



A WEEK IN *Learning*

SPOTLIGHT

Individuals and teams leading a culture of learning!

HELPING ADULTS MEET THEIR EDUCATIONAL GOALS

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In Arizona, over 750,000 adults lack a high school diploma. A high school diploma can lead to a significant increase in earning power (by nearly \$17,000 annually) compared to those with a GED or high school equivalency. However, many adult students who would like to return to school to receive their diploma often face a state-mandated age limit. In Arizona, students over the age of 22 are no longer eligible for public education funding to attend high school.



The Excel Center addresses this challenge by offering adults of all ages an opportunity to earn a diploma through on-campus learning. It goes beyond traditional high schools, providing no-cost childcare, access to college resources, and certification programs for meaningful employment. Allow me to tell you more about this remarkable school.

Leadership

Georgia Harris, Vice President and Superintendent of Excel Centers, has been with Goodwill for five years. She leads a team that includes the district office staff, teachers, career coaches, administrative staff, and, of course, the students. When I met with Georgia, she spoke passionately about her work with the Excel Center and the community we serve, saying, "The Excel Center is important to me because I am a living example of how transformational education can be. Working at the Excel Center is an opportunity to create the same opportunities for thousands of Arizonans who desperately need hope for the future."

Team Overview/School Goals

The Excel Center embodies GCNA's mission to end poverty through the power of work. The organization's focus has historically been on workforce development, it also recognizes that education is the greatest equalizer in our complex society. In response to this, the Excel Center was established, providing a pathway for adult high school completion along with industry-recognized certifications and college credits for sustainable employment. The school stands out because of its comprehensive support system that removes barriers for students. The top goals for 2023 include raising community awareness, expanding certifications and post-secondary opportunities, and conducting an inaugural graduation ceremony.

Team Development

Internally, Georgia focuses on professional development for the school team. Staff members have training requirements to fulfill for certification purposes, ranging from refreshing their teaching expertise to understanding student case studies. Team-building experiences are critical to fostering a culture of

collaboration and teamwork within the Excel Center. Georgia recognizes the significance of maintaining a strong sense of unity and actively collaborates with the Learning and Development team to cultivate a culture of continuous learning.

To Georgia, team development also involves raising awareness of the Excel Center in the community with the goal of sharing details about the school and the value it can bring statewide. Importantly, the idea of community starts first with forging strong partnerships within Goodwill, then focuses on our other neighbors and organizations in Arizona. This awareness and learning will continue to evolve as we progress with the Excel



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Center, and our success will always be rooted in our commitment to students, the community, and the Goodwill mission.

Another important aspect of the interdepartmental partnerships and the support they provide to the school is that one fourth of all Excel Center students are Goodwill employees. Having an organization well-versed in school operations will help remove barriers so more team members may be able to attend, in addition to expanding our community reach. Georgia shared, "My goal is for each department within GCNA/ GIMV to become an Excel Center Ambassador to the community as well as our Goodwill team members."

What's Next?

This summer, the Excel Center school at 48th St and McDowell campus will open. This new campus will feature state-of-the-art technology, a full-service childcare center and playground, and an adjacent Goodwill career center for community and student use.

In the next five years, the vision for the Excel Center is to establish five new campuses across Maricopa County. A cross-functional team of Goodwill leaders will also continue to advocate for the permanent funding of adult high schools in the state of Arizona. Most importantly, Georgia has set a personal goal to oversee the graduation of 300 students from the Excel Center in the coming years.

The Excel Center team shared a favorite quote from poet Maya Angelou: "You alone are enough." This sentiment encapsulates the belief in every individual's potential to succeed and the transformative power of education.

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