Monitoring**

- Directors, Student Culture and Climate, will monitor the local implementation of school discipline policy and will report to Chief Academic Officer and/or Executive Directors of schools
- Director, Student Engagement and Interagency partnerships will monitor the state-wide implementation of the policies
- Conducting and/or reviewing comprehensive needs assessments to ensure they are effective in measuring the perceptions of students and other members of the community in connection with the administration of school discipline, and using the results of these assessments to make responsive changes to policies and practices
- At least annually, conducting a forum during the school day that provides students, teachers and administrators the opportunity to discuss matters relating to discipline and provide input on the school's discipline policies;
- Conducting an annual comprehensive review of school resource officer interventions and practices; to assess their effectiveness for student safety and discipline.

## **Communication**

- Develop a training and information program for students and community members that explains the school's discipline policies and what is expected of students in an age-appropriate, easily understood manner. Academy staff will communicate these expectations through the student code of conduct.
- Engage families and communities as partners in revising policies and as participants in regular school and community informational forums.
- Develop a training and information program for students and community members that explains the school's discipline policies and what is expected of students in an age-appropriate, easily understood manner. Communication will occur through the student code of conduct as well as the Parent Advisory Council and regular parent/guardian teacher conferences.

## **Exclusionary Discipline**

Consistent with the CPS student code of conduct student may be suspended or expelled for violations as outlined in the CPS code of conduct for offenses such as:

- Prohibited substance possession (drugs/alcohol)
- Acts of Violence
- Bullying
- Insubordination



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In order to minimize these suspension opportunities, a process of corrective and instructive prevention will be utilized including parent meetings, counseling with students, peer mentors and incentives for positive student behavior.

### **Due Process**

Students have a right to due process in school. Any student accused of misconduct that could result in a suspension has the right to tell his or her side of the story in an informal or formal, closed or open hearing. The student must be told the accusation against him or her, and the basis for the accusation. If a student is facing a more serious punishment (suspension for more than 10 days, or expulsion), the student is entitled to a formal hearing before an impartial body (usually the local school board). The student may have a lawyer present and may cross-examine witnesses.

A school can suspend or expel a student without prior notice or a hearing only if school officials think he or she poses a danger to other students or school property. In that case, the school is still required to give notice of the charges and schedule a hearing as soon as possible following the disciplinary action. Students are **not** entitled to hearings for minor punishments.

IDEA gives the disputing parties specific rights in a due process hearing. These rights are found at §300.512 and include the right:

- Be accompanied and advised by counsel and by individuals with special knowledge or training with respect to the problems of children with disabilities, except that whether parties have the right to be represented by non-attorneys at due process hearings is determined under State law.
- Present evidence and confront, cross-examine, and compel the attendance of witnesses.
- Stop any evidence from being introduced at the hearing that has not been disclosed to that party at least five business days before the hearing.
- Get a written (or, at the option of the parents, electronic) verbatim record of the hearing.
- Get a written (or, at the option of the parents, electronic) findings of fact and decisions. [§300.512(a)]

### **Policies for Promotion, Graduation, and Student Discipline**

Because the Acceleration Academy program will have students enrolled in Chicago Public Schools, a crucible of our program is to follow the same policies for promotion, graduation, and student discipline as adopted in the district. A copy of the Code of Conduct is included in the Appendices. *Acceleration Academies* uses a Keys to Success System which addresses student readiness for learning and success. A copy of the Keys to Success is embedded within the proposal.

#### **2.1.g. Family Involvement**

*Acceleration Academies* will urge each campus to build strong Parent/Teacher Associations that will meet monthly and disseminate issues to parents via email on a monthly basis. Spanish-speaking parents will be especially targeted to join these partnership forums. Home visits by Academy directors as well as life coaches will be performed to increase parent awareness and support in cases where Graduation Candidates appear to have little support at home. Social



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events will take place at the Academies to increase parental participation and be made an active part of their child's education by understanding how our model works, how each Graduation Candidate can work from home and be supported and to allow questions to be asked of the staff.

## Communication and Engagement

Our academies disseminate a monthly newsletter from each Acceleration Academy site and also have it mailed to each home. Acceleration Academies holds Family and Community events periodically to raise awareness of its work and to garner support at home for our students from their family and friends. There are currently no required actions to be taken by our student's families as a number of our students are homeless, live with a friend or significant other and could never achieve a requirement of family engagement. It is not feasible to enforce an action plan of parent involvement with the population we target for our program.

## Family Resources

Families will not be required to purchase any technology or supplies for our students. Acceleration Academies allow students to earn an Amazon Kindle tablet after completing their first course in our program. Students can take their tablet home and work remotely using the device. For families that qualify, home Internet reimbursement is available through a program called Connect to Compete. Acceleration Academies also works with the school district to provide meals and snacks for our GCs. The company will also provide snacks out of pocket for our students as many stay at the academy from 7am when their mother or father drops them off until 5 or 6pm when the parent gets off work.

## **2.2.a. Roles and Demonstrated Experience**

Each member of our design team has had a hand in opening our first seven *Acceleration Academies* across the United States. Our Director of Logistics comes from a logistical background in supporting businesses across the country. Our Manager of Advocacy and Recruitment has lived her entire life in Chicago organizing members of communities on the south and west sides, and has developed a vast network of activists and civic leaders throughout the City. We have two former superintendents of massive, urban public school districts on our team who understand curriculum development at its core level and realize the supports that must be in place for our most vulnerable youngsters to achieve success in the classroom. Our Chief Operating Officer has played a key role in development of our seven Academies that stand today and serve over 1,000 Graduation Candidates across the country. He also has effectively managed local site budgets for each Academy and run surpluses in each during our first year of operation. Based on our team's focus group research of over 2,100 high school dropouts that have re-engaged in an alternative program, we are keenly aware of what makes an alternative learning environment appealing to the populations we're targeting. Our design team meets regularly and spends the bulk of our time centered in Chicago. Because we've found that a disproportionate number of our students have IEPs, we have retained additional Special Education experts to help mold a curriculum that will allow for early successes with this population in the hopes of driving their confidence to levels not attained in the traditional classroom.

*Acceleration Academies* has also retained a former state-level education policymaker to serve



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as our Manager of Program Integrity. We currently monitor our seven Academies through regular site visits to ensure fidelity to the model we have created.

### **2.2.b. Academic Track Record Serving Similar Student Populations**

*Acceleration Academies* has now been serving our Graduation Candidates (GCs) since summer of 2014. We have over 1,000 students across 7 academies in Florida and Washington State with 5 of our academies only opened since January 2015. Within weeks, two of our GCs graduated with a district-issued diploma; one has moved on to community college and the other to full-time employment to support his family. Over 100 courses have been completed by our GCs as of the time of this writing.

### **2.2.c. School Leadership**

#### Structure

Each site will have a principal/director and be supported by multiple staff, including deans, life coach and career coaches, a centralized shared leadership team that includes human resource professionals as well as curriculum, special education and technology leaders.

*Acceleration Academies* was just awarded a Breakthrough Schools Training grant by LEAP innovations. All members of the design team will complete this nine-month training in personalized learning and continue to bolster our internal training and capacity building with blended learning. We have made multiple site visits and conducted both a research study (attached) and proof of concept to develop our model.



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## 2.3.a. Educational Goals and Metrics

| Goal                               | Metric  | Grades                              | 2015-16 | 2016-17 | 2017-18 | 2018-19 | 2019-20 |
|------------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| STAR Composite Growth              | STAR  | 9th-12th                            | +2      | +2      | +3      | +3      | +5      |
| Graduation Rate                    | CPS Graduation Requirements   | 12 <sup>th</sup> Grade              | 67%     | 69%     | 71%     | 73%     | 75%     |
| Attendance Rate                    | Average Contracted Attendance   | 9th-12th                            | 70%     | 72%     | 74%     | 76%     | 79%     |
| Growth in Attendance               | Growth in Contracted Attendance   | 9th-12th                            | +2%     | +2%     | +2%     | +3%     | +4%     |
| Course Pass Rates                  | Ongoing Progress Monitoring   | 9 <sup>th</sup> - 12 <sup>th</sup>  | 60%     | 62%     | 65%     | 70%     | 75%     |
| Post-Secondary Engagement Planning | Naviance Progress monitoring and follow up surveys                                | 11 <sup>th</sup> - 12 <sup>th</sup> | 75%     | 77%     | 79%     | 81%     | 83%     |
| Post-Secondary Persistence         | Quarterly Post-Sec Seminars and Naviance Alumni follow up surveys & communication | 12 <sup>th</sup> Grade              | 50%     | 52%     | 54%     | 55%     | 57%     |
| 5 Essentials                       | My Voice My School Survey   | 9 <sup>th</sup> - 12 <sup>th</sup>  | 80%     | 82%     | 84%     | 85%     | 86%     |
| Personalization Rates              | Weekly Student Contact Documentation  | 9 <sup>th</sup> -12th               | 80%     | 82%     | 84%     | 85%     | 86%     |

### 2.3.b. Student Assessment Plan

The goal—and rationale—for this plan of assessments is to provide a system of purposeful Assessments for Learning, Progress Monitoring and Accountability whereby the following objectives can be met:

1. School Level Accountability for CPS and ISBE
2. Inform and guide teaching and learning
3. Help students set learning goals
4. Monitor student progress and adjust instruction where necessary
5. Personalize learning experiences
6. Monitor for Competence and Mastery
7. Motivate Students
8. Determine appropriate course placement and pacing
9. Assess the quality of teaching and learning
10. Provide teachers and parents a means to monitor student progress and communicate with families
11. Relate school activities to home activities and experiences
12. Identify children’s learning needs
13. Select appropriate curricula
14. Refer children, as appropriate, for additional services
15. Inform the public of a school’s achievement levels
16. Provide information regarding school wide achievements
17. Inform policy for improved school performance

| Type and Frequency of Performance Assessments                           |        |       |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |     |      |
|---|--------|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-----|------|
| Test & Grade Levels   | Summer | Sept. | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. | Jan. | Feb. | Mar. | Apr. | May | Jun. |
| STAR - Reading, Math (Grades 9-12)                                      |        |       |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |     |      |
| ACT – Reading, English, Math, Science (Grade 11)                        |        |       |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |     |      |
| PARC – For students enrolled in Algebra II or English III (Grades 9-11) |        |       |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |     |      |

Further, *Acceleration Academies* utilize two diagnostic and adaptive assessments to monitor student placement as well as progress. Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) are used to monitor student progress in literacy and numeracy regularly and the Plato Accusess assessments are used for student placements and to customize student coursework (where intervention and acceleration are appropriately personalized).

### **2.3.c Data-Driven Programs and Instruction**

Acceleration Academies utilizes individual student level, teacher level and academy level data to inform programs and instruction.

The primary vehicle to monitor data is through Plato's Sensei™ which is an unprecedented way for educators to seamlessly access and interact with data from Edmentum products. Sensei is an interactive hub that works with Plato Courseware and Edmentum Assessments. It is mobile optimized for the 21st Century classroom to allow educators to make faster, more informed decisions at anytime from a computer or mobile device. With Sensei, Acceleration Academy monitors activities related to student engagement, subject mastery, recent activity, and scores. Edmentum Sensei™ alerts educators to the tasks that need attention right away. Educators can easily see all students, students by class, and which students are currently online. Educators can engage with students to keep them on track and promote collaboration among peers. The Sensei dashboard is divided into three main sections: Alerts, Messages and Students.

Edmentum Sensei also has an intuitive reporting for teachers using Study Island and has added new views in Plato Courseware and Edmentum Assessments to offer insight for administrators and families. The new enhancements are currently available at no additional cost to Edmentum users.

With Edmentum Sensei for Study Island, educators track standards mastery data to make formative instructional decisions. The visually intuitive program allows teachers to track how students are progressing toward standards mastery and to take action to investigate down to the specific objective level. This type of actionable data helps teachers individualize learning for students by reviewing their progress and taking action to help fill gaps. Sensei aggregates data from our programs and presents it in an intuitive and engaging way so that educators can take action to improve their programs by making data-driven decisions.

Edmentum Sensei provides program-level view for administrative level roles and a family portal so that parents or guardians can engage and track a student's progress. The program view will allow district-level roles to view district progress toward program goals, monitor account usage and trends, and make data-driven decisions. Edmentum Sensei for Families provides a portal for parents and caregivers, delivering the ability to track student progress and ongoing assignments.

From the dashboard, educators view all alerts for finished assessments, message a student, or quickly manage students' activities and information. By using Edmentum Sensei™, educators can identify knowledge gaps using built in progress measures, and then use that information to take action. Sensei is designed to help minimize administrative tasks, allowing educators to leverage their expertise in their classroom. Educators can use Sensei to drill down to only the information they need. From the dashboard, an educator can view all alerts for finished assessments, message a student, or quickly manage students' activities (unlock a mastery tests) and information Sensei provides a quick snapshot of student activity. Sensei provides the ability to filter information to obtain only what an educator needs. Navigating back to PLE is one click away. In the upper left corner of the navigation bar the educator will have the choice to switch

between Edmentum Sensei and the Plato Learning Environment. Our educators use Sensei to produce a snapshot of student achievement and monitor the success of our educational programs at all levels.

Because the Acceleration Academy program uses Plato Courseware there is a personalized standards-based online learning program grounded in a tradition of solid research, sound pedagogy, and applied innovation. We develop rigorous, relevant curriculum that challenges our students with a 21st century approach - engaging them with interactive, media-rich content. Plato Courseware can be used in a lab setting, a blended model in which online courses supplement the traditional classroom, or through a completely virtual experience. Plato Courseware provides courses in a wide range of core subjects, electives, global languages, honors, and Advanced Placement® offerings. Courses consist of integrated assessments; including exemptive pretests that allow learners to forgo content they have already mastered and focus on the concepts that need additional work. Course-level assessments also include tests for each course module to ensure concept mastery. Effective Online Courses to Achieve Real Results: - Rigorous courses, proven to improve student achievement - Interactive, media-rich content actively engages students - Robust flexibility allows our educators to customize courseware to meet student unique needs - Aligned to Common Core and state standards - Award-winning courseware proven by third-party research and studies - High-quality content for original credit, supplemental learning, credit recovery, unit recovery and extended learning.

The Acceleration Academy utilizes Edmentum Assessments to offer a full range of assessment solutions, including diagnostic and formative assessments designed to help educators understand each student's unique needs to more effectively guide instruction. Our assessment solutions accurately evaluate learners and prepare them through a personalized learning path. This allows students to bypass objectives they have already mastered, gain confidence, and focus on topics that challenge them for a more relevant and satisfying learning experience. Edmentum Assessments offer comprehensive solutions that provide us with valuable assessment tools that integrate with the curriculum, monitor student progress, and engage students through a personalized and effective learning environment. Adaptive Intervention Solution Edmentum's adaptive intervention solution provides our educators with the tools they need to easily create a targeted intervention program using individualized, data-driven instruction to address the needs of all of our students.

## 2.4 Curriculum and Instruction

### a. Curriculum description

*Acceleration Academies* program will provide the *Edmentum* platform and accredited *Plato Courseware* (please see the Appendix for the entire list of courses in both core content and Career Technical Education). *Plato's* platform and curriculum are broad, rigorous and engaging, and are aligned to Illinois and Common Core standards. The content will be provided on Amazon Kindle Fires, which will be assigned to students and may be taken home so that students have 24/7 access to their learning.

*Plato Courseware* provides a broad range of core subjects, electives, World Languages, honors and Advanced Placement® to accommodate all student and instructor needs, including:

- Core Courses: Students receive a strong foundation with over 100 semesters of courses available in the core subject areas - English language arts, math, science, and social studies.
- Electives: Students stay motivated and engaged in the learning process with over 30 semesters of diverse and interactive electives they can choose from.
- Career Technical Education: Students acquire the skills they need to compete in today's workforce with 32 available semesters of CTE courses.
- World Languages: *Plato* offers 14 semesters of highly interactive, graphically rich, and visually stimulating language curriculum to choose from: Spanish I, II, III; French I, II;

- German I, II.
- Advanced Placement® (AP): 10 semesters of courses that address 100% of the standards defined by the College Board.
- Beyond High School: Suite of 27 semester courses designed specifically to prepare students for the leading college entrance and placement tests, as well as career certification and work skills exams.

All of *Plato Courseware's* offerings feature:

- Standards-based content to build the knowledge, skills, and competencies students need to succeed;
- High-quality content for original credit, supplemental learning, credit recovery, unit recovery, and extended learning;
- Comprehensive courseware proven by third-party research and studies to increase student achievement;
- Highly interactive, media-rich content that actively engages students and works with individual learning styles;
- Robust flexibility; with opportunities to customize courseware to meet unique student needs

Customizability features include:

- Lessons and their components may be enabled, disabled, and reordered;
- Classroom specific offline activities can be added to encourage higher order thinking;
- Unique courses can be created by combining content from multiple courses;
- Supplemental coursework is included to enhance course content and learning;
- The Plato platform provides for the sharing of custom content across school districts to enhance student offerings.

In addition to *Plato Courseware*, *Acceleration Academy* students will have access to these other *Edmentum* products:

**Study Island:** Mastery and standardized test preparation programs designed to help K-12 students master the content specified in state and Common Core standards and improve performance in core skill areas. Visit [www.studyisland.com](http://www.studyisland.com) for more information.

**Northstar Workforce Readiness:** Licensing, certification and college entrance exam practice programs, including full-length practice tests with immediate feedback and individualized remediation.

As an additional workforce readiness component, the *Acceleration Academy* will provide an opportunity for each student to gain the ACT's National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC). A variety of cognitive skills and work-related behaviors are measured through ACT's *WorkKeys* assessments. A growing number of employers use *WorkKeys* assessments to select, hire, train, develop and retain high-performing employees, and the NCRC is a meaningful credential that heightens a student's chances of securing employment.

#### 2.4.a Curriculum and Instruction Research Base

For the online components of the model, *Acceleration Academies* has partnered with a well-respected and established technology and content partner, *Edmentum*. With more than 50 years of experience, *Edmentum* offers one of the most comprehensive, engaging and effective online curriculums available: *Plato Courseware*.

Online learning was invented in 1960 at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Shortly thereafter, PLATO (Programmed Logic for Automated Teaching Operations) was created as an answer to a pressing need for greater access to high-quality education. Initially funded by a

number of grants that supported science and engineering education, including a National Science Foundation grant, PLATO became the first computer-assisted learning system. Early on, learners accessed PLATO through stand-alone computer systems.

Today, *Plato* courseware has high-quality, rigorous courses can be accessed anytime and from anywhere, and have been adapted to integrate the latest mobile device technology for even greater accessibility. *Acceleration Academy* program makes use of *Plato Courseware's* media-rich, customizable content and management system to provide a highly individualized curriculum tied to all relevant content standards.

The *EdOptions Academy* portion of our program is a fully accredited by the Northwest Accreditation Commission and AdvancED as a virtual provider. It is aligned with the 58 INACOL standards for course content, instructional design, student assessment, technology, course management and 21st century skills. Further, it and our curriculum are NCAA approved course.

For CPS, the *Academy* program will operate as a specialized district option for recovered students. Students will be enrolled in Chicago Public Schools as participants in a customized educational program supervised and delivered by *Acceleration Academies*. Upon securing a contract, *Acceleration Academies* will design and coordinate a district-wide recruitment effort, beginning with a geo-mapping process to identify those areas in the county with the highest concentration of dropouts.

*Edmentum* and *Acceleration Academies* will furnish a data analysis system, the *Edmentum Sensei*, allowing the district and *Acceleration Academies* to seamlessly access and interact with data from the online learning products, content and assessments. The system allows educators and administrators to easily explore onscreen data from student interactions, progress and feedback, as well as make faster and more informed decisions through user-friendly apps.

All partners in this program will be able to visualize and monitor student progress, addressing individual needs with customized learning pathways. By easily accessing and analyzing data from students both individually and collectively, educators can improve performance at the individual learner and classroom levels. The powerful partnership of *Acceleration Academies*, *Edmentum* and Chicago Public Schools will result in a best-of-breed reengagement program for at-risk student populations.

### **Empirical evidence of program efficacy**

Prior to designing its *Acceleration Academies* program, *Acceleration Academies* completed an analysis of available research on the national dropout crisis. Its aim was to identify and understand:

- e. The underlying factors that lead students to drop out of school
- f. The cognitive/behavioral signs that a student is at risk for dropping out
- g. The precise ways in which a traditional school setting fails to meet the needs of at-risk students, and how to address those shortcomings
- h. Techniques and supports that are most effective in recovering students

Data was compiled from sources including the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics, MIT Press Journals' *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, the Alliance for Excellent Education, the U.S. Census Bureau, the American School Counselors Association, the Center for Labor Statistics, and dozens of others.

In compiling this research, *Acceleration Academies* noted a distinct lack of student voice. The research team was especially interested in hearing student narratives, first-hand, about what

led them to drop out of school. To achieve this, *Acceleration Academies* surveyed over 1,100 students across 12 states who had dropped out of high school, and were now pursuing a diploma through alternative means. One-on-one interviews were also conducted with a substantial number of these students.

The following prominent findings are reflected in *Acceleration Academies'* approach:

- b. Most respondents indicated that the traditional classroom set-up was not meeting their needs in one way or another. Many cited too many distractions, too many students per classroom, and not enough communication with teachers in the traditional large-class, "sit-and-get" set up.
- b. Over 60% of respondents said that school lacked "real-world relevance."
- c. Many students indicated problems communicating with teachers as a primary reason for dropping out of schools.

These and other findings are outlined in a 2013 report by *Acceleration Academies* entitled *Dropping Out: Stereotypes, Reality and Recovery* (included in the appendices). They became the foundation on which the *Acceleration Academy* program was built.

In light of its research, *Acceleration Academies* conducted an investigation into various curriculum options, and selected *Edmentum* as its curriculum partner and provider of online learning solutions. The program outlined in this proposal will make use of *Edmentum's Plato Courseware*, a highly customizable system of online courses and learning and assessment tools. *Plato Courseware* is built on a rich base of research, which is outlined in a White Paper entitled *The Research Base of Plato Courseware* (2010), available at [www.edmentum.com](http://www.edmentum.com). The standards-based *Plato* curriculum is described in detail in the following section F: Curriculum Description.

*Plato Courseware* has been subject to several third-party evaluations and case studies. In 2012, Marzano Research Laboratories completed a thorough analysis of *Edmentum's* programs, including the *Plato Courseware* platform. The findings of this analysis were published in a report entitled *A Study of Best Practices in Edmentum Online Solutions*, and demonstrate empirical evidence of *Edmentum's* efficacy. The following is an excerpt from the report:

*Across all categories of teaching strategies, teachers reported frequent engagement of instructional behaviors and practices that have been found to positively impact learner outcomes up to 99% of the time. Student perceptions of teaching strategies corroborated the self-reported practices of teachers, reporting that teachers frequently implement effective instructional strategies using Plato Courseware up to 88% of the time. Regardless of instructional setting (pure virtual, blended, classroom/lab) or course purpose, teachers consistently and frequently implement effective instructional strategies.* (Marzano Research Laboratory, 2012)

A number of case studies have also been performed to evaluate the quality of the *Plato Courseware* content and systems. To assess the program's impact in the nation's lowest-performing schools, *Edmentum* performed a study of 17 Tier I and Tier II School Improvement Grant recipients in ten states. The findings offer compelling evidence of *Plato's* impact in the country's most underperforming districts:

- a. Upon adopting the *Plato* platform, graduation rates at participating schools improved an average of 24%; in some schools, graduation rates doubled.
- b. Participating schools showed an average increase of 30% in students meeting reading proficiency standards; some schools experienced growth of over 100%.
- c. Participating schools experienced an average increase of 43% in the number of students meeting mathematics proficiency standards.

Additional research base and efficacy:

Early on, learners accessed PLATO through stand-alone computer systems. Today, PLATO Learning provides access to high-quality education anytime and from anywhere through rigorous, Web-based course offerings. The timeline below highlights important milestones in PLATO Learning's development over the past five decades

1960—The PLATO system is developed at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

1967—The National Science Foundation awards a grant to support PLATO system expansion to 150 terminals with text, graphics, animation, and data sharing.

1969—The Internet is founded.

1971—PLATO courseware is introduced; an expanded set of curriculum offerings for K-adult learners is developed.

1971-2000—Increased access to technology to support instruction at all grade levels corresponds with expanded use of PLATO by thousands of learners worldwide on individual computer terminals and local area networks.

1994—The first postsecondary-level online learning programs are introduced.

2000-2003—Mergers with multiple companies leads to the introduction of PLATO to online learners via the PLATO Learning Network™ (PLN™). This system integrates the nation's largest standards-based alignment engine with management system technologies and expanded course offerings that are particularly focused on math, science, and literacy instruction. PLATO Learning later introduces the PLATO Web Learning Network™ (PWLN™), which leverages a Web-based platform that allows schools to extend courseware delivery beyond LAN/WAN system management.

2006—The PLATO Learning Environment™ (PLE™) debuts. This online learning platform provides integrated data, assessment, reporting, curriculum, and course management features to support school and district online learning programs

2007-Present—PLATO Learning developers expand online platform features and rigorous online course offerings in mathematics, science, social studies and English/ language arts, including AP\* courses. In addition, PLATO Learning continues to develop online learning technologies that include student/teacher communications, reporting and data features, and course management options that provide more personalized learning options and effective support of online course delivery. In 2010, as PLATO Learning celebrates its 50th anniversary,

more than 1.5 million educators and students have daily access to PLATO courses.

## 2.4.a Curriculum and Instruction – Refinement

### The PLATO and Acceleration Academy Promise

Ongoing evaluations of PLATO Learning products and Acceleration Academies through Plato's third party validation and Acceleration Academies Director of Research have helped identify key elements that graduation candidates and instructors inform and appreciate and expect in PLATO's effective, proven online learning solutions. These criteria encompass all of our online learning product requirements for PLATO Learning curriculum and Acceleration Academy academic approach:

- PLATO courses provide full curriculum coverage, addressing at least 90 percent of standards for each of our defined metric state and national standard sets for core courses or special courses and 100 percent of standards defined by the College Board for AP\* courses.
- PLATO courses are primarily technology-facilitated, not document-based. They make full use of online learning technology to make learning easier and more valuable for both students and teachers.
- From credit recovery to AP\*, PLATO courses engage students and make learning relevant to their lives.
- PLATO courses enable a single student to learn independently and in a self-paced way. There is no dependence on other students working simultaneously at the same customer site. This independent learning capability is true for credit recovery, first time, and AP\* students.
- PLATO courses facilitate or suggest creative ways for students who are learning at their own pace to interact with other students, especially in higher-order learning activities.
- For class-based learning, PLATO courses provide teachers with resources (such as online discussions or blended classroom suggestions) to enhance the basic course interaction and learning.
- Whether implemented for independent or class-based learning, PLATO Learning plans for and provides simple guidelines for using courses in a blended mode (both face-to-face and virtual) or primarily virtual (with assessment being the primary exception.)
- PLATO courses require modest teacher engagement in learning activities. Learning is largely in the student's hands, with guidance from the teacher.
- PLATO courses automate or simplify a significant portion of student assessment, scoring, recording, and reporting.
- PLATO courses require modest teacher training, with no re-education in content or pedagogy

### Rigor, Relevance, and a Taxonomy for Learning

In 1956 Benjamin Bloom worked with a group of educational psychologists to develop a taxonomy that classified six levels of learning: 1) Knowledge, 2) Comprehension, 3) Application, 4) Analysis, 5) Synthesis, and 6) Evaluation.

Bloom's theories have been refined over the decades. In the 1990s, cognitive psychologist Lorin Anderson worked with educational psychologist David R. Krathwohl to publish an adaptation of Bloom's work that reflected a taxonomy more closely tied to 21st century learning. The Anderson-Krathwohl revision maintained Bloom's six levels but labeled each level with verbs rather than nouns, reconceptualized Synthesis as Creating, and moved Creating up to the highest level in the taxonomy. The six levels of learning in the Anderson-Krathwohl taxonomy are 1) Remembering, 2) Understanding, 3) Applying, 4) Analyzing, 5) Evaluating, and 6) Creating.

Building on the work of Bloom, Anderson, and Krathwohl, the International Center for Leadership in Education, under the leadership of Dr. Bill Daggett, created a Rigor/ Relevance Framework model for learning and student achievement based on two dimensions. The first dimension is rigor, which refers to academic rigor, or level of knowledge and learning, as defined in the taxonomies of Bloom and Anderson- Krathwohl. The second dimension is relevance, meaning the ability to apply concepts or skills to solve real-world problems. Relevance, as defined in Dr. Daggett's Application Model of Rigor/Relevance, has a five-level continuum:

Level 1—Knowledge in one discipline

Level 2—Applying knowledge in one discipline

Level 3—Applying knowledge across multiple disciplines

Level 4—Applying knowledge to predictable real-world situations

Level 5—Applying knowledge to unpredictable real-world situations

Dr. Daggett's model demonstrates the application of knowledge or skills from the lowest level of knowledge within one discipline to the highest level, where knowledge is applied to real-world, unpredictable situations.

## Standards-Based Courses

PLATO Learning courses are developed using rigorous state and national standards, including those from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation index of A-rated states. Teachers and program administrators also have access to state and national standards within the PLATO system, which allows them to customize courses to address local standards and pacing guides. Teachers can add, remove, or re-sequence course content to meet these local course requirements.

## College and Career Readiness and K-12 Common Core Standards

Today the United States ranks fifteenth out of twenty-nine developed countries in the rate of college completion and tenth in the proportion of 25- to 34-year-olds with at least an associate degree. Currently, between 30 and 40 percent of students enrolling in college require at least one remedial class. Such courses don't give credits, don't qualify for tuition aid, and contribute

to US students' low college completion rate. About half of all students who start college never finish. A recent survey of employers found that about 40 percent of the high school graduates they hired didn't have the skills to advance in their jobs. Many states across the country are engaged in P-20 (preschool through graduate studies) efforts aimed at closing achievement gaps, improving college and career readiness for students, and raising the proportion of college graduates. More than thirty states now have college- and career-ready standards, according to an Achieve, Inc. report released in 2010.

College- and career-ready standards are intended to define the knowledge and skills that students should attain during their K-12 education careers so that they will graduate high school fully prepared for college or a career. Efforts such as state-level college and career readiness standards and K-12 Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are under way to address these goals. The CCSS stress not only procedural skills but also conceptual understanding. Their goal is to make sure students are learning and absorbing the critical information they need to succeed at higher levels rather than engaging in practices that allow many students to learn enough to get by. Designed to be robust and coherent, the CCSS set a rigorous definition of college and career readiness by helping students develop a depth of understanding and an ability to apply concepts to novel situations, as college students and employees regularly do.

There is no one CCSS curriculum; the standards "do not dictate curriculum or teaching methods." As with any set of standards, implementation of the CCSS ultimately will be the responsibility of teachers, administrators, and local school boards. The CCSS are meant to be the common core; they serve as the baseline from which states fill out their own frameworks. As of this writing, more than 33 states have officially adopted the CCSS. As states adopt and implement new and revised college- and career-ready standards, PLATO Learning engages in an extensive curriculum correlation process to map PLATO courses against these standards and provide interactive, up-to-date correlation information to educators within the PLATO system.

### College and Career Ready Students

The federal government, states, and school districts are engaged in numerous reforms to improve student achievement in college and career readiness. These reforms include policy changes and program requirements with emphasis on the following priorities:

| ESEA Priority   | PLATO Alignment  |
|---|--|
| Implement a School-wide Response to Intervention Model  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ PLATO online courses support personalized learning, allowing teachers to target learning options to specific students.</li> </ul>   |
| Provide additional supports and professional development to teachers to support instruction for special needs and ELL students  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The PLATO system supports instruction for these highly specialized populations with a mastery-based learning model and data resources for teachers.</li> </ul>  |
| Use and integrate technology-based supports and interventions as part of the instructional program  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ PLATO is a proven, technology-based support for instruction and is also highly effective in supporting multiple intervention strategies (e.g., extended time, intervention academies, credit recovery, transition support, etc.)</li> </ul>   |
| Improve student transition from middle to high school   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ PLATO's course delivery solutions support targeted instruction for students to ensure that their achievement stays on track with their cohorts.</li> <li>▪ PLATO's reporting features support continuous monitoring of student progress and individualized instruction options for teachers.</li> <li>▪ PLATO's flexible delivery system</li> </ul> |
| Increase graduation rates through, for example, credit- recovery programs, re-engagement strategies, smaller learning communities, competency-based instruction and performance-based assessments, and acceleration of basic reading and mathematics skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ PLATO has a history of success in providing cross- functional, competency-based online courses that support multiple program delivery options.</li> <li>▪ PLATO provides an engaging, data-driven online instructional model that ensures access to consistent, standards-based curriculum.</li> </ul>  |
| Increase rigor by offering opportunities for students to enroll in advanced coursework  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ PLATO provides dozens of rigorous courses in core content areas, including AP* courses.</li> <li>▪ PLATO courses are frequently customized to meet specific district advanced or honors program requirements.</li> </ul>  |

### PLATO Online Courses Model

Throughout its history, PLATO Learning has used a mastery-based model to build the content at the heart of its courses and curriculum. PLATO Learning provides semester-long courses on a range of core and elective subjects. Developers start with a curriculum

structure built around discreet learning objectives. Then each learning module, or lesson, is focused on one individual objective. Each module includes an introduction to the new material, a chance to practice or apply new knowledge, and an opportunity to demonstrate mastery of the objective before progressing to the next module. This structure is built into units of related material and includes pretests to assess prior knowledge, as well as posttests and end-of-semester tests to confirm mastery for broader levels of content beyond the lesson.

PLATO Learning's courses are designed to explicitly incorporate the multiple levels of rigor and relevance discussed earlier within an integrated online learning environment. Each PLATO online course incorporates basic and higher levels of learning within the rigor and relevance dimensions in Dr. Daggett's application model.

Numerous organizations publish standards for online learning. The International Association for K-12 Online Learning (INACOL) has a set of standards for high-quality K-12 online teaching and learning. The International Society of Technology in Education (ISTE) produced a set of guidelines in its report *What Works in K-12 Online Learning*. Organizations such as the Institute for Higher Education Policy, the North Central Regional Education Laboratory (NCREL), and others have presented their own sets of guidelines or standards for online learning.

Many of these guidelines and sets of standards are valuable resources for planning and executing online learning programs. Some are more focused on higher education than on K-12 schools. The set most instructive to understanding the PLATO Learning approach to online learning is the INACOL National Standards for Online Teaching. This set of guidelines keeps a solid focus on the teacher and important instructional principles, rather than on the technology, infrastructure, or administrative challenges that online programs face. As PLATO Learning partners with teachers to provide high-quality educational outcomes, this focus on the teacher and instruction suits our approach well.

The table below lists the INACOL National Standards for Online Learning and provides an illustration of how PLATO Learning's approach matches up with each standard.

|   | Standard   | PLATO Instructional Approach  |
|---|--|---|
| A | The teacher meets the professional teaching standards established by a state-licensing agency or the teacher has academic credentials in the field in which he or she is teaching. | Use of PLATO content cannot substitute for a district or school ensuring their employment of highly qualified teachers.   |
| B | The teacher has the prerequisite technology skills to teach online.  | PLATO provides on-site and virtual sessions for professional development of technology skills that goes well beyond click training on our products, digging into implementation strategies and follow-up coaching to support student success.   |
| C | The teacher plans, designs and incorporates strategies to encourage active learning, interaction, participation and collaboration in the online environment.                       | PLATO curriculum includes interactive multimedia and simulations for active learning, hands-on project tasks and lab experiences for participation, online discussion forums, and specific discussion topics tied to the curriculum for collaboration experiences/  |
| D | The teacher provides online leadership in a manner that promotes student success through regular feedback, prompt response and clear expectations.                                 | PLATO Courses include immediate system-generated feedback throughout each lesson for students to understand their progress in the midst of the instruction. PLATO Courses have consistent expectations for mastery of each lesson, and provide clear descriptions of the objective of all work. Teachers also have tools within the system to provide feedback to students, including a digital drop box that allows annotated responses to student-submitted work. |
| E | The teacher models, guides and encourages legal, ethical, safe and healthy behavior related to technology use.   | PLATO Courses include targeted online resources that teachers can trust to focus student technology use. PLATO includes a course on Computer Applications, which involves some targeted instruction in the area of online behavior.   |

|   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| F | The teacher has experienced online learning from the perspective of a student.   | Through our virtual training sessions, PLATO provides online learning experiences for teachers. The PLATO Learning Environment allows teachers to engage in PLATO Courses as learners as well as an instructor.   |
| G | The teacher understands and is responsive to students with special needs in the online classroom.  | PLATO content has instructional redundancies (audio support, selectable text, visual support, off-line tests) which provide tools for teachers to leverage in response to students with special needs.  |
| H | The teacher demonstrates competencies in creating and implementing assessments in online learning environments in ways that assure validity and reliability of instruments and procedures.           | PLATO Courses contain multiple online assessments of each major objective taught, including lesson-level mastery tests, unit-level pre-tests and post-tests, and end of semester tests. In addition, PLATO carries out and publishes studies of program efficacy to validate our online learning solutions.   |
| I | The teacher develops and delivers assessments, projects, and assignments that meet standards-based learning goals and assesses learning progress by measuring student achievement of learning goals. | PLATO content is built against national and high quality state standards. Our management system provides a correlation for each lesson and assessment to sets of specific state standards. Progress in mastering individual lessons in the PLATO online courses can be seen as evidence of mastery of these standards-based learning goals.   |
| J | The teacher demonstrates competencies in using data and findings from assessments and other data sources to modify instructional methods and content and to guide student learning.                  | PLATO's management system provides extensive reporting tools to help teachers track student progress in our curriculum and guide student learning. We also provide professional development which focuses on use of our reports for data-driven decision making. In addition, PLATO provides assessments to judge student mastery of objectives and modify instructional content to the specific student needs. |

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| K | The teacher demonstrates frequent and effective strategies that enable both teacher and students to complete self- and pre-assessments. | PLATO Courses have unit-level pre-assessments that support teachers and students in this activity. Many lessons leverage learner self-assessment to build skills for lifelong learning.  |
| L | The teacher collaborates with colleagues.   | The PLATO management system allows for teachers to collaborate with colleagues by sharing teaching responsibilities for a class and sharing customized learning materials with their peers across their school or district.  |
| M | The teacher arranges media and content to help students and teachers transfer knowledge most effectively in the online Environment.     | PLATO Courses are built with rigorous instructional design standards targeted specifically at online environments. PLATO Courses are media-rich and have curriculum structures based on quality learning standards. In addition, the management system allows teacher to customize course structures and add their own media and content to support students' transfer of knowledge. |

## 21st Century Learning

Today's students live and learn in a world that is increasingly more digital, more interactive, and more complex. As technology progresses in new directions, it is becoming more interactive, portable, flexible, and powerful than ever before, and the world's people, economy, and environment are increasingly interconnected.

In their research paper on 21st century learning environments, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills states that "...a learning environment can be virtual, online, remote; in other words, it doesn't have to be a place at all. Perhaps a better way to think of 21st century learning environments is as the support systems that organize the condition in which humans learn best – systems that accommodate the unique learning needs of every learner and support the positive human relationships needed for effective learning."

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills has also defined the skills and competencies that students need to prepare them for success in today's global economy. Following is an alignment of PLATO online courses solutions to the Partnership for 21st Century Skills Framework:

### *Core Subjects and 21st Century Themes*

| P21 Framework  | PLATO Online Courses   |
|--|--|
| <p>Mastery of core subjects and 21st century themes is essential to student success. In addition, schools must promote an understanding of academic content at much higher levels by weaving 21st century interdisciplinary themes into core subjects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Global Awareness</li> <li>▪ Financial, Economic, Business and Entrepreneurial Literacy</li> <li>▪ Civic Literacy</li> <li>▪ Health Literacy</li> <li>▪ Environmental Literacy</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ PLATO's comprehensive catalog of online courses meets the needs of diverse groups including: students on track to graduate, students at risk of not graduating, and advanced college bound students.</li> <li>▪ PLATO online courses address the concepts and skills related to global awareness and understanding other nations and cultures in courses such as World History, Civics, Geography, Art History and Appreciation, and others</li> <li>▪ Concepts and skills related to financial, economic, business, career options, and entrepreneurial literacy are directly addressed in courses such as Consumer Math and Economics</li> <li>▪ Concepts and skills related to civic literacy, understanding governmental processes, exercising right, and making civic decisions are directly addressed in courses such as Civics and U.S. Government</li> <li>▪ Concepts and skills related to health literacy in courses such as Health, Biology and Life Science</li> <li>▪ PLATO courses are designed with interdisciplinary themes using real-world scenarios of global economy, careers, culture, and environment.</li> </ul> |

*Learning and Innovation Skills*

| P21 Framework   | PLATO Online Courses  |
|---|---|
| <p>Learning and innovation skills are what separate students who are prepared for increasingly complex life and work environments in today's world and those who are not. They include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Creativity and Innovation</li> <li>▪ Critical Thinking and Problem Solving</li> <li>▪ Communication and Collaboration</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Throughout PLATO courses, projects and unit culminating activities encourage students to think creatively and develop innovative solutions while providing the opportunity to research, brainstorm, refine, evaluate, and present their ideas and opinions.</li> <li>▪ Online discussions and collaborative projects encourage students to discuss and debate new ideas, understand the viewpoint of others and work creatively with others to solve real-world problems and present solutions.</li> </ul> |

*Information, Media and Technology Skills*

| P21 Framework  | PLATO Online Courses  |
|--|---|
| <p>Today, we live in a technology and media-driven environment, marked by access to an abundance of information, rapid changes in technology tools and the ability to collaborate and make individual contributions on an unprecedented scale. Effective citizens and workers must be able to exhibit a range of functional and critical thinking skills, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information Literacy</li> <li>• Media Literacy</li> <li>• ICT (Information, Communications and Technology) Literacy</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The instructional design of both PLATO online tutorials and explorations provide access to information from a wide variety of sources, (e.g.: educational web links within lessons). Students collect, analyze, understand and use information to master lesson content.</li> <li>▪ Concepts and skills related to applying technology to access information, solve problems, and create information are directly addressed in courses like Computer Applications and Technology.</li> <li>▪ Students leverage online tools to collaborate and communicate with peers and instructors.</li> <li>▪ Students leverage technology tools such as Word, PowerPoint, and Excel to research, analyze and evaluate information and create new information, authentic work, and presentations.</li> </ul> |

*Life and Career Skills*

| P21 Framework   | PLATO Online Courses   |
|---|--|
| <p>Today's life and work environments require far more than thinking skills and content knowledge. The ability to navigate the complex life and work environments in the globally competitive information age requires students to pay rigorous attention to developing adequate life and career skills, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Flexibility and Adaptability</li> <li>▪ Initiative and Self-Direction</li> <li>▪ Social and Cross-Cultural Skills</li> <li>▪ Productivity and Accountability</li> <li>▪ Leadership and Responsibility</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Online discussions provide opportunities for students to participate actively with peers, collaborate effectively in a team environment, demonstrate appropriate behaviors, respond open-mindedly to the ideas and opinions of others while being monitored by an instructor.</li> <li>▪ Lessons that include self-checked activities require students to work independently in a self-directed manner without direct oversight.</li> <li>▪ Culminating activities and real-world projects within PLATO courses provide opportunities for students to work independently, and demonstrate initiative to advance beyond basic skill levels.</li> <li>▪ Courses like English, Health and Civics deal with concepts of integrity and ethical behavior and using power appropriately to influence and persuade others.</li> </ul> |

| P21 Framework  | PLATO Online Courses  |
|--|---|
| <p>Developing a comprehensive framework for 21st century learning requires more than identifying specific skills, content knowledge, expertise and literacies. An innovative support system must be created to help students master the multi-dimensional abilities that will be required of them. The Partnership has identified five critical support systems to ensure student mastery of 21st century skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 21st Century Standards</li> <li>• Assessments of 21st Century Skills</li> <li>• 21st Century Curriculum and Instruction</li> <li>• 21st Century Professional Development</li> <li>• 21st Century Learning Environments</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ PLATO online courses are designed to explicitly address 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and prepare students for success in work and life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.</li> <li>▪ PLATO online courses include a wide variety of assessments designed to measure a student's mastery of knowledge, understanding of deeper concepts, and retention of information.</li> <li>▪ PLATO courses apply a competency approach where each standards is measured with a mastery test before a student moves forward in the curriculum sequence.</li> <li>▪ PLATO professional development models help teachers with the complex challenges of teaching within a 21<sup>st</sup> century environment. The PLATO professional development model includes:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Implementation Planning</li> <li>○ Program Orientation and Training</li> <li>○ Coaching and Mentoring</li> <li>○ Implementation Review</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ The PLATO Learning Environment provides a robust technology platform that enables educators with diverse levels of experience and technical expertise to apply 21<sup>st</sup> century best practices leveraging a suite of easy-to-use online tools and curriculum.</li> </ul> |

### Data-Driven Online Instruction

The collection, analysis, and use of education data are central to the improvement of student outcomes envisioned by educators and administrators. This data is also needed to ensure that students, schools, and school districts are meeting local, state, and federal policy mandates. In an education context, data-based decision-making consists of educators and administrators systematically collecting and analyzing various types of data to guide a range of decisions to help improve the success of students and schools. A number of activities and decisions undertaken by schools and districts involve data-based decision making, such as screening

students for placement, using progress monitoring to determine curricular changes, and interpreting annual performance data to identify areas of weakness for future educational focus.

In today's classroom, educators must implement programs and make decisions that impact students' learning and academic future. They have limited time available to explore individual student strengths and areas of need. To address this challenge, educators and administrators require immediate access to student performance data and results in a format that supports informed classroom teaching and decision-making throughout the school year.

To ensure the success of all learners, it's important to monitor their performance and progress continuously. Doing so will help educators make sound instructional adjustments as needed. The effectiveness of educational technology on student learning depends not only on what outcomes are targeted and how the technology is integrated into instruction, but also on how teachers evaluate student performance in classrooms and adjust instruction accordingly. Technology offers teachers a broad range of tools to collect and analyze data and richer sets of student data to guide instructional decisions.

The PLATO system provides users with the ability to easily record and track student information, including data needed for current federal mandates. PLATO reports provide instructional direction in clear, easy-to-understand formats that can be viewed at the student, class, school, or district levels and can be filtered by various categories. Students and parents may access the system at any time to review academic progress. Teachers can export reports into several file types and email data to parents.

The PLATO system provides multiple categories of reports:

**Curriculum Reports:** Through class and individual progress reports, educators can track and report on student progress.

**Assessment Reports:** The Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) reports (class level only) allow educators to report on a single variable or two variables to assess progress toward AYP goals.

**System Reports:** Usage reports allow account administrators to monitor how licenses are being used, which courseware is being used, and what parts of the PLATO system are being used.

Below is a summary of reporting features of PLE.

| Report Name                                 | Purpose   |
|---|---|
| Curriculum Reports                          |   |
| Learner Progress by Class and Assignment    | This report monitors multiple learners' progress, status, and scores on activities within multiple assignments.   |
| Learner Progress by Learner                 | This report monitors a student's progress, status, and scores on activities within multiple assignments across all classes.   |
| Learner Daily Usage by Class and Assignment | This report monitors the activity of students in a class as they log in and out of the PLATO system and progress through their assignments each day. The report includes data on how much time each student spent on the system and how long each student worked on content in selected assignments for a specified date range. |
| Learner Daily Usage by Learner              | This report monitors how much time a student spends working on class assignments in the system.   |
| Class Usage Summary                         | This report provides information about how learners in a class are spending their time in the system.   |
| Assignment Module Mastery                   | This report compares a learner's progress against the progress of class peers for a single assignment.  |
| Curriculum Strengths and Needs by Class     | This report offers a view of student performance on courseware assessments for a given class.   |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Curriculum Strengths and Needs by Location | This report gives administrators a view of student performance on courseware assessments for a given location.  |
| Curriculum Test Progress                   | This report provides educators with a snapshot of how learners in a class are performing on the assessments for a course assignment.  |
| Grade                                      | This report calculates final or midterm grades for students in an assigned course with standard pacing.   |
| Data Extract                               | This report allows administrators and teachers to see all summary usage and progress data for a group of students or for all students in a class, school, or district. The data available is based on the locations where administrators and teachers are assigned. |
| Class Roster                               | This report allows one to print out or export a list of learners in a class. It is available only on the Manage Classes page and not in the Reports mini-app.   |
| <b>Assessment Reports</b>                  |   |
| Assessment Strength and Needs by Class     | This report offers a view of student performance on a state standards test for a given class.   |
| Assessment Strength and Needs by Location  | This report gives administrators a view of student performance on a state standards test for a given location.  |
| Assessment Progress by Assignment          | This report tracks average scores for a class on specific assignments of like fixed benchmark tests covering the same content.  |
| Assessment Progress by Test Series         | This report tracks average scores for all students in a location for tests taken during a specified date range. The report specifically tracks this information for all three tests in a Test Packs test series.  |
| Demographic Summary                        | This report identifies demographic patterns in assessment results.  |
| Class List of Assessment Scores            | This report provides a quick snapshot of how students in a class performed on a fixed benchmark test assessment assignment.   |

| System Reports |   |
|----------------|---|
| License Usage  | The purpose of this report is to provide peak usage information for concurrent licenses for only a specific period of time. |
| Resource Usage | The purpose of this report is to show a listing of overall system usage and a listing for each client in the system.        |
| Site Traffic   | The purpose of this report is to show how, when, and how many users from an account are accessing PLE.                      |

## STEM Initiatives in Education

The State Education Technology Directors Association (SETDA) report, Science, Technology, Math and Engineering, from September 2008 stated: “It is our responsibility to ensure that our children are prepared to lead our country in the 21st Century and compete in the global marketplace. In order to do that, we need to provide our children with an education that includes a solid foundation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)”. The Report of the Academic Competitiveness Council defined the national STEM goal for student learning as: Prepare all students with the science, technology, engineering, and math skills needed to succeed in the 21st-century technological economy, whether in postsecondary education or the workforce; and graduate students with the capability and motivation to become STEM professionals, educators, and leaders.

## Scientific Inquiry and Science Labs in Online Instruction

### Scientific Inquiry

Scientific inquiry refers to the diverse ways in which scientists study the natural world and propose explanations based on the evidence derived from their work. Inquiry also refers to how students develop knowledge of scientific ideas as well as an understanding of how scientists study the natural world (National Science Education Standards 1996). In a position paper on scientific inquiry the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) described the inquiry-based learning process as “... a powerful way of understanding science content. Students learn how to ask questions and use evidence to answer them. In the process of learning the strategies of scientific inquiry, students learn to conduct an investigation and collect evidence from a variety of sources, develop an explanation from the data, and communicate and defend their conclusions.” Science inquiry melds a powerful and natural learning process with the scientific process.

Some key components of scientific inquiry and learning include:

- Incorporating content knowledge
- Use a pedagogical approach that encourages students to explore and question.
- Use instructional strategies that leverage relevant student experiences to answer questions.
- Provide students with the resources, tools, and environment for scientific inquiry and research.
- Learn to ask questions that can be answered through scientific investigation.

- Learn to collect research and data in conducting scientific investigations.
- Learn to analyze data and research, think critically, and draw conclusions based on evidence.
- Practice writing and presenting conclusions.

Although there is no single recipe for the scientific method, it is very close to the constructivist learning process. The scientific method, however, is more intentional and quantitative. It includes both “experience and experiment” and “social transmission,” meaning that scientists publish their findings and review, analyze, test, and critique the work of others. Inquiry learning marries the learning process to the science process. Like the scientific method, inquiry learning has no single recipe, but the BSCS 5E Instructional Model is flexible and widely used:

#### BSCS 5E Instructional Model

|   |             |  |
|---|-------------|--|
| 1 | Engagement  | Observe, question, hypothesize.                        |
| 2 | Exploration | Design and investigate.                                |
| 3 | Explanation | Analyze and share (peer review).                       |
| 4 | Elaboration | Go deeper. Connect to the real world. Connect to other |
| 5 | Evaluation  | Do I really understand this? Can I use it?             |

#### Scientific Labs

Another critical component of inquiry-based scientific learning is the laboratory investigation, or science lab. Science labs allow students to understand the natural world by conducting investigations, collecting and recording data, analyzing research, and documenting and presenting findings.

In 2005 the National Research Council (NRC) Board on Science Education defined four key principles for design of effective laboratory experiences in America’s Lab Report:

Clearly communicate the purposes

Sequence lab experiences into the flow of instruction  
 Integrate learning of science concepts and processes  
 Engage in ongoing discussion and reflection

PLATO online courses include inquiry-based activities that support the practices of prediction, hypothesis, and data interpretation, as well as lab investigations that are integrated into the overall instructional sequence of a course. Lab investigations take a variety of forms: wet labs to be experienced in a formal laboratory setting (the school science lab), kitchen sink labs that can be conducted at home with common household elements, and Web-based labs that leverage the Internet and online simulations. PLATO online courses also provide numerous opportunities for students to analyze experimental data and practice the process of drawing conclusions from laboratory procedures and outcomes.

Who are the generation X-Y-Z learners? As educators, it is critical that we understand who our learners are, what’s important and relevant to them, and what engages and motivates them.

Data suggests that today's students are savvy digital users:

**Internet Use**—The Internet is fully entrenched in the lives of young people; 94 percent of teens now use the Internet or email.

□ **Access in Internet**—Among teenage Internet users, 89 percent access the Internet from home, 77 percent do so from school, 71 percent do so from a friend or relative's house, and 60 percent do so from a library.

**Daily Internet Use**—Nearly two thirds (63 percent) of teenage Internet users now go online daily, and more than one third (35 percent) of teens who are online use the Internet multiple times each day.

**Access to Technology**—Six in ten teens (59 percent) now have a desktop or laptop computer, but computers are not the only technology that teens use to communicate. Cell phone use has grown rapidly among teens in recent years: 71 percent of teens currently have a cell phone, up from 45 percent in 2004 and 63 percent in 2006. Overall, more than four in ten teens (45 percent) personally have both a computer and a cell phone. Among older teens, ownership of cell phones (81 percent) and computers (65 percent) is particularly high.

**Electronic Communication**—Eighty-five percent of teens ages 12 to 17 engage at least occasionally in some form of electronic personal communication, which includes text messaging, sending e-mail or instant messages, or posting comments on social networking sites (Writing, Technology, and Teens 2008).

**Text Messaging**—Daily text messaging by teens to friends has increased rapidly since early 2008. Some 38 percent of teens texted daily in February 2008, and by September 2009, that figure rose to 54 percent of teens who use texting daily. Of the 75 percent of teens who own cell phones, 87 percent use text messaging at least occasionally. Among those teens who text,

-half send 50 or more text messages each day, or 1,500 texts a month, and one in three send more than 100 texts a day, or more than 3,000 texts a month; and

-15 percent send more than 200 texts each day, or more than 6,000 texts a month (Teens and Mobile Phones 2010).

**Social Networking**—More than half (58 percent) of all teens maintain a profile on a social networking site such as Facebook or MySpace, 27 percent have an online journal or blog, and 11 percent maintain a personal Web site.

-Fully 60 percent of Internet-using teens (58 percent of all teens) have profiles on social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace. For those who use them, social networking sites are a hub of teen communication. Fully 95 percent of social networking teens use social networking sites to communicate with their friends in one way or another, with commenting on photos and posting messages to friends being the most popular methods (Writing, Technology, and Teens 2008).

Computer and Video Gaming—Fully 97 percent of students ages 12-17 play computer, Web, portable, or console games. Research reveals the following statistics:

-50 percent of teens played games “yesterday.”

-86 percent of teens play on a console like the Xbox, PlayStation, or Wii.

-73 percent play games on a desktop or a laptop computer.

-60 percent use a portable gaming device like a Sony PlayStation Portable, a Nintendo DS, or a Game Boy.

-48 percent use a cell phone or handheld organizer to play games (Teens, Video Games, and Civics 2008).

### Motivating Today’s Learner

High-quality online instruction encourages discovery, integration, application, and practice. While learning at a distance is not a new phenomenon, the emergence and popularity of the virtual classroom has transformed education in recent years, providing unique learning opportunities to students through a vast array of digital resources and content. This evolution has caused educators to rethink traditional approaches to teaching and learning. The flexibility, convenience, and level of personalized learning offered by online instruction have been widely detailed as significant benefits for students; however, these benefits may not be sufficient to sustain students if they are not prepared to engage in an online educational setting. Many instructors consider the motivation level of students the most important factor in successful instruction. Motivation is not only a causal factor of learning; it also mediates learning and is a consequence of learning as well (Wlodkowski 1985). Simply stated, students who are motivated to learn will have greater success than those who are not. Furthermore, students who experience learning success will be more motivated to do so in the future.

Motivation is important, even vital to learning. Goal orientation directs behavior (Pintrich 2000), and a positive self-efficacy promotes effort and persistence (Bandura 1997; Pintrich and DeGroot 1990). While many theories of motivation exist, previous research has consistently found that motivated students exhibit higher levels of achievement. Within the various theories of motivation are the concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to a learner’s internal desire to perform a task for no reward other than personal satisfaction or enjoyment. When a student is motivated by rewards and incentives external to the learner’s interest and satisfaction, these factors are called extrinsic motivators. Research indicates that intrinsic motivation is much more successful at reinforcing desired behavior than extrinsic motivation (Malone and Lepper 1987; Csikszentmihalyi 1990). In fact, care must be taken with extrinsic rewards. Over time, students who are intrinsically motivated, but rewarded extrinsically, can devalue their intrinsic interest in learning (Husen and Postlethwaite 1994).

Fostering adequate motivation for the online learner is one of the critical factors for creating a successful online learning environment. Yet responding to the motivational requirements of students in online learning environments has been reported to be a significant challenge due to the lack of student engagement and interest, teacher interactions (learner isolation), and opportunities for success in such learning environments (Keller 1999; Bonk and Dennen 2003).

Teachers who want to motivate students to stay on task, increase their knowledge and skills, and improve their ability to process information in an online setting must guide the initiation, direction, intensity and persistence of learning behavior. Challenge, interest, feedback, and success are four components of an online learning environment that impact student motivation.

Challenge: Students are motivated when they are working toward personally meaningful goals whose attainment requires activity at a continuously optimal level of difficulty. This condition is vital to the learning process. To increase the level of engagement, students must be provided with tasks that continue to be interesting, meaningful, and relevant at a level of difficulty that is challenging but within reach.

#### PLATO Application:

PLATO Learning provides an online learning environment designed to overcome these noted challenges to increase student motivation and enhance the learning experience by providing instructional tools that leverage the most current advances in instructional and media design combined with rigorous research-based content. PLATO provides an engaging, age-appropriate learning experience that focuses on real world applications of content. Instruction is presented using a variety of techniques, including:

- use of pre assessments that measure a student's level of mastery with concepts and focus a student on what they need to learn next – therefore providing an optimal level of challenge
- use of on-screen manipulatives which simulate hands-on experiences for the learner
- multiple response modes including multiple choice, fill in the blank, drag and drop, sequential problem solving and open ended Promethium-screen resources such as notebooks for note taking, glossaries and dictionaries to enhance vocabulary building, calculators, and unit conversion tools (e.g., miles to kilometers)

Interest: Motivation is impacted by the learner's level of interest and attention in the activity. To maintain the student's interest, an online learning environment should employ various methods to avoid the sense of boredom from students. Student interest is crucial to the learning process because it fosters a desire for more information.

#### PLATO Application:

Content is presented using text, graphics, animations, and audio to provide clear and engaging instruction for the learner. All content includes navigational options that make learning self-paced and allow the learner to repeat or review previously viewed material. Tutorials elicit frequent responses from the learner to enhance student engagement and confirm understanding of the content. Rich media interactions like visual timelines and clickable diagrams provide engaging instructional material.

Feedback: Students need to have consistent and authentic feedback. Positive and creative feedback that is linked to a student's work will build relevance for the learning.

## PLATO Application:

As students progress through instruction within the PLATO Learning Environment, they receive informative feedback that informs them of their successes and progress. Student feedback provided by the PLATO system is tied to a specific student's performance level rather than simple milestones or scores on assignments. Additionally, the PLATO Learning Environment provides several communication tools to connect students with teachers as well as other users. These tools include a message board, discussion board, and email. Success: An online learning system should provide students with feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction with their learning experience, otherwise motivation will not be sustained through the learning process.

## PLATO Application:

PLATO Courses administered through PLE provide students with powerful opportunities for success such as scaffolding and guided practice. The system offers scaffolded instruction which provides step-by-step guidance while teaching a process or concept, as well as the use of on-screen characters who mentor the learner.

## Individualizing Learning for Each Student

A range of instructional design theories have as one of their goals the outcome of individualized learning. For example, Scandura's Structural Learning Theory (Scandura 1973 and Scandura 1976), Collins & Steven's Cognitive Theory of Inquiry Teaching (Collins and Stevens 1982; Collins and Stevens 1983), and Merrill's Component Display Theory (Merrill 1983), all have certain factors in common when it comes to tailoring instruction to each individual in a group or class. The commonality lies in the presence of these three elements:

- Some approach that breaks the content to be taught into a structure that includes goals or objectives (they don't all use those terms, but the concepts are similar)
- Regular opportunities to assess each learner in terms of whether they have mastered a particular goal or set of goals
- Prescribing content specific to the individual learner that includes only material for the goals they have not yet mastered

Some prefer to describe this approach as personalized learning, as the coursework and learning can be done in collaboration with others, not just as an individual. The important aspect is that the instruction follows a path that meets the individual needs of a learner, regardless of the instructional method used (group work, discussion, projects, tutorials, etc.). In *Disrupting Class*, the authors base much of their advocacy for innovation in education around a tension between "customization of learning" and the standardized model of school institutions. In their analysis, they state, "The proper use of technology as a platform for learning offers a chance to modularize the system and thereby customize learning."

For many years, PLATO Learning has used a mastery-based model to build the content at the heart of the courses and curriculum delivered on the PLATO system. That instructional model

shares three basic elements from the approaches described above.

PLATO online courses break the content into goals and objectives. Each learning module is built at a single objective level and provides an opportunity to practice the material being taught. Students are asked to demonstrate mastery of that objective through a mastery test or project. If mastery is not achieved, the material can be repeated and a new assessment of that objective can be taken to demonstrate mastery. PLATO online courses include unit-level pretests of the objectives covered within that unit. If mastery is demonstrated on any objective in that unit, the learner is exempted from the lesson that teaches that objective. In this way, learning is customized for the needs of that individual student.

### Multiple Intelligences and Learning Styles

In his 1983 groundbreaking work, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, Howard Gardner broke from previous theories around a single, quantifiable intelligence measured through a standard IQ test. Initially, Gardner divided intelligence into seven distinct categories, then refined his theories and added an eighth intelligence, the naturalist, in his subsequent research, *Intelligences Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century* (1997).

The following list is a summary of the eight intelligences:

- Verbal-Linguistic—the ability to manipulate words in a variety of ways, including speaking, writing poetry or prose, and story telling
- Logical-Mathematical—the ability to think and express ideas in logical, rational terms, establish patterns, and find cause-and-effect relationships. The Logical-Mathematical intelligence is the basis for the hard sciences and fields of mathematics
- Spatial—the ability to be highly attuned to the visual world, perceive visual detail, and create pictures
- Musical—the ability to appreciate, understand, and produce melody and rhythm
- Bodily-Kinesthetic—the ability to manipulate one's own body to express ideas and emotion (dance) or to overcome challenges or competition (sports)
- Interpersonal—the ability to interact well socially, to collaborate, and to work within a team
- Intrapersonal—the ability to access and understand one's own feelings and emotions
- Naturalist—the ability to be highly attuned with the natural world, plants, animals, and natural outdoor settings

### Learning Styles

Early theory on learning style is based on the work of Carl Jung's (*Psychological Types* 1923) conceptualization of human psychological types as either perception (how we absorb information) or judgment (how we process information). Jung states that we can absorb

information in two ways, either concretely through sensing or abstractly through intuition. Also, we can process information in two ways, either through the logic of thinking or subjectivity of feeling.

Building on the early work of Jung and later researchers, like Isabel Myers, who developed the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, researchers Harvey Silver and J. Robert Hanson (Learning Styles and Strategies 1998) developed a formal learning style model characterized by four basic learning styles:

Sensing-Thinking (Mastery)—characterized by the ability to remember, order, organize, and plan; learns best through hands-on experience, practice, and demonstration

Intuitive-Thinking (Understanding)—characterized by the ability to analyze, examine, make connections, and explain; learns best through lectures, tutorials, reading, logical discussion, or debates

Intuitive-Feeling (Self Expressive)—characterized by the ability to generate ideas, imagine, think metaphorically, express, and create; learns best through open-ended activities or discussions, as well as creative and artistic activities

Sensing-Feeling (Interpersonal)—characterized by the ability to empathize, respond, express feelings, and build trust and rapport; learns best through group activities, personal encounters, role-playing, and collaborative projects.

#### Multiple Intelligences, Learning Styles, and PLATO Online Learning

The PLATO instructional design process leverages the extensive research base behind multiple intelligences and learning styles to create a rich learning environment that appeals to the unique traits of different learners. For example, practice activities provide the opportunity for learners to solve a variety of problems and demonstrate their skills. They appeal to sensing-thinking (mastery) and logical-mathematical learners. Video enhances and supports learning and provides connections to the real world. This element appeals to spatial and intuitive-thinking (understanding) learners. The table below lists and defines the key components of PLATO online instruction and notes the learning style or intelligence that each component supports.



# ACCELERATION ACADEMIES

Expect Your Success

| PLATO Online Instructional Component | Description  | Learning Style or Intelligence   |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| Tutorial                             | Tutorials introduce concepts, present critical information and facts and provide explicit step-by-step instruction on terminal and enabling objectives.  | Intuitive-Thinking (Understanding) Verbal-Linguistic                       |
| Practice                             | Practice activities provide a variety of problems that are based on both abstract concepts and real-world scenarios and allow learners to check their understanding and demonstrate their skills.  | Sensing-Thinking (Mastery) Logical-Mathematical                            |
| Application                          | Application activities provide the opportunity for students to take learning from one context and apply it to a variety of problems or scenarios.  | Intuitive-Feeling (Self Expressive)  |
| Exploration                          | Explorations are constructivist inquiry-based activities that allow a learner to take control of their learning experience by providing guided research activities with demonstration of learning. | Intuitive-Feeling (Self Expressive) Verbal-Linguistic Logical-Mathematical |
| Culminating Activity                 | Culminating activities provide opportunity for learners to demonstrate that they can synthesize knowledge and understanding to solve problems or formulate logical thesis.                         | Sensing-Feeling (Interpersonal) Verbal-Linguistic Logical-Mathematical     |
| Project-based Assignments            | Project based assignments provide the opportunity for learners to apply learning on concepts and skills to real world problems.  | Sensing-Feeling (Interpersonal) Verbal-Linguistic Logical-Mathematical     |
| Mastery Tests                        | Mastery Tests are groups of five to ten assessment questions designed to measure specific learning on terminal and enabling objectives.  | Sensing-Thinking (Mastery)   |



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|                    |   |  |
|--------------------|---|--|
| Graphic Imagery    | Learning experiences are often supported through graphic imagery that provides support for instructional concepts and connections to the real world.  | Spatial  |
| Interactions       | Learning experiences are supported through a variety of technology-based interactions that allow students to apply learning, as well as practice and check their understanding of concepts. Examples include multiple choice, | Sensing-Thinking (Mastery)<br>Bodily-Kinesthetic                                       |
| Video              | Learning experiences are often supported through video that enhances and supports instructional concepts and provides connections to real-world scenarios.  | Spatial<br>Intuitive-Thinking<br>(Understanding)                                       |
| Simulations        | Simulations provide learning experiences that mimic real world problems, systems, or scenarios and give the learner the opportunity to explore, learn and test their knowledge without real world                             | Sensing-Thinking (Mastery)<br>Bodily-Kinesthetic                                       |
| Online Discussions | Online discussions provide a virtual environment where students can interact with their teacher and peers to explore, discuss and debate specific topics relevant to learning.  | Sensing-Feeling (Interpersonal)<br>Verbal-Linguistic<br>Interpersonal<br>Intrapersonal |

## 2.4.b. Instructional Strategies

*Across all categories of teaching strategies, teachers reported frequent engagement of instructional behaviors and practices that have been found to positively impact learner outcomes up to 99% of the time. Student perceptions of teaching strategies corroborated the self-reported practices of teachers, confirming that teachers frequently implement effective instructional strategies using Plato Courseware up to 88% of the time. Regardless of instructional setting (pure virtual, blended, classroom/lab) or course purpose, teachers consistently and frequently implement effective instructional strategies. (Marzano Research Laboratory, 2012)*

A number of case studies have also been performed to evaluate the quality of the *Plato Courseware* content and systems. To assess the program's impact in the nation's lowest-performing schools, *Edmentum* performed a study of 17 Tier I and Tier II School Improvement Grant recipients in ten states. The findings offer compelling evidence of *Plato's* impact in the country's most underperforming districts:

- Upon adopting the *Plato* platform, graduation rates at participating schools improved an average of 24%; in some schools, graduation rates doubled.



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- Participating schools showed an average increase of 30% in students meeting reading proficiency standards; some schools experienced growth of over 100%.
- Participating schools experienced an average increase of 43% in the number of students meeting mathematics proficiency standards.

See Section 2.1.b. for a deeper discussion of instructional strategies and empirical evidence.

### 2.4.b Differentiation

A fundamental practice of the Acceleration Academy program is develop a personalized learning pathway for each student. This requires adaptive assessment and continual monitoring of student progress as well as competency based instructional practices to assure student mastery. Acceleration Academies and Plato seamlessly apply this differentiation and model of instruction and assessment for students due to the personalized approach undertaken for each graduation.

### The New Role of 21st Century Educators: Differentiated Learning Using Online Solutions

As technology changes so does the way we communicate, access information, establish communities, live, and work. Technology is also changing the way students learn and is changing the role of 21st century educators.

A recent analysis of online learning from the U.S. Department of Education took a look at several key questions concerning its effectiveness:

1. *How does the effectiveness of online learning compare with that of face-to-face instruction?*
2. *Does supplementing face-to-face instruction with online instruction enhance learning?*
3. *What practices are associated with more effective online learning?*
4. *What conditions influence the effectiveness of online learning?*

Some important findings from the 2009 U.S. Department of Education study *Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning: A Meta-Analysis and Review of Online Learning Studies* include the following:

- Students who took all or part of their class online performed better, on average, than those taking the same course through traditional face-to-face instruction.
- Instruction combining online and face-to-face elements had a larger advantage relative to purely face-to-face instruction than did purely online instruction.



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- Studies in which learners in the online condition spent more time on task than students in the face-to-face condition found a greater benefit for online learning.
- The effectiveness of online learning approaches appears quite broad across different content and learner types.
- Elements such as video or online quizzes do not appear to influence the amount that students learn in online classes.
- Online learning can be enhanced by giving learners control of their interactions with media and prompting learner reflection.
- Providing guidance for learning for groups of students appears less successful than does using such mechanisms with individual learners.

While the U.S. Department of Education's meta-analysis indicates that the effectiveness of various approaches to online learning appears quite broad across different content and learner types, an INACOL report focused specifically on the benefits of online learning for at-risk and credit recovery students. Findings from INACOL's report, *An Exploration of At-Risk Learners and Online Education*, suggest that online learning supports increased motivation, student engagement, and achievement success for at-risk students due in large part to the flexibility and self-paced nature of online delivery programs.

### Adapting PLATO Learning's Model for Different Settings

As described above, PLATO Learning's instructional model provides the flexibility to adapt online courses for settings ranging from credit recovery to first-time credit and AP\*.

#### *Core courses and electives*

PLATO online courses are regularly used by schools and districts to offer courses with rigorous curriculum and instructional design for first-time credit. Following are the primary features of PLATO Learning's approach to first-time credit.

- Curriculum is centered on individual objectives in a scope and sequence built to address national and high-quality state standards.
- Courses are correlated to individual state standards.
- Unit pretests identify content that students are struggling with, which allows for customized instruction.
- Interactive and engaging content is accessible in a self-paced setting.
- A mastery model confirms that learners understand each objective before they move on to additional material.
- Each semester-long course consists of 75 to 90 hours of instruction.



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- Optional discussions and culminating activities extend instruction as needed.
- Tools are available for customizing PLATO-structured courses to supplement lessons with local activities, other online resources, or modules from other PLATO courses.

### *AP\* Courses*

PLATO Learning is introducing innovative courses with rigorous curriculum and instructional design for use in AP\* settings. Following are the primary features of PLATO Learning's approach to AP\*.

- Curriculum is centered on individual objectives in a scope-and-sequence built to meet College Board expectations.
- Syllabi are provided that document the course design for ready submission to the College Board for local course approval.
- Courses are correlated to individual state standards.
- Retest results can be overridden to ensure that students review all material relevant to the curriculum.
- Interactive and engaging content is accessible in a self-paced setting.
- A mastery model confirms that learners understand each objective before they move on to additional material.
  - Each semester-long course consists of 120 to 150 hours of instruction.
- Unit-level discussions and culminating activities deepen learning and extend understanding of rich curriculum.
- Assessments and activities are modeled on College Board exam formats to prepare students for AP\* exams.
- College Board lab experiences are integrated into science courses in a hybrid online/in-person model.
  - Interactive elements present material in novel forms and confirm deeper learner understanding of the objective.
- Tools are available for customizing PLATO-structured courses to supplement lessons with local activities, other online resources, or modules from other PLATO courses.

PLATO Learning: Expanding on a History of Success in Online Learning

PLATO courses are delivered online primarily in one of three ways:

**Pure Virtual Model**—In this environment, face-to-face interaction between students and teachers is limited. Teachers assign courses to students using PLATO communications and reporting features to provide instruction, monitor student progress, and communicate directly with students.

**Blended Model**—In this type of implementation, the course is designed to blend



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classroom-based instruction with online instruction. Teachers typically deliver course components via a whole class, small group, or individual direct- instruction model, with some components assigned using PLATO online learning solutions. PLATO assignments may include entire courses or specific course components, such as units, assessments, and/or offline activities.]

**Intervention Model**—Students sometimes use PLATO courses to accelerate learning or engage in remediation. Intervention programs are typically based on specific student learning need and incorporate full courses, strategies, lessons, modules, etc. The teacher often works one on one with students or in small groups to provide targeted instruction.

Please see the Appendices for a full listing of Plato courses offered in the Acceleration Academies.

## 2.4.c. Specialized Instruction

Due to the personalized approach and instructional strategies of Acceleration Academies as mentioned earlier in Section 2, curriculum and instruction for each student including accelerated, traditional, special education and English language learners as well as other diverse learners are specifically designed and delivered for each graduation candidate with licensed instructors (content coaches).

As outlined in the ISBE special education form and further through the outlined staffing program, all learners are provided a continuum of services for students to assure the least restrictive environment (LRE) possible is the proper placement.

Curriculum and instructional practices are modified and accommodated where appropriate in a student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) personalized for each learner. As outlined earlier and in the Research Base of the Plato Curriculum (attached) the program including a robust data monitoring system, Sensei, to monitor and evaluate the progress of diverse learners to ensure student attainment of the attainment of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals or those outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and Article 14 of the Illinois School Code

The Plato Learning System, as referenced earlier in curriculum, is adaptive and works deliberately to ensure mastery learning. Further, the learning management system has specific accommodation for English Learners (EL) and is in compliance with sections 508 of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The exit criteria for learners are the same as traditional students unless outlined separately in the student's IEP.

The ISBE special form (attached) outlines a clear plan for Child Find and Assistive Instructional Materials and Technologies.



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Further, because graduation candidates (traditional, EL, special education, and accelerated) are fully integrated in the same learning environment, the Least Restrictive Environment is explicitly met for all learners.

Acceleration Academies employs a national expert in special education who utilizes specialized progress and program fidelity and monitoring to ensure compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which ensures equal access to education for EL students.

## **2.4.d. School Calendar and Daily Schedule**

### School Calendar

The *Acceleration Academies* will be open twelve hours per day (730 AM to 730 PM) and will follow the Chicago Public Schools Calendar. Allowing additional hours for students and flexible scheduling are strategies that CPS and other districts and studies have shown to be effective to increase student achievement.

Since students take one course at a time, our graduation candidates gain greater focus and our mastery learning approach allows them to have a personalized and successful learning experience. All core subject are in compliance with state requirements for each subject and students will generally spend 2-8 hours per day in the Academy with additional instructional time available after hours or outside the Academy with their tablet-learning device.

State requirements of 300 instructional minutes with a 185-day calendar will be established.

Teacher's Daily Schedule: *Teachers will have an eight (8) hour workday that will vary in shifts to accommodate the 12 hours of school opening per day. Teachers will have designated time devoted to teaching of at least six (6) hours and approximately two (2) hours for planning, lunch and other responsibilities.*

Student schedules will be based on students' time available for learning and their other life responsibilities (e.g., work, family). With our blended learning model, students are expected to complete the first 20% of the class in a face-to-face instruction and then can earn the right in a gradual release model to do more independent learning.

Time in the Academy is spent in 1 of 5 modality stations:

1. The Genius Station – a small group-learning environment with a teacher present.
2. The Concentration Station – a quiet space for students to work independently.
3. The Collaboration Station – a small group station for peer-to-peer interaction and work or for a teacher or graduation candidate advocate to work collaboratively with graduation candidates.
4. The Acceleration Station – a location dedicated to content based and neurological interventions to assist students who are missing fundamental skills.
5. The Engagement Station – a work setting much like in a community college library or the Admiral's Club where graduation candidates can engage in reading current periodicals or



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be engaged with a peer or Coach in a conversation about their needs and progress or take a short “engagement break” to ready themselves to return to working.

## 2.5 Talent Management

The Talent Management section asks applicants to describe plans to recruit, develop, support, evaluate, and retain an instructional staff that can drive student achievement.

### a. Recruitment and Staffing

#### Staffing Plan

Outlined below is the staffing plan for each of our academies.

| Acceleration Academy<br>Per Center                        | Staffing Model | 15-16<br>FTE | 16-<br>17 | 17-18<br>FTE | 18-19<br>FTE | 19-20<br>FTE | 20-21<br>FTE |
|---|----------------|--------------|-----------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Teachers  |                |              | 4.        | 4.00         | 6.00         | 6.00         | 8.00         |
| SPED Teachers ( <b>positions that are reimbursed by</b>   |                |              | 1.        | 1.25         | 2.00         | 2.00         | 2.50         |
| SPED Aides ( <b>positions that are reimbursed by</b>      |                |              | 2.        | 2.00         | 3.00         | 3.00         | 4.00         |
| SPED Clinicians-Psychologist ( <b>reimbursed by CPS</b> ) |                | 0.13         | 0.        | 0.25         | 0.50         | 0.50         | 0.50         |
| SPED Clinicians-Social Worker ( <b>reimbursed by</b>      |                |              | 0.        | 0.50         | 1.00         | 1.00         | 1.00         |
| SPED Clinicians-Speech Therapist ( <b>reimbursed by</b>   |                |              | 0.        | 0.50         | 1.00         | 1.00         | 1.00         |
| SPED Clinicians-Physical Therapist ( <b>reimbursed by</b> |                |              |           |              |              |              |              |
| SPED Clinicians-Occupational Therapist                    |                |              |           |              |              |              |              |
| SPED Clinicians-Nurse ( <b>reimbursed by CPS</b> )        |                |              | 0.        | 0.13         | 0.25         | 0.25         | 0.25         |
| Teacher Assistants/Aides                                  |                |              | 3.        | 3.00         | 4.50         | 4.50         | 6.00         |
| Counselors (Career Coaches)                               |                | 0.13         | 0.        | 0.50         | 1.00         | 1.00         | 1.50         |
| Deans   |                |              | 0.        | 0.25         | 0.50         | 0.50         | 0.75         |
| Principal   |                | 0.13         | 0.        | 0.25         | 0.38         | 0.38         | 0.50         |
| Assistant Principal                                       |                |              | 0.        | 0.25         | 0.38         | 0.38         | 0.50         |
| Librarians  |                |              |           |              |              |              |              |
| Custodians  |                |              |           |              |              |              |              |
| Security  |                |              |           |              |              |              |              |
| Full-Time Executive Team (i.e., CEO's, COO, CFO,          |                | 0.13         | 1.        | 1.00         | 1.50         | 1.50         | 2.00         |
| Full-Time Administrative Staff (Human Resources,          |                | 0.38         | 1.        | 1.50         | 2.25         | 2.25         | 3.00         |
| <b>Community Outreach Coordinator</b>                     |                | 0.25         | 1.        | 1.00         | 1.50         | 1.50         | 2.00         |
| Registrar   |                |              | 1.        | 1.00         | 1.50         | 1.50         | 2.00         |
| Accounts Payable/Receivable                               |                |              | 0.        | 0.50         | 0.75         | 0.75         | 1.00         |
| <b>Enrollment</b>   |                |              | 250.      | 250.00       | 375.00       | 375.00       | 500.00       |
| Staff FTE   |                | 1.13         | 17.       | 17.88        | 28.00        | 28.00        | 36.50        |
| Certified Staff / student                                 |                |              | 24.       | 24.10        | 22.39        | 22.39        | 23.26        |
| Total Staff / student                                     |                |              | 13.       | 13.99        | 13.3         | 13.3         | 13.70        |



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## Hiring Process

*Acceleration Academies* utilizes a predictive professional educator tool (TeacherMatch) to screen candidates under a strict set of criteria including success factors for blended and personalized learning models.

Our experience has been to develop a 100-day plan to staff and equip our academies and have shown this to be effective in each of our openings.

## Compensation

*Acceleration Academies* develops its budget and compensation plans through a thorough benchmarking of comparative positions and venues. *Acceleration Academies* maintains a comprehensive program of benefits and multiple opportunities for professional growth.

## **2.5.b. Professional Development**

### Overview

While high school dropouts have always been part of the fabric of American schools, societal changes make this a significant problem not only for schools but also for our society at large. Up until the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a high school education was not a factor of economic prosperity. With advances in technology that have occurred over the past 20+ years, college and workforce readiness is paramount. High school dropouts account for the largest segment of unemployed workers in the nation, about 13 percent, according to a 2012 report compiled by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

In 2009, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that the national dropout rate of young adults ages 16-24 was about 7 percent. In 2013, approximately 1.2 million students did not graduate from high school. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics also reports that, in 2012, high school dropouts were 4 percent more likely to be unemployed than those who finish high school. The absence of a high school diploma also translates to about \$10,000 less in annual wages than high school graduates earn.

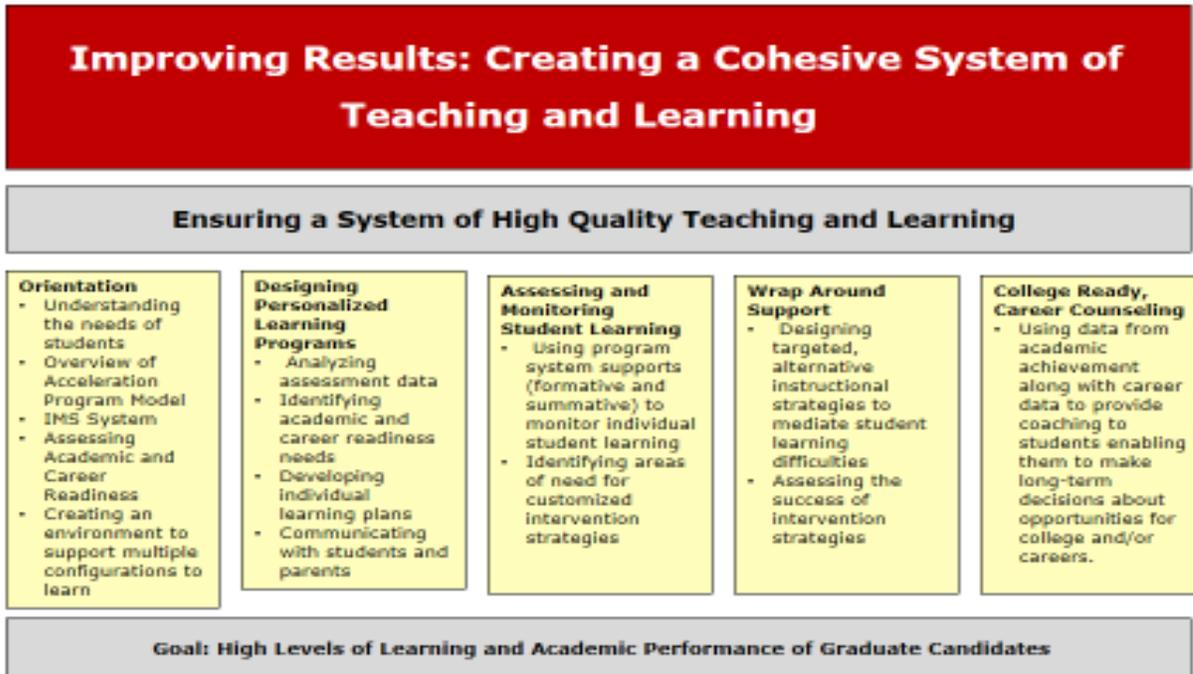
*Acceleration Academies (Acceleration)* clearly understands that these students need a different educational option that will bring them back on track to completing high school with a plan for postsecondary life. We also understand in order to accomplish this, we need to employ only highly effective educators – *effective teachers are the most important element of student success*. *Acceleration Academies* will design and deploy a comprehensive professional development training module focused on ensuring that content coaches not only understand the design of our program model but also have depth of knowledge on highly effective teaching practices that are documented in research. Following is an overview of the professional development system that will be deployed.



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## Acceleration Academies, LLC.



*Acceleration Academies* model for professional development immerses content coaches in a rich system of training and on-going learning beginning with a thorough understanding of the unique needs of students enrolled in the program, e.g., understanding that students have been underperforming for some time. Coupled with this, coaches need to understand the *Acceleration Academies* program model, and the information management system that is used to not only provide personalized learning to students but that also tracks and assesses student progress. Along with understanding program systems, coaches need to understand the importance of establishing a learning environment that includes a range of learning options: one to one instruction, small group support and teaching, peer to peer learning, and individual learning utilizing program technology systems.

The second area of professional development is focused on the comprehensive assessment of student learning needs. While many programs conduct some form of identifying student learning needs, strategies used are often very narrow in scope. Our processes of identification of student learning needs includes:

- Interviewing the student and parents;
- Review of school academic records;
- Candidates readiness for learning;
- Career readiness needs.



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The professional development of content coaches will be evaluated in order to provide data on the relevancy and effectiveness of the professional development program and its impact on student learning. A five level model\* will be utilized that includes both formative and summative evaluation is described as follows:

| <b>Evaluation Focus</b>                       | <b>Measures Examined</b>  | <b>Use of Information and Data</b>   |
|---|---|--|
| Participant Reactions                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Effective use of time</li><li>• Meaningful content that can be utilized</li><li>• Knowledge of trainers</li></ul>   | Improve design and delivery of learning content  |
| Participant Learning                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Did participants acquire the intended knowledge and skills? Was the presenter(s) knowledgeable and effective?</li></ul>                                   | Information used to improve program content, format and organization   |
| Participants' Use of New Knowledge and Skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Did participants effectively apply the new knowledge and skills?</li><li>• To what degree are participants utilizing new knowledge and skills?</li></ul>  | Information used to identify additional training and/or support needed.  |
| Organizational Support and Change             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is the impact to the organization?</li><li>• Did training affect organizational practices?</li><li>• What is the degree of implementation?</li></ul> | Information used to document improved organizational practices and to inform future change efforts.  |
| Teacher Evaluation Outcomes                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is the impact on teacher practice?</li></ul>   | Information used to focus and improve all aspects of program design, implementation and follow-up and to demonstrate the impact of professional development. |



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\*Adapted from Thomas Gusky, *Evaluating Professional Development*, 2006.

Data will be collected using multiple measures such as immediate feedback of training (questionnaires), direct observations, examination of artifacts, focus groups and structured interviews with participants and supervisors, and school data.

## 2.5.c Teacher Induction

*Acceleration Academies* professional development and training practices draw on the principles contained in *Power of Coaching—Teachers and Teaching*, a textbook guide to instructional coaching and school capacity-building. Based upon years of research by *Acceleration Academies'* co-founders Dr. Joseph Wise and David Sundstrom, the publication addresses the highly-nuanced need for school-building leaders to address teaching performance issues effectively.

Because of the pivotal role technology plays in this program, all instructors will receive ongoing training and support on how to use and maximize the capabilities of the *Edmentum* software. Additionally, a 24-hour help desk will be available to both instructors and students.

Acceleration Academy's new teacher induction program is designed to provide Illinois teachers new to the profession necessary support for success. New teachers design individual growth plans to include the Illinois Induction Program Continuum for Continuous Improvement. This includes:

- Self-Assessment
- Goal Setting
- Action Steps
- Data Collection and Analysis
- Reflection

Acceleration Academy's new teacher induction program is monitored and evaluated relative to the Illinois State Board of Education's (ISBE) Induction Program Standards.

Standard 1: Induction Program Leadership, Administration, and Support

Standard 2: Program Goals and Design

Standard 3: Resources

Standard 4: Site Administrator Roles and Responsibilities

Standard 5: Mentor Selection and Assignment

Standard 6: Mentor Professional Development

Standard 7: Development of Beginning Teacher Practice

Standard 9: Program Evaluation

Induction Content coaches design individual growth plans under the tutelage of an experienced mentor. The individual growth plan extends so the Acceleration Academy Self-Assessment (Parts



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A & B) are included within the job-embedded process so that student and teacher data seamlessly inform new teacher learning and mentor support.

Acceleration Academy curriculum directors provide monitoring and performance status using ISBE's established criteria to identify one of the four levels of program implementation. A recursive feedback model is used so that appropriate program augmentations can be made by site to increase likelihood for growth system transformation.

Inductees receive direct training and technical support within the induction program for Acceleration Academy's:

- Learning Management System
- Mastery Learning
- Project-Based Learning
- Personalization of Mathematics

## 2.5.d Professional Culture

Acceleration Academies uses a robust talent acquisition tool (Teacher Match) to vet potential content coaches and non-certified staff. We hire only the most professional individuals with a social justice fire burning within them. Many of our staff have personal stories of overcoming challenges that could have prevented them from earning their own high school diploma. Our staff is focused on helping our GCs take advantage of this second chance at success and are committed to this mission. As we've met recruitment goals and deadlines at other academies, our staff has shown the commitment of working late hours, even 24-hour shifts, to advance the mission of Acceleration Academies and providing first-class instruction that is engaging to our GCs.

Our staff is highly diverse in its experiences and cultures. About 30% of our staff nationally is African-American, Asian, Hispanic or other non-Caucasian background.

## 2.5.e. The Principles of the Evaluation System

What It Is:

*Acceleration Academies* has designed a **Framework for Acceleration Academies Content Coaches** that is research-based (adapted from iNACOL Standards for Quality Online Teaching), transparent, fair and adaptable to the specific contexts of its Accelerated Academies. This framework builds on what we know about the importance of ongoing assessment and feedback as a powerful vehicle to support improved practice. Our goal is to develop and grow our coaches from good to better to great.

What It Is Based Upon:

- Research of the specific skills and knowledge need to be effective in blended, on-line teaching environments
- Current evidence and new findings on assessing effective teaching
- Research linking teaching to student achievement and learning
- Current research on the use of formative assessment



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What the System Is Created to Do:

- Encourage ongoing dialogue between teachers and their evaluators
- Foster the professional growth of teachers in terms of increased knowledge and skills
- Customize teacher evaluation to a teacher's level of experience
- Propel schools to higher levels of effectiveness as a result of improved teacher performance
- Improve student learning and increase student achievement

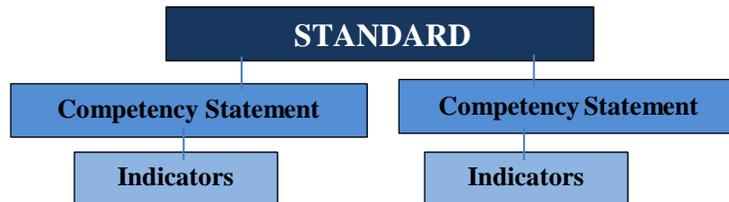
## **The Design of the Evaluation System**

The **Framework for Acceleration Academies Coaches** is organized around five standards. The standards represent broad, overarching categories of knowledge, skills and performance.

- Standard 1: Knowledge of Online Systems
- Standard 2: Assessment and Monitoring of Learner Needs
- Standard 3: Instructional Planning and Delivery
- Standard 4: Creating a Supportive Learning Environment
- Standard 5: Engagement in Collaboration and Communication

For each standard, competency statements are delineated. Competency statements define a specific set of skills and knowledge that effective content coaches demonstrate for each of the five standards. Indicators for each competency statement provide concrete examples and evidence of observable behaviors. Indicators suggest tangible actions or behaviors of the competency.

### **Framework for Acceleration Academy Content Coaches**



Rubric to Describe Levels of Performance:

The **Framework for Acceleration Academies Content Coaches Rubric** describes evidence of performance at four levels of performance (*deficient, developing, proficient, exemplar*) for each competency statement. While there are a number of factors that lead to differing performance levels, the descriptions in the rubric define performance at each level.

Rating Scale:

The rating scale in the rubric provides necessary feedback to identify areas of effective performance while also informing opportunities for growth. As is the case for all of the monitoring tools developed for the Acceleration Academy, the goal of the rubric is to help grow coaches from good to better to best. For each competency, the indicator statements are delineated across the four performance levels and articulate evidence and observable application of skills, knowledge and behaviors. The four levels of performance are:



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- Deficient – performance that does not meet expectations for the identified competency
- Developing – performance that may not always meet all the expectations for the competency
- Proficient - performance that consistently meets all the expectations for the competency
- Exemplar – performance that consistently exceeds expectations for the competency and represents performance at the highest levels

### Structure of the System for Monitoring *Acceleration Academy* Content Coaches Effectiveness

The System for Monitoring *Acceleration Academy* Content Coaches was designed to develop the expertise and effectiveness of coaches over time with an emphasis on multiple measures of performance. These include:

- Pre and post conferences
- Self-assessment against the standards and competency statements contained in the Framework
- Process for observations
- Collection of artifacts and evidence
- Formative and summative feedback delivered through direct conferencing with coaches

#### ***Pre and Post-Conferences:***

Pre and post-observation conferences enhance the formal observation process by providing the opportunity for content coaches and site directors to communicate about the coach's performance prior to and after an observation. Pre-conferences serve as a means for the site director to examine and discuss the coach's self-assessment as well as decision-making processes used by coaches to analyze and evaluate graduate candidate learning and their use of data to identify and plan appropriate interventions to ensure mastery of learning content. Post-observations allow the coach and site director to review evidence collected during the observation and examine the focused feedback from the site director.

#### ***Self-Assessment:***

It is important to the process of monitoring the effectiveness of academy coaches that coaches engage in self-assessment of their performance using the tool: ***Using the Framework for Acceleration Academies Content Coaches Self-Assessment***. This tool is specifically designed to help coaches consider their knowledge and skills against the set of competencies articulated in the framework. It is expected that the self-assessment by coaches be completed in advance of an observation pre-conference and discussed by the coach and site director during the pre-conference.

#### ***Observation:***

Observations of content coaches provide important evidence when determining levels of performance and effectiveness. As the evaluator (site director) observes a content coach engaging graduation candidates in learning, valuable evidence may be collected on multiple levels. As part of the observation process, on-going communication and collaboration between the site director and content coach helps to foster a productive professional relationship that is supportive and leads to a content coach's professional growth and development.



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All competencies may not be seen in one observation. The ***Framework for Acceleration Academies Content Coaches Rubric*** was designed with the assumption that site directors would see a content coach's performance in each of the standard areas over time and that additional artifacts and data can be collected over the course of the year and discussed in coach-evaluator conferences (pre-post) to provide evidence of the coach's performance in each area.

## 3.1 General Operations

### a. Operational Plans, Goals, and Metrics

*Acceleration Academies* will offer Graduation Candidates courses and additional services through Edmentum Online Learning Program, Plato Courseware, Edmentum Sensei, and EdOptions Academy. All technological support will be provided by Edmentum. The Executive Director of the *Acceleration Academy* will be tasked to oversee the program's operation. Edmentum Online Learning Program is a certified Schools Interoperability Framework (SIF), and as such, can integrate education-related information across Edmentum Sensei (growth measuring) and *Acceleration Academies'* Student Information System (SIS).

### b. Start-up Plan

Please see Appendix for timeline of *Acceleration Academy* site build-out and all operational pieces necessary to ensure a successful program opening. The document includes activities in real estate, operations, technology, personnel, district communications, and community outreach necessary for a seamless opening of *Acceleration Academies* at all four locations (Belmont Cragin, West Englewood, Washington Heights, and Bronzeville). Expected start and end dates, project leads, and a Gantt chart are included in the timeline. This document will be used for each individual *Acceleration Academy*.

### c. Transportation

During the registration and enrollment process, *Acceleration Academies* will determine which Graduation Candidates require assistance with transportation to the Academy. *Acceleration Academies* will offer Graduation Candidates student reduced fares on CTA buses and trains. *Acceleration Academies* will complete homeless transportation plan/cost-sharing agreement and request for transportation forms for students covered under the McKinney-Vento Act. This process will be covered by the Graduation Candidate Advocate registering the Graduation Candidate. *Acceleration Academies* will follow the district policy regarding transportation of diverse learners. The routes below are viable transportation options available for Graduation Candidates at the proposed locations for *Acceleration Academies*.

Bethesda Church

-4538 W Fullerton Ave. Chicago, IL 60639

Bus transportation: 74 (east/west) on Fullerton

54 (north/south) on Cicero

53 (north/south) on Pulaski

Metra: Healy stop

L stop: California-O'Hare blue line (California and Milwaukee)



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Samaritan Bible Baptist Church  
-6847 S Halsted St, Chicago, IL 60621  
Bus transportation: 67 (east/west) on 69th St.  
8 (north/south) on Halsted  
44 (north/south) on Racine  
L stop: 69th red line (69th and Lafayette)  
Halsted green line (Halsted and 63rd)

Trinity United Church of Christ Space  
901 E 95th St, Chicago, IL 60619  
Bus transportation: 115 (north/south) on Cottage Grove St.  
4 (east/west) on 95th St and (north/south) on Cottage Grove St.  
5 (east/west) on 95th St and (north/south) on Cottage Grove St.  
95E (east/west) on 95th St and (north/south) on Cottage Grove St.  
100 (east/west) on 95th St.  
115 (east/west) on 95th St.  
Metra: 95th St. stop  
L stop: 95th St. stop

Bronzeville Community Club House  
3847 S. Giles St., Chicago, IL, 60653  
Bus transportation: 3 (north/south) on Martin Luther King Dr.  
29 (north/south) on State St.  
39 (east/west) on Pershing Rd  
L stop: Indiana green line (40th and Indiana)  
Sox-35th red line (35th St.)

### **3.1.d. ADA Compliance –**

Acceleration Academies welcomes all persons to its facilities, whether as an employee or student, and encourages self-regulation of accessibility standards at all Acceleration Academies' locations. Acceleration Academies works to address access for people with physical, sensory, or cognitive disabilities through ADA compliant websites, facilities, and classrooms. In regards to hiring practices, Acceleration Academies accepts all qualified individuals with disabilities in recruitment, hiring, job assignments, training, benefits, leave, or any other employment related activity. Acceleration Academies considers all persons with disabilities while designing facilities' operational characteristics, including but not limited to square footage, placement of furniture and equipment, storage space, and technology. Acceleration Academies will modify any spaces, entries and exits, corridors, and any other part of its facilities to make Acceleration Academies open for all persons. For more information on how Acceleration Academies will become fully ADA compliant in Chicago, please review the ADA compliance reports completed by a CPS-approved architect in Appendix 4.3c.



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## 3.2 Recruitment and Retention

### a. Recruitment and Retention

*Acceleration Academies*, in partnership with Chicago Public Schools, proposes a comprehensive program of recruiting students with assistance from the faith-based community, social services and juvenile justice systems. Recruiting efforts will include:

- **Geo-mapping:** *Acceleration Academies* will use a geo-mapping application to create maps of all disengaged students' last known addresses. The resulting maps will help the team identify those areas of the county where the greatest concentrations of disengaged students reside.
- **Partnerships with faith-based communities:** *Acceleration Academies'* Manager of Advocacy and Recruitment will attend local church events, activities, and ministerial alliance meetings to solicit support from the faith-based community.
- **Partnerships with community organizations and agencies:** *Acceleration Academies* will seek partnerships with local entities including the Department of Social Services, Department of Juvenile Justice, Housing Authority, unemployment services, Boys and Girls Clubs, social service agencies and many others.
- **Media:** Recruitment efforts will include ads in local newspaper(s), radio announcements on local radio station(s), and a robust social media campaign. Grassroots street teams: using the information gathered through geo-mapping, grassroots outreach/street teams will be assembled to locate, re-engage and re-enroll students.
- **Direct outreach:** *Acceleration Academies* will assemble a grassroots street outreach team to identify participants in those areas with the highest concentrations of dropouts. In an effort to communicate directly with students who have been identified as dropouts, outreach team members will use existing student contact information to mail postcards and make door-to-door recruiting visits to students.
- **Literature:** In neighborhoods with large populations of dropouts, *Acceleration Academies* will distribute literature and inform local community organizations, social services providers and faith-based institutions of its programs.

### Recruitment Timeline:

- After being provided the district's list of dropouts or disengaged students, ground teams will be knocking on doors, phoning families and running radio ads within one week.
- *Acceleration Academies* will work with the dropout epicenter philosophy to immediately source real-estate for the centers. The grassroots recruiting effort is essential to our protocol for finding students.



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- All faculty will be trained in the extensive programming we have of Blended Learning delivery and working with at-risk students.
- *Acceleration Academies* has developed a 100 day Project Action Timeline to address all the needs of facilities, fixtures, furniture, management, staffing, curriculum, technology, student recruitment, parent and district communication, operations and maintenance, finances, compliance, permits and student learning materials. Further, with a full year of planning for implementation, *Acceleration Academies* will deliver a best of breed blended learning model to support and re-engage out of school youth toward a high school diploma and career credential.
- **3.2a Recruitment and Retention**
  - Explaining the opportunities afforded by enrolling in an Acceleration Academy to potential Graduation Candidates and other members of the community is at the heart of our recruitment effort. Recruiters combine these talking points along with techniques and approaches taught in training.
    - What We Offer: Acceleration Academies, LLC offers a high school diploma and National Career Readiness Credential to all students.
    - How We Get There: Acceleration Academies, LLC helps students receive their diploma and credential through personalized learning and wrap-around support.
    - Why It's Important: Earning your high school diploma will improve your quality of life and financial earnings over the course of your lifetime.
    - Acceleration Academies, LLC understands each student faces different barriers, whether it be at-risk students, youth with unstable homes, diverse learners, transportation issues, and myriad other hurdles. Acceleration Academies will have an open discussion with potential students on these barriers and how we can overcome said hurdles to provide the best possible education for each student. With diverse learners, recruitment focuses on the advanced technology (Chromebooks, tablets, Chromecast) as another exciting way to learn. We offer Fast ForWord, a program that allows students with reading deficiencies to improve in a private setting. Acceleration Academies focuses on the stability of the classroom, wrap-around support, and the staff itself as a recruitment point for at-risk students and students with unstable homes. Recruitment focuses on the Acceleration Academies model (one course at a time, personalized learning, one-on-one time with staff) for any EL students.
  - Recruitment efforts for Acceleration Academy use both a target specific approach and a general recruitment approach. Recruitment activities will be overseen by the Recruitment Coordinator of the Operations and Logistics team. The Recruitment Coordinator will receive on-site assistance throughout recruitment from team members on the ground at Acceleration Academy sites. Recruitment plans will be designed with the goal to maximize the number of eligible potential students contacted and informed about the opportunities available at Acceleration Academy.



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- This goal can be best achieved by having smaller goals for the various recruitment activities. Details for activities, goals, and recruitment team members completing them are outlined below.

## Targeted Recruitment

- The first step in recruitment is acquiring the district specific list of confirmed youth that have disenrolled from the district. When possible, this list should include contact information, school credit information, and home addresses to facilitate targeted geo-mapping recruitment.
  - Phone Banking of District Dropout List: Recruitment team will reach out by phone to all listed on the district provided dropout list. The primary point person for this activity will be the Call Center Lead.
    - Goal: To reach out to everyone listed targeting: Recruitment and commitment to registration (complete soft application) Updates on status (e.g., returned to school, enlisted in military, enrolled in alternative program). Providing youth not eligible or currently not interested or able to commit to Acceleration Academy with information regarding alternative opportunities.
    - Geo-mapping Recruitment: Recruitment team will use addresses on the district provided dropout list to make home visits. The primary point person for this activity will be the Recruitment Team Lead. Recruiters will be available as an additional resource early in process.
      - Goal: Home visits for all available addresses targeted: Recruitment and commitment to registration (complete soft application) Updates on status (e.g., returned to school, enlisted in military, enrolled in alternative program). Providing youth not eligible or currently not interested or able to commit to Acceleration Academy with information regarding alternative opportunities.
    - Targeted Events and Populations: Recruitment team will reach out to specific community organizations (e.g., church communities, LGBT organizations, teen outreach, etc.) and during community events to share information regarding Acceleration Academies and the opportunities available for disengaged youth. The primary point person for these activities will be the Recruitment Coordinator.
      - Goal: To establish and build relationships with community organizations and leaders. This will ensure their assistance in spreading the message of Acceleration Academy and the second-chance opportunity available to youth that have left the traditional school system.

## Retention

- In developing a student retention plan, Acceleration Academies focuses on the approach and goals laid out in Acceleration Academies' Mission Statement. Acceleration Academies is committed to supporting students from start to finish; from



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recruitment, registration, and enrollment through graduation. The retention plan outlined here is intended to assist in supporting students throughout their journey on their way to earning a high school diploma. The plan outlines guidelines and expectations for Academy support teams to use during a student's enrollment and course work. The initial approach is the same for all students. The plan design scales up contact and action by different team members as appropriate to keeping students engaged in the on-site portion of their personalized learning plan. The retention plan does have room for nuance and flexibility as Academy teams become more familiar with each student but is designed to allow consistency in the timeframe and approach for taking steps to re-engage students as quickly as possible.

- The first day of no contact from a student either at the Acceleration Academy or online through Plato and Edmentum will be the trigger to initiate the Student Retention Plan and get a student re-engaged as quickly as possible. The first step will be to have the Graduation Candidate Advocate (GCA) to reach out and make an appointment for the student to come in and meet with the GCA. Understanding that the primary objective is to keeping student engaged, the retention plan aims to achieve this by taking steps at different points relative to a student's scheduled on-site appointment. The plan includes reaching out to student:

- -The day before (24-hours) the scheduled on-site with the GCA.
- -The day of the scheduled on-site appointment (if a student is late for their scheduled on-site appointment).
- -Two days after the scheduled on-site appointment (if GCAs were unable to make contact with a Graduation Candidate that did not arrive for the scheduled appointment).

- In keeping with our mission, Acceleration Academies wants students to know that we desire to maximize their opportunity for success as well as assist with removing the non-academic barriers that may arise as quickly as possible.

- Each step is outlined in detail with each team member's role and responsibility along with next steps below.

- The Day Before (24 Hours)

- Each day, Graduation Candidate Advocates (GCAs) access all appointments scheduled for the following day. This should indicate which students are scheduled to come in to work with a Content, Career, or Life Coach. GCAs will make contact with each student scheduled to come in the following day to: Remind the Graduation Candidate of their appointment time and with whom they're meeting and to confirm the student can make it in to Acceleration Academy for their scheduled appointment the next day. Students may require assistance with transportation or information regarding transportation or possible childcare. GCAs can attempt to assist or pass information along to the appropriate team member best able to assist. Contacting students can consist of email and/or text message in addition to a phone call. The objective is to receive confirmation from the Graduation Candidate or initiate



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communication to discuss potential barriers for making it to the Acceleration Academy for appointment.

- The Day of Scheduled Appointment (24 Hours)

- In the event a student is late or misses scheduled appointment intensive engagement is needed:

- -GCAs will reach out to students after they have missed a scheduled time by 30 minutes. GCAs can reach out via email and/or text in addition to placing phone calls. The objective is to reach the student and let them know that we've missed them and to request a call back to schedule next on site appointment.

- -GCAs should make a second effort to reach a student that has missed a scheduled appointment and who hasn't made an effort to reschedule or speak with a GCA or other team member to discuss their circumstances.

- -The second effort should include a voice message and email to the student's personal email account (not the Acceleration Academy email) letting the student know that we would like to hear from them.

- The Day after Missed Appointment (24 Hours)

- After making multiple attempts to reach a student without success, the Recruitment Lead will be the first line of intervention reaching out to the student with a home visit. Recruitment Leads will report back to GCAs on their effort to contact student and assist in getting them to Acceleration Academy or rescheduling a time to meet with GCA. The Life Coach will be brought in to assist as appropriate with a re-engaged student or to continue intensive engagement efforts. GCAs will provide the Life Coach with the following information to facilitate the handoff:

- -If the Graduation Candidate confirmed the day before the meeting
- -What time the Graduation Candidate was expected on site
- -What contact attempts were made by the GCA and Sponsor Lead
- -Any information the GCA or Sponsor Lead may have received (e.g., from another household member, Graduation Candidate, etc.)

Life Coaches will follow up with contact efforts, letting the student know that we wish to help. The primary objective for the Life Coach would be to establish communication with the student. This can be achieved through multiple means (e.g., phone, email, or time to meet in person to discuss the student's' circumstances as appropriate). Knowing that students are facing unique challenges, the retention plan is designed for Life Coaches to employ available resources to reach students (GCA phone calls, sponsor home visits, contact coaches reaching out). Once a student is communicating with a member of the team, appropriate steps can be put in place to reduce and remove barriers for student on-site engagement.



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## **b. Individual Success Plan**

After registering, each of our Graduation Candidates (GC) takes a math and reading assessment to determine competence levels and decide if remediation should be built in to the next appropriate course per the student's transcript. The Graduation Candidate Advocate (GCA), a staff member of *Acceleration Academies*, is assigned to each new GC to interview and learn 'the story' of each of our youngsters. Building an interpersonal relationship between a staff member and each GC that comes to our academy to advance their education is critical to earning trust from all of our students. GCAs follow the progress of each GC by monitoring their progress online and contacting them via text, telephone and email to encourage on-site study, tutoring and mentoring. GCs are charged with the goal of completing 5% of their current course during each visit to the academy. Content coaches will also assist in contacting each GC to offer tutoring and mentoring opportunities at the academy. During monthly visits to each site, our Manager of Program Fidelity will assess GC academic progress and report to Site Directors any concerns. Completing 5% of their coursework each visit during approximately 3 visits a week will allow a GC to complete 6 courses a semester and be on track to earn the number of credits required to graduate on pace with their contemporaries inside traditional high school settings.

### **3.2.c. Student Intake and Orientation**

During first visit to Academy, Graduation Candidate Advocate (GCA) will confirm residency and age eligibility of student. GCAs will begin the Student Checklist with confirmation of age and in-district residency. Students must be a minimum of 16 and maximum of 21 years of age. Only students that reside within the school district are eligible to register and enroll at Chicago Acceleration Academies. Information on documenting that residency is included below.

During first visit, students must complete all sections outlined below with the help of Graduation Candidate Advocate.

- Secondary Enrollment Form
- Home Language Survey
- Verification of Residency
- Life Threatening Illnesses Letter
- Request for Student Educational Records
- Health History Form
- Certificate of Immunization Status
- Network Use Form

The Home Language Survey is to be completed by all students. Students must also be able to provide proof of residency during student intake. The Request for Student Records form should be completed to include a request of medical history and immunization. Students have 30 days from the date of registration to be in compliance with district required vaccines. If a student has a copy of their Certificate of Immunization Status GCAs should make a copy and submit this to the Registrar along with all other documents. Information for times and locations where free or reduced cost immunizations are available should be provided to students needing additional immunizations or booster immunizations.



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Accuaccess will be the first assessment tool used for students. The following assessments should be administered for candidates while the registration process is being completed by the registrar (within the first 2 to 3 visits). Once completed, the Edmentum assessments coupled with the PLATO courseware will assign a customized learning path for students.

Accuaccess Reading Comprehension Assessment  
Accuaccess Mathematics Assessment  
Accuaccess Language Arts Assessment

Upon receiving student's transcripts, a credit deficiency calculation must be made.

### 3.2.d Application, Enrollment, and Registration Policies

Acceleration Academies has a short registration form that requires name and address (to verify district eligibility), last known year of school in the district (to assist in obtaining transcript) and other demographic data. Enrollment is a multi-step process as transcripts must be obtained prior to placement in a GC's first course. In the meantime, however, GCs are encouraged to visit the academy to take assessment tests in reading and mathematics. Once the registration form and assessments have been completed and a transcript has been obtained, the GC can be enrolled in their first course. Because our instruction is completely online, GCs can register and begin their coursework at any time during the academic year. We have never turned away an applicant and do not use a lottery system for admissions. So long as the potential student meets the eligibility requirements of being a district student, Acceleration Academies will accept s/he into the program. All district rules will guide the actions of our program.

### 3.2.d. Transition

*Acceleration Academies'* program *begins* with a purposeful focus on where the individual seeks to be at the end of his or her time with us. What we have found—and what the research nationwide substantiates—is that with great frequency, those who are considering a return after having “dropped out” are wholly unfocused on any goal other than attaining a diploma. Often, the concept of what their lives might be like *after* that point hasn't been in any manner truly explored.

Consequently, the transition process begins immediately upon the student's commitment to reengage in education. It starts with one-on-one discussions and planning with a qualified career coach, who probes into the graduation candidate's preferences, hopes and fears about the workplace and the future. Exploring *with* the individual multiple options, the career coach gathers information about the student, and ultimately provides data and materials relating to the specific career or college options the student appears to be leaning towards.

Once options are clarified, the career coach analyzes with the student the specific requirements for each; basically, transitioning consists of *back-mapping*—the identification of what is needed to reach the goal, and mapping backwards from that point to ascertain what is needed to get the individual to that goal in concrete, manageable steps.

The *timeline* for transitioning out of our program is wholly dependent upon where the individual is—academically, emotionally and cognitively—upon arrival, and whether there are gaps in his or her prior educational experiences. Once those factors are examined and assessed, a strategy is



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designed collaboratively with him or her, and a targeted end date is set. Because our program tackles content areas one subject at a time until mastery, the pace of progress is highly individualized and often fluctuates significantly with each individual (e.g., strength in algebraic thinking may not be evidence of strength in Language Arts, so that mastery in one content area may be far more rapid than in another).

Eligibility for transitioning is wholly dependent upon assessed mastery of content; there is no specified time of year for a student to move from one content area to another. That said, progress is monitored closely and consistently to ensure that—if one specific intervention isn't working for an individual—another is implemented promptly and monitored for effectiveness.

Our support team members throughout the entire process—in addition to other site-based support staff and leaders—include the following, each of whom works with the individual and the individual's family to ensure:

- A. The Career Coach, who:
  - Assists the individual in identifying personal goals, developing leadership skills and planning career moves.
  - Assist the individual in searching for new employment opportunities, and serves as an advisor and advocate for Graduation Candidates. This includes facilitating communication between the individual, his or her family, other teachers, and the individual's support team, as well as monitoring attendance, academic progress, and overall wellness. (See detailed job description in Section 2.5(a) for more extensive aspects of these responsibilities).
- B. The Content Coach, who teaches academic content, but also serves as an advisor and advocate for the individual, and assist with the development of the individual's learning pathways and support plans, and conduct regular formative and summative assessments to gauge individual student progress. (See detailed job description in Section 2.5(a) for more extensive aspects of these responsibilities).
- C. The Life Coach, who assists in designing and supporting the transcript review process that results in the development of personalized learning pathways for the individual. Further, the Life Coach:
  - Interacts and facilitates inter-agency communications with community organizations that can be of assistance to the individual in removing non-academic barriers to success.
  - Drives the life pathway planning and maintain required documentation to facilitate graduation.
  - Work closely with the individual's support team to develop learning pathway, behavior, and transition plans (including incentives) to improve student achievement.
  - Collaborate with other instructional staff to develop interdisciplinary and project based curricula and alternative assessments such as portfolios.
  - Support and coach Graduation Candidates to obtain passing or better scores on required assessments.

### **3.2.e Attendance and Truancy Strategies and Family/Guardian Information**

When a GC has stopped attending the Acceleration Academy for 3-4 days, the GCA that has been assigned to said GC will begin a series of communications to the student to learn why the student has stopped coming. Emails, texts and home visits by our staff will also take place to



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ensure retention. A staff member specifically assigned to providing transportation and home visits to GCs will assist in retention efforts as well. Offering transportation to and from the Academy has allowed many of our GCs to attend on a regular basis. Our academies in Florida and Washington are in rural areas and require personal vehicles for transportation to the academy. In Chicago, Acceleration Academies will be strategic in placing locations on busy bus routes and near train stops on the el. Course completion reports will be sent to the parents of our GCs if that information is provided to the Academy. When appropriate, the parents will be contacted if behavior at the Academy warrants parental notification or involvement.

### 3.3. Governance Model

#### a Governance

##### Structure

The Governing Board of *Acceleration Academies* is a four-member panel comprised of the company's Chief Executive, Chief Legal Officer and Chairman of the Board, and two private investors that have a deep interest in providing quality educational opportunities for underserved populations in Chicago. Because of its size, the Board has decided not to elect members to Board positions or create committees within the Board. Please see the Appendix for Board bylaws pertaining to powers, duties, etc.

##### Progress Monitoring

The Board meets monthly to discuss academic progress of Graduation Candidates, financial forecasts, operational challenges and to plan site visits for our Manager of Program Integrity. A bi-weekly Dashboard is also disseminated to all Board members that charts enrollment numbers, courses completed and number of graduates by academy. Each Board meeting is run by an agenda with specific time frames set to discuss topics. This ensures a timely and efficient meeting.

##### Family and Community Involvement

Parents of our Graduation Candidates play a vital support and oversight role. The Board welcomes parental contributions to ensure their children are receiving the most comprehensive education possible. Currently, our Academy Site Directors are the sounding board at the local academies for feedback from parents. There are clear communication channels for this information to reach the Board by way of the Regional Executive Director directly to the Board.

#### b. Board Experience

Our Design Team is proud to have as its Manager of Advocacy and Recruitment Adrienne Leonard. Ms. Leonard is a life-long Chicago resident and has worked tirelessly to fill charter schools on Chicago's west and south sides. She has created a deep network of community leaders, elected officials and key organizational stakeholders to assist in recruitment of Graduation Candidates and to ensure our message of providing a second chance to high school dropouts is heard throughout the communities we hope to serve.

#### c. Legal Compliance and Ethics Policies

The Board meets monthly in Chicago. Please see Appendix for the Board bylaws for compliance measures around the Open Meetings Act and the Freedom of Information Act. The



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Board Ethics Policy and Conflict of Interest Policy are also provided in the Appendix.

## **d. Board Development**

**Composition:** As our Board grows, we would like to add greater gender and racial diversity. Our executive and design teams are made up of veteran leaders in education, former school superintendents, community organizers, business professionals, logistics experts and law professionals.

**Selection:** Current Board members were selected based on their deep understanding of educational leadership. Dr. Wise has served as Superintendent of the 19th largest school district in the United States (Duval County, FL) and the largest school district in the State of Delaware (Christina School District); he has co-authored two education textbooks: *The Power of Teaching* and *The Power of Coaching*. A former Disney executive, he has substantial corporate and business leadership experience; he also co-founded Distinctive Schools in Chicago, IL.

David Sundstrom served special education students in hospital setting, taught k-8, taught at Michigan State University for 9 years, served as interim superintendent in Wilmington, DE (Christina School District, the state's largest); served as Chief of Staff in one of the nation's largest school districts (Jacksonville, FL); co-authored *Power of Teaching*.

Bryan Daniels formed Prairie Capital with Steve King in 1997, and is responsible for overseeing due diligence, transaction structuring and negotiation, along with fundraising and investor relations. He formerly served as Senior Vice President of commercial banking at American National Bank & Trust Company, and also served on the Investment Committee of ANB Mezzanine. He is a Visiting Committee Member of the Physical Sciences Department at the University of Chicago.

Steve King is on the Board of Directors of First Busey Corporation (NASDAQ: BUSE). He is also a Leadership Greater Chicago Fellow and past chairman of the National Association of Small Business Investment Companies. Steve is active in various civic and community organizations with a particular interest in education. He is currently on the Board of Directors of Arc of Hope, Big Shoulders Fund and Boys Hope/Girls Hope of Illinois.

**Transition:** Executives on the Design team, Mark Graves and Bart Anderson, attend open sessions of the monthly Board meetings and communicate important topics to the Board and offer recommendations on the basis of their skill set.

**Training:** The founding Board intends to present monthly seminars on the following topics: the distinction between governance and management, student academic data: how to interpret it and determine its significance and legal liabilities associated with special education/student professional interactions.

**Accountability:** Local academy directors report directly to our Executive Vice President, Dr. Jim Hager. Hager is a past superintendent of schools in Washington, Colorado and Nevada. He is seen as an instructional leader in education. Within our corporate office, the departments of Logistics and Human Resources report to the Chief Operating Officer. The Chief Financial Officer, Chief Operating Office and Executive Vice President all report to the Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of the Board.



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The Board will ultimately determine the success of each academy based upon student achievement growth and number of graduates. Each of our site directors meets regularly with our Executive Vice President and Manager of Program Integrity for feedback on curriculum and student growth.

Removal from the Board is detailed in the bylaws found in the Appendix.

### **3.3.c. Board Calendar**

The Board meets monthly to discuss student progress, model fidelity, business development, professional development, staffing issues, and a host of other issues. All meetings take place in Chicago where the executive Board members maintain offices.

### **3.3.c. Code of Ethics Policy**

#### ***POLICIES GOVERNING ETHICS***

The successful operation and reputation of each Acceleration Academy established by *Acceleration Academies* is built upon trust in the ethical conduct of our employees and contractors. Our reputation for integrity and excellence requires careful observance of the spirit and letter of all applicable laws and regulations, as well as a scrupulous regard for the highest standards of conduct and personal integrity.

The continued success of *Acceleration Academies* is dependent upon our students' and communities' trust in our work. We are dedicated to preserving that trust. We are all, individually and collectively, under a duty to act in a way that will merit the continued trust and confidence of our students, our client school districts, and the communities we serve.

*Acceleration Academies* will comply—and expects its entire team to comply—with all applicable laws and regulations governing our conduct and our work, and in accordance with the letter, spirit, and intent of all laws and of all client school district policies.

In general, *Acceleration Academies* relies upon and trusts the good judgment and high ethical standards of its entire team. If ever a situation arises in which a team member is uncertain as to a proper course of action, the matter should be discussed openly, directly and immediately with the person to whom he or she directly reports, or with *Acceleration Academies'* Chief Human Resources Officer.

Compliance with this policy of ethical conduct is the responsibility of every *Acceleration Academies'* employee, contractor and team member. Disregarding or failing to comply with this standard of ethical conduct could lead to:

- Disciplinary sanctions, up to and including possible termination of contract, and
- Legal action to protect the interests of client school districts and the students we serve.



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## ***Hiring of Relatives***

The employment of relatives in the same area of an organization may cause serious conflicts and problems with favoritism and employee morale. In addition to claims of partiality in treatment at work, personal conflicts from outside the work environment can be carried over into day-to-day working relationships.

For purposes of this policy, a relative is any person who is related by blood or marriage, or whose relationship with the employee is similar to that of persons who are related by blood or marriage.

Although *Acceleration Academies* has no prohibition against employing relatives of current employees, we are committed to monitoring situations in which such relationships exist in the same area. In case of actual or potential problems, *Acceleration Academies* will take prompt action. This can include reassignment or, if necessary, termination of contract for one or both of the individuals involved.

## ***Immigration Law Compliance***

*Acceleration Academies* is committed to employing only individuals who are authorized to work in the United States; it does not unlawfully discriminate on the basis of citizenship or national origin.

In compliance with the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, each new employee (as a condition of employment) must complete the Employment Eligibility Verification Form I-9 and present documentation establishing identity and employment eligibility. Former employees who are rehired must also complete the form.

Employees with questions or seeking more information on immigration law issues are encouraged to contact their immediate Supervisor. Employees may raise questions or complaints about immigration law compliance without fear of reprisal.

## ***Conflicts of Interest***

Individuals serving as employees or agents of *Acceleration Academies* have an obligation to conduct their work within guidelines that prohibit actual or potential conflicts of interest. This policy establishes only the framework within which *Acceleration Academies* wishes to operate. The purpose of these guidelines is to provide general direction so that individuals serving the organization can seek further clarification from *Acceleration Academies'* Board of Managers on issues related to the subject of acceptable standards of operation.

Transactions with outside firms must be conducted within a framework established and controlled by the executive level of *Acceleration Academies*. Business dealings with outside firms should not result in unusual gains for those firms. Unusual gain refers to bribes, products or bonuses, special fringe benefits, unusual price breaks, and other windfalls designed to ultimately benefit either the organization, the affected individual, or both. Promotional plans that could be interpreted to involve unusual gain require specific executive-level approval.

An actual or potential conflict of interest occurs when an employee or agent is in a position to influence a decision that may result in a personal gain for that employee or agent, or for a relative



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of that employee or agent as a result of *Acceleration Academies'* business dealings. For the purposes of this policy, a relative is any person who is related by blood or marriage, or whose relationship with the individual is similar to that of persons who are related by blood or marriage.

No "presumption of guilt" is created by the mere existence of a relationship with outside firms. However, if employees or agents have any influence on transactions involving purchases, contracts, or leases, it is imperative that they disclose to *Acceleration Academies'* Board of Managers as soon as possible the existence of any actual or potential conflict of interest so that safeguards can be established to protect all parties.

Personal gain may result not only in cases where an individual or relative has a significant ownership in a firm with which *Acceleration Academies* does business, but also when an individual or relative receives any kickback, bribe, substantial gift, or special consideration as a result of any transaction or business dealings involving *Acceleration Academies*.

Content coaches need to thoroughly understand processes for assessing the unique learning needs of each student along with design the Graduate Candidate Individualized Learning Pathway (e.g., specific goals for content needed as well as strategies/methods that match the students learning style) and communicating the plan to the student and their parents.

Once student learning is initiated tracking student success is imperative. Considerable professional development training is provided to our content coaches as to how to effectively monitor the progress of learning for graduate candidates using a variety of formative and summative assessments. The content coach must be able to provide frequent targeted feedback to individual students to improve learning experiences (e.g., student mastery of learning content versus content that remains as a challenge). Content coaches must also understand how to lead students in self-assessment and reflection.

The fourth area of focus for professional development is the identification of intervention strategies to apply when students are experiencing problems. The content coach must understand that each graduate candidate presents with unique learning needs and ways in which they learn best, and how to effectively select specific strategies and alternative learning methods to support candidates as they experience any difficulties in learning but also as they need to move ahead. Strategies such as lesson summaries, examples, graphic organizers and illustrations, flexible grouping, curriculum compacting, questioning, and tiering work (not more but different work) have documented research as best practices for both remediation and acceleration of learning.

The ultimate goal of the Chicago Public Schools Education Options Initiative to increase graduation rates and academic preparedness for college and career, entry into college, military, or employment. Content coaches will receive professional development training in career and college readiness counseling. Throughout their enrollment in the *Acceleration* program students will receive counseling and support that will enable them to propel skills and knowledge obtaining into career options and opportunities.



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## **3.3.e Accountability**

*(Please reference the organizational Acceleration Academies documents and local Acceleration Academy tables of organization which are included in the appendices.)*

The Organization's level table shows clear lines of authority of the education and operational components of the Acceleration Academies.

An experienced superintendent, Dr. Jim Hager provides educational oversight and Executive Directors are appointed in each region much like regional or area superintendents. Within each site is an Academy Director who supervises all staff – Content Coaches (teachers), Life Coaches (social workers), Career Coaches (guidance and specialized vocational rehabilitation counselors, and Graduation Candidate Advocates (degreed para-professionals).

Further, the Organization's centralized level consists of a Logistics Team, Human Resources Management team, Senior Advisor team and Shared Leadership team (curriculum, instruction, technology and special education administrators); these teams provide system-level oversight of the academies.

At the academy level, a Parent Advisory Council provides input to the Executive Director and Academy Director. The purpose of this structure is to optimize the personalized experience for each graduation candidate as well as enhance parental involvement opportunities.

The corporate level oversight is provided by a very experienced board of educators and business persons all of whom have served in top level leadership roles with organizations having multi-billion dollar budgets; further, these individuals have served in numerous philanthropic and educational leadership or board level roles (as evidenced by their resumes, included in appendices).

The board is in the process of refining and finalizing its set of operational metrics for evaluating performance of the network of schools.

As is specified in the appendices, a Manager of Program Fidelity will use all applicable technology to monitor and evaluate schools and programs as well as site and organizational leadership.

School leadership is provided consistent feedback and the rubric attached in the appendix demonstrates the clear process for school leaders' accountability and for school performance. The PERA evaluation procedures will be utilized for school leader evaluation in addition to the Acceleration Academy evaluation process.

Each year the Board will conduct an annual Self-Evaluation to assess its own effectiveness through a process designated for school board leadership; performance is to be measured against the metrics and goals set and specified for the board and academies. The board bylaws and procedures lay out the mechanism to evaluate effectiveness, and to remove a member when removal is warranted.



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## **4.1.a. School Budget – Please see Appendix**

### **4.1.b. Budget Narrative**

The budget provides for a strategic staffing and aligned spending plan to optimize resources for student success. The staffing plan is developed from our experience and research in personalized learning environments as well as the mission and vision of the academy.

The budget readily identifies key personnel, competitive salary and benefits, and instructional and technological expenditures critical for the effective delivery of blended learning.

Although many high school programs have student to staff ratios of 100:1, the *Acceleration Academy* program has student to certified staff ratios of less than 25:1 in all years of operation.

Further, when considering non-licensed staff, all graduation candidate advocates are degreed para-professionals who have specialized training and professional development to serve in tutoring and support capacities, the student to staff ratios are approximately 13:1.

### **4.1.b. Last three Audits: N/A**

### **4.1.c. Development Plan: N/A**

## **4.2 Financial Controls**

*Acceleration Academies* maintains a strong accounting system that includes third-party, independent CPA-monitoring and oversight, coupled with internal controls and transparency.

Monthly operating statements are prepared under GAAP by *Acceleration Academies* third party accounting firm and issued monthly to management and the Board of Directors. Prior to issuance, the statements are reviewed by the external firm's President who is a registered CPA in Illinois. This individual has 30 years of experience as a CPA and performs similar services for numerous non-profits.

Monthly Board meetings are held and include management and the external CPA. Results are carefully reviewed and all deviations from budget explained. The CEO is ultimately responsible for all material budget variations. The statements prepared and reviewed monthly are as follows:

1. Consolidated Income Statement – month and year-to-date
2. Consolidated Income Statement versus Budget – month and year-to date
3. Consolidated Balance Sheet
4. Consolidated Balance Sheet versus Budget
5. Consolidated Statement of Cash Flow – month and year-to date
6. Income statement by location – month and year-to date
7. Income Statement by location versus Budget – month and year-to-date

Annually, *Acceleration Academies* is audited by an independent outside accounting firm with no relation to the firm's external CPA that prepares operating statements. Financial statements are issued including all required disclosures.



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Operationally, the Company maintains a sound system of internal controls that incorporates clear segregation of duties and incremental approval levels for expenditures. In addition, all contracts are reviewed by in-house counsel. All internal control recommendations are reviewed with the auditing firm and suggestions implemented when warranted.

The company's well respected management team recruits qualified individuals through multiple avenues, including professional referral networks and the use of recruiters when necessary. Background checks are always performed and all licenses and accreditations verified prior to any individual's employment commencement date.

In addition to the Organization's sound financial position, it maintains a line of credit of \$1.5 million to ensure sufficient resources are provided at each site.

Financial policies in place are numerous, and include:

1. Chief Operating Officer approval of all nonrecurring expenditures is required.
2. All expenditures in excess of \$20,000 require approval by a member of the Board of Directors.
3. All fixed asset expenditures greater than \$1,000 are capitalized.
4. All fixed assets are maintained on a comprehensive fixed asset schedule and routinely confirmed.
5. All banking transactions are downloaded daily and matched with anticipated transactions. All exceptions are immediately acted upon.
6. All bank accounts are immediately reconciled once statements are available.
7. Segregation of duties exist in all pertinent areas including:
  - a. Payroll processing
  - b. Expense report processing
  - c. Accounts payable
  - d. Cash receipts

## Financial Monitoring

### 4.3 Facilities

#### a. Facility Plan

*Acceleration Academies* will work to draft leases prior to the announcement of the RFP awardees. Once the RFP has been awarded, *Acceleration Academies* will continue negotiations with the primary and secondary locations. While negotiating leases with the two viable facilities, *Acceleration Academies* will consult general contractors. Once a lease has been signed, *Acceleration Academies* will begin the preliminary phase of the build-out.

The first step in the preliminary phase, which will begin in November 2015, will be the hiring of a general contractor. Once the general contractor has been hired, *Acceleration Academies* will begin reviewing the renovation work necessary to build an operational school space and become



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ADA compliant. These reviews will involve the general contractor, a CPS-approved architect, and CPS.

While the renovation reviews are ongoing, *Acceleration Academies* will begin the zoning review and building permit processes. These processes will begin in early October 2015 to allocate appropriate time to resolve any issues that may arise and to resolve any zoning issues prior to lease execution. The final aspect of the preliminary work will include the sign permit process, which will begin in February 2016.

The final phase in the facility plan will be completing all renovations. After reviewing with CPS and a CPS-approved architect, the contractor will schedule building permit and certificate of occupancy inspections. After inspections are complete, the contractor will begin renovation work in early December 2015. The contractor will be given until early August to complete all renovations required for a viable and ADA-compliant facility. During this time, signage will be installed at the entrance of the facility.

Risks associated with this plan include expensive renovation, denial of zoning or permits, or breakdown during lease negotiations. *Acceleration Academies* will combat these risks by continually monitoring the secondary locations and potentially moving forward with back-up facilities.

Please see Appendix for *Acceleration Academies'* facility plans, from securing spaces through final renovations.

## **b. Space Requirements**

Pivotal to *Acceleration Academies'* program is a site design that provides sufficient space for individual studying, group learning, or one-on-one work with a highly-qualified educator. The ideal location for *Acceleration Academies* includes a large, open space that would be used as a classroom, two separate offices for counseling and administration, a small space for storage, and multiple bathrooms.

The largest space at *Acceleration Academies* is the open classroom. The atmosphere gives the impression of a Starbucks mixed with a community college lounge. Students can use this space however best fits their learning style. The open classroom has space for individual study for students that work best independently. Another section of the classroom is called the "Genius Station." This station, the closest resemblance to a classroom, is a single row of seats facing two monitors on the wall and a whiteboard. Another section of the classroom has tables for one-on-one work with a teacher or group discussion and work.

One of the additional rooms is required for guidance counselors and social workers to work privately. These rooms have a window or camera for clear visibility. This room is only to be used for counseling, so it doesn't require a large amount of space. However, security will be an important aspect. The final room will be used for our administrative team. The space needs to be large enough for securing documents, holding meetings for staff, and a potential for multiple desks.



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Technology is a major aspect of the *Acceleration Academies'* model. A strong Internet connection is important, but because not all students will be in the classroom at once, a connection of 100Mbps will satisfy the classroom's need. Chromebooks and e-tablets are provided to GCs to complete their coursework.

Since the *Acceleration Academies'* model does not require students to be present for a full day of instruction, the space only requires between 2,000 and 3,000 square feet. The largest part of this space is used for the open classroom. As the Academy grows, additional space may need to be built-out or purchased for additional counseling areas, more administrative offices, an additional open classroom, or storage. The ideal space will be carpeted and on the first floor of its building.

Please see Appendix for graphic model of *Acceleration Academies*.

*Acceleration Academies* will open four sites across Chicago. Below are the addresses and general descriptions of each location:

## General Description

### Belmont Cragin

The Belmont Cragin Acceleration Academy will be located in Bethesda Church at 4538 W Fullerton Ave., Chicago, IL 60639. The site is located on a major commercial street in a stable area. A former factory, the space has been converted into a large church and daycare center on the first floor. The second floor has been converted into a congregation hall and offices. There is also a basketball court and dance studio on the second floor. The office space on the second floor is where *Acceleration Academies* will be located. The space for Acceleration Academy is roughly 3,850 square feet and currently unoccupied. This unoccupied space has five offices and one large area that can be used for an open classroom. The overall space of Bethesda Church is slightly less than 20,000 square feet. The space has a parking lot that will require minor repairs. The space is owned by Bethesda Church.

### West Englewood

The West Englewood Acceleration Academy will be located within the Samaritan Bible Baptist Church at 6847 S. Halsted St., Chicago, IL 60621. The site is located on a major commercial street in a depressed area. The building dates to the 19th century and requires significant renovation. The adjacent lot is undeveloped, and will accommodate parking, an elevator, and a stair addition to enhance the access to the second floor space. The first floor of the space is the church. The second floor of the space is where *Acceleration Academies* will be located. *Acceleration Academies'* space is one large, open room, with a kitchenette, storage, and men's and women's restrooms. The approximate size of the entire building is 8,880 square feet, with 4,400 square feet of usable space for *Acceleration Academies*. Space can be modified to include an office area for counseling and administration. The space is owned by Samaritan Bible Baptist Church.



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## Bronzeville

The Bronzeville Acceleration Academy will be located in the Bronzeville Community Clubhouse at 3847 S. Giles St., Chicago, IL 60653. The site is located on a quiet street in a stable area. The appearance and maintenance of the space is in good condition. The approximate year of construction is 1903. The building has 2,500 square feet of usable space for *Acceleration Academies*, with an additional 750 square feet for storage. The building is only one story, with a large, open space for a classroom, a kitchenette, and two bathrooms. Additional space in the back near the kitchenette can be used for offices. Although there is space for parking, additional spaces may be needed. The space is currently used for events, parties, and educational field trips and is owned by the Bronzeville Community Clubhouse. It has previously been used as a store.

## Washington Heights

The Washington Heights Acceleration Academy will be located at 901 E. 95th St., Chicago, IL 60619. The space is on a major commercial street in a depressed area. The space is one story and over 30,000 square feet. Roughly 7,500 square feet near the entrance of the building has offices for counseling and administration and multiple open space classrooms. A large open space in the center of the building, along with several offices, classrooms, and a kitchen on the west side of the building will not be occupied by Acceleration Academy. However, the space has restrooms on the west side of the building accessible for *Acceleration Academies*. Another section of the building closed off from *Acceleration Academies*' space is used for gymnastics. The space is currently owned by Trinity United Church of Christ. The space was formerly used for Nkrumah Academy Elementary School. Prior to the elementary school, the space was an indoor amusement park.

## **Management**

Project management at *Acceleration Academies* on facility renovations will be overseen by Ryan Graves, Director of Logistics and Site Support. Mr. Graves has overseen the build-out of seven *Acceleration Academies* across two states, normally in a timeline of 60 days or less. In previous work, he has managed over numerous operational and logistics projects for nationwide retailers such as Walgreens and Best Buy.

## **Scope of Work**

Please see Appendix for each site's renovation work plan and timelines. These documents will detail how rehabilitation work will address issues raised by the architect, meet applicable building codes, bring the locations into ADA compliance, and support *Acceleration Academies*' model. For additional information on the scope of work, please review attached architect's inspection report.



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## Secondary Locations

### Belmont Cragin

A secondary option for *Acceleration Academies* in the greater Belmont Cragin area is located in Circle Urban Ministries at 118 N. Circle Ave. The building is several stories and slightly less than 20,000 square feet. *Acceleration Academies* would have a large, open space for a classroom, a kitchen, and two bathrooms sectioned off from the remainder of the building on the first floor. The space has been owned by Circle Urban Ministries since 1983.

### West Englewood

A secondary option for *Acceleration Academies* in West Englewood is constructing a 1,500 square foot space on the adjacent lot owned by Samaritan Bible Baptist Church. Based on rough estimates from architects, the build-out should cost roughly \$250,000-\$300,000. The space would be modeled towards the Acceleration Academy program, but with the ability to turn the structure into other retail storefronts if needed. Samaritan Bible Baptist Church is amenable to the idea of building out a new space on their land if renovations prove too costly or lease negotiations fail.

### Bronzeville

A secondary option for *Acceleration Academies* in Bronzeville is Bright Star Church located at 735 E. 44th St. The space is three stories, and the church would lease to *Acceleration Academies* the entire basement. The space would need a slight build-out for additional office space. A large, open space is available for a classroom. The space is over 50 years old and is currently owned by Bright Star Church.

### Washington Heights

A secondary space for *Acceleration Academies* in Washington Heights is located at 8522 S. Lafayette St. *Acceleration Academies* would work with the Legacy Project to procure the location. Enough space is available for multiple offices, a large classroom, restrooms, and storage. The site, with ample parking, was formerly a factory and is currently being used for a church and a charter school. There are eventual plans for a youth center, restaurant, and retail stores. It was formerly owned by Hobby Lobby Stores Inc.