

# *How a High School Diploma Makes a Difference in DC*



Excel in Learning. Excel in Life.

The Excel Center

ADULT CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL



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# INVEST ENGAGE EMPLOY

**Do you or your business  
believe in the power of education?**

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The Excel Center |   
ADULT CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

# AN OPEN LETTER FROM CATHERINE MELOY

To the Greater Washington, D.C. Business Community:

On August 22nd, The Goodwill Excel Center Adult Charter High School will officially open its doors. While many area high schools will be welcoming back fresh-faced and anxious pupils eager to build upon the knowledge they gained in the previous school year, the students at The Goodwill Excel Center will probably have different butterflies in their stomachs than their counterparts.

Why? Because the students at The Goodwill Excel Center aren't children. They are adults - adults who earlier in life made the decision to leave school. Maybe they made that decision because they needed to find work to help support their families. Maybe they made that decision because they simply didn't understand the value of an education at the time. Or maybe they made that decision because they had no one to encourage them and help them learn.

Whatever their reason for leaving school early, these students have now committed themselves to completing their secondary education to get all of the benefits of employment opportunities offered to them as a result of attaining a high school diploma.

With more than 60,000 adult Washington, D.C. residents lacking a high school diploma, we are already seeing that the demand for a high school diploma is quite high. But the team of amazing Goodwill Excel Center teachers, administrators and support staff is prepared for the challenge and excited about the prospect of changing so many lives in a very impactful way.

The U.S. Department of Labor data shows that high school graduates are 72 percent more likely to be employed than those who didn't finish high school. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average wage for a high school graduate is almost \$10,000 a year more than someone without a diploma. To provide some context, \$10,000 can feed a family of four for up to a year!

The mission of The Goodwill Excel Center is to transform lives through the attainment of a high school diploma



Sincerely,  
**CATHERINE MELOY**

President and CEO  
Goodwill of Greater  
Washington and  
The Goodwill Excel Center  
(202) 715-2603

and industry certifications leading to sustainable, living wage careers.

However, what truly separates The Goodwill Excel Center from other public charter high schools is that the students earn a diploma and industry specific certifications rather than a General Educational Development (GED) diploma. This differentiator provides students with greater access to careers and post-secondary education. Additionally, in order to mitigate major barriers to success, The Goodwill Excel Center offers enrolled students a free child development center operated by the YMCA, as well as travel stipends, to help ensure strong attendance.

Transforming lives is what we do. In fact, it's all we do. But we couldn't do it without the support of the business community. Therefore, I'd like to thank some of those companies who have played such a vital role in the development of The Goodwill Excel Center.

- DC Public Charter School Board
- Colliers International

- HBW Group, General Contractors
- Little Diversified Architectural Consulting
- Morris Manning & Martin, LLP
- The Ezra Company
- The Meyer Foundation
- Washington REIT

To each of you and to all who choose to embrace what The Goodwill Excel Center represents – Thank you!

If you're interested in learning more about The Goodwill Excel Center, I invite you to visit us at 1776 G Street, NW. We'd be proud to introduce you to the future workforce of our nation's capital.

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# The Goodwill Excel Center Isn't Just Another D.C. High School

On August 22nd, 2016, The Goodwill Excel Center will begin classes for the 2016-2017 school year just like all other public charter schools in the District of Columbia.

The doors will open, students will shuffle in, greet their classmates, pull out their class schedules, take their seats and finally go about learning.

That will be a pretty consistent scenario for the first day of school everywhere. So why is there such a buzz about The Goodwill Excel Center? Because The Goodwill Excel Center is Washington, D.C.'s first charter high school for adults that awards a high school diploma and industry recognized credentials rather than a General Educational Development (GED) diploma.

Modeled after the highly successful Excel Centers in Indianapolis, Indiana, the D.C. school will offer a high-quality, tuition-free adult education for District residents. At The Goodwill Excel Center, students will embark on an accelerated program supported by academic success coaches, plus career and college counselors.

Today, there are more than 60,000 adult D.C. residents who lack a high school diploma. With the growing need for enhanced academic credentials to secure sustainable employment in our modern world, a high school diploma has become a virtual necessity.

"We're excited to have The Goodwill Excel Center open its doors to adult learners in Washington D.C.," says Scott Pearson, executive director of the D.C. Public Charter School Board. "This public charter school has quality and flexible programs so important to adult learners who attend classes while juggling other obligations like work and raising a family."

The Goodwill Excel Center organizers decided to apply for an adult charter high school after completing a large jobs training program for the Marriott Marquis Washington, DC hotel in 2014. A large percentage of the D.C. residents applying for the program lacked the literacy and numeracy skills required for many of the jobs in our local economy.

While the high school graduation rate in D.C. has been inching up over the past five years, it is still far below the national average. (See graph at right)

To help ensure that students succeed,





**“This public charter school has quality and flexible programs so important to adult learners who attend classes while juggling other obligations like work and raising a family.”**

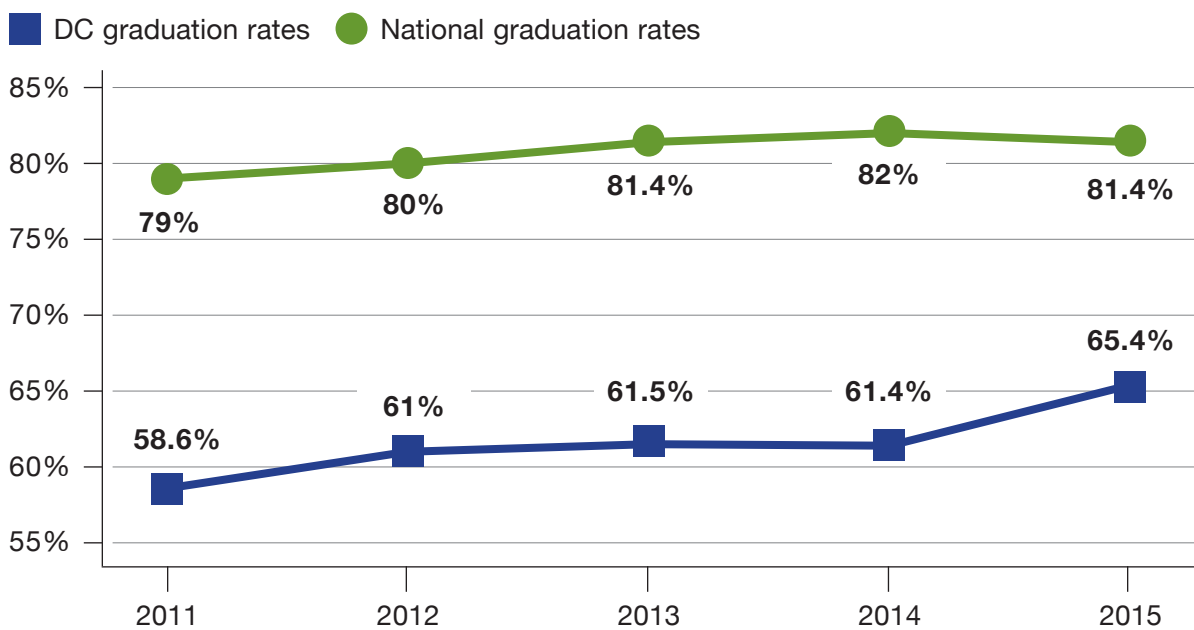
**SCOTT PEARSON**, Executive Director, D.C. Public Charter School Board

The Goodwill Excel Center will offer a free, on-site drop-in child development center, transportation assistance and life coaching in addition to job training and placement assistance in growing local industries.

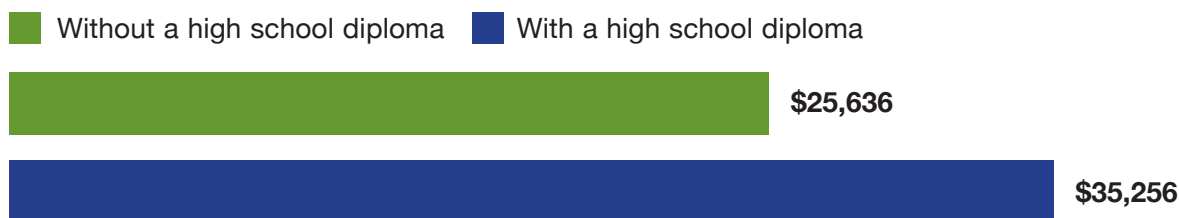
All of this will be provided while emphasizing a school-work-life balance through flexible scheduling, extended hours and year-round terms. One of the primary goals of the school is to mitigate barriers to success by offering a solution rather than additional red-tape.

“The unique supportive services The Goodwill Excel Center offers its adult students will dramatically increase enrollment, retention, and graduation rates leading to increases in the number of adult learners entering the workforce,” Nicky Goren, president and CEO of the Meyer Foundation, says. The Foundation is one of the school’s funders.

### HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES



### NATIONAL SALARIES



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2011-2015

The Goodwill Excel Center will offer classes Monday through Thursday, with Friday as an optional day for students who wish to receive additional support (tutoring, life coaching or career and college counseling). Evening classes will be evaluated based on need and demand. There

are five, eight week terms, to accelerate credit attainment.

Does The Goodwill Excel Center offer a solution to every barrier to academic success? No. But the people who manage and operate the center believe that it comes pretty close.



# How Education Benefits Business and Communities

**BY SUZANNE DAVIS**

Corporate Communications Director, Grant Associates

Since opening our doors nearly 20 years ago, Grant Associates, a national, award-winning workforce development company, has collaborated with government agencies to develop workforce programs and business solutions that create opportunities to advance job seekers, businesses and local economies. During that time, we have served more than 20,000 U.S. businesses and assisted more than 100,000 low-income workers in preparing for and finding quality jobs that lead to advancement opportunities.

In 2012, under a contract with the Department of Human Services, we began providing services for Washington D.C.'s underserved population. The more than 1,000 customers we work with annually face employment challenges, among them the lack of a high school diploma. Without a diploma, they cannot compete for quality jobs and earn significantly less than those who have one (See Table 2).

Although the District experienced an increase in its graduation rate for the class of 2015, up from 58 percent four years ago to 64 percent, it is still well below the national average of 81.4 percent.

In fact, some 60,000 adult District residents do not have a high school diploma

and persistently struggle to get by. African-American and Latino males are the most vulnerable, with just 53.6 percent of young African-Americans males, and 56.4 percent of Latino males, graduating in 2013, according to data published in 2015 by the Schott Foundation for Public Education.

Many job openings in D.C., particularly administrative, security and hotel industry positions, are missed opportunities for D.C. residents without a high school diploma or credentials needed to advance into management jobs. That's why Grant Associates is excited by the opportunity the The Goodwill Excel Center offers our customers and the city's workforce. The Goodwill Excel Center serves adult customers holistically, offering a high school diploma, post-secondary career and college options through flexible scheduling, and a full range of no-cost support services, including transportation assistance, child care and job placement assistance.

The Goodwill Excel Center eliminates some of the prevalent barriers with which our customers frequently struggle when they set an educational goal for themselves. To date, 30 of Grant Associates' customers are in the enrollment process with The Goodwill Excel Center, with many more expected to follow.

As the business landscape evolves to meet the demands of the local and global

marketplace, the District will require an educated workforce that can easily adapt to shifting business needs and the acquisition of new skills. Making the pursuit of a high school diploma and higher education a top priority is crucial in building quality workforce talent and ensuring there is a place at the table for every D.C. resident.

At a glance, here are the top ways that an educated workforce benefits business and the community:

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- **DEMONSTRATES TENACITY.** People who earn their high school diploma, often while managing difficult life circumstances, prove that they are driven to succeed and accomplish an important goal despite obstacles. That same perseverance and tenacity will make itself evident on the job, especially when an employee is confronted with learning a new skill, completing a difficult task, or solving a problem.

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- **LEADS TO FURTHER EDUCATION AND ABILITY TO TAKE ON GREATER WORKPLACE RESPONSIBILITY.** A high school diploma is the prerequisite for vocational training, credentialing or a college degree that will ultimately enable employees to take on more responsibility. Equally important, increased education helps people to advance along their career

Table 2  
Median Wages in DC by Educational Attainment, 1979 - 2014

	All	Less than high school	High school	Some college	Bachelor's or higher
1979	\$18.25	*	\$15.71	*	\$25.54
1980	\$16.98	\$12.56	\$14.80	\$16.23	\$26.59
1984	\$17.00	\$11.66	\$14.58	\$16.72	\$26.63
1989	\$18.34	\$12.16	\$14.58	\$16.70	\$27.34
1994	\$17.45	*	\$14.10	\$15.77	\$27.30
1999	\$19.36	*	\$14.43	\$16.80	\$26.58
2004	\$22.28	*	\$16.20	\$17.89	\$31.36
2007	\$21.80	\$11.54	\$14.84	\$17.25	\$30.73
2009	\$23.63	*	\$15.93	\$17.60	\$32.91
2014	\$24.20	*	\$13.04	\$15.01	\$31.12
Percent Change, 1980-2014	28.4%	-8.1%**	-11.9%	-7.5%	17.0%

Source: Economic Policy Institute analysis of Current Employment Statistics survey data.  
 \* Not available due to insufficient sample size.  
 \*\* Change reflects 1980-2007.

pathway, earn more money and improve their lives.

• **HIGHER RETURN ON INVESTMENT.**

Once hired and trained, an employee with a high school diploma will likely be promotable in time with further education, training and experience. Investing in employees through a tuition reimbursement plan, or by supporting their decision to earn their diploma at a no-cost adult charter high school like The Goodwill Excel Center, ensures a return on investment in the form of loyalty, higher quality work, better communication, and greater revenue as the employee's productivity level increases. With

D.C.'s minimum wage increase to \$11.50 an hour starting July 1, 2016, an educated, quality team cannot be undervalued. During an economic downturn, those are the employees you'll want to keep.

• **INCREASES RETENTION.** Employees who have a high school diploma or college degree, or who earn a new credential, are able to earn higher wages, move along on their career pathway and gain more satisfaction from their work. Engaged staff are more inclined to stay and grow with their company rather than move on. Reduced turnover results in greater stability and productivity, and saves a company thousands

of dollars in recruiting, hiring and training new people.

• **IMPROVES THE COMMUNITY'S OVERALL ECONOMIC HEALTH.**

Businesses have a vested interest in the economic health of the community they serve. The higher a person's educational attainment, the greater his or her opportunity for obtaining a good job with advancement opportunities that provide financial self-sufficiency and increased spending capacity. The business community prospers and the community at large thrives when more people have more money to spend on goods and services.

• **GENERATIONAL IMPACT.** Among the conclusions of a study by The Urban Institute, "Child Poverty and Its Lasting Consequence," is that earning a high school diploma can help break the cycle of multi-generational poverty. Parents are the role model for their children and a low level of educational attainment is a strong predictor of continued persistent poverty. Children are likely to follow in their parents' footsteps and drop out of school, making it even more imperative to support motivated employees in improving their educational level, and finding and retaining good jobs for the long-term. It's an old adage, but true: Employees are a company's greatest asset.

# STRENGTHENING THE PRIDE IN OUR COMMUNITIES

United Bank is dedicated to improving the communities it serves. We understand that being a force for positive change is both a responsibility and a privilege. That's why we are proud to partner with The Goodwill Excel Center.



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## HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA OR GED: Providing Options Creates More Paths to Success

BY DAVID MELOY

It should come as no surprise to anyone that education is one of the most critical factors in obtaining gainful employment. In many instances, an individual's academic success can often forecast professional success.

There are, however, always exceptions to the rules. The definitions of academic success can be very subjective.

For example, is a bachelor degree from an Ivy League school just as valuable in the job market as a master's degree from a small state school? Is a Bachelor of Arts degree just as valuable as a Bachelor of Science degree?

This subjectivity also rings true when comparing the benefits of earning a high school diploma with the benefits of earning a General Educational Development (GED) diploma.

The GED is a test that is designed to demonstrate that the recipient of the GED has an equivalent knowledge base with a high school student. It is often taken by those who did not complete high school but feel that they have the ability to demonstrate high school knowledge.

The GED is made up of five parts, all of which are meant to assess an individual's ability to reason through mathematics, science, social studies, reading and writing.

The test was initially introduced in 1942 to soldiers returning from World War II so they could apply for jobs or enroll in colleges without having to go back to high school. It was eventually recommended that civilians who did not complete high school also have the opportunity to take the test. About 20 million people have earned a GED since its inception.

Today, more than ever before, high school completion is widely viewed as an economic necessity. The criteria for taking the GED includes being at least 16 years of age; not officially enrolled in a high school program or school; and having officially been unenrolled by an accredited high school.

The GED therefore was created as an option for students with high school knowledge who also had college and career aspirations. While the GED is an incredible accomplishment, especially given its rigor and its alignment with 12th grade completion, getting a GED comes with a stigma.

In many cases, those with a GED are viewed as "high school drop-outs" rather than those who simply took an alternative academic path. As such, the question often arises - which credential yields more opportunity, especially in the workforce?

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2012, on average high school graduates earned about \$1,600 more a month than people with a GED. The U.S. Census Bureau also reported that less than 5 percent of those who earn a GED went on to earn a bachelor degree as opposed to 33 percent of those with a high school diploma.

Also, the military limits the number of applicants that hold a GED. Enlistment statistics show that they are twice as likely to fail within their first term of service as opposed to those who have a diploma.

While these statistics support a case for achievement of a high school diploma over a GED, the GED is a high school equivalency test, and passing the test still requires a mastery of high school level content. So for some, passing the GED remains as elusive as earning a high school diploma.

In fact, according to Education Week, the GED Testing Service has decided to lower the pass rate for its high school equivalency exam, a move that resulted from students who passed the latest, tougher version of the test were doing better in college than actual high school graduates.

Whether one chooses to take the GED, or enroll in a high school program, both conceivably do so to create better opportunities for themselves.

Ultimately, the GED lends itself to expediency, and its pursuit provides students more flexibility for students who may need to juggle work and other personal commitments. Many students take GED classes for weeks or months, followed by the test.

On the other hand, a high school diploma program, like The Excel Center, as an alternative for non-traditional students in pursuit of high school completion offers more opportunity to delve deep into high school content. It provides a level of depth in the core curriculum that a GED program isn't generally intended to offer.

Moreover, a high school program may offer students an opportunity to better identify and strengthen academic skills gaps, as well as build upon existing skills.

"We are preparing individuals for a lifetime of success," Catherine Meloy, President and CEO of The Goodwill Excel Center, says. "A high school diploma and industry credentials are only the beginning. Ultimate success will be when every Goodwill Excel Center student transitions to college or a career."

The road to success without a high diploma or its equivalent is almost always uphill. But it is by no means insurmountable. The biggest factor above all else is the person. But the greater the education, the greater the opportunity.



# The Learning, and the Living, Can Begin Anew

The stories of pursuing a productive life for some of the 60,000 Washington, D.C. residents in urban communities who don't have a high school diploma can be heart-breaking.

Everyone wants to have a life where they can take care of themselves and their families. But the hard reality of getting a well-paying, steady job that can sustain a family and completely change what happiness means begins with getting the required high school diploma.

For some, attaining that elusive goal has been a journey full of obstacles that have to be recognized and overcome. It's been a matter of creating new priorities and focusing on the future.

The mission of The Goodwill Excel Center Adult Charter High School is to provide that important document, and help adult students achieve their goal of a happy and independent life where they have finally managed the struggles of daily living with the educational attainment required to get to the next level of success.

These are people who made choices in life that stalled their growth as productive citizens. Some realized that fact too late. Some had to drop out of school before finishing high school to take care of their children. Some had issues with the way that they were being taught and decided that not going to school was a better way to live.

But hope springs eternal. Now, with adult hindsight adding more insight to those earlier decisions, these students at The Goodwill Excel Center have discovered another chance to add purpose to their lives, move forward with what they want to accomplish and support their families. It is indeed an uplifting renewal of their spirit.

"I left school in 2012 because I was 15 and pregnant," Tyra, now 19 years old, says. "I thought I could find something better to do but never did. I just had to do what I needed to do for my baby girl at the time."

She saw an ad on Facebook and found out about The Excel Center. What appealed to her the most was the free daycare for her child offered by the center. "I feel like it's time for my dreams to come true," Tyra says. "Everything I want I'm going to get. I'm going to better myself for my kids and they're going to watch me do it," she says. "I have no time to lose. I'm excited."

Another student at The Excel Center, Benita, quit high school in 2008 because she had a son. She says that she planned on returning, but things changed. "I tried to go back to school but it seemed uninviting.



**"I feel like it's time for my dreams to come true. Everything I want I'm going to get. I'm going to better myself for my kids and they're going to watch me do it. I have no time to lose. I'm excited."**

TYRA, student,  
Goodwill Excel Center



**"I felt like a lot of the teachers were against me. But they were just tired of me. I thought running the streets would be the best way. But it wasn't."**

TROY, student, Goodwill Excel Center

I couldn't ask questions," Benita says. She once interviewed for a job that had everything she needed. The interview went great. "But they didn't call me back because I didn't have my high school diploma. It affected me because you have to worry about

rent and kids. So it's hard," she continued.

With her enrollment in The Excel Center and the diploma she will earn as a result, she is looking at pursuing a position in mortuary science.

Another applicant, Troy, says that teachers wanted him out of his high school. "I felt like a lot of the teachers were against me. But they were just tired of me," he says, adding that he eventually dropped out. "I thought running the streets would be the best way, but it wasn't."

Troy left high school in 1996 and tried to make a living to support his kids. "I realized in 2011 that not having a high school diploma doesn't work," he says.

His son is now reaching the same age he was when he dropped out of school. "I want to set an example for my son now by me having a high school diploma."

These stories of real people overcoming the odds and getting their high school diplomas and industry specific certifications points to a common theme they all share of desire for improvement, and the tenacity to make a better life for each other and their loved ones.

Goodwill wants D.C. residents to know that if you think it's too late to get your high school diploma because you are now an adult, or because there are too many variables in your life to organize the effort, that it's never too late to go after your dreams.

The students featured here have shown they can overcome adversity. And because of the transformational help of Goodwill, every day becomes a better day.



# LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

John F. Kennedy said it best through this quote: “Leadership and learning are indispensable to one another.” There is no doubt about the truth in that statement.

Every successful school has a strong, smart and committed leader. The Goodwill Excel Center left no stone unturned in its quest to find a director committed to both leadership and learning.

Meet Amina Brown. She is a Washingtonian to her very core, and an educator with a passion for helping those in her community. Having grown up in Washington, D.C. and attended D.C. schools, Brown understands first-hand the many challenges and barriers faced by D.C. high school students. She saw friends and classmates who were blindsided by the

realities of life and forced down a path that became more difficult to navigate than they imagined. That path for those friends and classmates started when they left school prior to completion.

As a result, Brown chose a vocation that will help many of those people get on the right path – a path that will lead to greater success for themselves and their families.

Even before taking over the reins at The Goodwill Excel Center, Brown was the Turnaround Principal for Community Academy Public Charter School’s Amos V. campus. Brown also served as the National Director of Programs for the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship, where she was responsible for conceptualizing, developing, implementing and assessing their line

of new curriculum products designed to support struggling learners in high poverty areas.

As The Excel Center’s very first director, Brown will take a hands-on leadership approach to directing, planning, managing and coordinating the educational goals and vision of the school. She will ensure that the instructors and school curriculum are applied according to the principles of The Goodwill Excel Center and that the school is meeting the desired outcomes.

While achieving outcomes are vital to the success of the charter school, Brown’s vision is to change the narrative around how staff and instructors address and think of the students, specifically not referring to them as “drop outs.”

It’s important to Brown that the team understands that the term “drop out” connotes that the students did something wrong and made the choice to leave school. In reality, there are many things outside of their control that act in concert with one another to disrupt prospective students’ ability to successfully complete educational pursuits.

At a recent team retreat, Brown pushed the team to view their work as making the students “undroppable,” ensuring they are truly better in their service, teaching, learning and relationship building.

For Brown, real success comes from instilling in every student that they are deserving of more than just being condemned to a life of poverty, and the various sub-circumstances that are assigned to them because of poverty. She believes, and wants them to believe, that receiving and taking advantage of a quality education is the only way to transcend poverty.

“When we think of school and education improvement, we start with the students we currently serve, and often forget about the ones we have already served,” Brown says. “The Goodwill Excel Center is focused on those populations previously served but who have been left behind.”

Too often those who have chosen to remove themselves from the educational system are left to fend for themselves, regardless of the circumstances that led to that decision. Brown wants to be part of a school that doesn’t just teach students math and science, but leads them towards career success as a result of learning.

Remember, as John F. Kennedy said, leadership and learning are indispensable to one another. Brown believes that must also be The Goodwill Excel Center way.

**“When we think of school and education improvement, we start with the students we currently serve, and often forget about the ones we have already served. The Goodwill Excel Center is focused on those populations previously served but who have been left behind.”**

**AMINA BROWN**, Director, Goodwill Excel Center

# The Goodwill Excel Center is Good for Business

The Goodwill Excel Center is committed to helping each of its 325 un-droppable students achieve their highest levels of independence by eliminating barriers to success through support mechanisms like childcare and transportation assistance. Eliminating those barriers can mean the difference between a prosperous future filled with choices and a future defined by struggles and limitations.

As a business leader, you too can play a part in their stories and in their successes by investing in, employing and engaging with Excel Center students.

Students will need businesses and individuals to invest financially in their paths to success. Priority opportunities for financial support include: transportation stipends; underwriting the cost for free onsite child development services; technology; special education teachers; student coaches; and workforce trainings in high-demand careers.

Upon graduating, students will be



equipped with the skills and tools they need to be successful in the workforce. Businesses interested in employing qualified, eager, and capable associates should look to graduates of The Goodwill Excel Center to join their teams. Students will gain access to The Excel Center's sector training programs in industries like hospitality and security. Additional sector training programs will be planned for the future based on high growth industries that offer the greatest opportunities for career advancement.

To prepare students for their ultimate success, achieving their

highest level of self-sufficiency, the engagement of volunteers who are willing to share their expertise and offer hands-on learning through apprenticeships will be integral to ensuring graduates are prepared for work. Opportunities for engagement can include mentorships and tutoring, financial literacy sessions, apprenticeships and guest speaking.

Students at The Goodwill Excel Center are our neighbors. They are residents of Washington, D.C. who are choosing the path to success, and want to change the trajectory of their lives and the lives of future generations.

## TO SUPPORT

If you want to learn more about how you or your business can support Excel Center students on their paths to independence, please contact Vice President of Development, Janece Kleban, at: [janece.kleban@dgoodwill.org](mailto:janece.kleban@dgoodwill.org) or (202) 719-1226.

The Goodwill Excel Center would like to recognize and thank The Meyer Foundation for being the first investor in our students.

The **Excel Center** |   
Excel in Learning. Excel in Life.

**We are honored to  
have built the first  
Goodwill Excel Center  
Public Charter School  
in Washington DC!**

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# The Excel Center®



ADULT CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

Our mission is to transform lives through the attainment of a high school diploma and industry certifications leading to sustainable, living wage careers.

## The Excel Advantage.

We understand many students may come into our program with varying skills having been out of the classroom for some time. Our courses are designed to meet students where they are regardless of level. We support the whole student by offering:



### Transportation Assistance

We support students getting to class.



### Flexible Class Schedules

Class schedules tailored to our students' needs.



### Child Development Center

Free child care while students attend class.



### Job Placement Assistance

We'll help students apply for jobs.



@goodwillexcelDC



@goodwillexcelcenterDC

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[goodwillexcelcenter.org](http://goodwillexcelcenter.org)