

Application Type

APCSC New School Application for an Opening in Fall 2027 or Fall 2028

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy

Submitted To

Alabama Public Charter School Commission

Submitted by

Melissa Capehart

Submitted at

03/16/2026 03:26 PM

1. GENERAL INFORMATION

Status: Completed

Form Result

Please provide the following information to support the processing of this application. By signing and submitting this application you are giving permission for Commission staff to review the application and contact you for further information and clarification.

School Information

Proposed School Name	xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy
School Type	Elementary/Middle
Grade Levels Served at Capacity	K, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th
School District Name	Birmingham City Schools
Neighborhood / Community	Birmingham/ East Birmingham
Physical Address	Country: USA State: Alabama Selected Address: isOther
Phone Number	2059025647
Web Site	http://xstreammindsacademy.org/
If a Letter of Intent (LOI) was submitted, please attach a copy	File name: xMA Letter of Intent (SC) (1).pdf Uploaded: 03/11/2026 02:34 PM Uploaded by: Melissa Capehart

Primary Contact Person Information

Provide the name of the person who will serve as the primary contact for this Application. The primary contact should serve as the contact for follow-up, interviews, and notices regarding this Application.

Contact Name	Melissa Capehart
Title / Relation to School	Founder/Executive Director
Mailing Address	Country: USA Street Name: 3018 Galaxy Drive City: Hueytown State: Alabama Zip Code: 35023 Selected Address: isOther
Primary Phone Number	2059025647
Email Address	mcapehart@xstreammindsacademy.com
Preferred Method of Contact	email
Operational Information	
Anticipated Opening Year	Fall 2027

Operator Type	6d27f27a-9dd9-4970-8678-c62c85df6d7b
Is the entity behind the school out of state?	No
Is the school part of a network, such as a CMO, EMO?	No
School Calendar Type	39e019db-d406-40d3-a2b3-202dd379d6c8
Number of instructional days in a school year	180

I certify that I have the authority to submit this application and that all information contained herein is complete and accurate, realizing that any misrepresentation could result in disqualification from the application process or revocation after award. I understand that incomplete applications will not be considered. The person named as the contact person for the application is so authorized to serve as the primary contact for this application on behalf of the applicant.

I Do Not Agree

I Agree

Melissa Capehart

Founder/Executive Director

03/11/2026

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Reviewer Instructions

Rate the Executive Summary below

Status: Completed

Form Result

1) Mission Statement. The mission statement is a brief description of the fundamental purpose of the school and should include any organizing theme or concept if applicable. The statement is the expressed public purpose of the school defining its culture, goals and values.

Mission Statement

School Mission Statement

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy in Birmingham, Alabama, our mission is to reimagine the K–8 learning experience for all learners through S.T.R.E.A.M. exploration, personalized learning, and social-emotional growth. We cultivate a rigorous and innovative learning environment where students explore S.T.R.E.A.M. careers, engage in personalized, mastery-based learning, and grow socially and emotionally through our P.O.W.E.R.S. values, ensuring every child develops the skills, confidence, and character to thrive in a rapidly changing world. We embrace learner variability and our

school exists to ensure that every child, regardless of background or ability, is empowered to thrive in a world that is constantly evolving.

2) School Vision. Identify the community being served and provide a brief statement on how the proposed school would operate within that community. Include long-term goals for how the school would enhance and provide a service to the community. Define benchmarks for what a successful endeavor entails. Align with the stated goals of the Alabama School Choice and Student Opportunity Act. Ala. Code § 16-6F-3.

School Vision

School Vision

Our vision is to build a dynamic K–8 learning community where STREAM innovation, personalized learning, and social-emotional growth empower every student to master their potential and shape their future. At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy, success is not one-size-fits-all; it looks like students who are confident, engaged, and challenged students who see learning as a journey, not just a destination. We envision a school that serves the diverse families of Birmingham, Alabama, particularly those seeking rigorous academics, individualized support, and innovative STREAM opportunities within a public school setting. Our community includes students from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds, English Language Learners, and students with varied academic strengths and needs. xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy exists to expand access to high-quality educational options that are responsive, inclusive, and future-focused.

Birmingham families continue to seek high-quality public school options that provide rigorous academics, innovative STREAM programming, and individualized instruction responsive to diverse learner needs. xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy is designed to meet this demand by increasing access to mastery-based learning, future-ready skill development, and inclusive educational practices that reduce achievement gaps and expand opportunity for all students

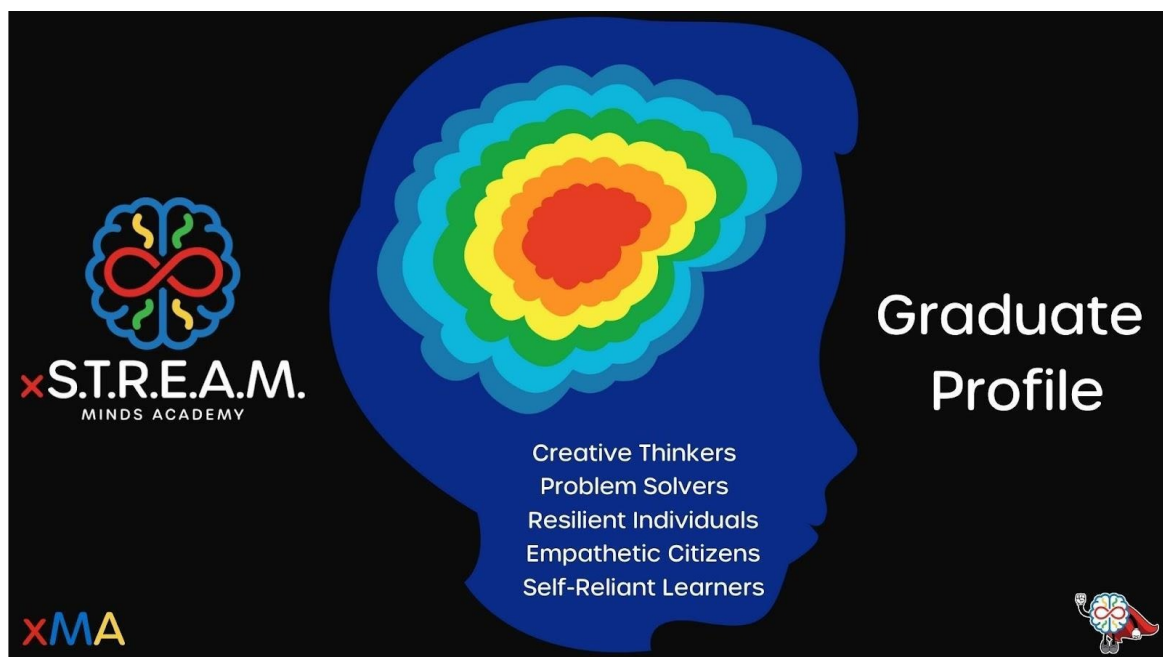
To bring this vision to life, our school operates Personalized Learning using the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, embedded with mastery-based learning, small group instruction, blended learning, and project-based STREAM experiences. We believe that every child can succeed when instruction is matched to their unique needs, interests, and pace, and we are committed to making that belief a reality every day. Our long-term success will be measured by clear, ambitious, and accountable performance goals that reflect both academic excellence and whole-child development. Over the first five years of operation, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy will measure success through the following benchmarks:

- Academic Growth in Core Subjects: 90% of students will demonstrate at least one year of academic growth annually in English Language Arts, Math, and Science, as measured by i-Ready Diagnostics and the ACAP Summative Assessment.
- Benchmark Proficiency: 80% of students will score 85% or higher on interim assessments aligned to Alabama State Standards in ELA, Math, and Science.
- STREAM Pathway Proficiency: 90% of students will demonstrate proficiency in at least two STREAM pathways such as robotics, coding, animation, or artificial intelligence through project-based assessments and digital portfolios.
- Culture and Core Values in Action: 90% of students will consistently demonstrate our P.O.W.E.R.S. values (Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, Safety First), as measured by school climate surveys, teacher observations, and PBIS-aligned behavior data.

- Family Engagement and Satisfaction: 90% of families will report feeling informed and engaged in their child's education, measured through annual surveys and participation in Personalized Learning Plan conferences and school events.

Aligned with our mission and vision, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy is guided by a clearly defined Portrait of a Graduate, which represents the core competencies we strive to cultivate in every student and the ultimate measure of our long-term community impact. We envision graduates who are:

- Self-Reliant Learners who take ownership of their learning journey, set personal goals, and persevere with confidence and independence.
- Resilient Individuals who embrace setbacks as opportunities for growth and demonstrate grit, courage, and a positive mindset.
- Empathetic Citizens who show compassion, respect diverse perspectives, and contribute meaningfully to their communities.
- Problem-Solvers who think critically, analyze complex situations, and collaborate effectively to develop innovative solutions.
- Creative Thinkers who imagine possibilities, take intellectual risks, and express ideas across artistic, technological, and interdisciplinary mediums.



Through intentional integration of these competencies into academics, STREAM programming, and school culture, we ensure that every graduate is equipped not only to succeed in high school and beyond, but to lead, create, and make a lasting impact on Birmingham's future. In alignment with the Alabama School Choice and Student Opportunity Act (Ala. Code §16-6F-3), xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy expands high-quality public school options for families, encourages

innovative teaching methods, increases learning opportunities for students, and improves pupil achievement through data-driven personalized instruction. By offering families meaningful choice within the public school system and fostering academic excellence and accountability, our school fulfills both the letter and the spirit of the Act.

3) Education Plan/School Design. Provide an overview of the education program of the proposed school, including major instructional methods and assessment strategies and non-negotiables of the school model. Describe the evidence that suggests the school model will be successful in improving academic achievement for the targeted student population. Summarize what the proposed school would do more effectively than the schools that are now serving the targeted population and how the school would measure its progress.

Educational Plan/School Design

Education Plan / School Design

xMA offers a bold, student-centered model built on three foundational pillars:

1. Personalized Learning
2. STREAM Education
3. Social Emotional Learning

This research-based approach is urgently needed in Birmingham, where too many students, particularly students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities have been underserved by traditional education models. Combined with high chronic absenteeism (28.7%) and deep racial and economic disparities, these outcomes call for a radically different school design; one that is responsive, inclusive, and personalized.

xMA's Personalized Learning model meets this need by embracing learner variability and building pathways for every child to thrive. xMA implements our four core interconnected, research-based personalized learning methods: Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Mastery-Based Learning, Blended Learning, and Small Group Instruction. Our mastery-based approach ensures that students progress based on understanding, not pace, providing targeted support for those who need it, and meaningful challenges for those ready to accelerate. As supported by RAND research, personalized learning improves student outcomes, particularly in math and reading, and is most impactful for students who begin below grade level (Pane et al., 2017).

Our S.T.R.E.A.M. focus extends this vision by connecting learning to real-world careers and creative industries. Students from underrepresented backgrounds especially Black, Latino, and neurodiverse youth have historically faced barriers to entering high-growth fields. By embedding S.T.R.E.A.M. from kindergarten onward, we prepare students for 21st-century futures. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, STEM jobs are projected to grow by 10.4% between 2023–2033, with median wages over \$101,000, nearly double the national average. (BLS, 2023)

Finally, our Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) model ensures that students develop essential mind-sets and habits for lifelong success. Through daily SEL routines, explicit instruction, and a schoolwide culture rooted in our P.O.W.E.R.S. values, students build self-awareness, resilience, empathy, and collaboration foundational skills that support both academic achievement and well-being. Research from CASEL shows that students who participate in high-quality SEL programs demonstrate an 11 percentile-point gain in academic performance, along with improved attitudes, behavior, and emotional regulation (Durlak et al., 2011).

Personalized Learning

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA), personalized learning is not a single strategy, it is the heart of our instructional design. Our framework ensures that every student receives instruction tailored to their current level of understanding while providing continuous opportunities for extension and enrichment. To operationalize this vision, xMA implements our four core interconnected, research-based personalized learning methods: Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Mastery-Based Learning, Blended Learning, and Small Group Instruction. Together, these methods create an accessible, rigorous, and engaging environment for every learner.

1. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) serves as the foundation of our instructional planning. By offering multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression (CAST, 2018)UDL re-

moves barriers to learning and ensures that all students including English Language Learners, students with disabilities, and gifted students have equitable access to rigorous content. xMA classrooms present material through visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile experiences, and students demonstrate their learning through varied outputs such as models, presentations, projects, and traditional assessments. Research confirms that UDL significantly improves outcomes for diverse student populations (Okolo & Bouck, 2021), fostering both academic achievement and student agency.

2. **Mastery-Based Learning** structures all learning so that students progress only after demonstrating true understanding typically 80–90% proficiency. At xMA, this means every standard is anchored to a clearly defined Mastery Check, and students receive timely, targeted feedback that informs reteaching, peer collaboration, or acceleration. Unlike traditional pacing models where all students move at the same rate regardless of readiness, mastery-based instruction ensures that time becomes a variable and learning becomes the constant, preventing the compounding skill gaps that occur when students advance without foundational understanding. xMA's approach is grounded in the widely researched foundations of Mastery-Based Instruction (MBI). Benjamin Bloom's landmark studies showed that when students receive structured feedback, corrective instruction, and adequate time, nearly all learners, not just a select few, can achieve high levels of success. Fred Keller later extended Bloom's insights through the Personalized System of Instruction, reinforcing that students who are behind and students who are ahead both learn more deeply when mastery not pacing guides advancement. At xMA, these research-based principles appear in our non-negotiable system of clear learning goals, strong initial instruction, formative checkpoints, and corrective or enrichment pathways that give every student what they need to succeed. This approach not only improves academic outcomes (Bloom, 1968; Guskey, 2010) but also cultivates resilience, confidence, and the growth mindset essential for success in STREAM pathways.
3. **Blended Learning** is seamlessly embedded into daily station rotations and personalized learning routines. Classrooms integrate both digital resources (such as i-Ready and adaptive online practice tools) and hands-on, project-based materials. Teachers design Choice Boards of activities, offering students agency to select tasks aligned to their current goals, mastery levels, and interests. Blended learning also includes short teacher-created instructional videos that allow students to learn at their own pace, revisit concepts as needed, and build independence. Daily teacher-led stations further ensure students receive direct instruction and real-time feedback. Research from (Pane et al. 2017) at RAND Corporation found that students engaged in high-quality blended learning models outperformed their peers in traditional settings, particularly when technology was used strategically alongside hands-on, collaborative learning experiences.
4. **Small Group Instruction** ensures differentiated, high-impact support for every learner. Students rotate through color-coded stations that include teacher-led skill groups (blue station), independent and collaborative practice (yellow station), mastery checks (green station), and personalized learning pathways (red station). Groups are strategically formed using real-time data from mastery checks and Personalized Learning Plan (PLP) goals. Research from the National Center for Education Evaluation (2020) confirms that targeted small-group instruction, particularly in early grades and core content areas, leads to statistically significant gains in literacy, mathematics, and higher-order thinking skills, especially for students requiring remediation or enrichment.

Each student's progress is driven by an individualized Personalized Learning Plan (PLP) and documented in a Personalized Learning Portfolio. The PLP includes SMART goals aligned to state standards and STREAM competencies, choice board selections, mastery data from Challenge Boards, Progressing Monitoring data and student reflection artifacts. Portfolios are reviewed during quarterly student-led conferences, fostering metacognition, ownership, and family engagement. Research by Paulson et al. (1991) and more recent studies (Zimmerman, 2011) highlight that student-led portfolios significantly enhance self-regulation, motivation, and parental involvement critical levers for long-term academic success. Through this comprehensive, research-backed personalized

learning model, xMA ensures that every student is empowered to master their potential, embrace ownership of their learning journey, and prepare for future success across STREAM careers and life pathways.

S.T.R.E.A.M.

S.T.R.E.A.M. (Science, Technology, Reading, Engineering, Arts, and Math) is the second anchor of xMA's educational model and is embedded in every student's daily experience. Using the nationally aligned WOZed curriculum, xMA introduces students to high-demand, future-facing fields including Artificial Intelligence, Robotics, Animation, Coding, AR/VR, Data Science, Cybersecurity, and Engineering Design integrated with reading, writing, and artistic expression. Our S.T.R.E.A.M. curriculum is interdisciplinary, project-based, and deeply connected to both Alabama's standards and national frameworks such as Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) Standards, Computer Science Teachers Association (CSTA) Standards, and Digital Literacy and Computer Science (DLCS) Standards. Students apply their knowledge through real-world challenges whether designing an earthquake-resistant structure, creating a digital story, or programming drones to complete a task. Final products are presented to peers, families, or community partners, building not only technical skills but also communication and collaboration.

A critical part of our S.T.R.E.A.M. approach is building digital literacy and digital citizenship from an early age. Using the Common Sense Education curriculum, all students are explicitly taught how to navigate technology safely, ethically, and responsibly. Topics such as online privacy, cyberbullying, media balance, misinformation, and respectful digital communication are embedded throughout the year, helping students develop the awareness and habits to be effective and empathetic digital citizens.

The S.T.R.E.A.M. program is structured in three progressive academies:

- Primary Academy (K–2): Focuses on foundational skills through joyful exploration of robotics, storytelling, fine arts, and early numeracy/literacy integration.
- Exploratory Academy (3–5): Deepens conceptual knowledge in cybersecurity, coding, and virtual design while reinforcing reading and research through digital projects.
- Career Prep Academy (6–8): Connects students to high school pathways and careers through app development, ethical tech discussions, and hands-on engineering challenges.

S.T.R.E.A.M. programming is directly aligned to workforce readiness. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, STEM occupations are projected to grow 10.4% from 2023 to 2033, with a median salary over \$101,000 (BLS, 2023). Research shows that early exposure to STEM significantly increases long-term interest and persistence in these fields (Maltese & Tai, 2011). By giving students early access to high-skill pathways, especially those underrepresented in these industries, xMA is expanding opportunity and economic potential.

Social Emotional Learning

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA), Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is a foundational school design element intentionally embedded across all aspects of the academic and cultural model. SEL at xMA is not treated as an isolated program but is fully integrated into daily instructional practices through the P.O.W.E.R.S. values: Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, and Safety, which align to our Portrait of a Graduate (POG) competencies, including developing Self-Reliant Learners, Resilient Individuals, Empathetic Citizens, Problem-Solvers, and Creative Thinkers.

SEL implementation at xMA is intentionally supported by the Dean of Culture & Instruction and counselor, who ensure that SEL practices are embedded into classroom structures, daily routines, and culture systems. Each day begins with a P.O.W.E.R.S. bellringer aligned to a specific SEL focus area and designed to foster reflection, goal setting, and social-emotional growth. Bellringers often include reflection prompts, short scenario-based discussions, and opportunities for students to connect the daily theme to real-life behaviors inside and outside of the classroom. xMA also

organizes P.O.W.E.R.S. Theme Days throughout the week (Positive Attitude Mondays), where the entire school community spotlights one P.O.W.E.R.S. value, encouraging students to practice and celebrate SEL-aligned behaviors intentionally across academic and social settings.

Teachers implement SEL mini-lessons daily using the CharacterStrong curriculum, (CharacterStrong, 2023) an evidence-based program aligned to the CASEL Core Competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Lessons are differentiated through the UDL framework by offering multiple modes of engagement (group discussions, journaling, role-playing), representation (visual aids, peer models, written reflections), and expression (goal trackers, project-based SEL tasks, leadership roles) (CAST, 2024; CharacterStrong, 2023).

Students participate in daily SEL check-ins during morning meetings or entrance routines, rating their emotional state, identifying personal goals for the day, and developing short-term SEL or academic action steps. Progress Trackers include both academic pacing and SEL growth targets, reinforcing metacognition, self-reliance, and self-advocacy (Panorama Education, 2022; McCormick et al., 2023). Teachers and staff monitor SEL goals in real time, providing immediate feedback, support, and individualized strategies for emotional regulation or conflict resolution as needed. This embedded goal-setting model directly reinforces the POG traits of Self-Reliant Learner, Resilient Individual, and Empathetic Citizen, while also cultivating Critical Thinking and Collaborative Problem-Solving during peer discussions and restorative circles.

Positive behavior and leadership are further reinforced through the Hero Token and Power Credit systems, which recognize and celebrate students for demonstrating SEL-aligned behaviors such as perseverance, encouragement, respect, and ownership. Students ahead of pace academically and socially are also invited to serve as peer mentors or class assistants, modeling leadership, communication, and empathy skills essential for college, career, and community success (Roseth, Johnson, & Johnson, 2008; Patrick, 2023).

Current research strongly supports that when SEL is integrated intentionally across the academic day particularly through UDL-based flexible structures and culturally responsive leadership it results in significant gains in academic achievement, student engagement, emotional regulation, school connectedness, and life-long wellbeing (CASEL, 2023; Jones et al., 2021; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). A 2022 meta-analysis from the American Institutes for Research found that systemic SEL models led to a 27% increase in academic performance and a 24% reduction in behavioral incidents when SEL was embedded daily through goal setting, reflection routines, and explicit SEL instruction rather than taught in isolation. (AIR, 2022) CharacterStrong's own 2023 outcomes report also demonstrated measurable improvements in student empathy, resilience, and self-regulation after consistent daily integration across instructional time.(CharacterStrong, 2023)

Through this intentionally designed, research-driven SEL system, xMA ensures that social-emotional development is not supplemental but foundational, equipping students to master rigorous academics while also preparing them to lead with resilience, creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, and empathy in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

Assessment Strategies & Non-Negotiables

Assessment at xMA is formative, competency-based, and intentionally designed to advance personalized learning. Our system integrates daily Mastery Checks, unit assessments, adaptive diagnostics (i-Ready), performance-based assessments, and ongoing student reflection into a coherent data cycle that guides instruction at every level. Mastery Checks provide frequent, standards-aligned demonstrations of understanding, while unit assessments offer a more comprehensive measure of proficiency across clusters of standards, ensuring students can apply skills in both isolated and integrated contexts. i-Ready delivers baseline and growth data three times per year, supporting targeted intervention, individualized goals, and progress monitoring. Performance-based tasks including written products, demonstrations, experiments, and applied problem-solving provide students with multiple ways to show what they know, aligned with UDL principles and our standards-based rubric. Teachers analyze this real-time data daily to adjust instruction, plan flexible small groups, and identify students who need reteaching, additional practice, or enrichment. Data cycles occur in PLCs, weekly planning meetings, and during in-the-moment instructional decisions to ensure every learner receives timely and targeted support.

Students play an active role in their assessment journeys. They track progress through Personalized Learning Portfolios, which include SMART goals, mastery evidence, self-assessments, and reflections. These portfolios are reviewed quarterly during student-led conferences, where students articulate their growth, identify next steps, and demonstrate ownership of their learning.

In S.T.R.E.A.M. courses, students demonstrate mastery through interdisciplinary projects evaluated with clear rubrics and peer feedback. These authentic performance tasks mirror real-world problem-solving, collaboration, and design thinking ensuring students not only master content, but also apply it in meaningful and relevant ways.

The non-negotiables of our model include:

- Daily implementation of blended instruction and mastery-based progression to ensure students access content in multiple ways and progress when ready.
- Differentiated, mastery-based, and small-group instruction in every classroom to provide targeted support, reteaching, and enrichment aligned to student data.
- Consistent use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles across instructional design to remove barriers and increase accessibility for all learners.
- Integration of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) throughout the day to build habits of work, resilience, and a strong school culture grounded in the P.O.W.E.R.S. values.
- S.T.R.E.A.M. project-based learning that connects content to real-world applications and cultivates creativity, inquiry, and problem-solving (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008).

Compared to existing schools in Birmingham, xMA's design provides a significantly more customized, inclusive, and future-focused education. While traditional schools often rely on whole-group pacing, uniform curriculum, and limited career exposure, xMA differentiates across all instructional decisions. Every student has an individualized learning plan, every classroom incorporates multiple modalities of content delivery, and S.T.R.E.A.M. Education is embedded daily, not reserved for the few or offered after the fact. Our program is supported by an extensive research base. UDL has been widely recognized for its role in increasing access and reducing barriers (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014; CAST, 2018). Small group instruction has consistently been shown to improve reading and math outcomes, particularly when instruction is targeted and differentiated based on student need (Lou et al., 1996). Research also shows that blended and flexible learning structures where students engage with digital tools, direct instruction, and individualized practice can increase learning outcomes while reducing student stress by allowing learners to revisit content, receive timely feedback, and progress with greater clarity and confidence (AIR, 2023). Project-based assessments deepen engagement and critical thinking (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008)³³, while student portfolio systems enhance accountability and self-efficacy (Paulson et al., 1991). This model is not only about academic growth it's about student identity, purpose, and preparation for the future. Students learn to see themselves as creators, engineers, storytellers, and problem-solvers. Our interdisciplinary S.T.R.E.A.M. The model makes learning relevant and inspiring, while our personalized learning systems ensure every student has the support to succeed.

Citations

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4) Educational Need and Anticipated Student Population. Describe the anticipated student population, students anticipated educational needs, and non-academic challenges the school is likely to encounter. Describe the rationale for selecting the location and student body. Identify any enrollment priorities on which the program is based consistent with applicable restrictions on enrollment eligibility and selection. As an attachment, provide evidence of the educational need in the community.

Educational Need and Anticipated Student Population.

Educational Need and Anticipated Student Population

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy is a proposed K–8 charter school located in Birmingham, Alabama, designed to meet the needs of a richly diverse and high-potential student population. Our school model is grounded in the belief that all students deserve access to rigorous, engaging, and personalized learning opportunities that prepare them not only for academic success, but for thriving futures.

Our vision is deeply responsive to the current educational landscape of Birmingham City Schools (BCS), which serves over 19,000 students across 43 schools. The 2025 Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program (ACAP) results reveal a concerning opportunity gap; only 39% of BCS students in grades 3-8 are proficient in English Language Arts (ELA), 17% in math, and only 16% in science. (ALSDE, 2025) These figures point to the urgent need for innovative, student-centered school models that can respond to a wide range of learner profiles. Within this context, students with disabilities (SWD) who comprise approximately 16% of the BCS student population face especially stark academic challenges. According to the 2025 ACAP results, 13% of SWD are proficient in ELA, 7% in math, and 12% in science. (ALSDE, 2025) These disparities are compounded by the demographic realities of the district: as of Fall 2024, 83% of BCS students identify as Black and 14% as Hispanic, and together these students represent 96% of those receiving exceptional education services. (ALSDE, 2024) For these historically underserved populations particularly those at the intersection of race, poverty, and disability educational systems must do more to remove barriers and create meaningful, inclusive pathways to success.

Recent achievement data from Birmingham City Schools highlights significant academic challenges in East Birmingham elementary schools, particularly in mathematics and science achievement. For example, at Huffman Academy Elementary, only 37% of students are proficient in reading, 13% in math, and 10% in science, despite the school serving a population that is 86% African American and 85% economically disadvantaged. Similarly, Martha Gaskins Elementary reports 41% reading proficiency, 15% math proficiency, and 11% science proficiency, with 84% of students economically disadvantaged. Sun Valley Elementary shows comparable patterns, with 47% reading proficiency but only 17% math and 15% science proficiency, while serving a student population that is 96% African American and 81% economically disadvantaged. Achievement gaps are even more pronounced among special populations. For example, at Huffman Academy Elementary, students with disabilities demonstrate only 4% proficiency in reading and math, and ELL students show just 4% proficiency in math and science. Similar trends appear across nearby schools, where students with disabilities and English language learners consistently perform well below overall proficiency levels. While W.J. Christian Elementary shows stronger reading outcomes (82%), math and science proficiency remain significantly lower at 45% and 46%, and subgroup performance still reveals large gaps. These data points demonstrate a clear and urgent need for additional high-quality public school options in East Birmingham that provide stronger academic support, particularly in mathematics, science, and differentiated instruction for historically underserved student groups.

Birmingham City Schools Achievement Data					
School	Reading (24-25)	Math (24-25)	Science (24-25)	African American students (24-25)	Economically Disadvantage (24-25)
Huffman Academy Elementary (P-5)	37%	13%	10%%	86%	85%
Students with Disabilities	4.00%	4%	6%		
ELL	25%	4%	4%		
Martha Gaskins Elementary (K-5)	41%	15%	11%	67%	84%
Students with Disabilities	9%%	12%%	0%%		
ELL	31%%	8%	20%%		
W.J. Christian Elementary (PreK-8)	82%	45%	46%	89%%	65%
Students with Disabilities	25%	18%	17%		
ELL	57%	13%	0%		
Sun Valley Elementary (P-5)	47%	17%	15%	96%	81%
Students with Disabilities	14%%	4%%	19%		
ELL	50%%	33%	0%		

These needs are especially relevant for families in East Birmingham communities such as Huffman, Roebuck, Center Point, and surrounding neighborhoods, where many students attend schools with high concentrations of economically disadvantaged students and limited access to innovative instructional models that integrate science, technology, and applied learning. xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy is designed specifically to address these challenges by providing a rigorous academic program that emphasizes science and mathematics through a hands-on STREAM model (Science, Technology, Reading, Engineering, Arts, and Math). Through project-based learning, inquiry-driven science instruction, and real-world problem solving, students will develop strong analytical and quantitative reasoning skills. In addition to strengthening foundational literacy, the school will emphasize digital literacy and digital citizenship, ensuring that students develop the skills necessary to responsibly use technology, collaborate online, and navigate an increasingly digital world. This focus is particularly important as Alabama’s workforce continues to expand in technology, engineering, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing sectors that require strong STEM competencies and digital skills. By combining personalized learning, STREAM-integrated instruction, and targeted support for diverse learners, xMA will provide families in East Birmingham with a high-quality public school option designed to accelerate academic growth, close achievement gaps, and prepare students for future success in high-demand fields.

Anticipated Academic and Nonacademic Challenges

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy anticipates serving a richly diverse population of students in Birmingham, Alabama, many of whom are historically underserved in traditional school settings. Based on enrollment trends from Birmingham City Schools (BCS) and community-level indicators, our students are expected to reflect the demographic and academic composition of the district: as of Fall 2024, 83% of BCS students identify as Black, 14% as Hispanic, and 80% qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, a widely used indicator of poverty (ALSDE, 2024).

Academically, students across BCS continue to face challenges in core content proficiency. As mentioned before, according to the 2025 Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program (ACAP) results point to widespread learning gaps that begin early and persist across grade levels. Many

incoming students at xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy are likely to have experienced interrupted instruction, unfinished learning, and a lack of consistent access to grade-level content especially in foundational literacy and numeracy (TNTP, 2021) .

Non-academic indicators further underscore the need for comprehensive and responsive school support. Chronic absenteeism in BCS is 28.7%, significantly higher than the state average (ALSDE, 2024) . Birmingham students also face significant socio-emotional and mental health needs, with local data showing higher-than-average exposure to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), such as housing insecurity, food instability, and trauma (Jefferson County Health Department, 2023) . According to Alabama Possible’s 2024 Jefferson County Data Sheet, 43.5% of children in Jefferson County live in households below the ALICE survival budget meaning families are working but cannot afford basic needs like housing, food, and transportation (Alabama Possible, 2024) .

Students with disabilities (SWD) make up approximately 16% of the district’s student population based on current BCS demographics (ALSDE, 2024) . These students currently demonstrate the lowest proficiency levels in the district 13% in ELA, 7% in math, and 12% in science according to the 2025 ACAP results (ALSDE, 2025). They are also disproportionately represented in exclusionary discipline practices, which contributes to lower engagement and academic persistence (U.S. Department of Education, 2021) . Additionally, a significant portion of the student body will likely include English Language Learners (ELLs), who account for 6–8% of BCS enrollment (ALSDE, 2024) and often require dual support in both content access and language development (NCES, 2023) .

In totality, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy expects to serve students who bring a wide range of academic readiness levels, social-emotional needs, learning differences, and life experiences. Meeting these complex needs will require a holistic, equitable approach that honors learner variability and responds to both academic and non-academic barriers to success.

xMA expects to serve a student population with demographic characteristics comparable to Birmingham City Schools.

Projected Student Demographics

Student Demographics	xMA	BCS
% Black	85%	83%
% Latino/Hispanic	5%	9%
% Asian, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	<1%	<1%
% American Indian, Native American, Alaska Native	0%	0.6%
% White	5%	6%
% Economically Disadvantaged	85%	90%
% English Language Learners	5%	11%
% Students with Special Needs	20%	16%

Enrollment Priorities

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy will adhere to Alabama’s open-enrollment and lottery-based charter school regulations. In the event of oversubscription, we will implement a transparent lottery process. As permitted by law, enrollment priorities will be given in the following order:

1. Students residing within the Birmingham City Schools district;
2. Siblings of currently enrolled students;
3. Children of school founders, board members, or full-time staff, not exceeding 10% of enrollment;
- 4.

Students residing outside the BCS district.

Our enrollment strategy is designed to be equitable while honoring community relationships and ensuring access for those most in need of high-quality, personalized education.

Evidence of Educational Need **File name:** MC.Birmingham.2025 ACAP_ACT Proficiency Results.xlsx

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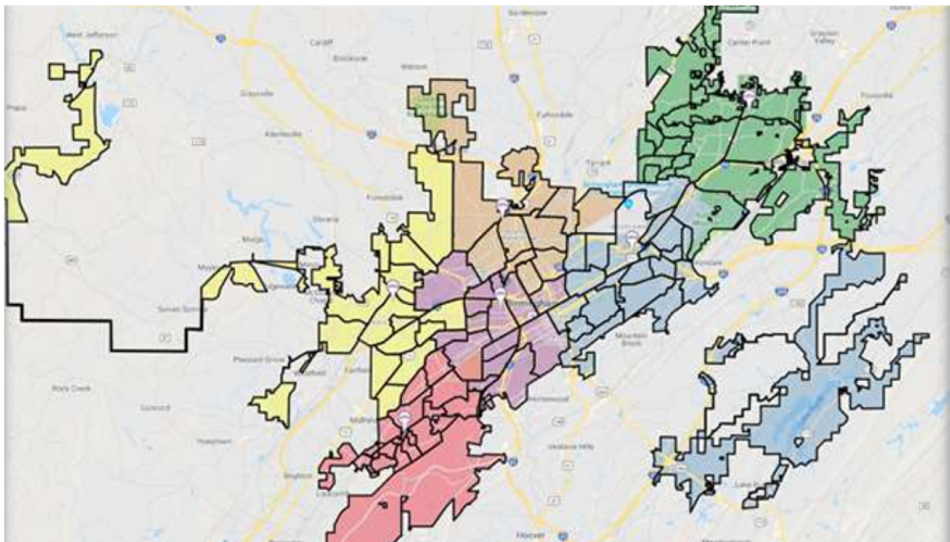
5) Community Engagement. Describe the relationships within the community that have been established to generate community support for the proposed school. Briefly describe and provide evidence of these activities and summarize their results. Examples of community engagement evidence are documents such as community meeting sign in sheets, agendas, and survey results.

Community Engagement

Community Engagement

Community engagement has been integral to the design of xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA). From the outset, the founding team committed to building a school with families and community partners across Birmingham. Through this work, xMA has cultivated meaningful relationships with parents, caregivers, youth programs, childcare centers, libraries, faith-based organizations, and local small businesses, each contributing insight into the needs and aspirations of East Birmingham families. We have held over 75 individual meetings, over 125 community engagement survey responses and over 30 letters of support and have over 87 families interested to date. East Birmingham emerged as the primary focus area based on clear community need and strong family demand. The region includes more than 1,500 children ages 3–6, representing one of the densest early-learner populations in the city.

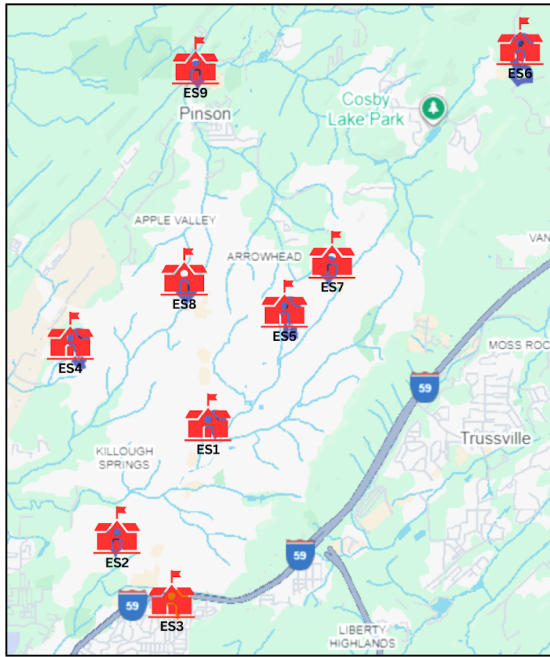
Figure (1): Birmingham City Schools Target Zone Map



All BCS Map

Target Green Zone- East Birmingham

Figure (2): Enrollment Feasibility



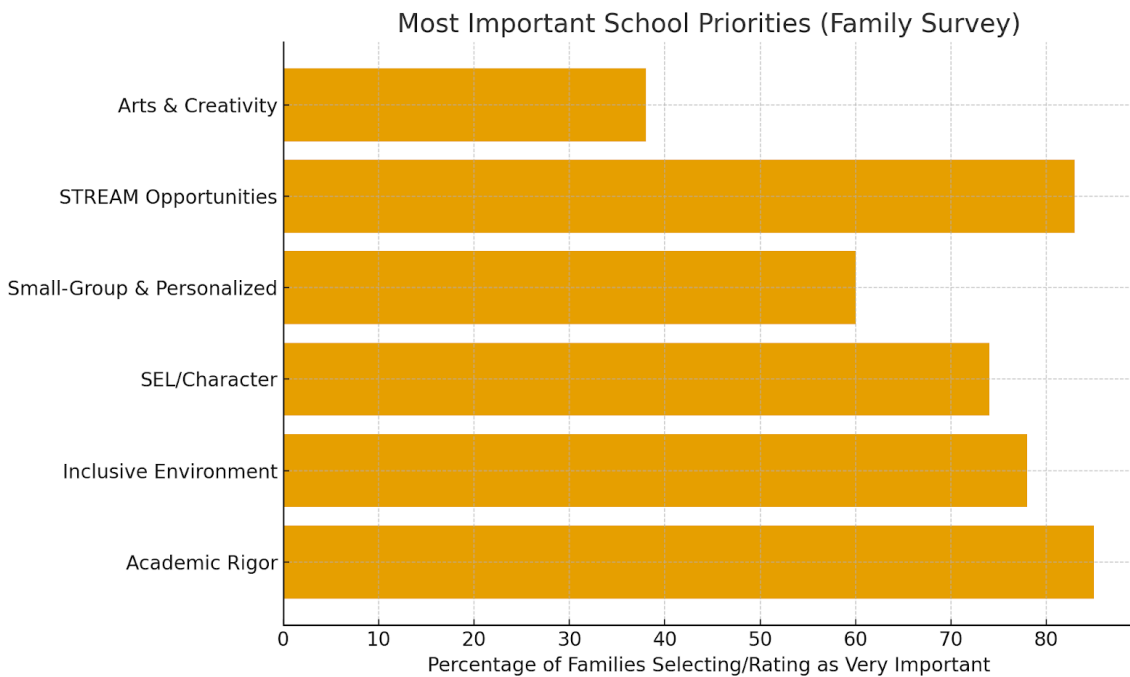
Priority Outreach- East Birmingham	
School	K-Enrollment (24-25)
1. Huffman Academy Elementary (P-5)	143
2. Martha Gaskins Elementary (K-5)	80
3. W.J. Christian Elementary (PreK-8)	38
4. Sun Valley Elementary (P-5)	103
Total-K enrollment BCS	364
5 Surrounding schools	732
Total- K enrollment	1096

These neighborhoods also serve schools where 67–96% of students are African American, 65–96% are economically disadvantaged, and substantial percentages are students with disabilities (4–25%) or English Learners (25–57%). Families consistently expressed concerns about limited small-group instruction, insufficient personalized support, and the desire for a school that “truly sees their child.” These insights aligned directly with xMA’s STREAM-integrated, personalized, mastery-based model. xMA launched a multi-phase community engagement strategy to assess demand and co-design the model.

Phase 1 (August–December 2024) centered on deep listening through more than 75 one-on-one conversations with parents, early childhood providers, disability advocates, and neighborhood organizations. The team also visited high-performing schools nationwide through BES and New Schools for Alabama, gaining insight into inclusive culture systems, family-centered practices, and STREAM-aligned environments. This feedback shaped core design elements, including daily STREAM instruction, targeted small-group learning, PLPs, and SEL structures grounded in the P.O.W.E.R.S. values.

Phase 2 (January 2025–July 2026) expanded this foundation through 125+ family surveys, multiple Parent Information Sessions, and ongoing presence at community events and neighborhood hubs. The founding team hosted coffee chats, lunch-and-learn sessions, and both virtual and in-person community meetings, creating accessible, low-pressure opportunities for families to engage with the school’s design. These conversations allowed parents to hear the vision, ask questions, and provide candid feedback about what they want from a high-quality public school.

Figure (3): School Priorities



Across all engagement formats, families consistently emphasized the need for stronger small-group instruction, STREAM-aligned hands-on learning, personalized supports, and a school culture that centers SEL, relationships, and high expectations. These insights directly shaped xMA’s instructional model and strengthened momentum for the school’s launch.

Phase 3 (June 2025–May 2027) focuses on a comprehensive, community-centered recruitment and enrollment strategy ahead of the Fall 2026 application window. The founding team will continue canvassing neighborhoods, tabling at childcare centers and local businesses, and hosting seasonal family events that introduce families to xMA’s STREAM, personalized learning, and SEL model. Digital outreach including Facebook Live Q&As, text updates, and captioned videos will ensure accessibility for families with varying internet access. Partnerships with nonprofits, churches, daycare centers, and civic groups will support at least ten information sessions and targeted “From Diapers to Diplomas” chats. Survey data showing strong interest in Parent Workshops (67%), Volunteer Opportunities (54%), and Parent Advisory Councils (49%) will guide the design of family engagement and onboarding systems.

Through this intentional, relationship-centered approach, xMA has built a strong foundation of trust, demonstrated demand, and a shared commitment to delivering a high-quality, inclusive public school option for East Birmingham’s young learners

Evidence of Community Engagement

File 1

File name: _xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy Family Feedback Survey (Responses)-Application (1).xlsx
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File 2

File name: _xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy Community Feedback (Responses)- Application (2).xlsx
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Uploaded by: Melissa Capehart

File 3

File name: _xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy Community Feedback (Responses)- Application (1).xlsx
Uploaded: 03/11/2026 02:50 PM
Uploaded by: Melissa Capehart

File 4

File name: XMA events- application.pdf
Uploaded: 03/11/2026 02:50 PM
Uploaded by: Melissa Capehart

6) Leadership and Governance. In an attachment list the members of the school's proposed leadership team and governing board, including their roles with the school and their current job title and employer.

Leadership and Governance **File name:** xMA Board_Leadership Chart-for Application-F (1).pdf
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Uploaded by: Melissa Capehart

7) Leadership Narrative. Provide a brief summary of how the leadership and board's collective experience and expertise is well suited to support the operation of a high-quality charter school.

Leadership Narrative

The leadership team and governing board of xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy collectively brings distinguished expertise across educational leadership, curriculum and instruction, finance and contracting, executive operations, real estate and facilities development, nonprofit governance, communications strategy, mental health services, and STEM innovation. Together, this breadth and depth of experience position xMA to successfully open and sustainably operate a high-quality public charter school serving Birmingham families.

Executive Leadership

Dr. Melissa Capehart, Founder and Proposed Executive Director, brings more than a decade of experience in K–12 education, instructional leadership, and district-level innovation. She holds a Doctorate in Educational Leadership, an Education Specialist Degree in Instructional Leadership, Instructional Leadership Certification, a Master of Arts in Teaching and Bachelors in History and Psychology. Her academic preparation reflects advanced expertise in school administration, instructional systems design, mastery-based learning, and data-driven school improvement.

Prior to serving as a District Technology Integration Specialist, Dr. Capehart was a middle and high school social studies teacher, teaching Advanced Placement U.S. History, Government and Economics, AP Psychology, and Career Preparedness courses. During her time in the classroom, she was an early adopter and leader in mastery-based learning and digital portfolio implementation, presenting to educators on the use of digital portfolios to track student mastery, reflection, and ownership of learning. Her instructional leadership was recognized through numerous professional honors, including Teacher of the Year and Hoover City Schools' "Teacher in the Trenches" distinction, reflecting excellence both in classroom instruction and instructional coaching.

As a District Technology Integration Specialist, Dr. Capehart led the implementation of digital portfolio systems at the middle school level and supported more than 2,000 educators through professional development, coaching, and systems implementation. She trained and coached teachers in the Modern Classrooms Project instructional model, which focuses on personalized learning through mastery-based progression, blended learning, and self-paced instructional structures. She continues to serve as a Modern Classrooms Project instructional coach, training and mentoring educators around the world in implementing personalized, mastery-based instructional systems that improve student ownership and academic outcomes. She led district-wide STEM initiatives, robotics programming, coding expansion, GEMS, GreenPower engineering projects, and digital learning implementation that directly aligned with xMA's STREAM-centered model.

Academic and Instructional Expertise

Dr. Amanda Giles brings exceptional academic leadership experience spanning K–12 and higher education. As a former Assistant Principal, she supervised curriculum implementation, led instructional improvement efforts, analyzed school-wide student achievement data, and mentored teachers to improve instructional effectiveness. She holds a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction and National Board Certification, demonstrating nationally recognized expertise in instructional leadership and teaching excellence. In her current role as a Clinical Assistant Professor at the University of Alabama in Huntsville, she prepares future educators, supervises instructional programs, and contributes to federally funded educational initiatives designed to improve academic outcomes for diverse student populations. Her extensive publication record and research in English learner instruction, culturally responsive pedagogy, and collaborative teaching ensure that xMA's academic model is grounded in research-based best practices.

Beth Sanders brings extensive experience in STEM education and nonprofit educational leadership through her executive role at Ed Farm, where she has worked to expand access to technology education, digital literacy, and STEM learning opportunities. Her work has included developing educational programming, supporting school partnerships, and expanding access to innovative learning environments for historically underserved students. Her leadership in educational innovation and technology integration directly aligns with xMA's STREAM model and strengthens the board's capacity to oversee rigorous, future-focused academic programming.

Finance and Operations Expertise

The board brings exceptional financial oversight capacity through members with direct experience managing school budgets, nonprofit organizational finances, government contracts, and large-scale operational expenditures.

Courtney Winston contributes extensive executive-level expertise in financial management, operational oversight, and regulatory compliance. She currently serves as Director at Merrill Lynch and previously held senior executive roles at Bank of America, including Senior Vice President, Region Operations Manager and Consumer Banking Market Leader, where she oversaw operations across up to 180 financial centers serving more than 1.3 million customers and supervised more than 1,000 employees. In these roles, she managed operational performance, financial controls, risk management, and regulatory compliance across large-scale banking environments. Her experience overseeing profit and loss performance, implementing internal controls, and monitoring operational and financial performance ensures that xMA's board possesses exceptional financial governance capacity. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Finance and maintains multiple FINRA securities licenses, reflecting advanced financial expertise and regulatory knowledge.

Krishula Edwards brings sophisticated public-sector contracting and financial oversight expertise. As a Contracting Specialist with the U.S. Department of the Air Force, she negotiates contracts, analyzes

cost proposals, ensures regulatory compliance, and oversees contract performance, providing critical expertise in procurement, financial accountability, and fiscal oversight.

Evan Cottrell (Parent) brings extensive financial, operational, and project management expertise through his work in business operations, technology systems, and real estate. He currently serves as a Project Manager at SAP, where he supports compensation planning and operational systems for more than 1,150 employees, aligning financial incentive structures, managing operational processes, and supporting organizational financial planning initiatives. His role requires direct involvement in financial operations, stakeholder coordination, performance planning, and operational execution across a large global organization. Additionally, Evan brings real estate and financial services experience through his work as a Realtor and his previous role as a Personal Banker at Wells Fargo, where he provided financial guidance, supported investment and banking decisions, and built client financial portfolios. His experience evaluating financial opportunities, managing transactions, and guiding clients through major financial decisions strengthens the board's financial literacy and oversight capacity. Evan also brings extensive project management expertise, including leading cross-functional initiatives, managing organizational systems, overseeing operational workflows, and driving strategic improvements. His Google Project Management certification and professional experience managing complex operational systems ensure disciplined planning, execution, and oversight as xMA implements facilities, operational, and financial initiatives

Dr. Amanda Giles further strengthens the board's financial capacity through her experience managing school budgets as a school administrator, overseeing institutional and grant-funded program budgets at the university level, and serving as Treasurer of the TESOL professional organization, where she oversees nonprofit financial governance and budgeting.

Beth Sanders also brings significant nonprofit financial leadership through her role as Vice President of Ed Farm, where she manages nonprofit budgets, supports fundraising strategy, oversees partnership development, and ensures responsible stewardship of grant and philanthropic funding.

Governance Expertise

Megan Skipper brings strategic communications and board leadership expertise, supporting stakeholder engagement, branding alignment, and transparent community messaging. Her experience in organizational communications ensures that xMA maintains strong public trust, clear messaging, and consistent engagement with families and partners.

Krishula Edwards contributes extensive governance experience, having served in multiple board leadership roles across nonprofit and professional organizations. Her service on boards, advisory councils, and executive committees reflects demonstrated experience in fiduciary oversight, policy development, fundraising strategy, and organizational accountability. Her prior leadership roles including presidency within professional associations illustrate experience guiding strategic direction and upholding governance best practices. Collectively, board members bring firsthand experience in nonprofit board service, executive advisory roles, and community leadership, ensuring that xMA's governing board operates with clarity, accountability, and adherence to its policy-setting and oversight responsibilities.

Mental Health and Student Support Expertise

Kourtney Bilbo (Parent), a Licensed Professional Counselor and Senior Counselor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, brings extensive clinical, school-based, and community mental health experience serving Birmingham-area students. Her professional background includes conducting assessments, implementing treatment plans, providing individual and family counseling, and delivering psychoeducational programming. Her certifications as a Registered Play Therapist™, EMDR therapist, and Mental Health First Aid Instructor provide strong oversight of trauma-informed practices and social-emotional learning systems.

Krishula Edwards further strengthens this capacity through her clinical counseling background, crisis intervention leadership, and community advocacy experience. Together, these professionals ensure that student well-being, safety systems, and SEL frameworks are guided by individuals with deep subject-matter expertise.

Collective Capacity to Open and Operate

As a unified leadership body, the xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy team brings comprehensive and complementary expertise across instructional leadership, curriculum development, financial man-

agement, public-sector contracting, executive operations, real estate evaluation, project management, nonprofit governance, mental health services, communications strategy, and STEM innovation. This collective capacity ensures that the school is prepared not only to launch successfully, but to sustain high levels of academic performance, regulatory compliance, fiscal responsibility, operational excellence, and community trust. The board's combined professional accomplishments reflect demonstrated leadership in complex organizations, financial stewardship, systems oversight, and educational innovation providing the depth, experience, and strategic discipline necessary to open and operate a high-quality public charter school that delivers measurable outcomes for Birmingham families.

8) Revenue Sources. A brief description of the school's anticipated revenue sources. Distinguish between the pre-opening and after opening periods. This includes, but is not limited to: state funding, federal funding, federal grants, nonfederal grants and other large or small philanthropic funding. Indicate whether the funding has been secured, secured with charter authorization, applied for, or intent to apply.

Revenue Sources

The school anticipated revenues sources during the pre-opening periods are primarily philanthropy, CSP grant funds, predevelopment lending, and two months of foundation funding from the state to cover payroll during August and September of the opening year. Upon opening the school will receive typical state and federal funds on a monthly basis as any public school does.

The school has already secured \$578,500 in funding and is ahead of schedule toward raising \$3 million or more for startup and facilities needs. Additional funding is contingent upon approval and will take the school to over \$1 million in startup funds within a few months of approval. Other funds are applied for or will be applied for, such as CSP startup funding.

9) Enrollment Summary. Give the grades served and enrollment projections for both the first year of operation and when at full capacity

Enrollment Summary Spread-sheet	File name:	xMA Attachment - Enrollment Summary Spreadsheet 2026.xlsx
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	Uploaded by:	Melissa Capehart

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

3. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM DESIGN AND CAPACITY

The Educational Program Design and Capacity section demonstrates the school's readiness to provide a high-quality educational experience on opening day and throughout the charter contract period. This section emphasizes research-based instructional methods, assessment strategies, curriculum alignment with state standards, and the implementation of effective teaching practices. It aims to establish a strong foundation for academic excellence for all students. Applicants must present a well-rounded educational framework that meets the needs of the anticipated student population while adhering to state requirements.

1. Program Overview

Reviewer Instructions

Please rate the application using the provided rubric.

Status: Completed

Form Result

Summarize the unifying theoretical educational framework of the school model, ensuring it is evidence-based and aligns with best practices.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Compelling evidence of a unifying educational framework that will directly and consistently address the needs of the anticipated population and that clearly demonstrates the likelihood of all students meeting or exceeding the state standard.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

a) Provide compelling evidence of a theoretical educational framework that includes current best practices for high quality primary instructional methods, assessment strategies, and other elements of the school model. There must be evidence that it is research based, so it must be cited.

Education Framework Narrative

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy, our mission is to reimagine the learning experience for all learners through S.T.R.E.A.M. exploration, personalized learning and social emotional growth. Our approach centers on three foundational design elements: Personalized Learning, S.T.R.E.A.M. (Science, Technology, Reading, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics), and Social-Emotional Learning embedded in our core P.O.W.E.R.S. values. These pillars reflect decades of learning science and whole-child research, confirming that students learn best when instruction is personalized, mastery-focused, socially connected, and integrated with real-world relevance (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019; CASEL, 2020). We operationalize our model through four evidence-based instructional methods embedded across all grade levels: Mastery-Based Learning, Blended Learning, Small Group Instruction, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL)/Differentiation.

Personalized Learning- Instructional Strategies

1. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Framework

At x S.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA), our approach to personalized learning is all instruction is designed through the lens of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). UDL ensures that every student regardless of ability, language, or background can access rigorous content and demonstrate learning in ways aligned to their strengths. UDL is embedded into lesson planning and classroom design by offering multiple means of representation (e.g., visual supports, videos, manipulatives, texts), multiple means of action and expression (e.g., writing, speaking, performance tasks), and multiple means of engagement (e.g., choice, relevance, collaboration) (CAST, 2018)^{3t}.

Instruction is both personalized and self-paced, with each student’s pathway guided by their “Power Profile”, a Personalized Learning Plan grounded in diagnostic and formative data. Self-pacing means students move through lessons at their own speed, advancing only after demonstrating mastery. This approach directly cultivates two of xMA’s core Portrait of a Graduate (POG) competencies: Self-Reliant Learners, who set goals, track their growth, and persist through challenges, and Resilient Individuals, who adapt and take ownership of their learning journey. The flexibility of self-pacing, paired with high expectations for mastery, also reinforces our P.O.W.E.R.S. values, especially Ownership Now and Work Hard.

Each student maintains a daily progress tracker aligned to their Power Profile. These unit Challenge Board tracker outlines assignments and soft due dates:





- Must Do – Core instructional and practice activities essential for mastery
- ~~S~~hould Do – Targeted scaffolding for unfinished learning or concept review
- ~~A~~spire to Do – Extension and enrichment tasks for deeper understanding
- ~~M~~astery Check – A short 3–5 question assessment or performance task aligned to standards

The xMA Lesson Choice Board (Figure 5) is a comprehensive, student-centered tool that brings all components of the Must Do, Should Do, Aspire to Do, and Mastery Check into one cohesive format, aligned to a single academic standard or lesson objective. These learning activities are organized as a personalized menu of options that allow students to engage with content through digital or hands-on practice based on their learning preferences. For example, a student may choose an interactive vocabulary game from i-Ready or a comprehension activity from MyWorld Interactive for Social Studies. Aspire to Do tasks might include drawing and labeling a big idea from the lesson, recording a short video to explain their understanding, or designing a poster to teach others. This structure empowers students to take ownership of their learning path: Students complete one Must Do instructional task (teacher-led or video-based), may opt into a Should Do bonus for extra practice, and can challenge themselves with an Aspire–PowerUP! to earn points toward their Mastery Check, which is submitted through Google Classroom. This format promotes agency, reinforces key content, and provides a clear path to mastery.

Each Choice Board functions as a single-lesson component within a larger unit-level xMA Unit Challenge Board, a visual tracker that helps students monitor their progress, track completed lessons, identify mastered skills, and see what tasks remain. The Challenge Board supports goal-setting, metacognition, and executive functioning core attributes of a Creative Thinker and Problem Solver, two essential Portrait of a Graduate (POG) competencies at xMA.

Figure (5): xMA Lesson Choice Board



Lesson 1: Lowercase Letters

Complete 1 task from each horizontal row.		
<p>Must Do!</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Watch a Video.</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p style="font-size: small; text-align: center;">Watch and complete the questions in the Ed Puzzle lesson video.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Learn w/ Ms. C</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p style="font-size: small; text-align: center;">Add your star to Ms. C chart, complete the lesson. Complete Must Do video + practice.</p>
<p>Should Do Bonus</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Practice with i-Ready</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p style="font-size: small; text-align: center;">Practice + play letter game. i-Ready until you reach at least 80%.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Practice & Apply</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p style="font-size: small; text-align: center;">Complete task box flash card activity. Complete i-Ready game.</p>
<p style="font-size: small; color: #4a008a;">Aspire-PowerUP!</p> <p style="font-size: x-small; color: #4a008a;">+1 Above Mastery point toward MC score.</p> <p style="font-size: small; color: #4a008a;">Create a paper alphabet book or record a video showing letters a-z individually or with a partner.</p>		
<p style="font-size: small; color: white;">Mastery Check</p> <p style="font-size: x-small; color: white;">Turn into Google Classroom.</p>		

Students use their Challenge Board progress tracker and Choice Board together as both a daily checklist and schedule, determining which station to begin with and which tasks to complete. These tools are reviewed each morning during whole-group SEL and Goal-Setting check-ins, where students reflect on their learning progress and teachers support them in setting personal goals for the day. While soft deadlines help ensure momentum and accountability, students complete assignments at a pace aligned to their understanding moving forward only when mastery is demonstrated. This structure builds independence, self-regulation, and reflection (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011; Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009), and reinforces the P.O.W.E.R.S. values of Positive Attitude, Respect All, and Safety, by promoting autonomy, collaboration, and clarity in learning expectations.

Students can choose between teacher led instruction or video-based instruction delivered by teachers or videos from our , iReady, MyWorld Interactive, or StemScopes curriculum is completed or pulled for small-group reteaching in the ~~Blue~~ Station. These short, standards-aligned lessons include embedded comprehension checks to ensure understanding. Students then complete Must Do practice activities and, if ready, move on to Should Do tasks. If mastery is achieved in practice, students proceed to the ~~Green~~ Station for a Mastery Check. If not, they revisit the concept through a Should Do or can complete Asipre to Do activities at ~~Yellow~~ Station. The xMA Instructional Block Schedule (Figure 6) shows how personalized learning is embedded within a 60-minute, K-2, ELA class block. Each session begins with social-emotional learning (SEL) check-ins and vocabulary routines, transitions into three station-based rotations grounded in blended and small group learning, and concludes with personalized digital learning through iReady. Color-coded stations Blue for teacher-led instruction, Yellow for Practice, Green for mastery assessments, and Red for adaptive PLP practice create a highly visible, easy-to-follow classroom flow. Research on station rotation models indicates that they are especially effective in supporting differentiated instruction, reducing classroom management issues, and promoting on-task behavior (Pane et al., 2015; Basham et al., 2020; Christensen Institute, 2021). These models are particularly impactful in urban school settings where instructional time and teacher capacity must be maximized. Students use Challenge Boards and Choice Boards to track their progress through standards-based learning activities, aligned to each student's Power Profile. These tools promote academic ownership and build executive functioning skills like planning, metacognition, and self-monitoring. At the same time, teachers utilize real-time digital Teacher Progress Trackers to identify pacing needs, group students for small-group instruction, and differentiate assignments and assessments. Research affirms that student-facing trackers improve goal setting, motivation, and self-regulation especially when paired with visual learning maps and formative feedback (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011; Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009; Nagaoka et al., 2020). Teacher-facing progress dashboards also significantly increase the precision of instructional groupings and support timely interventions (Levine & Patrick, 2019; Tomlinson, 2023).
Figure (6): K-2 xMA Instructional Block Schedule

xMA Instructional ELA Block Schedule

Time	Student Activities 	Teacher Activities 
0:00-0:05	SEL Check-In, Goal Setting, Progress Tracker Update	Co-teacher: Lead SEL check-in, monitor tracker data, support goal setting
0:05-0:10	Vocabulary Bellringer	Lead Teacher: Lead Word of the Day Vocab Bellringer
0:10-0:20	Students choose 1 station based on their Challenge Board Progress Tracker Yellow Station: Must Do Video Lesson or Should Do Practice or Aspire to Do; Blue Station: Small Group 1 Reteach; Green Station: Mastery Check as needed	Students choose 1 station based on their Challenge Board Progress Tracker Lead Teacher: Small Group 1; Co-Teacher: Support & stations
0:20-0:30	Yellow Station: Continue Must Do, Should Do, Aspire to Do; Blue Station: Small Group 2 Reteach; Green Station: Mastery Check	Lead Teacher: Small Group 2; Co-Teacher: Support & stations
0:30-0:40	Yellow Station: Must Do Video Lesson, or Should Do Practice, or Aspire to Do Blue Station: Small Group 3 Reteach or Enrichment; Green Station: Mastery Check	Lead Teacher: Small Group 3; Co-Teacher: Support & stations
0:40-0:45	Wrap Up: Update their Unit Challenge Board Progress Tracker, and Goal setter for the next day	Teacher & Co-teacher: Review and support students while updating their tracker to inform Teacher Tracker & small groups for the next day
0:45-1:00	Red Station: PLP/iReady Personalized Pathway students work on personalized math pathway lessons	Teacher & Co-teacher: Monitor and support iReady station

By integrating UDL, student agency through Choice and Challenge Boards, and self-paced blended learning aligned to their Power Profile, xMA ensures learning is accessible, personalized, and engaging for every student. This approach is especially effective for diverse learners, including students with disabilities, English Learners, and gifted students, by eliminating barriers and fostering both confidence and competence (Basham et al., 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2019; Pane et al., 2017). It also actively nurtures our Portrait of a Graduate goals ensuring that by the time students leave xMA, they are creative thinkers, problem solvers, resilient, empathetic, and self-reliant learners equipped to thrive in the world ahead.

1. Mastery-Based Learning

xMA’s mastery-based learning model elevates personalized instruction by requiring students to demonstrate proficiency typically 80–90% accuracy before progressing to new content. This stands in contrast to traditional pacing models where all students move through the curriculum at the same rate, regardless of whether deep understanding has been achieved. Research is clear that when students advance before mastering foundational concepts, learning gaps compound over time, becoming increasingly difficult to close (Bloom, 1984; Guskey, 2010; Marzano, 2017). Mastery-Based Instruction (MBI) directly interrupts this pattern by ensuring time becomes a variable and learning becomes the constant.

xMA’s implementation of MBI is grounded in its research-based foundations. MBI traces its roots to Benjamin Bloom’s landmark work in the 1960s, which demonstrated that one-on-one tutoring could dramatically accelerate student learning regardless of starting proficiency (Bloom, 1968, 1984). Fred

Keller later translated Bloom's insights into a classroom-based model called the Personalized System of Instruction, an early and influential precursor to modern mastery-based learning (Keller, 1968). Across decades of research and multiple iterations, the consistent finding is clear: students who are academically behind and students who are advanced both learn more and learn more deeply when schools use mastery-based models implemented with fidelity (Guskey, 2007, 2010; Marzano, 2017). At xMA, MBI is not a set of isolated strategies but a carefully designed instructional system with clear, non-negotiable components:

1. Clear Learning Goals

Before instruction begins, teachers identify the specific knowledge and skills students must master. These goals anchor instruction, assessments, and feedback, ensuring consistency and clarity. Establishing these expectations in advance prevents the subjective or uneven implementation that can undermine mastery-based work.

2. Instruction and Initial Learning

All students first receive high-quality, grade-level instruction on core concepts. This may occur through direct instruction, small-group instruction, blended learning stations, or hands-on practice tasks depending on the lesson's design.

3. Formative Assessment

After initial instruction and practice, students complete a formative assessment that measures their current level of understanding. This assessment is not punitive; it is diagnostic. It helps teachers identify where students are succeeding and where targeted support is needed.

4. Feedback and Corrective Activities (or Enrichment)

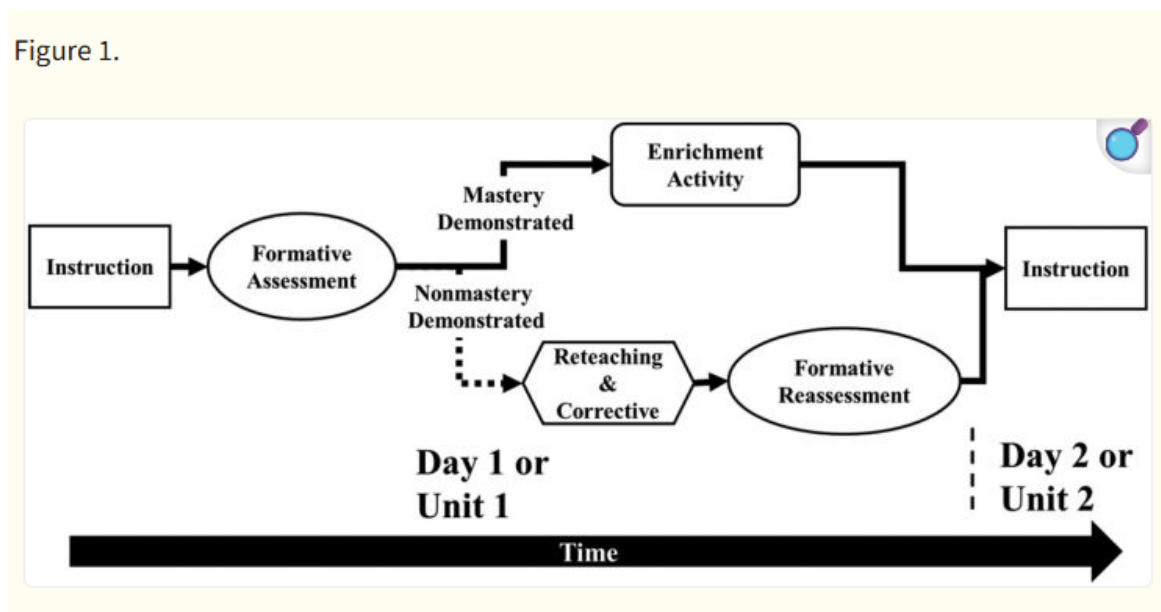
- For students who do not reach 80–90% mastery: Teachers provide specific feedback and corrective learning activities designed to be different from the original instruction so students can relearn concepts through alternative modalities.
- For students who achieve mastery: Enrichment or extension tasks offer challenge, depth, and application opportunities to further stretch thinking.

This system ensures that no child sits idle and no child is left behind.

5. Summative Assessment

Students demonstrate mastery before advancing. Summative assessments validate student readiness to move on and ensure that skills are solid, transferable, and connected to grade-level expectations.

Figure (7): Mastery Based Learning Cycle



(National Institutes of Health, 2022)

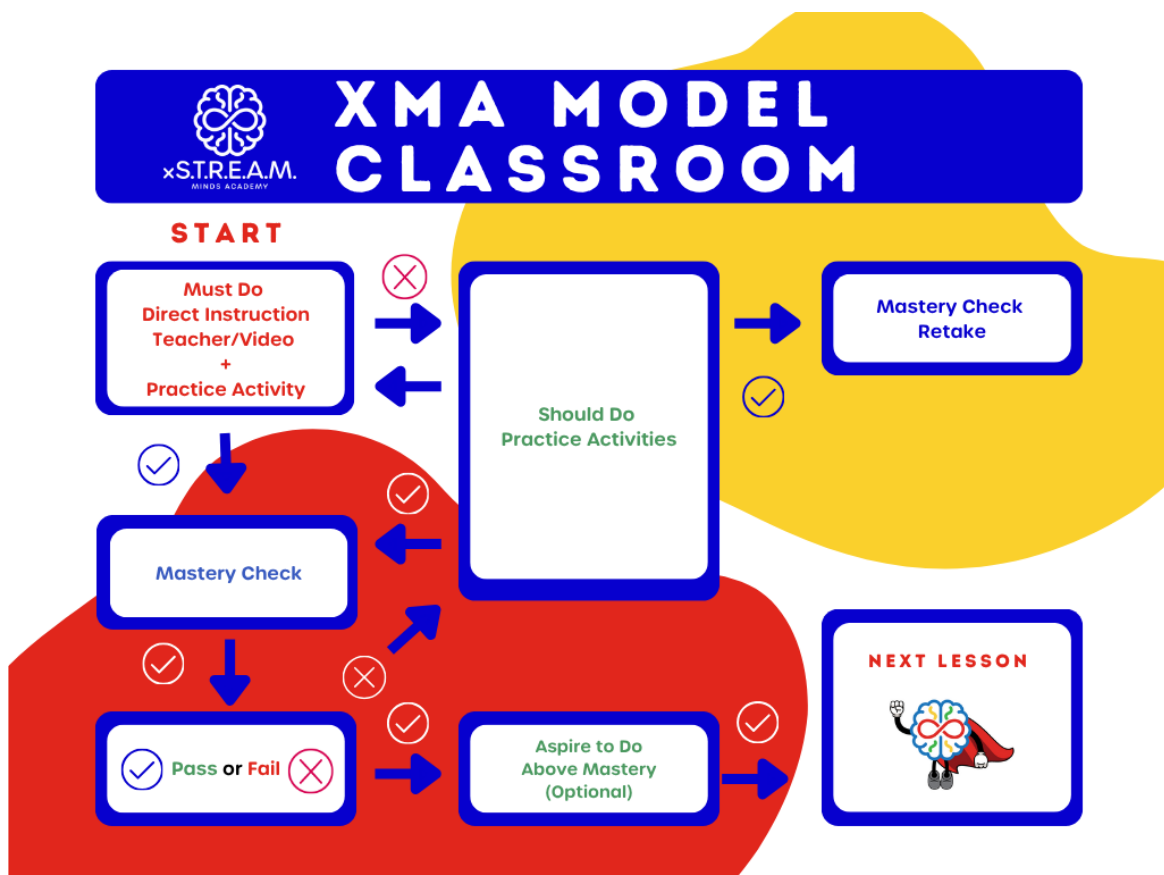
Figure (8) illustrates how Mastery-Based Instruction operates in a typical xMA classroom. Students engage with learning goals through a structured progression of Must Do ' Should Do ' Aspire to Do

activities aligned to xMA's 1–4 mastery rubric. After initial instruction and practice, students complete a Mastery Check only when they are ready demonstrating their understanding of the targeted skill or concept.

- Students scoring below a “3” revisit instruction through targeted corrective pathways, either with teacher support or through alternative modalities provided in the Should Do tasks.
- Students earning a “3” demonstrate readiness to move forward after showing accurate, consistent understanding.
- Students earning a “4” engage in Aspire to Do enrichment activities that deepen, extend, or apply their learning in more complex ways.

Teachers use the results of each Mastery Check to determine flexible small-group instruction, reteaching needs, and enrichment opportunities. Students track their mastery daily using personalized learning trackers, reinforcing ownership, metacognition, and goal-setting. To celebrate growth, students earn Hero Bucks or Power Credits for demonstrating mastery, perseverance, and academic habits, which are recognized at weekly House celebrations.

Figure(8): xMA Model Classroom



Feedback is central to this model. Teachers confer with students one-on-one or in small groups to unpack their results, clarify misconceptions, and plan next steps. This feedback loop fosters metacognition, goal setting, and reflection key skills emphasized in xMA's Portrait of a Graduate,

particularly the traits of Self-Reliant Learners and Resilient Individuals. Students are not penalized for needing additional attempts but are expected to revise, reflect, and persist living out the P.O.W.E.R.S. values of Work Hard, Ownership Now, and Positive Attitude every step of the way.

The xMA Teacher Progress Tracker (Figure 9) is a data-driven tool that supports teachers in monitoring student progress, pacing, and mastery across each unit. This visual tracker clearly identifies each student’s current lesson, status (e.g., Behind/Ahead of Pace or Revise), and performance on Must Do, Mastery Checks, and Aspire to Do extension tasks. Teachers can instantly see who needs reteaching, who’s ready to move on, and who may need support or acceleration. Color-coded indicators and real-time updates help drive targeted small group instruction, ensure timely intervention, and reinforce a culture of mastery-based learning.

Figure (9): xMA Teacher Progress Tracker- Shows example of Teacher Progress Tracker for students used to inform instructional groups and support

On Pace Lesson	#N/A	Unit #1						
Today's Date	October 26	Suggested Due Date	August 3	August 4	August 7	August 5	August 10	August 12
Student	Status	Lesson Classification	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.2
			Must Do	Bonus	PowerUps	Mastery Chec	Must Do	Bonus
Kenny	Behind Pace	Work on 1.2	mastered	mastered	mastered	mastered	now	
Conway	Behind Pace	Work on 1.1	mastered	mastered	excused	now		
Bob	Revise	Work on 1.1	mastered	revise				
Marty	Behind Pace	Work on 1.1	now					
Kitty	Behind Pace	Work on 1.1	mastered	mastered	now	mastered	mastered	now
Hank	Behind Pace	Work on 1.1	mastered	mastered	now	mastered	now	
Willie	Behind Pace	Work on 1.1	mastered	mastered	now	mastered	mastered	now
Johnny	Behind Pace	Work on 1.1	mastered	mastered	excused	now		
June	Revise	Work on 1.1	mastered	mastered	revise			
Dolly	Behind Pace	Work on 1.1	now					
Merle	Behind Pace	Work on 1.2	mastered	mastered	mastered	mastered	mastered	mastered
Loretta	Behind Pace	Work on 1.1	mastered	mastered	mastered	now		

All mastery data is tracked visually for students on their Challenge Board and collected in their Power Portfolio, which includes rubrics, work samples, tracker reflections, and goal updates. These tools empower students to monitor their learning progress, celebrate growth, and advocate for support when needed. Students who complete and master an entire Challenge Board including Aspire to Do activities are recognized as Challenge Crushers during weekly PowerHouse celebrations. They earn Hero Bucks and Power Credits, reinforcing the connection between academic success and character development. Research overwhelmingly supports the benefits of mastery-based learning. Mastery-based progression improves student agency, retention, and achievement, especially when paired with clear rubrics and formative feedback (Bloom, 1984; Guskey, 2007; Levine & Patrick, 2019). Rubric-based assessments increase transparency and reduce grading bias, leading to stronger student-teacher relationships and greater student investment in learning (Brookhart, 2013; Andrade & Brookhart, 2020). Moreover, embedding structured reflection within the assessment process builds executive function and self-awareness, further strengthening learning outcomes (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011; Hattie, 2012). At xMA, mastery-based learning is more than a strategy,

it's a belief system. We believe that all students can succeed with time, support, and the opportunity to grow. By removing barriers, redefining assessment, and celebrating the journey, we prepare students not just to meet standards, but to exceed them with confidence and pride.

1. Blended Learning

At x S.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA), Blended Learning is a core instructional practice that empowers students to take ownership of their learning while increasing access, flexibility, and individual support. Rather than relying on the traditional “sage on the stage” model, blended learning at xMA allows teachers to shift from delivering one-size-fits-all instruction to facilitating personalized, high-impact learning experiences that adapt to student needs in real time. This shift is supported by research showing that student-centered blended models improve academic performance, promote student agency, and enhance engagement across subjects (Horn & Staker, 2015; Christensen Institute, 2021).

Each instructional unit is built around a Challenge Board, which organizes standards-based learning tasks into a mastery-based sequence of Must Do, Should Do, Aspire to Do, and Mastery Check activities. This system of tiered task design supports personalized pacing and has been shown to be particularly effective in accelerating outcomes for students at different achievement levels (Pane et al., 2017; Patrick et al., 2016)³. See figure (10) for example of the Unit Challenge Board. Every lesson begins with either a short teacher-led mini-lesson at the Blue Station or an instructional video viewed at the Yellow Station. Research demonstrates that short, pre-recorded videos with embedded checks for understanding increase student retention and support asynchronous access (Brame, 2016; Roschelle et al., 2020).

From there, students choose how they want to engage in practice either through digital learning games, simulations, and online activities or through hands-on tools and manipulatives. This choice enhances both motivation and comprehension, as students are more likely to persist in learning tasks that reflect their preferred modality (CAST, 2022; Al-Azawei et al., 2017). Once students demonstrate understanding in their Must Do practice, they proceed to the Green Station for a Mastery Check, or revisit the concept through a Should Do scaffold or small-group reteach. Research has shown that mastery-based progression allowing students to revisit content until it is mastered is associated with significant gains in long-term retention and academic performance, especially in math (Guskey, 2010; Bloom, 1984).

Students who exceed expectations engage in Aspire to Do enrichment activities, often involving creative applications, performance-based tasks, or collaborative problem-solving. These extension activities align with deeper levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy and have been found to promote critical thinking, innovation, and content transfer (Conley & Darling-Hammond, 2020).

Figure (10) : Unit Challenge Board and Student Progress Tracker



During the final 15 minutes of every math and reading block, students participate in Personalized Learning Plan (PLP) Time at the Red Station, where they work on their iReady Personalized Learning Pathway, an adaptive digital sequence tailored to the mastery goals identified in their Power Profile. Adaptive learning software like iReady has been shown to accelerate growth by targeting instruction to precise skill gaps, particularly for students performing below grade level (Curriculum Associates, 2023; Reinhardt, 2022).

Blended learning plays a vital role in preparing students for college, career, and beyond by building digital fluency, critical thinking, and self-management competencies consistently identified as essential in 21st-century workforce and higher education readiness frameworks (World Economic Forum, 2023; Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). It also provides a lifeline for chronically absent students, allowing them to access video-based lessons, catch up on missed content, and continue progressing at their own pace (Fisher, Frey, & Hattie, 2021). For families, blended learning expands visibility into what students are working on and enables asynchronous access to resources for review and support at home, an equity-focused strategy shown to increase parent engagement and student support (Powell, Watson, & McGowan, 2022). For teachers, blended learning is a force multiplier allowing them to record mini-lessons, deliver instruction to multiple students simultaneously, and use real-time data to make timely instructional decisions. By freeing up time normally spent on whole-group instruction, teachers can focus their energy on targeted intervention, student feedback, and relationship-building all of which have a greater impact on student growth than direct instruction alone (Hattie, 2012; Basham et al., 2020).

Blended learning at xMA supports multiple elements of the school's mission and model. It builds student independence and agency, aligning with our Portrait of a Graduate traits like Self-Reliant Learner and Problem Solver. It also reflects and reinforces our P.O.W.E.R.S. values especially Ownership Now, Work Hard, and Positive Attitude as students learn to navigate their pathway with purpose and persistence. A growing body of research confirms the effectiveness of blended learning models. The RAND Corporation found that students in blended learning environments outperformed peers in traditional classrooms in both math and reading, particularly when self-paced digital components were paired with teacher-led instruction (Pane et al., 2017).³ Meta-analyses also show that blended models lead to stronger academic gains, higher motivation, and improved time on task, especially for students in underserved groups (Means et al., 2014; Basham et al.,

2020). At xMA, blended learning is more than a method, it's a mindset. By combining the best of face-to-face teaching with the power of adaptive technology and student choice, we ensure every learner has the tools, flexibility, and support to succeed anytime, anywhere. Research shows blended learning enhances engagement and achievement, especially when implemented within a structured, supportive classroom environment (Horn & Staker, 2015).

1. Small Group Instruction

At x S.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA), Small Group Instruction serves as the foundation of daily intervention and enrichment. Instruction is intentionally designed to meet students in their zone of proximal development and accelerate their progress toward grade-level mastery. Each day, teachers form flexible small groups based on mastery check data, Choice Board progress, and Challenge Board trackers, using real-time insights to group students by similar skill needs. These groups enable teachers to deliver targeted, just-in-time support or enrichment using high-quality instructional materials from , StemScopes, MyWorld Interactive, and iReady.

Classrooms operate on a consistent, color-coded station rotation model that ensures all students receive access to differentiated instruction, independent learning, and formative assessment:

- ~~Blue~~ **Blue Station – Teacher-Led Group:** Students participate in small-group direct instruction focused on reteaching, skill scaffolding, or enrichment. Teachers use the Power Profile and Challenge Board to determine targeted lessons and instructional strategies for each group.
- ~~Yellow~~ **Yellow Station – Independent Practice & Instruction:** Students complete Must Do video-based lessons, Should Do scaffolds, or Aspire to Do extensions. These lessons drawn from iReady , StemScopes, or MyWorld Interactive feature embedded comprehension checks and are accompanied by digital or hands-on practice tasks aligned to the daily standard.
- ~~Green~~ **Green Station – Mastery Check:** Students complete short, standards-aligned performance tasks (3–5 items or applied activities) to demonstrate understanding. Mastery data informs daily grouping and pacing decisions.
- ~~Red~~ **Red Station – PLP Time:** In the final 15 minutes of each reading and math block, all students engage in self-paced work on their iReady Personalized Learning Pathway, completing adaptive lessons aligned to their Power Profile goals. This station builds independence and reinforces skills in a tailored format.

Instructional blocks begin with whole-group routines, including Vocabulary Word of the Day in ELA/SS and Number Talks in Math/Science. These consistent practices develop fluency, critical thinking, and background knowledge while fostering academic discourse and cultural literacy (Marzano, 2004; Parrish, 2010). These routines also reinforce several of our P.O.W.E.R.S. values Positive Attitude, Work Hard, and Encourage Others as students build community through shared learning. This small group system also deeply supports xMA's Portrait of a Graduate competencies. In particular, it nurtures Empathetic Citizens, as students collaborate and support peers in group settings, and Problem Solvers, as they apply critical thinking during targeted instruction and assessment tasks. The opportunity to revise, reflect, and revisit skills promotes the development of Resilient Individuals and Self-Reliant Learners who understand that learning is a process, not a product. Decades of research confirm that flexible grouping is one of the most effective strategies for increasing student achievement especially in literacy and numeracy by offering timely and targeted instruction that builds on what students already know (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Lou et al., 1996). More recent studies show that mastery-based groupings improve academic equity by ensuring every student receives differentiated access to core content, while also promoting student agency and motivation (Torgesen et al., 2007; Tomlinson, 2014; Basham et al., 2020).

In combination with self-paced progression, Challenge Board goal-tracking, and a culture grounded in personalization, small group instruction at xMA is more than a routine; it's a transformational structure that ensures no student is overlooked and every learner is empowered to grow. This

model fosters high expectations, targeted support, and meaningful accountability hallmarks of xMA's commitment to equity, excellence, and whole-child development.

S.T.R.E.A.M.

S.T.R.E.A.M. (Science, Technology, Reading, Engineering, Arts and Math) education is not just about content mastery it's a direct pathway to economic opportunity, innovation, and social mobility (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Across the nation, the U.S. is projected to face a shortage of over 10 million STEM-related jobs by 2030 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022), yet only 20% of high school graduates are currently prepared for college-level STEM coursework (ACT, 2020). These jobs are not only in demand but also pay significantly more, with a median annual wage of \$95,420 for STEM occupations compared to \$40,120 for non-STEM fields. Despite this demand, major access gaps persist. Black and Hispanic workers make up just 9% and 8% of the STEM workforce, respectively, despite comprising a much larger portion of the overall population (Pew Research Center, 2021). Women, too, remain underrepresented, accounting for only 28% of all STEM professionals, with even fewer in engineering and computing fields (National Girls Collaborative Project, 2022). Daily S.T.R.E.A.M. classes serve as the foundation of interdisciplinary learning at xMA. S.T.R.E.A.M. is not a standalone subject, it is a vehicle through which creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking are developed in tandem with academic standards. Instruction is powered by the WOZed curriculum, aligned to Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), the Computer Science Teachers Association (CSTA), and Alabama's Digital Literacy and Computer Science (DLCS) standards. Research consistently supports integrated STEM and Arts instruction as a catalyst for student engagement, conceptual understanding, and career readiness (Beers, 2011; Honey, Pearson, & Schweingruber, 2014). Recent findings also emphasize STREAM's role in preparing students for careers that demand creativity, technical skill, and adaptability competencies identified as critical by the World Economic Forum's 2023 "Future of Jobs" report (WEF, 2023).

In the Primary Academy (Grades K–2), students explore STREAM through hands-on, play-based learning. Kindergarteners are introduced to animation, artificial intelligence (AI), drones, robotics, and digital citizenship. In first grade, they learn coding, cybersecurity, and data science while continuing with robotics and ethical tech practices. By second grade, students engage with the engineering design process, mobile development tools, and immersive AR/VR experiences. Early exposure to STEM significantly boosts interest, self-efficacy, and foundational problem-solving skills (McClure et al., 2017; Bers, 2018; Ribble, 2012). Newer research from the U.S. Department of Education (2021) highlights that engaging STEM in early grades increases future academic confidence and improves access to advanced coursework across K–12.

In the Exploratory Academy (Grades 3–5), STREAM learning becomes more structured. Third-grade students extend their work with animation, AI, and drones while applying digital storytelling and robotics. Fourth graders deepen coding, cybersecurity, and data science through hands-on projects that promote logical reasoning and data fluency (Grover & Pea, 2013; Robin, 2008). In fifth grade, students design mobile apps, engineer prototypes, and work with AR/VR tools. Project-based learning at this level has been linked to increased retention, critical thinking, and motivation (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Freeman et al., 2014). Recent studies confirm that STEM programs integrated with design thinking and iterative prototyping improve learning outcomes for historically marginalized students (Scott, Sheridan, & Clark, 2020)w².

In the Career Prep Academy (Grades 6–8), students choose STREAM electives in STEM or Fine Arts tracks and participate in real-world simulations. Sixth graders work in animation, AI, drones, robotics, and digital ethics labs. Seventh graders explore advanced coding, cybersecurity, and data science applications aligned to workforce trends (Manyika et al., 2011; World Economic Forum, 2020). Eighth-grade students complete capstone projects using mobile development, engineering design, and AR/VR to solve authentic problems and build digital portfolios. Research shows that middle school exposure to these disciplines increases persistence in STEM and advanced coursework in high school (Tai et al., 2006; Nugent et al., 2015). A 2022 study from Brookings further supports that middle school STEM pathways reduce opportunity gaps and increase access to tech-aligned careers when integrated with equity-focused, hands-on instruction (Brookings, 2022). Robotics and

digital citizenship are embedded yearly reinforcing core STREAM skills and ethical tech leadership across all grade levels.

Beyond elective S.T.R.E.A.M. classes, Fine Arts instruction is offered as a vital component of student development. In grades K–5, students participate in schoolwide "Fine Arts Friday," a weekly immersion into rotating disciplines like art, music, theater, and dance through a local arts partnership. These rotations offer diverse creative outlets and complement S.T.R.E.A.M.'s emphasis on innovation and creative self-expression (Sousa & Pilecki, 2013). In grades 6–8, students may choose Fine Arts and/or STEM electives. Research has shown that students who engage in arts education have higher GPAs, better attendance, and increased college readiness (Deasy, 2002; Catterall et al., 2012).

To further support the "R" in S.T.R.E.A.M., xMA's wide focus on literacy is extended into S.T.R.E.A.M. classes through embedded reading, writing, research, and oral communication tasks. Special emphasis is placed on digital literacy in alignment with the Alabama Digital Literacy and Computer Science (DLCS) standards, helping students build safe and responsible habits for online engagement and productivity (Ribble, 2012; ISTE, 2021). Students engage in coding journals, multimedia presentations, and design thinking narratives developing both digital and academic literacies (Hobbs, 2017).

Social Emotional Learning

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is foundational to xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy's instructional model, behavior systems, and schoolwide culture. Grounded in the CASEL framework, SEL is woven into daily routines through explicit instruction, reinforcement systems, and reflection practices that align with our six core P.O.W.E.R.S. values Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, and Safety First. These values are defined through action: a student showing Positive Attitude uses affirming language during a challenge; Ownership Now means updating their tracker without prompting; Work Hard is sticking with a difficult S.T.R.E.A.M. task; Encourage Others is cheering on a peer during advisory; Respect All means honoring different perspectives in group work; and Safety First is using calm body language and keeping peers safe.

Our P.O.W.E.R.S. values directly reinforce our Portrait of a Graduate competencies Resilient Individuals, Empathetic Citizens, Self-Reliant Learners, Creative Thinkers, and Problem Solvers which outline the essential habits and mindsets we believe every xMA student should carry into the world. Research consistently shows that cultivating resilience, empathy, and self-management leads to improved academic performance, stronger school engagement, higher graduation rates, and long-term well-being (Mahfouz et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2022). Studies also affirm that when SEL, character development, and personalized learning are intentionally integrated, students build a stronger sense of identity, motivation, and purpose key predictors of lifelong success (Aspen Institute, 2019; Cantor et al., 2021).

Together, our P.O.W.E.R.S. values and Portrait of a Graduate competencies create a unified, research-based framework that supports students in developing academic mastery, emotional intelligence, and purpose-driven leadership.

Each weekday spotlights one core value:

- Positive Attitude Mondays

- Ownership Now Tuesdays

- Work Hard Wednesdays

- Encourage Others Thursdays

- Respect & Safety Fridays


These values are explicitly taught and reinforced through daily Morning and Afternoon Meetings in grades K–5 and structured Advisory blocks in grades 6–8, creating a schoolwide rhythm that centers character and emotional development.

Our curriculum is built on CharacterStrong, a CASEL-aligned, evidence-based SEL and character education program proven to increase students' emotional regulation, empathy, and academic engagement (Bryk et al., 2010; Payton et al., 2008). CharacterStrong lessons emphasize core traits like kindness, courage, perseverance, and self-reflection delivered through developmentally scaffolded, discussion-rich, and culturally responsive materials. These lessons are adapted and curated by the Dean of Culture & Instruction and counselor, ensuring alignment to both our daily P.O.W.E.R.S. value and broader school priorities.

The xMA SEL Do Now Journal (Figure 11) is a daily, schoolwide routine completed at the start of every class that supports both academic ownership and emotional well-being. Rooted in our SEL school design element and aligned with xMA's P.O.W.E.R.S. and Portrait of a Graduate competencies, the journal helps students begin each lesson with clarity, focus, and purpose. Each journal entry prompts students to update their current learning status by identifying whether they are engaging with lesson notes, working through independent practice, or preparing for a Mastery Check. They also evaluate their academic pacing, indicating whether they are ahead, on track, or behind and, if behind, how many lessons they need to catch up. To support emotional awareness and regulation, students complete an "internal weather check," using simple, student-friendly terms like Sunny, Windy, or Stormy to describe how they're feeling that day. They then set a daily P.O.W.E.R. goal by selecting one or more core values Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, Safety First to guide their behavior and mindset throughout the class. Students also respond to a class-specific bellringer prompt, articulate a focused learning goal, and choose one or more practical strategies to help them succeed, such as reviewing notes, using time wisely, or calmly asking for help.

Finally, each journal offers space for students to communicate directly with their teacher, sharing reflections, asking for support, or celebrating progress fostering strong relationships and a culture of trust and responsiveness. Journals are submitted weekly via Google Classroom or on paper and are used to draft reflective emails or student letters home. Each entry is also added to the student's Personalized Learning Portfolio, creating a meaningful record of their academic and social-emotional growth. The xMA SEL Do Now Journal (Figure) builds consistency, self-awareness, and intentional learning habits equipping students to take ownership of their growth across all content areas and classrooms.

Figure (11):xMA SEL Do Now Journal



xSTRE.A.M.
MINDS ACADEMY

Math Do Now Journal

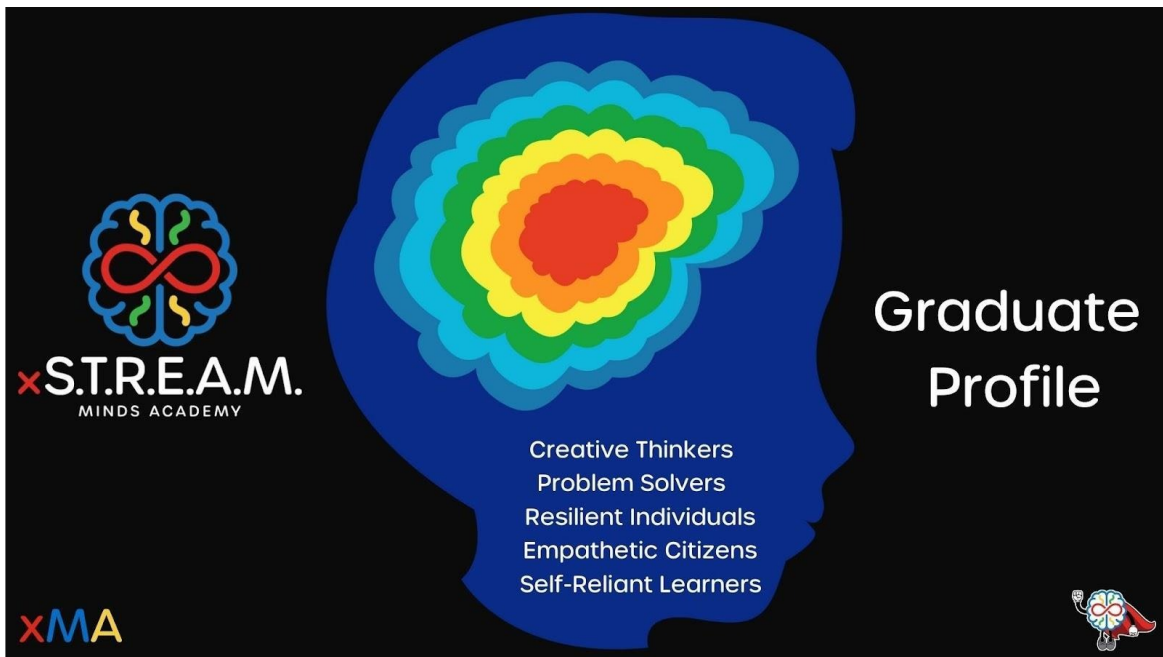
Directions: Complete the Do Now Bellringer daily. These will be turned into Google Classroom every Friday and used to draft your weekly emails to your parents.

Name: Erica Noel	Today's date: 9/09/2025	I am on lesson: <input type="checkbox"/> notes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> classwork/practice <input type="checkbox"/> Mastery check
I am <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ahead of pace! <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> on pace <input type="checkbox"/> not on pace (___ lessons behind where I should be)		
My internal weather check: Today I am feeling: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sunny! <input type="checkbox"/> Partially cloudy <input type="checkbox"/> Windy <input type="checkbox"/> Stormy		
P.O.W.E.R. Goal(s) of the Day (check all that apply): I will commit today to... <input type="checkbox"/> Positive Attitude <input type="checkbox"/> Ownership Now <input type="checkbox"/> Work Hard <input type="checkbox"/> Encourage Others <input type="checkbox"/> Respect All <input type="checkbox"/> Safety First		
Number Bellringer Question:		
My Math goal today: To complete my Should Do lesson 1.3 practice ahead of pace so I can prepare myself for my mastery check.		
Strategies that will help me accomplish my goal today (choose one or more options): <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Take deep breaths (breath in for five seconds, breath out for five seconds) to calm and focus myself <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Avoid talking to classmates, so I use time well <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Use technology responsibly, so I can finish my work faster <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Review my notes or a video to better understand this lesson <input type="checkbox"/> Calmly ask for help with _____ (Be specific!) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> My own strategy: Have faith in myself that I CAN do anything that I put my mind to		
Explain how this strategy will help you today: The strategy will help me motivate myself to work harder on staying on pace and focus on staying ahead of my work.		
Anything I want to share with my teacher? I am doing my best to complete my Should Do practice activities so I can be ahead of my lessons.		

xMA Portrait of a Graduate

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy, daily SEL instruction is not isolated it is fully embedded within our Portrait of a Graduate (POG) framework, which highlights five essential competencies: Creative Thinkers, Problem-Solvers, Resilient Individuals, Empathetic Citizens, and Self-Reliant Learners. These competencies are intentionally chosen to develop adaptable, independent, and compassionate individuals. Creativity and problem-solving enhance cognitive flexibility and innovation; resilience fosters perseverance; empathy builds strong social connections; and self-reliance empowers students to take ownership of their learning. Students practice these habits through journaling, goal setting, classroom projects, and real-time reflection, while also engaging in student-led conferences, peer feedback, and classroom discourse. Grounded in research, this model draws on evidence that creativity and problem-solving enhance cognitive flexibility and innovation (Hsin & Capps, 2019), resilience supports perseverance and adaptive coping (Duckworth, 2016), empathy builds stronger peer relationships and collaboration (Jones et al., 2017), and self-directed learning fosters independence and long-term academic success (Jitendra et al., 2013). By 8th grade, xMA students are equipped with both the academic skills and social-emotional readiness to thrive in high school and beyond.

Figure (12):xMA Portrait of a Graduate



To support coherence and vertical alignment, the following chart illustrates how our Portrait of a Graduate, CASEL, and P.O.W.E.R.S. values work together to build whole-child competencies:

Figure (13):xMA POG-CASEL-P.O.W.E.R.S. Values

POG Competency	CASEL Competency	P.O.W.E.R.S. Value
Creative Thinker	Self-awareness, decision-making	Positive Attitude, Ownership Now
Problem Solver	Self-management, decision-making	Work Hard, Safety First

Empathetic Citizen	Social awareness, relationship skills	Encourage Others, Respect All
Self-Reliant Learner	Self-management, self-awareness	Ownership Now, Safety First
Resilient Individual	Self-awareness, self-management	Positive Attitude, Work Hard

Each POG competency is reinforced in both academic and SEL settings. For example, students build self-reliance by tracking progress in Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs), setting SMART goals, and reflecting on behavior using Hero Boards or Power Bank systems. They build resilience by engaging in weekly perseverance challenges and reflective journaling, and they build empathy by participating in peer shout-outs, restorative circles, and group discussions. To ensure data-driven and personalized support, xMA administers the Social, Academic, and Emotional Behavior Risk Screener (SABERS) three times annually (BOY, MOY, EOY). Developed by Kilgus et al. (2014), SABERS assesses emotional regulation, social behavior, and academic engagement. This screener is shown to be over 90% effective at identifying students who benefit from early SEL intervention (Kilgus et al., 2016; Gresham et al., 2017).

Results from SABERS inform xMA's Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS):

- Tier 1: Daily SEL lessons, CharacterStrong routines, classroom-based reflections, and school-wide P.O.W.E.R.S. reinforcement
- Tier 2: Targeted small-group SEL sessions led by the co-teacher or counselor, addressing themes such as anxiety management, friendship skills, or self-monitoring
- Tier 3: Individualized behavior and SEL interventions developed collaboratively by the Student Support Team, which includes the Executive Director, Principal, Dean of Culture & Instruction, Counselor, and relevant teaching staff. Support may include weekly check-ins, restorative conferences, family coaching, and embedded goal tracking in PLPs.

These tiered supports are integrated directly into student Personalized Learning Plans and Personalized Learning Portfolios, allowing students to monitor SEL goals alongside academic growth. The combination of academic and SEL reflection fosters metacognition and internal accountability shown to increase motivation and self-efficacy (Zimmerman, 2002; Bandura, 1997).

Reinforcement systems further strengthen SEL skill development and school culture. In grades K–5, students earn Hero Bucks for value-aligned behaviors, which are tracked on Hero Boards and redeemed weekly at the Hero Hub. In grades 6–8, students earn Power Credits through a virtual Power Bank, reinforcing leadership, effort, empathy, and goal achievement. These systems culminate in weekly and monthly PowerHouse Celebrations, where students and staff are recognized for demonstrating SEL and P.O.G. competencies. Research shows that consistent, specific reinforcement increases intrinsic motivation, reduces behavioral incidents, and builds school connectedness (Reeves, 2008; Osher et al., 2010).

Importantly, SEL is not just for students; adults are key culture carriers. Teachers are celebrated weekly for SEL implementation and P.O.W.E.R.S. modeling, and staff meetings include SEL check-ins, shared practices, and collaborative problem-solving. As Brackett et al. (2019) Jennings & Greenberg (2009) note, adult emotional competence and modeling are essential to student SEL success. Schools with emotionally supported staff experience better implementation, lower burnout, and stronger culture. The impact of SEL is well-documented across research: SEL-integrated schools outperform peers academically and behaviorally, with students scoring significantly higher on standardized assessments and demonstrating improved focus, empathy, and decision-making skills (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017; Greenberg et al., 2003). Schools that embrace whole-child models combining SEL, character, and academic development are especially effective in reducing opportunity gaps, increasing belonging, and improving long-term outcomes in mental health, relationships, and civic engagement (Jones et al., 2015; Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). At

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy, SEL is not a program it is a way of being. Through clear values, a unified language, and structured support, we cultivate a school community where students are equipped to lead, relate, reflect, and thrive.

Assessments

Assessment at xMA is personalized, mastery-based, and aligned with the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework to ensure equity and responsiveness. Students are assessed through multiple measures, allowing for flexibility in how they demonstrate mastery while ensuring that learning targets are met with depth and rigor. We use Mastery Checks, Progress Monitoring Assessments, Personalized Learning Portfolios and Project Based Learning Assessments as multiple data points of mastery.

Mastery Checks

At the heart of the assessment model are individual, standards aligned Mastery Checks, which occur at the assessment small-group station. These quick, targeted checks evaluate students' understanding of specific objectives using 3–5 questions or performance tasks. Mastery checks are common assessments created by our academic team to ensure consistency and fidelity across mastery. Students receive the same mastery check option but may take them a different time depending on their progression. Mastery checks are tied to choice boards and personalized learning pathways, giving students a voice in how they show what they know through digital quizzes or short performance tasks. Teachers use this data in real time to adjust instruction, reteach, or provide enrichment.

Progress Monitoring

Additionally, students complete progress monitoring assessments through the i-Ready platform three times per year fall, winter, and spring supplemented by monthly data checks to evaluate growth in reading and math. These adaptive diagnostic tools inform differentiated instruction and identify learning gaps early. At the state level, the Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program (ACAP) measures student achievement and growth, ensuring alignment with grade-level standards and accountability expectations. Students data will be compiled in their Personalized Learning Plans and Portfolios and updated daily on progress which includes students daily progress trackers.

Personalized Learning Portfolios

xMA's Personalized Learning Portfolios are a central tool for ongoing reflection, self-assessment, and documentation of growth, compiling the PLP, student goals, and multiple layers of learning evidence into one accessible space. Each student sets SMART goals and maintains a digital portfolio that includes work samples, mastery check data, project artifacts, and progress trackers. These portfolios are used in student-led conferences, serve as documentation for IEPs where applicable, and foster metacognition and ownership of learning, and are formally reviewed during student-led conferences held quarterly. This approach is supported by research indicating that student portfolios improve engagement, accountability, and reflection (Paulson et al., 1991).

Project Based Assessments

In S.T.R.E.A.M. classes, assessment is rooted in Project-Based Learning (PBL), where students apply knowledge through collaborative, real-world tasks. Projects culminate in authentic demonstrations of learning standards such as coding challenges, engineering prototypes, or digital storytelling presentations which are evaluated through rubrics, peer feedback, and public exhibitions aligned to state aligned standards and the Alabama Digital Literacy and Computer Science. These assessments promote deeper conceptual understanding, problem-solving, and communication skills (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Thomas, 2000). Together, these assessment strategies provide a comprehensive, student-centered system that promotes mastery, growth, and readiness for the demands of both academic and real-world environments. By combining research-driven instruction, personalized pacing, real-world application, and S.T.R.E.A.M. innovation, xMA has built a robust and responsive instructional program aligned with best practices in 21st century future education. Research shows that well-designed PBL assessments not only measure academic content knowledge but also evaluate critical thinking, collaboration, and communication skills essential for success in modern workplaces (Ravitz, 2010; Vega, 2012). The use of public presentations, peer evaluations, and rubric-aligned performance tasks in PBL provides more authentic evidence of learning than traditional assessments and supports long-term retention and transfer of knowledge

(Darling-Hammond et al., 2008; Boss & Krauss, 2018). These assessment practices align with the demands of 21st-century education, ensuring students are prepared to apply learning in diverse, real-world contexts.

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b) Provide evidence for the success of this theoretical framework with the anticipated student population. Comprehensively summarize the essential design elements of the school model and provide at least three (no more than five) specific and measurable goals for the anticipated student population.

xMA's Year 5 Goals

In five years, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy will exceed local district proficiency averages in reading and math while surpassing performance benchmarks for schools in Alabama with similar demographics. We will measure our progress by setting annual performance goals using data from our student population to ensure ambitious, yet attainable, targets.

1. Academic Growth in Core Subjects

90% of students will demonstrate at least one year of growth in ELA, Math, and Science as measured by i-Ready Diagnostics and ACAP.

2.

Benchmark Proficiency in Core Subjects

80% of students will score 85% or higher on interim assessments aligned to Alabama State Standards.

3. S.T.R.E.A.M. Pathway Proficiency

90% of students will demonstrate proficiency in at least two S.T.R.E.A.M. pathways through projects, portfolios, and competency-based rubrics.

4. Culture and Core Values in Action

90% of students will consistently demonstrate P.O.W.E.R.S. values as measured by climate surveys, observations, and PBIS data.

5. Family Engagement and Satisfaction

90% of families will report feeling informed and engaged through surveys and participation in conferences, workshops, and school events.

These goals are aligned to xMA's mission and vision of fostering creative, problem solving, and self-reliant learners equipped with 21st-century competencies.

Evidence of Success with Anticipated Student Population

At the heart of xMA is a deep and unwavering belief in our students. Many of them are students of color, come from low-income households, or learn in ways traditional schools haven't always honored and they bring with them real strengths, real curiosity, and real potential. Our job, through our evidence-based model, is to build the conditions where that potential can fully flourish.

As outlined in the previous section, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) is intentionally designed to address the academic and opportunity gaps faced by students in Birmingham and similar communities across Alabama. The xMA model is rooted in evidence-based practices that prioritize flexibility, inclusion, personalization, and career-connected learning. Research on Universal Design for Learning (CAST, 2023; Meyer, Rose & Gordon, 2014), personalized learning (Pane et al., 2017), inclusive education (NCLD, 2020; Ainscow, 2020), multilingual learner supports (OELA, 2023), and career-connected STEM pathways (NASEM, 2022) affirms that these student-centered approaches lead to improved outcomes for neurodiverse learners, students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and students performing below grade level populations historically underserved in traditional public school settings. As mentioned previously, BCS statistics underscore the urgent need for an educational model that not only supports foundational academic growth but also provides inclusive, culturally relevant, and engaging pathways to long-term success.

Outlined below are several research-based indicators of our core design elements' likelihood to drive strong outcomes for our proposed student population.

1. Personalized Learning:

1. A 2022 report from KnowledgeWorks emphasized that student-led conferences and digital portfolios increase motivation, deepen reflection, and foster goal-oriented habits in elementary learners, especially those with learning gaps or limited access to enrichment opportunities.
2. Research shows that flexible, skills-based grouping accelerates growth for diverse learners by allowing targeted small group instruction, meaningful peer collaboration, and scaffolded SEL support (Tomlinson, 2017; CASEL, 2020; Modern Classrooms Project, 2024). By aligning to each student's Personalized Learning Plan (PLP) and Personalized Learning Portfolio (PLPortfolio), pods promote academic achievement, self-regulation, and metacognitive growth critical for closing gaps and boosting success across a diverse, inclusive population (Hattie, 2018; Zimmerman, 2002). This is particularly relevant in Birmingham, where systemic opportunity gaps persist: over 65% of students in city schools are economically disadvantaged, and the percentage of students identified for Tier II/III interventions continues to grow (ALSDE, 2023).
3. UDL has been shown to improve both academic achievement and behavioral outcomes, particularly for neurodiverse learners (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014).
4. Recent studies further affirm the impact of UDL in post-pandemic classrooms. According to Katz and Moore (2022), implementing UDL principles improved learning engagement and self-efficacy for students in inclusive classrooms, particularly those with disabilities

and English Learners. In Birmingham and similar urban contexts, research highlights that UDL strategies are especially effective in supporting culturally and linguistically diverse learners (Al-Azawei et al., 2023).

5. Research is clear that when students advance before mastering foundational concepts, learning gaps compound over time, becoming increasingly difficult to close (Bloom, 1968, 1984; Guskey, 2010). Mastery-Based Instruction (MBI) directly interrupts this pattern by ensuring time becomes a variable and learning becomes the constant. xMA's implementation of MBI is grounded in its research-based foundations. MBI traces its roots to Benjamin Bloom's landmark work in the 1960s, which demonstrated that one-on-one tutoring could dramatically accelerate student learning regardless of starting proficiency (Bloom, 1968, 1984). Fred Keller later translated Bloom's insights into a classroom-based model called the Personalized System of Instruction, an early and influential precursor to modern mastery-based learning (Keller, 1968). Across decades of research and multiple iterations, the consistent finding is clear: students who are academically behind and students who are advanced both learn more and learn more deeply when schools use mastery-based models implemented with fidelity (Guskey, 2007, 2010; Marzano, 2017).
6. In alignment with national research (AIR, 2023; NIH, 2022; CRPE, 2023), xMA's mastery-based learning model:

- Supports deeper cognitive processing
- Reduces performance anxiety by emphasizing growth over grades
- Increases student agency and ownership
- Closes learning gaps by ensuring true readiness before progression
- Accelerates learning for advanced students through extension pathways

This flexibility is a lifeline for students in Birmingham who may be navigating challenges related to poverty, trauma, or housing instability. Blended learning systems that allow students to control the pace and path of their learning are correlated with higher academic outcomes in high-poverty schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

1. A 2021 meta-analysis by Kim et al. found that differentiated small-group instruction in early elementary grades significantly improved math and literacy outcomes for students in low-income schools (Kim et al., 2021). xMA's co-teaching model in K–2 classrooms allows for strategic station rotations, targeted scaffolding, and differentiated assignments aligned to each student's readiness level. Teachers use real-time data to adjust groupings and provide scaffolds or extensions based on student performance.

1. S.T.R.E.A.M.

1. For students in rural areas or under-resourced communities, access to high-quality STEM and arts education remains limited, further widening the opportunity gap (Carnevale et al., 2018). At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy, we recognize that early exposure is critical. Research has shown that students introduced to STEM before high school are twice as likely to pursue it as a career (Tai et al., 2006). That's why our S.T.R.E.A.M. program begins in kindergarten and builds year by year incorporating hands-on learning, career simulations, and creative projects that reflect real-world industries. Our integration of the arts not only fuels engagement but strengthens the very competencies that STEM careers demand: creativity, collaboration, and design thinking. In fact, students involved in the arts are five times more likely to graduate, four times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement, and show higher levels of critical thinking making S.T.R.E.A.M. a powerful engine for student success and long-term career readiness (Catterall et al., 2012; Arts Education Partnership, 2011).
2. According to Maltese & Tai (2011) Early exposure to STEM fields significantly increases a student's likelihood of pursuing and persisting in high-wage, high-demand industries. More recently, the U.S. Department of Education's 2022 STEM Education Strategic Plan emphasized that underrepresented students including Black, Hispanic, and low-income youth benefit most from early and immersive STEM experiences. This is particularly critical in Birmingham, where

economic mobility is tightly linked to access to high-skill careers in technology, healthcare, engineering, and design.

3. These real-world applications deepen engagement and build student confidence and creativity. Research from Digital Promise (2023) and the Learning Policy Institute (2022) affirms that project-based S.T.R.E.A.M. Learning improves critical thinking, persistence, and career readiness especially for students with limited prior access to advanced coursework or enrichment.
4. The inclusion of the Arts and Reading components ensures that S.T.R.E.A.M. is not solely technical, it's human-centered and inclusive. Project-based arts integration has been linked to increased literacy rates, improved emotional expression, and higher math achievement for elementary students in Title I schools (Barry et al., 2021). Additionally, early engineering and design-thinking curricula build spatial reasoning and collaboration skills, which are foundational for both academic and workforce success (Perry et al., 2023).
5. xMA's S.T.R.E.A.M. class is intentionally structured to support exploration and exposure across multiple disciplines. Students work in collaborative teams, use digital and physical tools, and complete challenges that require them to prototype, iterate, and present their learning. These hands-on tasks are not only engaging but research shows they help close the "experience gap" that disproportionately impacts Black and Brown learners in under-resourced communities (National Science Foundation, 2022).

1. Social Emotional Learning

1. A growing body of research confirms that high-quality, integrated social-emotional learning (SEL) programs significantly improve academic achievement, student behavior, and long-term outcomes, especially for students with disabilities, English Language Learners (ELLs), and those at risk of academic failure (Durlak et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2017; Mahoney et al., 2018).
2. SEL has been shown to increase academic performance by an average of 11 percentile points, improve classroom behavior, and reduce student stress, aggression, and dropout risk (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017).
3. Recent research following the COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted SEL's essential role in school recovery: a 2022 RAND Corporation report found that over 80% of educators identified SEL as "very important" for supporting student engagement, regulation, and learning post-COVID (Hamilton et al., 2022).
4. Additionally, schools that prioritized SEL post-pandemic reported stronger attendance, reduced behavior incidents, and higher overall academic gains (Hamilton et al., 2022).
5. At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA), our SEL model is built on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework and the CharacterStrong curriculum an evidence-based, developmentally scaffolded program that promotes empathy, perseverance, and self-reflection. CharacterStrong has demonstrated effectiveness in diverse learning environments, including Title I and inclusive schools, with documented improvements in student self-management, reduced bullying, and stronger school climate (CharacterStrong Impact Report, 2022; Mahoney et al., 2021).
6. Research supports this integrated approach: when SEL is embedded within classroom routines and modeled by adults, students show increased emotional regulation, empathy, and engagement in learning (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Brackett et al., 2019).
7. SEL instruction at xMA is intentionally aligned to our Portrait of a Graduate (POG) traits: Creative Thinker, Problem Solver, Empathetic Citizen, Resilient Individual, and Self-Reliant Learner. Students develop these traits through journaling, goal setting, peer collaboration, advisory projects, and daily reflection. These competencies are directly supported by research showing that resilience and self-reliance contribute to improved academic performance and persistence (Duckworth et al., 2007; Yeager & Dweck, 2012), while empathy and perspective-taking promote stronger peer relationships, collaboration, and belonging (Jones et al., 2017) all crucial for historically underserved learners.

8.

To ensure student needs are identified early and addressed systemically, xMA uses the Social, Academic, and Emotional Behavior Risk Screener (SABERS) at the beginning, middle, and end of each year. SABERS is validated as over 90% effective in identifying students who benefit from SEL support (Kilgus et al., 2014; Gresham et al., 2017). This data feeds into our Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework:

Together, these Year 5 goals and research-aligned practices reflect xMA's unwavering belief in what Birmingham's children can achieve when given access to rigorous academics, intentional SEL, and rich S.T.R.E.A.M. learning experiences. By pairing high expectations with an evidence-based, inclusive model, xMA is positioned to deliver exceptional outcomes for students who have historically been underserved in traditional public school settings.

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Element Review

Reviews is not provided

2. Curriculum and Instructional Design

Reviewer Instructions

Please rate this section using the provided rubric.

Status: Completed

Form Result

Propose an implementation of the educational framework as a curriculum that both reflects the needs of the anticipated population and ensures that all students will meet or exceed the state standard.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Compelling evidence of a curriculum implementation of the unifying educational framework that will directly and consistently address the needs of the anticipated population and that clearly demonstrates the likelihood of all students meeting or exceeding the state standard.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

a) Describe the proven methods employed to transform the unifying educational framework into a school curriculum. Describe how the mission, vision and framework inform the planning of the curriculum.

Curriculum Implementation Narrative

xMA Instructional Design Framework

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy, our mission, vision, and instructional framework serve as the foundation for curriculum design, ensuring that every instructional decision reflects our commitment to personalized learning, academic mastery, and social-emotional development. Our curriculum is intentionally backward designed, beginning with the Alabama Course of Study standards, xMA's Portrait of a Graduate competencies, and our mastery-based learning goals. From these anchor points, instructional leaders and teachers develop standards-aligned units, learning targets, and mastery-based assessments that ensure academic rigor and clear progression toward mastery. Our personalized learning model is operationalized through the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, using mastery-based learning, blended learning, and small group instruction as core instructional strategies. UDL ensures lessons are accessible and responsive to learner variability, while mastery-based progression ensures students develop deep understanding before advancing. This structured design process transforms xMA's unifying instructional framework into a coherent, standards-aligned curriculum that directly reflects our mission to provide equitable, high-quality instruction tailored to each student's needs.

Our vision and instructional framework also inform how curriculum is delivered, monitored, and continuously refined to meet the needs of Birmingham students. Teachers use real-time data from mastery checks, digital platforms, and progress trackers to adjust pacing, group students strategically, and provide targeted instruction aligned to each student's personalized learning pathway. Curriculum implementation is reinforced through consistent instructional routines, instructional coaching, and collaborative planning to ensure fidelity to xMA's mastery-based, personalized learning model. Social-emotional learning is intentionally embedded through daily goal-setting, reflection, and routines aligned to our P.O.W.E.R.S. values, ensuring students develop self-regulation, ownership, and perseverance alongside academic skills. In addition, STREAM learning is delivered through a dedicated STREAM class where students engage in hands-on, project-based experiences aligned to STREAM pathways, reinforcing problem-solving, creativity, and real-world application of knowledge. Through this intentional alignment between mission, vision, instructional framework, and curriculum

implementation, xMA ensures that every instructional experience is tailored to each student's needs while advancing student mastery and cultivating our Portrait of a Graduate competencies: Creative Thinkers, Problem-Solvers, Resilient Individuals, Empathetic Citizens, and Self-Reliant Learners who are prepared for future academic success and leadership.

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA), our instructional framework is intentionally designed to meet the needs of Birmingham's underserved learners through a cohesive integration of Blended Learning, Mastery-Based Learning, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and Small Group Instruction. Decades of research affirm that these approaches improve engagement, close learning gaps, and increase long-term achievement particularly for historically marginalized students (CAST, 2018; Pane et al., 2017; AIR, 2023; NCEE, 2020). Blended learning provides multiple ways to access instruction; mastery-based learning ensures students progress only after demonstrating understanding; small groups offer focused remediation and enrichment; and UDL ensures lessons are designed for learner variability from the start. Together, these interconnected methods form the backbone of xMA's personalized learning model and our commitment to equitable, high-quality, student-centered learning.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) guides every aspect of instructional design. Teachers develop lessons that include multiple means of representation (visuals, texts, manipulatives, videos), action and expression (writing, performance, technology), and engagement (student choice, cultural relevance, collaboration). Students access content in diverse ways and demonstrate mastery through flexible modalities that reflect their strengths. UDL-aligned instruction has been linked to increases in academic performance, particularly for English Language Learners and students with disabilities (CAST, 2022; Basham et al., 2021). A recent longitudinal study showed that schools with consistent UDL implementation reported higher student achievement growth and reduced special education referrals over time (Capp, 2022).

Mastery-Based Learning ensures students move forward only after demonstrating proficiency. Every lesson culminates in a standards-aligned Mastery Check scored using xMA's 1–4 rubric, with multiple opportunities for reteaching and reassessment. Aspire to Do extension tasks provide pathways for deeper learning and a "4" Above Mastery on the standard. This system not only raises academic expectations but removes the stigma of failure, encouraging persistence and growth. Research shows that mastery-based grading increases transparency, improves student motivation, and leads to stronger academic outcomes across diverse populations, especially in urban school settings (Levine & Patrick, 2019; Feldman, 2021; Andrade & Brookhart, 2020). Recent evidence also finds that students in mastery-based classrooms demonstrate higher self-efficacy and goal-setting behaviors (Patrick, Worthen, & Truong, 2023).

Small Group Instruction is built into the daily schedule through a four-station rotation model: ~~Blue~~ Yellow (self-paced digital or hands-on practice), ~~Green~~ Blue (teacher-led instruction or reteaching), ~~Red~~ Green (Mastery Check), and ~~Blue~~ Red (Personalized Learning Plan/iReady pathway). This structure allows students to engage in varied tasks that support practice, feedback, assessment, and targeted instruction. Groups are formed using real-time progress and assessment data, enabling teachers to reteach, enrich, and accelerate learning with precision.

Research consistently supports flexible grouping and tiered small-group instruction as one of the most effective strategies for accelerating achievement, especially for students reading below grade level or experiencing unfinished learning (Fisher, Frey, & Hattie, 2021; Torgesen et al., 2020; Tomlinson, 2023). A 2023 meta-analysis found that small-group instruction outperformed whole-group instruction by nearly 20 percentile points in math and reading for low-income students (Slavin et al., 2023).

Blended Learning at xMA increases access, autonomy, and rigor. Students are introduced to core content through instructional videos or mini-lessons, then engage in practice through digital tools, interactive simulations, or hands-on materials. This flipped structure enhances motivation and comprehension and ensures learning continues outside of the classroom, especially important for students with inconsistent attendance or gaps in foundational skills. Studies confirm that blended learning leads to measurable improvements in student engagement, autonomy, and academic achievement (Powell, Watson, & McGowan, 2022; Christensen Institute, 2021; Roschelle et al.,

2020). Additionally, blended learning environments have been shown to increase time on task and reduce off-task behaviors for students with attention difficulties (Basham et al., 2020).



xMA Framework Instructional Practices in Action

xMA's instructional model is not just theoretically sound, it is carefully operationalized within each classroom through a series of structured, research-based routines. Instruction is delivered through a consistent system of color-coded learning stations, progress trackers, SEL routines, and adaptive technology, creating a predictable and high-accountability learning environment. These components are all grounded in evidence-based practices shown to improve academic outcomes, especially for students from historically marginalized communities. Recent findings confirm that schools with clearly structured routines and explicit instructional cycles like station rotations and daily progress tracking yield stronger growth in both math and literacy, particularly for students with unfinished learning and chronic absenteeism (Goodwin et al., 2021; Fisher, Frey, & Hattie, 2021; Slavin et al., 2023).

The xMA Instructional Block Schedule (Figure 12) shows how learning is embedded within a 60-minute, K-2, ELA class block. Each session begins with social-emotional learning (SEL) check-ins and vocabulary routines, transitions into three station-based rotations grounded in blended and small group learning, and concludes with personalized digital learning through iReady. Color-coded stations Blue for teacher-led instruction, Yellow for self-paced learning, Green for mastery assessments, and Red for adaptive PLP practice create a highly visible, easy-to-follow classroom flow. Research on station rotation models indicates that they are especially effective in supporting differentiated instruction, reducing classroom management issues, and promoting on-task behavior (Pane et al., 2015; Basham et al., 2020; Christensen Institute, 2021). These models are particularly impactful in urban school settings where instructional time and teacher capacity must be maximized. Students use Challenge Boards and Choice Boards to track their progress through standards-based learning activities, aligned to each student's Power Profile. These tools promote academic ownership and build executive functioning skills like planning, metacognition, and self-monitoring. At the same time, teachers utilize real-time digital Teacher Progress Trackers to identify pacing needs, group students for small-group instruction, and differentiate assignments and assessments. Research affirms that student-facing trackers improve goal setting, motivation, and self-regulation especially when paired with visual learning maps and formative feedback (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011; Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009; Nagaoka et al., 2020). Teacher-facing progress dashboards also significantly increase the precision of instructional groupings and support timely interventions (Levine & Patrick, 2019; Tomlinson, 2023).

xMA Instructional Block Schedule (Figure 12)

xMA Instructional ELA Block Schedule

Time	Student Activities 	Teacher Activities 
0:00-0:05	SEL Check-In, Goal Setting, Progress Tracker Update	Co-teacher: Lead SEL check-in, monitor tracker data, support goal setting
0:05-0:10	Vocabulary Bellringer	Lead Teacher: Lead Word of the Day Vocab Bellringer
0:10-0:20	Students choose 1 station based on their Challenge Board Progress Tracker ● Yellow Station: Must Do Video Lesson or Should Do Practice or Aspire to Do; ● Blue Station: Small Group 1 Reteach; ● Green Station: Mastery Check as needed	Students choose 1 station based on their Challenge Board Progress Tracker Lead Teacher: ● Small Group 1; Co-Teacher: Support ● & ● stations
0:20-0:30	● Yellow Station: Continue Must Do, Should Do, Aspire to Do; ● Blue Station: Small Group 2 Reteach; ● Green Station: Mastery Check	Lead Teacher: ● Small Group 2; Co-Teacher: Support ● & ● stations
0:30-0:40	● Yellow Station: Must Do Video Lesson, or Should Do Practice, or Aspire to Do ● Blue Station: Small Group 3 Reteach or Enrichment; ● Green Station: Mastery Check	Lead Teacher: ● Small Group 3; Co-Teacher: Support ● & ● stations
0:40-0:45	Wrap Up: Update their Unit Challenge Board Progress Tracker, and Goal setter for the next day	Teacher & Co-teacher: Review and support students while updating their tracker to inform Teacher Tracker & small groups for the next day
0:45-1:00	● Red Station: PLP/iReady Personalized Pathway students work on personalized math pathway lessons	Teacher & Co-teacher: Monitor and support ● iReady station

The Instructional Design Integration Chart (Figure 13) illustrates how each 5–15 minute segment of the instructional block explicitly reinforces xMA’s four core methods. Each portion of the lesson cycle beginning with SEL goal-setting and ending with iReady’s personalized pathway aligns with research-supported strategies that enhance student growth. Multiple means of representation (video, manipulatives, texts), multiple means of expression (oral presentations, performance tasks, visual products), and multiple means of engagement (choice, gamification, peer collaboration) are embedded across the day. These components are core to UDL and supported by research showing that multimodal learning environments increase student comprehension and retention by up to 25% over single-mode environments (CAST, 2022; Brame, 2016; Al-Azawei et al., 2017). These tools and routines are not isolated strategies but rather integrated components of a cohesive, learner-centered ecosystem. Each day, students begin by reflecting on their learning progress, setting goals, and updating their Challenge Board progress trackers aligned to their personalized Power Profile. Teachers, in turn, use this data to deliver just-in-time supports and pace lessons responsively. Research shows that classrooms that include embedded reflection, goal setting, and self-monitoring practices show significantly higher academic engagement and self-efficacy (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020; Dweck, 2017; Andrade & Brookhart, 2020). In classrooms where this kind of metacognitive routine is reinforced consistently, students develop stronger learner identity and are more likely to persist through academic challenges, an essential trait for historically underserved student populations. This operational alignment across Challenge Boards, progress trackers, station rotations, SEL routines, and teacher-led groupings ensures instructional consistency, promotes student autonomy,

and increases access to rigorous learning. In high-poverty schools, such structured and responsive instructional ecosystems are shown to close achievement gaps more effectively than traditional whole-group models (Means et al., 2014; Patrick et al., 2023; Basham et al., 2021). At xMA, these systems are not just tools, they are the infrastructure of an equity-centered instructional design where all students are empowered to master content, reflect on progress, and take ownership of their academic journey.

Figure (15): Instructional Design Integration Chart

Time	Blended Learning	Mastery-Based Learning	Small Group Instruction	UDL Integration
0:00-0:05	Digital & visual tools for tracker and goal-setting (PLP/UDL-aligned)- Unit Challenge Board Progress Tracker, SEL Daily/Goal setting Journal	Students set goals toward mastery, track progress	N/A	Progress Trackers based on individual student self pacing and mastery, SEL/Goal tracker gives students voice/choice in goals
0:05-0:10	Students engage in whole-class vocabulary instruction using visual aids, word walls, and interactive tools.	Build background vocabulary for comprehension tasks	N/A	Multiple engagement modes: oral, written, and visual vocabulary tools
0:10-0:20	In Yellow &/or Blue station . Students use the Lesson Choice Board to select either a video-based or teacher-led lesson and begin Must Do practice using digital or hands-on activities. Students can move to Green Mastery Check station after mastering Must Do activities.	Initial Must Do instruction; If pass Must Do activities, Mastery Check when ready. Complete Should Do practices if fail, Must Do activities.	Teacher Led Blue Station: 1st Rotation Group (reteach or scaffold); Student-Led Yellow Station: Lesson, Practice, Aspire to Do Station; Green Station: Mastery Check	Multiple Means of Representations: videos, text, co-teacher support
0:20-0:30	In Yellow &/or Blue station . Students use the Lesson Choice Board to select either a video-based or teacher-led lesson and begin Must Do practice using digital or hands-on activities. Students can move to Green Mastery Check station after mastering Must Do activities.	Continue Must Do, Should Do or Mastery Check; Complete Aspire to Do for Above Mastery credit (optional)	Teacher Led Blue Station: 2nd Rotation Group (reteach or scaffold); Student-Led Yellow Station: Lesson, Practice, Aspire to Do Station; Green Station: Mastery Check	Multiple Means of Engagement: Hands-on and digital Must Do & Should Do activities by preference
0:30-0:40	In Yellow &/or Blue station . Students use the Lesson Choice Board to select either a video-based or teacher-led lesson and begin Must Do practice using digital or hands-on activities. Students can move to Green Mastery Check station after mastering Must Do activities.	If fail Mastery Check, Rettempt Must/Should Do; or Complete Teacher Led Small Group Blue Station . Then, Retattempt the Mastery Check	Teacher Led Blue Station: 3rd Rotation Group (reteach or scaffold); Student-Led Yellow Station: Lesson, Practice, Aspire to Do Station; Green Station: Mastery Check	Multiple Means of Expression: Choices in Digital Mastery Check & Aspire to do performance tasks, which could include oral, written, and artistic tasks
0:40-0:45	Digital & visual tools for tracker and goal-setting (PLP/UDL-aligned)	Reflect on goals toward mastery, track progress on Unit Challenge Board	N/A	Progress Trackers based on individual student self-pacing and mastery, SEL/Goal tracker gives students voice/choice in goals
0:45-1:00	Students access iReady at the Red Station , working through their PLP-aligned digital pathway while teachers provide targeted content support.	Remediate or extend learning via PLP based on mastery data	Teacher Led Blue Station: Optional based on support needed in iReady, Red Station , and PLP goals	iReady's Reading and Math Personalized Learning Pathways lessons provide lessons and practice activities based on student level and mastery

Empowering Student Success Through the xMA Framework

Birmingham City Schools serves a student population facing significant academic and structural barriers. Only 28% of students are proficient in English Language Arts and just 21% in Math,

according to the latest state assessments. Chronic absenteeism and unfinished learning remain ongoing challenges, compounded by high rates of students requiring Tier 2 and Tier 3 academic interventions. Many learners also have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), 504 Plans, or are English Language Learners (ELLs), which demands a responsive, differentiated, and equity-centered instructional model. xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy's instructional framework is uniquely positioned to address these challenges. Through personalized, mastery-based learning paths, students begin instruction at their individual level of proficiency and progress only after demonstrating true understanding. This approach removes the pressure of traditional pacing calendars and provides the time and support students need to close learning gaps without sacrificing rigor or expectations. Self-pacing structures embedded in our model allow learners to move forward at their own speed, which research shows significantly increases retention and reduces frustration especially among students who have fallen behind (Pane et al., 2017; Patrick et al., 2023).

Each lesson at xMA is designed using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, ensuring accessibility for all. Students interact with content through visual aids, hands-on tools, and assistive technologies, and express understanding through multiple formats such as writing, speaking, video, or artistic representation. This approach is particularly effective for students with disabilities and language barriers, as it eliminates access issues and allows every child to demonstrate mastery in ways aligned to their strengths (Capp, 2022; Basham et al., 2021). Instruction is further differentiated through daily small-group instruction. Using real-time data from Mastery Checks and progress trackers, teachers group students flexibly to reteach missed skills, provide scaffolded support, or offer enrichment. No student is left behind in this model; instead, every learner receives targeted support exactly when they need it most. Built-in social-emotional learning (SEL) routines, such as daily reflection and goal setting, help students build resilience and academic ownership. These moments are aligned to xMA's P.O.W.E.R.S. values and Portrait of a Graduate traits, reinforcing self-regulation, perseverance, and a growth mindset. Recent studies confirm that when SEL is integrated with academic instruction, student achievement rises by an average of 11 percentile points (Durlak et al., 2020; Mahoney et al., 2021).

Student engagement is further supported through the use of Challenge Boards and digital portfolios, which gamify the learning process and help students visualize their progress in real time. These systems promote motivation, clarify goals, and provide regular opportunities for celebration particularly important for students who benefit from tangible evidence of their growth. Family engagement is also strengthened through blended learning access: all lessons and mastery-based assignments are housed in Google Classroom, allowing caregivers to support learning asynchronously and remain connected to their child's academic progress. Research affirms that when families have visibility into student progress through LMS platforms, both student outcomes and parent confidence increase (Powell et al., 2022; Goodall, 2020).

Ultimately, xMA's instructional design is not only grounded in best practices, it is custom-built for Birmingham's student profile. By combining structure, flexibility, differentiation, and high expectations through blended learning, mastery-based progression, self-pacing, and daily progress tracking, xMA provides a proven pathway for every student to meet and exceed grade-level standards while developing the confidence, skills, and mindset to thrive.

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- b) Describe the basic learning environment (e.g., classroom-based, independent study), including class size and structure. Demonstrate alignment to the school’s mission and vision.

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) fosters a personalized, rigorous, and student-centered learning environment that ensures all students including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with diverse learning needs can access, engage with, and succeed in their educational journey. Rooted in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and strengthened by blended learning, mastery-based instruction, differentiation, and small-group instruction, xMA’s personalized learning approach creates a flexible, inclusive, and engaging environment that supports individual student progress. These approaches are well supported by research demonstrating that personalized learning models improve academic outcomes, particularly for students who have historically been underserved (Pane et al., 2017).

The physical classroom layout is intentionally structured to support self-paced, differentiated instruction, incorporating learning zones designed for whole-group instruction, small-group collaboration, independent work, and assessment stations. Each classroom follows a station rotation model, which has been found to enhance student engagement and achievement by allowing for individualized instruction in smaller settings (Grossman et al., 2014). Within this model, students rotate through teacher-led instruction, collaborative or independent practice, and an assessment or feedback station that enables real-time progress monitoring and targeted support.

During math and literacy blocks, co-teachers including academic and special education staff deliver scaffolded, small-group instruction aligned with individual student needs. This model supports mastery-based progression, where students advance upon demonstrating understanding, rather than being restricted by a fixed pacing calendar (Levine & Patrick, 2019). Visual supports, structured routines, and visual timers are used throughout classrooms to foster independence, maintain engagement, and help students and staff stay on task.

xMA’s personalized learning model offers students direct instruction through live teaching as well as teacher-created and curriculum-embedded instructional videos, giving learners multiple ways to access, revisit, and internalize new content. Instruction is organized using the “Must Do, Should Do, Aspire to Do” framework, which promotes natural differentiation, student agency, and clear pathways for practice, reteaching, and enrichment.

Students monitor their own learning through digital and physical progress trackers, which double as visual schedules that indicate the station where they will begin each day. Alongside individual trackers, teachers use student group trackers to reinforce flexible groupings and maintain pacing expectations. Schoolwide Hero Board trackers celebrate students’ demonstration of the P.O.W.E.R.S. values, reinforcing positive behavior, effort, and academic habits.

These evidence-based tools support goal-setting, self-regulation, and intrinsic motivation (Zimmerman, 2002). Teachers regroup students daily based on mastery data, ensuring that instructional supports and interventions are both timely and precisely targeted.

This personalized and inclusive learning environment directly aligns with xMA’s mission to develop curious, confident, and capable learners who are prepared for a dynamic, S.T.R.E.A.M.-based world. By combining evidence-based strategies with a commitment to equity and access, xMA creates

an environment where all learners can thrive. We ensure an environment that supports our school design elements through Personalized Learning Pods and Supportive Classroom setup grounded in predictable structures, routines and procedures.

Personalized Learning Pods

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy, the academic environment is intentionally designed to foster deep personalization, mastery-based progression, and whole-child growth. A core structure that drives this vision is our Personalized Learning Pods flexible, data-driven groupings of students based on similar academic skill levels, social-emotional readiness, and personalized learning goals. Each pod provides an environment where students work alongside peers pursuing mastery of comparable standards, executive functioning skills, and habits of work, all informed by real-time data from Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs), Mastery Checks, and student reflections captured within Personalized Learning Portfolios (PLPortfolios).

The research strongly supports this flexible, skills-based grouping approach. Differentiated instruction is most effective when students are grouped by readiness levels and learning needs, allowing teachers to tailor supports and scaffold instruction in ways that meaningfully accelerate progress (Tomlinson, 2017). By clustering students who are working toward similar mastery targets, teachers can deliver precise small-group instruction that is more manageable, focused, and responsive. This structure mirrors a wide body of research showing that differentiated small-group rotations increase engagement, deepen content understanding, and streamline formative assessment cycles (Fisher & Frey, 2019; Hattie, 2021).

Additionally, Personalized Learning Pods foster meaningful peer collaboration, which is critical for academic and social development. Peer learning structures, when properly aligned to skill levels, yield large learning gains across diverse populations, with an effect size of 0.82 according to Hattie's meta-analysis (Hattie, 2018). Within pods, students engage in structured partner work, project-based learning tasks, and peer feedback sessions, promoting higher-order thinking, problem-solving, and metacognitive skills. Working alongside peers at similar developmental levels allows students to have richer academic conversations, collaborate more authentically, and receive more relevant peer modeling and support.

Personalized Learning Pods also streamline progress monitoring. Teachers can more efficiently administer Mastery Checks, review Challenge Board progression, and provide actionable feedback when students are moving through similar standards and tasks. Formative assessment research (Bloom, 1984) shows that ongoing, targeted feedback accelerates mastery, and the pod structure makes real-time adjustments and reteaching significantly more manageable. Data-informed flexibility ensures that teachers are responsive to student needs, while students maintain a clear, visible understanding of their own learning progress.

In addition to academic benefits, Personalized Learning Pods intentionally support students' social-emotional development. Grouping by SEL readiness creates emotionally safe, predictable spaces where students can practice self-management, collaboration, and self-pacing skills. Research from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020) and Marzano & Marzano (2003) confirms that environments where SEL competencies are explicitly supported lead to stronger academic outcomes, improved student relationships, and greater engagement in learning. By creating pods that balance both academic needs and SEL readiness, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy ensures that students can thrive both cognitively and emotionally. Critically, Personalized Learning Pods are not fixed. Students move fluidly between pods based on demonstrated mastery, personal growth, and evolving academic needs. This mobility reinforces a growth mindset and cultivates a culture of continuous improvement, where learning progress is tied to effort, feedback, and perseverance rather than perceived ability (Dweck, 2015; Sousa & Tomlinson, 2018). Daily goal setting, reflection, and self-assessment embedded within each pod cycle further develop students' metacognitive awareness, self-efficacy, and academic ownership (Zimmerman, 2002).

By fully integrating Personalized Learning Pods with our Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs), Challenge Boards, Mastery Checks, and Personalized Learning Portfolios (PLPortfolios), xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy creates a cohesive academic environment where every student experiences targeted support, meaningful collaboration, personalized growth pathways, and social-emotional safety.

Backed by decades of learning science, formative assessment research, and best practices in differentiation, Personalized Learning Pods embody our commitment to ensuring that every learner is empowered to achieve mastery, independence, and lifelong success.

Supportive Classroom Setup

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy classrooms are intentionally designed to be flexible, accessible, and learner-centered, ensuring that every student regardless of their learning profile feels empowered, supported, and equipped to succeed. Each space reflects the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and our commitment to predictable, personalized environments that nurture student agency, engagement, and academic ownership. When students walk into a classroom at xMA, they enter a space that celebrates diverse learning styles, encourages movement and choice, and builds a foundation for independence and mastery.

Predictable Classroom Layouts

The xMA Model Classroom Setup is intentionally designed with clearly defined zones that support our color-coded station rotation system. Each classroom includes four key learning stations: the Blue Station for teacher-led direct instruction and reteaching, the Yellow Station for independent or choice-based work, the Green Station for mastery checks and assessments, and the Red Station for intervention, enrichment, or work aligned to PLP or IEP goals. These zones are consistently labeled and color-coded across all grade levels, providing students with predictable, visual cues that help them understand where to go, what to work on, and how to structure their day.

~~Yellow~~ Station: This is the Independent/Group Work area where students engage in Must Do, Should Do, or Aspire to Do tasks at their own pace. It promotes collaboration, peer learning, and student ownership of their academic progress.

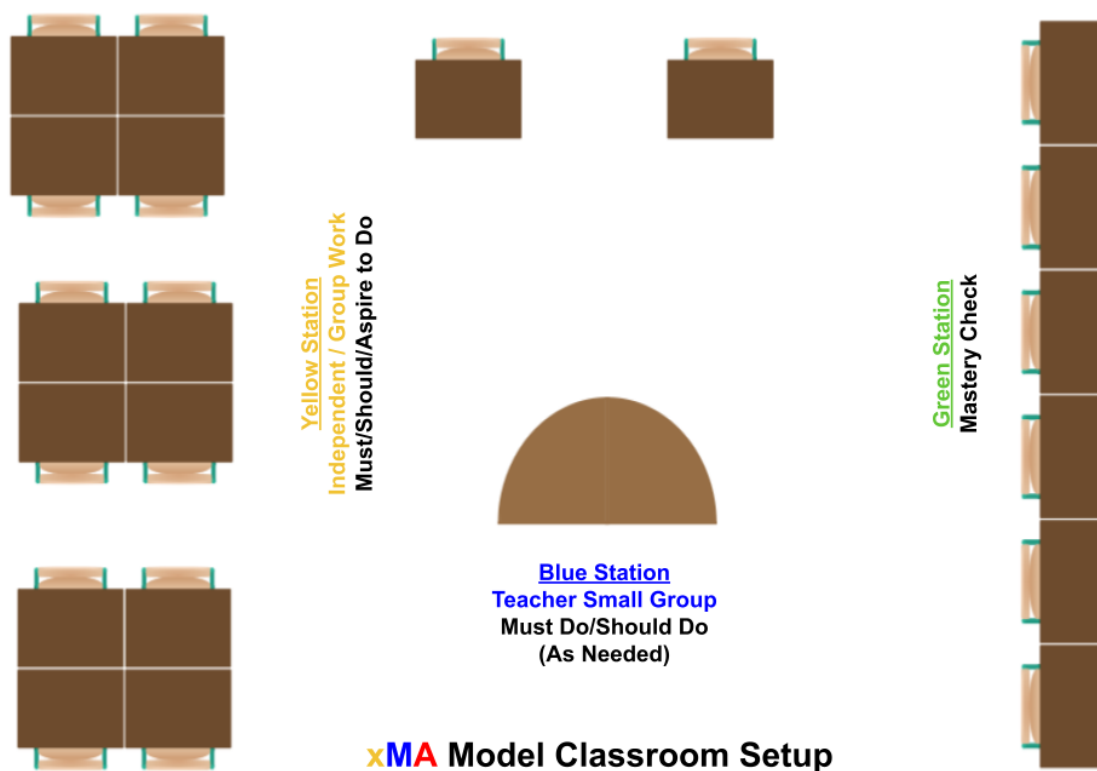
~~Blue~~ Station: The Teacher Small Group zone is where targeted instruction takes place. Here, teachers provide direct support for Must Do lessons, reteaching, or guided Should Do practice based on real-time data and student needs. This flexible space ensures responsive teaching and just-in-time intervention.

~~Green~~ Station: The Mastery Check zone is designated for independent assessment. Students come here when they are ready to demonstrate understanding of the standard through a checkpoint task. This quiet area reinforces accountability and helps teachers track individual progression.

~~Red~~ Station: Used for intervention, enrichment, or assignments tied to Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs) or IEP goals, ensuring support for students at all levels.

Students use their unit progress trackers in tandem with these stations, allowing them to move independently, manage their learning pace, and stay aligned with their personalized goals throughout the day. This strategic layout supports a self-paced, mastery-driven environment where students move fluidly between stations based on their learning needs and goals. It also enables teachers to monitor progress, facilitate differentiated instruction, and implement the xMA Academic Playbook with ease. Figure (14) shows an example of the xMA model classroom setup. While teachers have the autonomy to set up their classrooms, they must include our stations and elements from our essential “ Power Elements” classroom checklist (Figure 16).

Figure (16): xMA Model Classroom Setup



Flexible Seating and Engagement

Flexible seating at xMA is grounded in student choice. Students move between stations and select seating types based on the structure of the lesson, their progress within a learning cycle, and their personal learning preferences. This flexibility promotes engagement, self-regulation, and ownership of learning. While full-scale flexible seating furniture will be built out over time due to budget considerations, the emphasis remains on empowering students to make choices that support their focus, comfort, and academic stamina.













Accessibility and Technology Integration

Technology is seamlessly integrated throughout the classroom in our blended learning environment. Students access instructional videos, digital tools, and learning platforms via classroom tablets, laptops, or interactive boards to support blended learning, accommodate different learning modalities, and enable self-paced progress. Students regularly update their Hero Boards and unit trackers tools that not only support accountability but also reflect the values of Ownership Now and Work Hard within our classroom culture.

To support our blended learning environment and reinforce consistent classroom procedures, xMA intentionally operationalizes Google Classroom as our Learning Management System (LMS) to provide visual structure and predictability for both students and teachers. All classrooms organize their LMS in the same way to ensure consistency across grade levels and improve accessibility for students and families. Each digital classroom follows a standardized layout with clearly labeled sections for Must Do, Should Do, Aspire to Do, and Mastery Checks, mirroring our instructional framework. Teachers who implement more hands-on or paper-based instruction maintain the same structure in their physical classroom environments to ensure alignment. Figure (15) below provides an example of our standardized LMS setup, which is consistent across all xMA classrooms.

Figure (17): xMA Learning Management System (LMS) Setup

Unit 1: Letters

	 U1 L1: Lowercase Letters (Must Do)	Assignments	Due Sep 10	
	 U1 L1: Lowercase Letters (Should Do)...	Enrichment	Due Sep 11	
	 U1 L1: Lowercase Letters (Aspire to D...	Enrichment	Due Sep 16	
	 U1 L1: Lowercase Letters (Mastery Ch...	Assignments	Due Sep 12	

Visual Supports and Classroom Power Elements

Visual reminders of our Hero Code and P.O.W.E.R.S. Values are posted throughout the classroom, including anchor charts, student examples, and reflection prompts that connect academics to character. Each classroom includes a Hero Wall of Fame where students display evidence of their growth and accomplishments celebrating both mastery and the learning process. To ensure a consistent, empowering, and student-centered environment across all learning spaces, every xMA classroom is equipped with a common set of “Power Elements” (Figure 16) that visually reinforce our academic systems, behavioral expectations, and core values. These classroom features build predictability, autonomy, and motivation serving as daily anchors for student success.

Figure (18) :xMA Classroom Power Elements Checklist

Power Element	Rationale
Hero Classroom Banner	Each classroom is named after a superhero or inspiring figure to create a sense of identity and pride. This schoolwide theme helps students connect to the values of personal growth and resilience, building a classroom culture where every learner sees themselves as powerful and capable.
Hero Oath	Students and teachers begin each day by reciting the Hero Oath, a shared pledge that reflects the P.O.W.E.R.S. values. This daily ritual reinforces collective responsibility and sets a positive tone for how students will interact and engage in learning throughout the day.
Progress Trackers	Each student uses a personalized progress tracker to monitor their mastery of academic standards, set learning goals, and plan their station schedule. Students update these trackers daily at the end of each class, and during advisory check-ins, ensuring ownership and real-time reflection.

Color-Coded Station Rotation	Classrooms implement a color-coded system for station rotations: Blue for small group instruction, Green for Mastery Checks , Yellow for independent or choice-based work, and Red for PLP. These consistent visual cues promote independence, reduce transition anxiety, and support all learners in managing their schedules.
Hero Code Behavior Matrix	The Hero Code Matrix is posted in every classroom and outlines clear expectations aligned to the P.O.W.E.R.S. values across learning spaces. This shared language supports consistency in behavior expectations and encourages positive self-regulation and classroom climate.
Hero Board	The Hero Board allows students to earn Hero Bucks (K–5) or Power Credits (6–8) when they model core values throughout the day. Teachers and co-teachers award tokens in real time, and students use their boards to monitor daily and weekly goals related to behavior and effort.
Hero Wall of Fame	Student work both in-progress and mastered is showcased on the Hero Wall of Fame. This reinforces a growth mindset, celebrates persistence, and builds a culture of peer recognition and encouragement.
Anchor Charts	Anchor charts are used to display strategies, reminders, content knowledge, and the P.O.W.E.R.S. values. They serve as reference tools for students as they navigate their lessons and reflect on how to embody values like Ownership and Work Hard.
Word Wall	Essential academic and content-area vocabulary is posted and updated frequently. Word walls support independent learning and language development, especially in reading and writing-heavy classrooms.
Data Tracking Systems	Classrooms include digital or visual systems for teachers and students to track academic mastery and behavior data. This helps teachers plan interventions or pull small groups, and supports students in understanding their progress toward personal goals.
Visible Timers	Timers are used to support transitions and station pacing, helping students build time awareness and self-management. They are especially useful in supporting the pacing of self-directed learners in the blended classroom model.

Flexible Seating & Group Setups	Classrooms feature a range of seating options and clearly defined zones for our small group, color coded station stations for collaboration, independent work, and teacher-led instruction and assessments. This flexibility allows students to choose learning environments that match their needs, preferences, and tasks, reinforcing the UDL framework.
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Class Size and Structure

xMA maintains a structured yet adaptable classroom-based learning model that balances whole-group, small-group, and individualized instruction to meet the needs of all learners. Each grade level enrolls 60 students, divided into three classes of 20 students, maintaining a 1:20 teacher-student ratio. To enhance personalized learning and differentiation, class sizes adjust to a 1:10 ratio during math and literacy blocks, with teachers and teacher associates co-facilitating small-group instruction and targeted interventions. This structure ensures continuous progress monitoring, flexible regrouping, and mastery-based advancement, allowing students to move through structured, meaningful learning experiences at their own pace while reinforcing foundational skills.

Collaborative Support Teams

To ensure equitable access to learning, xMA's Special Education (SPED) and English Language Learner (ELL) teams work alongside teachers to develop and implement Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and Individualized Language Plans (ILPs). These specialists provide co-teaching, small-group pull-outs, and differentiated support, ensuring that students receive the academic and behavioral interventions necessary for success.

Alignment with xMA's Mission and Vision

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) is committed to fostering an innovative, personalized, and rigorous learning environment where S.T.R.E.A.M. education, mastery-based learning, and differentiated instruction empower students to think critically, solve problems, and explore diverse career pathways. By integrating Universal Design for Learning (UDL), blended learning, and a small-group station rotation model, xMA ensures that learner variability is embraced and every student receives targeted, flexible instruction to meet their individual needs. Through self-paced learning structures, digital and physical progress tracking, and technology integration, students take ownership of their education, developing the skills, confidence, and adaptability needed to thrive in an evolving world. Additionally, Personalized Learning Pods and intentionally supportive classroom setups operationalize the school's core design elements by grouping students according to academic and social-emotional needs, enabling precision in differentiation, strengthening mastery-based progression, and creating emotionally safe, collaborative learning communities. Our S.T.R.E.A.M.-driven, student-centered approach creates a collaborative, high-expectation learning environment where every student is empowered to master their potential, engage in meaningful learning, and shape the future through creativity, innovation, and problem-solving.

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c) Provide an overview of the planned curriculum. Attach a sample course scope and sequence for one subject for each division (elementary, middle, high school) the school would serve. In addition, identify course outcomes and demonstrate alignment with applicable state standards.

Curriculum Overview

xMA has selected high-quality curricula for ELA, Math, Science and Social studies that align with Alabama's Course of Study Standards. The curriculum is fully developed and utilizes high quality selections recommended by the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) and EdReports, an independent nonprofit that conducts evidence-based reviews of instructional materials. xMA chose i-Ready for our ELA, iReady for Math, Stemscopes for Science and Savvas' MyWorld Interactive for Social Studies. A more detailed curriculum description provided within the curriculum choices section. We prioritize curricula that align with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, ensuring access and engagement for all learners (CAST, 2024). This approach emphasizes small group instruction with embedded scaffolds, tiered instruction, and frequent formative assessments to provide individualized support and challenge (Rosenshine, 2012). The curriculum is carefully aligned with Alabama's rigorous Course of Study standards, particularly focusing on the enhanced ELA standards emphasizing foundational reading skills, comprehension strategies, and increasing text complexity, as outlined by the Alabama Literacy Act. Furthermore, the math curriculum emphasizes the critical shifts in rigor, focus, and coherence, fostering deep conceptual understanding and problem-solving skills (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 2014). Our curricular choices are thoughtfully differentiated to meet the diverse needs of all students ensuring a personalized learning experience for each individual

[xMA ELA Scope and Sequence](#)

Sample Course Scope	File name:	xMA_ELA_Scope_Sequence-updated.pdf
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	Uploaded by:	Melissa Capehart

d) If the curriculum is fully developed, summarize curricular choices, such as textbook selection, by subject, and the rationale for each. Describe the evidence that these curricula will be appropriate and effective for the targeted students. Describe how the curriculum aligns with Alabama state standards.

Curriculum Choices

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy, all core academic curricula are intentionally selected and implemented to ensure full alignment with the Alabama Course of Study Standards and the Alabama Literacy and Numeracy Acts. Our English Language Arts and Math curricula both selected from the Alabama State Department of Education's list of highly recommended, evidence-based instructional materials are vertically aligned to grade-level standards and provide comprehensive coverage of required competencies, ensuring students build foundational literacy and numeracy skills while progressing toward grade-level proficiency and beyond. Similarly, our Science and Social Studies curricula are standards-aligned and designed to ensure mastery of Alabama's academic content standards through inquiry-based learning, standards-aligned assessments, and scaffolded instruction. In addition, xMA's dedicated STREAM curriculum, WOZed, is fully aligned to the Alabama Digital Literacy and Computer Science Standards, ensuring students develop computational thinking, digital citizenship, coding, data analysis, and engineering design skills consistent with state expectations. Through topics such as robotics, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and data science, WOZed provides structured, standards-aligned learning progressions across grade levels. CharacterStrong, our social-emotional learning curriculum, further aligns with state SEL and character education priorities, reinforcing competencies that support student success in academic and social contexts. Collectively, these curricula ensure that all instruction at xMA is fully aligned to Alabama state standards, while advancing our mission to provide rigorous, personalized, and future-ready learning experiences for every student.

Our curriculum is intentionally designed to support all learners through a personalized learning model that integrates the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework. Selected curricula align with Alabama's Course of Study Standards and are recommended by the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) and EdReports for their quality, rigor, and effectiveness. These choices were made to ensure that every student regardless of learning style, background, or ability has access to the tools, resources, and supports needed to thrive academically. We prioritize curricula that offer robust differentiation, multimodal and multisensory learning experiences, and strong instructional scaffolds to promote engagement, accessibility, and mastery-based learning for all students. The following section outlines each curriculum selection and how it supports our commitment to high-quality, inclusive, and student-centered instruction.

English Language Arts

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) adopts the i-Ready Reading curriculum as its core English Language Arts (ELA) program for grades K–8, based on its strong alignment with the Alabama Course of Study, its grounding in the Science of Reading, and its intentional support for diverse learners through Universal Design for Learning (UDL). This curriculum was formally selected by the Alabama Literacy Task Force and the Alabama Department of Education as one of the top-rated, evidence-based ELA programs aligned to the state's literacy priorities. i-Ready received green ratings across all gateways from EdReports, indicating high marks for text quality, knowledge-building, and instructional support (EdReports, 2023).

i-Ready's ELA suite includes Ready Reading for grades K–8, which provides teacher-led instruction through the close reading of high-quality, complex texts, alongside writing, vocabulary, and oral language components. Lessons are designed to help students deeply understand both literature and informational texts while meeting grade-level standards. The program integrates writing tasks that are text-dependent and standards-aligned, helping students strengthen their analytical thinking and communication skills through authentic practice. These practices reflect current research underscoring the role of rich content knowledge and meaningful engagement with complex texts to improve long-term reading comprehension and literacy outcomes (Wexler, 2019).

For students in grades K–2, i-Ready includes a strong phonics and foundational skills strand based on Scarborough's Reading Rope (2001) and aligned with the instructional practices promoted by the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI). Lessons are sequenced to support phonological awareness, decoding, and orthographic mapping critical components of fluent and automatic reading. This structured approach ensures that students build the decoding and comprehension skills necessary for academic success across content areas.

The curriculum's design is deeply rooted in the principles of Universal Design for Learning, offering flexibility in content delivery, assessment, and student engagement. Instructional materials include visual supports, interactive modeling, and scaffolded tasks that provide multiple means of representation for students with diverse needs. Students demonstrate their understanding through multiple means of action and expression, including writing, oral discussions, and digital tools. Lessons also incorporate multiple means of engagement, using culturally responsive texts and collaborative learning structures to maintain student motivation and relevance.

To further individualize instruction, xMA will leverage i-Ready Personalized Instruction, a digital platform that delivers adaptive reading pathways tailored to each student's needs. Based on a research-based diagnostic assessment, this platform identifies skill gaps and provides targeted instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. This model aligns with key components of the Science of Reading and supports the implementation of the Alabama Literacy Act, which emphasizes explicit, systematic foundational skills instruction in the early grades.

i-Ready's data-driven ecosystem provides robust tools for progress monitoring and instructional decision-making. Teachers receive real-time data that supports flexible grouping for small-group instruction, targeted interventions, and academic enrichment. By embedding personalized learning opportunities within the core program, i-Ready helps ensure that all students including English Learners, students with disabilities, and advanced learners have access to appropriately rigorous instruction and support.

Ultimately, i-Ready Reading offers a high-quality, inclusive, and adaptive ELA experience that reinforces xMA's mission to provide personalized learning opportunities while preparing all students to meet or exceed grade-level expectations.

Mathematics

xMA selects i-Ready Classroom Mathematics for its comprehensive approach to supporting all learners, including neurodiverse students. This program, an approved curriculum that aligns with the Alabama Course of Study standards, has received a perfect score from EdReports, praised for its strong focus on conceptual understanding, procedural fluency, and application (EdReports, 2021). xMA utilizes Ready Mathematics, a high-quality, standards-aligned curriculum identified by the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) Math Task Force and the Office of Mathematics Improvement as a top recommended program aligned to the Alabama Numeracy Act. To support data-driven instruction, xMA also implements the i-Ready platform as its universal screener and progress monitoring tool. Teachers further leverage the i-Ready Math Toolbox to provide targeted, differentiated Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction based on individual student needs. i-Ready Classroom Mathematics explicitly embeds Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles throughout its lessons. This aligns with research demonstrating that UDL principles are highly effective in creating inclusive learning environments for diverse learners (CAST, 2024; Rappolt-Schlichtmann, Daley, & Rose, 2018). For example, to address Multiple Means of Representation, the program provides various formats for presenting information, such as interactive simulations, videos, and real-world examples. Students can also choose to listen to the text read aloud or adjust the text size and font for better readability. These features are particularly beneficial for students who may have auditory processing difficulties, visual processing challenges, or attention deficits. To support Multiple Means of Action and Expression, students have options for demonstrating their understanding, including drawing, writing, using manipulatives, and engaging in interactive exercises. This flexibility allows learners to express their knowledge in ways that best suit their strengths and preferences. For example, students with fine motor challenges may find it easier to express their understanding through verbal explanations or by using manipulatives, while those with strong visual-spatial skills may excel in drawing or using visual representations. Finally, to foster Multiple Means of Engagement, the program incorporates a variety of learning activities, such as games, puzzles, and real-world challenges, to pique student interest and maintain motivation. These engaging activities can be highly motivating for students who may struggle with traditional, passive learning approaches.

Furthermore, i-Ready Classroom Mathematics emphasizes differentiated instruction through its focus on small group instruction, providing guidance for grouping students based on their needs and offering targeted support for each group. This approach, supported by research on effective

mathematics instruction for diverse learners (Gable & Hendrickson, 2008; Bouck, Joshi, & Johnson, 2021) ensures that all students, including those with specific learning differences, receive appropriate challenges and support. Additionally, i-Ready Classroom Mathematics is recommended by the Alabama Mathematics Task Force for its strong alignment to research-based best practices in mathematics instruction, particularly around problem-solving, conceptual understanding, and fluency development (Alabama State Department of Education, 2023). This alignment ensures that xMA students benefit from a curriculum that reflects statewide priorities for high-quality math instruction. Importantly, the use of i-Ready Classroom Mathematics also connects directly to xMA's broader assessment strategy, as i-Ready Diagnostic and Standards Mastery assessments serve as the school's primary standardized assessment tools for monitoring student growth and informing instructional decisions in mathematics. Research shows that pairing high-quality curricula with aligned, adaptive assessment systems significantly improves both instructional quality and student outcomes (Hamilton et al., 2022; Dusseault, 2020). By integrating curriculum, daily instruction, and assessment into one cohesive system, xMA creates a seamless, data-driven instructional cycle that personalizes learning and supports mastery for all students. i-Ready Classroom Mathematics, with its strong UDL foundation, differentiated instruction, and focus on meeting the diverse needs of all learners, provides a strong framework for supporting the academic success of all students in the xMA learning environment.

Science

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) has selected STEMscopes as the science curriculum for its K-8 program due to its strong alignment with the Alabama Course of Study Standards and its inclusion on the state's approved curriculum list. STEMscopes is a hands-on, inquiry-based science program that fosters student engagement through real-world problem-solving and interactive learning experiences. Developed using research-based instructional practices, it supports a three-dimensional learning approach, integrating disciplinary core ideas, crosscutting concepts, and science and engineering practices as outlined by the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) (Bybee, 2013). STEMscopes is particularly effective within a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, ensuring accessibility and inclusivity for all students (CAST, 2024). It provides multiple means of representation, including interactive simulations, hands-on investigations, multimedia content, and graphic organizers, which support diverse learning preferences (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014). Multiple means of expression are encouraged, allowing students to demonstrate understanding through written explanations, oral presentations, digital models, and hands-on projects, aligning with their individual strengths (Hall, Vue, Meyer, & Rose, 2021). Furthermore, the curriculum enhances multiple means of engagement by incorporating phenomena-based learning, inquiry-driven activities, and gamified elements, which increase student motivation and deepen conceptual understanding (National Research Council, 2012).

Additionally, STEMscopes supports small group instruction and personalized learning, making it highly adaptable for differentiated instruction. Teachers can modify lessons to provide tiered support, using built-in scaffolds such as sentence stems, guided inquiry prompts, and hands-on experiments to meet the needs of all learners (Tomlinson, 2017). Research suggests that hands-on, inquiry-based science instruction improves student engagement, critical thinking skills, and scientific literacy, particularly for students who benefit from experiential learning approaches (Hofstein & Lunetta, 2004). By incorporating UDL principles, inquiry-based learning, and differentiated instructional support, STEMscopes ensures that all students regardless of learning style, background, or ability can actively participate in scientific discovery and develop a deeper understanding of the natural world.

Social Studies

In grades K-8, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) selects Savvas' MyWorld Interactive Social Studies curriculum for its strong alignment with the Alabama Course of Study Standards and the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies. This student-centered, inquiry-based curriculum encourages active learning, critical thinking, and civic engagement by integrating real-world problem-solving, historical analysis, and strong literacy connections. Research supports inquiry-based learning as a powerful method for promoting deeper understanding, engagement, and retention of social studies concepts (Levstik & Barton, 2015).

MyWorld Interactive is designed with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, ensuring accessibility and engagement for all students (CAST, 2024). It provides multiple means of engagement by incorporating project-based learning, real-world simulations, and hands-on activities that encourage students to explore historical and contemporary issues in meaningful ways. These features help foster intrinsic motivation and civic responsibility, key components of effective social studies instruction (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013). The curriculum offers multiple means of representation through visuals, primary source documents, interactive maps, multimedia content, and digital resources, making historical and social concepts accessible to diverse learners (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014). This multimodal approach enhances comprehension by allowing students to engage with content in ways that best suit their learning preferences (Tomlinson, 2017). Students also have multiple means of action and expression, demonstrating their understanding through written reflections, discussions, debates, digital projects, and role-playing activities. This flexibility empowers learners to express their knowledge in ways that align with their strengths, improving communication and analytical reasoning (Hall, Vue, Meyer, & Rose, 2021). By integrating UDL principles and prioritizing student inquiry, collaboration, and active learning, MyWorld Interactive fosters an inclusive, engaging, and differentiated learning environment where all students can develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and civic engagement skills necessary for success in the 21st century.

S.T.R.E.A.M. Curriculum

At xS.T.R.E.A.M.Minds Academy (xMA), our daily S.T.R.E.A.M. elective classes utilize the WOZed curriculum, an innovative program aligned with the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) Standards, Computer Science Teachers Association (CSTA) Standards, and Digital Literacy and Computer Science (DLCS) Standards. This curriculum ensures students gain essential 21st-century STEM skills while fostering problem-solving, collaboration, and creativity through hands-on, real-world applications. With a structured, progressive approach, students engage in immersive learning experiences that develop both foundational and advanced competencies in science, technology, engineering, the arts, and mathematics. Our class will use Common Sense Media for digital citizenship and literacy lessons and curriculum.

Students progress through three levels of our S.T.R.E.A.M. Academy: Primary, Exploratory and Career Preparatory.

In K-2 Primary Academy, students build foundational skills through an engaging curriculum that integrates S.T.R.E.A.M. (Science, Technology, Reading, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) with Fine Arts. S.T.R.E.A.M. class introduces early concepts in Animation, AI, Drones, Robotics, and Digital Citizenship, aligning with Alabama's Digital Literacy and Computer Science Standards. Literacy is embedded throughout, with students using read-alouds, storytelling, and coding-based narratives to develop comprehension and vocabulary. Alongside S.T.R.E.A.M., students explore Fine Arts through Art, Music, and Dance/Theatre, fostering creativity, critical thinking, and self-expression. At this stage, children are naturally curious and open to new experiences, making it an ideal time to nurture foundational academic and creative skills. Additionally, targeted instruction in reading and math, with differentiated enrichment and intervention, ensures all learners progress in literacy and numeracy.

In 3-5 Exploratory Academy, students continue their S.T.R.E.A.M. education with more complex concepts in Animation, AI, Drones, Robotics, Coding, Cybersecurity, Data Science, Engineering Design, Mobile Development, and AR/VR while reinforcing Digital Citizenship skills. Literacy remains central, with students using coding journals, digital research, and technical reading strategies to enhance comprehension. At this stage, students also gain autonomy in their Fine Arts education, choosing to specialize in Art, Music, or Dance/Theatre based on their interests. This choice fosters a sense of ownership over their learning and encourages deeper exploration of their talents. As students develop greater independence, they engage in project-based learning that connects technology, engineering, and literacy, strengthening both analytical and creative thinking. Core instruction in reading and math continues with differentiated support, ensuring all learners receive the targeted instruction needed to advance or catch up in their academic journey.

In 6-8 Career Prep Academy, students begin exploring career pathways in STEM, Fine Arts, and vocational fields through advanced S.T.R.E.A.M. coursework. They engage in real-world applications of Animation, AI, Drones, Robotics, Coding, Cybersecurity, Data Science, Engineering Design, Mobile Development, and AR/VR, deepening their understanding of digital literacy and computational thinking. Literacy is embedded through research-driven assignments, career-aligned technical reading, and digital fluency projects that prepare students for the demands of future careers. As they refine their academic and creative skills, middle school students also continue their Fine Arts journey, choosing electives in Art, Music, or Dance/Theatre to further develop their artistic expression. This stage is pivotal as students begin seriously considering their future, and career exploration opportunities help lay the groundwork for high school pathways. Alongside this, targeted reading and math instruction, with intervention and enrichment opportunities, ensures they are well-prepared for future academic and professional success.

Curriculum Overview

The program is structured to introduce and develop key competencies at different grade levels:

- Kindergarten, 3rd, 6th Grades (Levels 1, 2, 3):
 - Animation
 - Artificial Intelligence (AI)
 - Drones
 - Robotics
 - Digital Citizenship
- 1st, 4th, 7th Grades (Levels 1, 2, 3):
 - Coding
 - Cybersecurity
 - Data Science
 - Robotics
 - Digital Citizenship
- 2nd, 5th, 8th Grades (Levels 1, 2, 3):
 - Engineering Design Process
 - Mobile Development
 - Augmented/Virtual Reality (AR/VR)
 - Robotics
 - Digital Citizenship

The WOZed curriculum introduces students to a wide range of cutting-edge STEM topics. Students explore Animation, learning digital storytelling, character design, and motion graphics, while Artificial Intelligence (AI) introduces them to machine learning, chatbots, and ethical considerations in AI development. Augmented and Virtual Reality (AR/VR) exposes students to immersive digital experiences, allowing them to design interactive virtual environments. In Coding, students develop computational thinking through block-based and text-based programming, while Cybersecurity teaches them about digital safety, encryption, and ethical hacking. Data Science equips students with skills in data collection, analysis, and visualization, preparing them to make data-driven decisions. Through Drones, students explore aerodynamics, programming, and their practical applications in various industries. The Engineering Design Process engages them in prototyping, problem-solving, and iterative design. Mobile Development introduces app creation, user experience (UX) principles, and interface design, while Robotics provides hands-on experiences in building and programming autonomous systems.

WOZed's structured progression ensures age-appropriate engagement, with students advancing through four levels: Level 1 (K-2), Level 2 (3-5), Level 3 (6-8), and Level 4 (9-12). This scaffolded learning approach helps younger students develop foundational STEM concepts through play-based and exploratory activities, while older students engage in more complex, career-connected applications that align with industry standards and workforce demands. Research indicates that early exposure to STEM careers significantly increases students' long-term interest and success in STEM

fields (Maltese & Tai, 2011), making this curriculum a key component of xMA's career exploration efforts.

[WozED Curriculum Scope & STEM Standards -xMA. pdf](#)

Social Emotional Learning

CharacterStrong is a nationally recognized, evidence-based social-emotional learning (SEL) and character development curriculum designed to build the skills, mindsets, and habits that lead to improved academic engagement, stronger relationships, and positive school culture. Rooted in the CASEL framework and aligned to state SEL and character education standards, CharacterStrong equips students with the competencies needed to become compassionate, resilient, and purpose-driven individuals traits that mirror xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy's Portrait of a Graduate. At its core, CharacterStrong is built on the principle that character and SEL must be taught explicitly, practiced consistently, and reinforced systemically. The curriculum offers developmentally appropriate, vertically aligned lessons for grades K–12, allowing for seamless integration across multiple grade levels. Each lesson is centered around three key objectives:

1. Character Development: Focusing on traits like kindness, responsibility, and respect
2. SEL Skill-Building: Teaching CASEL-aligned competencies including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making
3. Purpose and Well-being: Cultivating identity, belonging, and goal-setting as core elements of student flourishing

CharacterStrong lessons are designed to be interactive, culturally responsive, and easy to implement, with a range of modalities including:

- Scenario-based discussions
- Reflection prompts and journal writing
- Team-building activities
- Video-based modeling
- Real-world application challenges

At xMA, CharacterStrong is delivered daily during Morning Meetings (K–5) and Advisory (6–8) and aligned to the school's daily P.O.W.E.R.S. value themes (e.g., Positive Attitude Mondays, Ownership Now Tuesdays, etc.). Lessons are adapted weekly by the Dean of Culture & Instruction and counselor to align with the school's SEL calendar, Portrait of a Graduate traits, and current student needs, making it a living, responsive curriculum not a static program. The curriculum is intentionally trauma-informed and inclusive, with scaffolds for students with learning differences and English Language Learners (ELLs). It also includes built-in tools for staff training, adult SEL, and family engagement, aligning with research that highlights the importance of adult modeling and whole-school consistency for effective SEL implementation (Brackett et al., 2019; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). CharacterStrong's effectiveness is supported by multiple studies and district-level implementations across the country. According to an internal impact report (CharacterStrong, 2022), schools implementing the curriculum have reported:

- 30–50% reduction in office discipline referrals
- Improved student self-regulation, empathy, and relationship-building
- Stronger sense of belonging and peer connectedness
-

Improved classroom behavior and school climate ratings

- Increased academic engagement, especially among historically underserved groups

A 2021 evaluation by Mahoney et al. highlights CharacterStrong as one of the top emerging SEL programs that combine character education with CASEL's core competencies, an approach found to be especially effective in improving student well-being, resilience, and self-efficacy during the post-pandemic period. Furthermore, its alignment with whole-child frameworks, including those promoted by CASEL, the Aspen Institute (Nation at Hope, 2019), and the Science of Learning and Development Alliance (SoLD), makes it an ideal foundation for equitable, inclusive, and developmentally responsive SEL implementation. At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy, the CharacterStrong curriculum serves as a cornerstone of the school's daily SEL model reinforcing the P.O.W.E.R.S. values, building Portrait of a Graduate competencies, and creating a shared language of respect, empathy, and purpose. Its flexible structure, evidence-based outcomes, and whole-school design make it a powerful tool to support the academic, emotional, and social success of every student.

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e) If the curriculum is not already developed, describe a timeline for how the curriculum will be developed between approval of the application and the opening of the school, including who will be responsible and when key stages will be completed.

This section does not apply because the curriculum is already developed.

f) Describe the primary teaching methods and instructional strategies that the school will expect teachers to use and why they are well-suited for the anticipated student population. Describe the methods and systems teachers will have for providing differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all students.

Instructional Strategies

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA), instruction is anchored in a cohesive set of research-based teaching methods and high-impact instructional strategies designed to meet the academic and developmental needs of Birmingham's anticipated student population. These approaches ensure clarity, access, rigor, and personalization particularly for students entering below grade level, English Language Learners, neurodiverse learners, and students from historically underserved communities. xMA's core instructional methods Universal Design for Learning (UDL), mastery-based learning, small-group instruction, and blended learning were intentionally selected to address the wide variation in learner readiness across Birmingham. In the 2024–2025 academic year, Birmingham City Schools served approximately 19,710 students, with 85% identified as economically disadvantaged and only 37% demonstrating proficiency in ELA and 16% in math. These data reflect persistent structural barriers and underscore the urgent need for personalized, research-based instruction that meets students where they are and accelerates them forward.

- Primary Teaching Methods describe how teachers teach across the school.
- Instructional Strategies describe the tools and routines teachers use to bring those methods to life.

Together, they create a coherent, equitable, and mastery-driven learning experience fully aligned to xMA's STREAM-integrated instructional model.

Primary Teaching Methods

The following figure (19) teaching methods represent the foundational instructional approaches used across all classrooms at xMA. These high-leverage methods align with the school's personalized

learning and mastery-based instructional model and complement the STREAM experiences offered through dedicated elective courses.

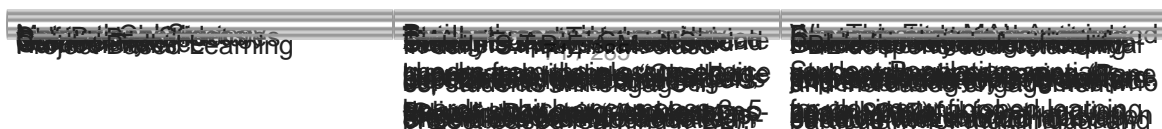
Figure (19): Teaching Methods

Teaching Method	Description	Why This Fits xMA's Anticipated Student Population
Direct Instruction (Explicit Teaching)	As a small group station, whole group lesson, or by video, teachers provide explicit teaching, modeling, and guided practice to ensure clarity and retention of new concepts. Research by Rosenshine (2012) highlights that direct instruction, with clear explanations and immediate feedback, is one of the most effective ways to build student understanding.	Highly effective for students with unfinished learning, language-processing challenges, and ELLs. Explicit instruction improves outcomes for struggling learners and ensures understanding before independent work (Rosenhine, 2012; Archer & Hughes, 2011).
Small Group Instruction	Students rotate through flexible, targeted groups formed using ongoing data. Teachers provide intensive reteaching, guided practice, or enrichment based on students' immediate needs.	Small group instruction provides opportunities for targeted intervention and enrichment, enabling teachers to respond directly to students' current levels and provide scaffolded support in real time. Meta-analyses and longitudinal studies confirm that small group instruction is highly effective in boosting literacy and numeracy outcomes for students who are below proficiency levels, especially when paired with ongoing formative assessment (Lou et al., 1996; Connor et al., 2009).
Blended Learning	xMA uses a blended learning model that combines digital and in-person instruction. Students have the option to engage with instructional videos and interactive digital activities or participate in direct, in-person lessons. This approach supports student agency, accommodates diverse learning styles, and ensures access to content at each student's pace. We utilize adaptive platforms like iReady and TeachTown to monitor progress and create personalized learning pathways based on skills mastered.	A combination of digital instruction, teacher-led lessons, and hands-on practice supports multiple learning modalities and gives students more control over pacing and review. Adaptive platforms provide personalized pathways and continuous data. Effective for low-income and diverse learners by providing individualized pacing, immediate feedback, and opportunities to close learning gaps (Means et al., 2014; Pane et al., 2015).

<p>Universal Design for Learning (UDL)</p>	<p>Lessons are intentionally designed with multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression to remove barriers and support diverse learning need</p>	<p>Universal Design for Learning (UDL) ensures that all students can access content through multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression critical in classrooms with varied learner profiles. UDL has been shown to increase academic engagement and performance among students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds by proactively reducing learning barriers (CAST, 2018; Ok et al., 2021).</p>
<p>Mastery-Based Learning</p>	<p>Students progress only after demonstrating mastery. Reteach-and-reassess cycles ensure students fill gaps before moving forward. Students receive timely feedback throughout their learning progression.</p>	<p>Mastery-based learning allows students to progress at their own pace, ensuring that gaps in foundational skills are addressed without forcing students to move on before they are ready. This approach is particularly effective in high-poverty communities with unfinished learning, like Birmingham, where many students enter classrooms significantly below grade level. Research demonstrates that mastery learning significantly improves retention, achievement, and motivation especially for students who have traditionally struggled in conventional pacing models (Guskey, 2007; Bloom, 1984).</p>
<p>Project-Based Learning (PBL)</p>	<p>In their STREAM elective class, students engage in STREAM investigations, collaborative design challenges, experimentation, prototyping, and real-world problem solving.</p>	<p>PBL increases critical thinking, collaboration, and engagement especially for multilingual learners and historically underserved students (Baron & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Hmelo-Silver et al., 2007).</p>

Instructional Strategies

Instructional strategies represent the concrete tools and routines teachers use to implement the methods above in daily practice. These strategies operationalize personalized learning, mastery-based progression, and STREAM integration while ensuring students experience clarity, structure, and choice. Figure (18) outlines our xMA embedded instructional strategies that prioritize Differentiation (UDL), Small Group Instruction, Mastery-Based Learning, and Blended Learning. Figure (20): Instructional Strategies



Methods and Systems for Differentiated Instruction

Instruction that is personalized, differentiated, and mastery-based is the foundation of xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy's (xMA) model. To meet the diverse needs of all students, xMA has established robust systems for data-driven differentiated instruction and continuous progress monitoring:

Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs), Portfolios, and IEPs:

Each student has a customized Personalized Learning Plan outlining specific goals, accommodations, and interventions based on BOY diagnostic assessments in ELA, Math, Science, Social Studies, SEL, and S.T.R.E.A.M.. For students with disabilities, the PLP aligns with their IEP, ensuring compliance with legal requirements and reinforcing individualized support. All student data, including learning goals, assessment results, mastery trackers, and progress reflections, are compiled in Personalized Learning Portfolios, which serve as each student's central dashboard for monitoring growth and guiding coaching conversations and family engagement.

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS):

Within this framework, xMA employs Response to Intervention (RTI) and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) to systematically identify, implement, and evaluate academic and behavioral interventions. Students receive support through clearly defined Tier 1, 2, and 3 systems ranging from universally designed instruction and proactive behavior supports to targeted interventions and intensive individualized plans. Teachers regularly assess student progress using data from portfolios and classroom assessments, adjusting supports in real-time to ensure that each learner receives the appropriate level of challenge and remediation.

Small Group Instruction (Station Rotation):

During small group rotations, students engage in Must Do, Should Do and Aspire to Do lessons and mastery checks. This includes direct teacher-led instruction, independent practice using adaptive platforms such as iReady, and frequent formative assessments at a Mastery Check Station aligned with their PLPs or IEPs. This structure guarantees targeted, responsive instruction and fosters peer collaboration, particularly beneficial for students with diverse learning profiles.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL):

xMA applies the principles of Universal Design for Learning to ensure lessons are accessible, engaging, and inclusive for all learners. Instruction is intentionally designed with multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement providing students with choice in how they access content and demonstrate mastery. Combined with the school's self-paced model, students are empowered to take ownership of their learning and progress through content based on mastery rather than seat time.

Through these systems and methods, xMA ensures that every student, regardless of academic level or learning differences, receives meaningful, appropriately challenging instruction that addresses both academic and developmental goals. This cohesive approach combining UDL, personalized portfolios, data-driven differentiation, small group instruction, and MTSS-informed supports allows for continuous adaptation of teaching strategies, guaranteeing that each learner can thrive and make measurable progress in a supportive, inclusive environment.

xMA's instructional program seamlessly integrates proven teaching methods with high-impact instructional strategies to deliver a rigorous, equitable, and personalized learning experience. By combining explicit instruction, small-group teaching, blended learning, mastery-based progression, and STREAM inquiry with strategic tools like choice boards, mastery checks, guided practice, and vocabulary routines, xMA ensures every student receives the support and challenge needed to thrive academically and socially.

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Element Review

Reviews is not provided

3. Student Performance Standards

Reviewer Instructions

Please rate this section using the provided rubric.

Status: Completed

Form Result

Provide the anticipated student performance standards and demonstrate how those standards align or exceed the Alabama State standards.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Compelling evidence of how the proposed school's student performance standards will directly and consistently meet or exceed Alabama standards.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

- a) Describe the school-wide student performance standards. In addition, attach a proposed academic performance framework for evaluating the school's academic progress. The Commission approved performance framework template is attached for reference.

School-wide Performance Standards Narrative

Schoolwide Student Performance Standards and Academic Performance Framework

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA), we ground all teaching and learning in the most recent Alabama Course of Study (ALCOS) standards for English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Physical Education, Digital Literacy, Computer Science, and Fine Arts. In addition, we prioritize the Alabama State Department of Education's identified critical standards for K–8 to ensure students master the essential skills and content required for future success. Upon approval, xMA will adopt and use the Commission-approved Performance Framework to evaluate academic progress over the charter term, and we will also track the additional academic and organizational goals below as part of our internal continuous improvement system. All performance expectations are implemented in compliance with applicable Alabama law, federal requirements, and charter school statutory requirements.

Academic and Organizational Goals

Our goals aren't just numbers on a chart, they are the compass guiding our daily work with students. Each is Specific, Measurable, Action-oriented, Realistic, and Time-bound, and together they represent the pillars of our S.T.R.E.A.M.-centered, inclusive model.

1. Academic Growth in Core Subjects

xMA commits to ensuring that 90% of students demonstrate at least one year of academic growth in English Language Arts, Math, and Science. This growth will be measured using i-Ready Diagnostics and the ACAP Summative Assessment. We believe that every student, regardless of starting point, deserves and is capable of measurable progress.

2. Benchmark Proficiency in Core Subjects

To ensure strong on-grade-level performance, 80% of students will score 85% or higher on quarterly interim assessments in English Language Arts, Math, and Science. These benchmarks will assess student mastery of Alabama State Standards and guide instructional adjustments throughout the year.

3. S.T.R.E.A.M. Pathway Proficiency

In alignment with our innovation-focused curriculum, 90% of students will demonstrate proficiency in at least two S.T.R.E.A.M. pathways, such as robotics, coding, animation, or AI. Through hands-on projects, digital portfolios, and competency-based rubrics, students show what they know and how they apply it in real-world contexts.

4. Culture and Core Values in Action

Our school culture is powered by our P.O.W.E.R.S. values: Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, and Safety First. We aim for 90% of students to demonstrate these values consistently, as captured through climate surveys, teacher observations, and behavior data aligned with our PBIS system.

5. Family Engagement and Satisfaction

We believe families are partners in learning. Our goal is for 90% of families to report feeling

informed and engaged in their child's education, measured through annual surveys and tracked participation in PLP conferences, family workshops, and school events.

Academic Performance Framework	File name:	xMA Attachment - Commission Performance Framework Template.docx.pdf
	Uploaded:	03/11/2026 09:12 PM
	Uploaded by:	Melissa Capehart
Proposed Learning Standards	File name:	xMA K &6th Proposed Learning Standards-updated.docx.pdf
	Uploaded:	03/11/2026 09:12 PM
	Uploaded by:	Melissa Capehart

xMA does not plan to adopt or develop additional academic standards beyond Alabama State standards.



Element Review

Reviews is not provided

4. Unique/Innovative Program Offering & Mission Specific Academic Outcomes

Reviewer Instructions

Please rate this section using the provided rubric.

Status: Completed

Form Result

Describe unique or innovative academic programming and/or initiatives that are central to the mission and vision of the school which may not be supported at the same level in the local school system.

Preference: The Commission prefers applications that employ unique programs or characteristics that may not be found in the traditional school model.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Compelling evidence of how the school will offer unique or innovative programs or characteristics that are otherwise not offered by the local school system or not offered to the same extent.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

- a) Describe the unique/innovative academic program(s) or characteristic(s) offered and explain how they differ from what is offered by the local school system. If applicable, connect to the mission or vision statements. Include identified funding sources.

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) offers a distinct and innovative educational model that differentiates it from local public school systems. As Alabama's first S.T.R.E.A.M.-focused charter school, xMA expands upon the widely used STEAM model by placing intentional emphasis on Reading and Literacy but also Digital Literacy and Citizenship skills, acknowledging literacy as the foundation for success across all disciplines. While Birmingham City Schools offers some STEM and arts programs at select campuses, xMA is unique in embedding Science, Technology, Reading, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (S.T.R.E.A.M.) into the core instructional program for all students across all grade levels.

Together, xMA's academic model integrates several key elements that distinguish it from traditional school structures:

- A fully integrated S.T.R.E.A.M. curriculum across all grade levels
- Personalized learning pathways that allow students to progress at their own pace
- Project-based learning experiences that connect academic standards to real-world challenges
- Early and continuous exposure to S.T.R.E.A.M. career pathways beginning in kindergarten

S.T.R.E.A.M.

At xMA, the S.T.R.E.A.M. curriculum is interdisciplinary and career-connected, providing students with real-world exposure to a variety of fields such as robotics, coding, environmental science, architecture, digital media, visual and performing arts, and biomedical science. These subjects are taught through hands-on, project-based learning experiences that allow students to collaborate, create, and solve authentic problems. Students participate in regular design challenges, research projects, and inquiry-based labs, with opportunities to present their work at school-wide S.T.R.E.A.M. expos, showcases, and public exhibitions. These experiences deepen academic understanding while building communication skills, creativity, and confidence.

To support this approach, xMA utilizes the WozED curriculum, a nationally recognized technology and computer science program developed by Woz Education and aligned to national computer science and STEM standards. WozED integrates engineering design, coding, robotics, and technology problem-solving into classroom learning while exposing students to real-world career pathways such as software development, robotics engineering, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, data science, biomedical technology, and digital media production. These pathways align with both national STEM workforce priorities and Alabama's growing demand for technology, engineering, and advanced manufacturing talent.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, STEM occupations are projected to grow more than twice as fast as non-STEM occupations through 2031, with millions of new jobs expected in fields such as computing, engineering, and data science. Alabama's economy increasingly depends on these sectors, particularly in industries such as advanced manufacturing, aerospace, biotechnology, and information technology. By exposing students to STREAM career pathways beginning in elementary school, xMA helps address this workforce gap while preparing students with the skills and interests needed for future high-demand careers.

While some schools within Birmingham City Schools offer STEM academies, magnet programs, or isolated enrichment opportunities, these experiences are typically limited to specific schools, grade levels, or elective courses. In contrast, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy integrates STREAM learning as a core component of the daily instructional program for every student. STREAM is not an occasional enrichment activity but a dedicated part of the school experience where students regularly engage in interdisciplinary design challenges, collaborative projects, and real-world problem solving. This schoolwide approach ensures that all students not only those enrolled in specialized programs have consistent access to hands-on, future-focused learning experiences.

Personalized Learning

In addition to the S.T.R.E.A.M. focus, xMA implements a personalized learning model that meets the diverse needs of all learners, including both neurodiverse and neurotypical students. xMA's personalized learning approach is grounded in a four-core instructional framework that includes Universal Design for Learning (UDL), mastery-based learning, blended learning, and small group instruction. Together, these elements ensure that instruction is accessible, flexible, and responsive to individual student needs.

Students engage in individualized learning pathways aligned to their strengths, needs, and pace of mastery. Through mastery-based learning, students progress after demonstrating understanding rather than moving forward based solely on time. Blended learning tools support differentiated instruction and real-time data monitoring, while small group instruction allows teachers to provide targeted support, enrichment, and intervention.

This approach differs from the more traditional instructional model commonly used in local systems, where pacing is typically fixed and instruction is delivered to whole groups at the same rate regardless of individual readiness. At xMA, students set goals, monitor their progress, and receive targeted support from teachers through flexible grouping, data-informed instruction, and mastery-based learning practices. This personalized learning environment fosters strong student ownership and self-direction while ensuring that all learners receive the support and challenge they need to succeed.

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy stands apart from the local school system through its innovative fusion of a fully integrated S.T.R.E.A.M. curriculum and a personalized, student-centered learning model. Together, these elements create a forward-thinking educational environment that supports diverse learners, fosters creativity and critical thinking, and prepares students for academic and career success in the 21st century.

This innovative model directly aligns with the mission and vision of xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy, which seeks to reimagine the K–8 learning experience through S.T.R.E.A.M. exploration, personalized learning, and social-emotional growth. By integrating interdisciplinary STREAM learning with student-centered instructional practices, xMA empowers students to master academic standards while developing the creativity, problem-solving, and self-direction necessary for future success. The implementation of this model will be supported through a combination of public education funding and philanthropic support. xMA has already secured pre-opening investments from national charter school development organizations, including NewSchools Venture Fund (NSVF), Building Excellent Schools (BES), NewSchools for Alabama (NSFA), and the National Accelerator for Autism Charter Schools (NAACS). In addition, the school will leverage state-supported initiatives such as Alabama Technology in Motion (ATIM), the Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative (AMSTI), and the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI), which provide professional development, instructional coaching, and curriculum support. Together, these funding streams and partnerships ensure that xMA can sustainably implement its innovative academic program while providing students with high-quality, future-focused learning experiences.

b) Explain how the unique/innovative program(s) and characteristic(s) are integral to the educational and student-development plans, the instructional design and/or the planning of curriculum.

The innovative programs and characteristics at xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) is intentionally embedded into every aspect of the school's educational and student development plans, instructional design, and curriculum planning. Both the S.T.R.E.A.M. framework and the personalized learning model are not standalone features; they are integral to how learning is designed, delivered, and experienced by students daily.

The S.T.R.E.A.M. model which uniquely includes reading alongside Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics drives curriculum planning and instructional design across content areas. Every unit is developed through an interdisciplinary lens that fosters creativity, critical thinking, and real-world problem-solving. The curriculum includes project-based learning (PBL) and design thinking strategies, allowing students to explore meaningful questions, engage in collaborative work, and demonstrate understanding through the creation and presentation of hands-on projects. These projects are showcased at S.T.R.E.A.M. expos and exhibitions, reinforcing student voice, confidence, and communication skills while connecting learning to career pathways in both STEM and the Arts. Additionally, xMA's personalized learning model shapes how instruction is delivered and how students engage with content. The curriculum is designed with multiple entry points, flexible pacing, and scaffolded supports to accommodate diverse learning needs, including those of neurodiverse students. Teachers use data-driven instruction to guide lesson planning and differentiate content delivery, ensuring students progress based on mastery rather than seat time. Goal setting, progress

monitoring, and reflection are embedded into instructional routines, promoting self-awareness and ownership of learning.

Student development is further supported through embedded social-emotional learning (SEL), which is aligned with the school's P.O.W.E.R.S. core values and integrated into academic content and classroom culture. Through both the personalized and S.T.R.E.A.M. models, students not only build academic competencies but also develop essential life skills such as collaboration, resilience, communication, and creativity. Together, these innovative programs shape a cohesive educational experience that aligns with the school's mission to meet the needs of all learners and prepare them for success in both school and life. The integration of S.T.R.E.A.M. and personalized learning into curriculum planning, instruction, and student development ensures a future-ready education grounded in relevance, inclusion, and high expectations.

c) Identify student learning outcomes tied to these initiatives and how these outcomes will be measured by the school. Indicate if these outcomes will be included as Mission Specific outcomes in the performance framework included in the charter school contract.

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy will measure the effectiveness of its innovative academic model through clearly defined student learning outcomes aligned with the school's S.T.R.E.A.M. programming and personalized learning approach. These outcomes ensure that the school's mission is translated into measurable student results and that progress is regularly monitored through multiple assessment measures.

First, students will demonstrate strong academic growth in core content areas, including reading, mathematics, and science. The school will measure academic growth through state assessments, benchmark assessments, and progress monitoring tools. Students will participate in the Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program (ACAP) as required by state law. In addition, the school will utilize interim benchmark assessments and progress monitoring tools such as i-Ready to track individual student growth throughout the year. xMA's goal is that at least 90% of students will demonstrate one year or more of academic growth annually in core academic subjects.

Second, students will demonstrate mastery and engagement in S.T.R.E.A.M. learning pathways. Students will participate in interdisciplinary projects, design challenges, and research-based learning experiences across Science, Technology, Reading, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics. Student learning will be measured through project-based assessments, performance tasks, STREAM portfolios, and public exhibitions of learning. The school's goal is that at least 90% of students will demonstrate proficiency in two or more S.T.R.E.A.M. pathway competencies each year.

Third, students will demonstrate growth in self-directed learning and personalized learning outcomes. Students will maintain individualized learning plans and digital learning portfolios that track mastery of academic standards, project work, and personal learning goals. Teachers and students will review progress regularly through conferences and reflection activities. The school's goal is that 100% of students will participate in personalized learning plans and maintain a portfolio documenting their academic progress and projects.

Finally, students will demonstrate growth in social-emotional learning and character development aligned with the school's P.O.W.E.R.S. values (Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, Safety). Student growth in these areas will be measured through behavior data, SEL surveys, and participation in school culture systems. The school's goal is that at least 90% of students will report regularly applying for the P.O.W.E.R.S. values in their learning community.

Several of these outcomes, particularly those related to S.T.R.E.A.M. pathway proficiency, student portfolios, and application of the P.O.W.E.R.S. values, will be proposed as Mission-Specific outcomes within the charter school performance framework. These measures reflect the unique elements of the school's educational model and provide clear indicators for evaluating the success of xMA's innovative academic program.

d) Explain how the unique/innovative program(s) and characteristic(s) integrate with and/or support state initiatives. (ARI, AMSTI, etc.)

The S.T.R.E.A.M. (Science, Technology, Reading, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) academic model aligns with several Alabama state initiatives, emphasizing STEM education, Reading, Math, and Fine Arts. To enhance literacy, xMA will collaborate with the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) to support our literacy program and provide teachers with LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) training. This evidence-based program equips educators with the latest research and best practices in the Science of Reading, empowering them to deliver effective literacy instruction.

xMA will further strengthen its commitment to S.T.R.E.A.M. education by partnering with the Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative (AMSTI). AMSTI's expertise and resources support xMA's S.T.R.E.A.M. program, fostering student innovation and creativity. Moreover, xMA recognizes the importance of Math education and will collaborate with the Alabama Office of Math Improvement to secure the services of a dedicated Math Coach. This coach will spearhead math programs, offering guidance, professional development, and resources to teachers, ultimately enhancing the math education experience for students.

As students progress to middle school, xMA will partner with the Alabama Workforce Development Department ALSDE Career Tech initiatives to provide seamless support for College and Career Development. Our middle school will prioritize career, vocational, and college preparation to expose our students hands-on to careers, certifications, and college courses. This collaboration ensures that students are well-prepared for high school and post-secondary education and the workforce, empowering them to make informed decisions about their future pathways. Through these strategic partnerships and a focus on S.T.R.E.A.M., xMA creates a dynamic learning environment that fosters academic excellence, critical thinking, creativity, and college and career readiness for all students.

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

5. Grade-Level Promotion

Status: Completed

Form Result

All schools need criteria for grade level promotion which is clear and communicated to students and parents. Criteria may include academic, social, emotional or maturity readiness. This may include special cases of accelerated grade level promotion.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Evidence of how the proposed school will promote students to the next grade level which may include meeting academic or social standards. If applicable, criteria for accelerated or double promotion (skipping a grade level). Include instances where parental involvement is required.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

Grade-Level Promotion Narrative

Mastery-Based Approach & Standards-Based Grading Scale

Our policy reflects the belief that every student can achieve grade-level mastery through rigorous standards, early and frequent communication about progress, and strong support systems. We believe in assessing what students genuinely know and can do rather than relying on traditional,

percentage-based averages. Through frequent assessments such as performance tasks, portfolios, class discussions, and projects teachers provide ongoing feedback and multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery. Those who need extra support receive targeted interventions to help them grow toward proficiency. To articulate progress transparently, we use a four-level scale centered on mastery of specific standards.

Figure (21):Mastery Rubric

Mastery Level	Descriptor	Definition
4	Exceeding Mastery	The student consistently demonstrates knowledge and skills beyond grade-level expectations. They apply and extend their learning in unique ways.
3	Proficient/Mastery	The student meets grade-level standards. They show firm understanding and can independently apply key concepts and skills in a variety of contexts.
2	Approaching Mastery	The student is making progress toward grade-level standards. They may need additional practice, guidance, or clarification to reach full proficiency.
1	Beginning/ Emerging	The student is in the early stages of learning the concept or skill. They require targeted support and instruction to move toward mastery.

While we emphasize mastery levels rather than letters or numeric grades, we offer an optional conversion for 8th-grade exit requirements or when a student transfers to a district that requires traditional grades.

Figure (22):Mastery Conversion Chart

Mastery Level	Descriptor	Conversion for Exit/Transfers
4	Exceeding Mastery	90–100 (A)
3	Proficient / Mastery	80–89 (B)
2	Approaching Mastery	70–79 (C)
1	Beginning / Emerging	69–60 D; 59-0-F

Promotion and Retention Criteria

At the end of each academic year, a committee of teachers, the Principal, Dean of Culture & Instruction, and the Director of Student Student Supports reviews all available mastery data to determine a student’s readiness for promotion. This data includes summative performance tasks, final assessments, portfolio artifacts, and teacher observations. Students demonstrating Approaching Mastery (Level 2) or higher in the majority of key standards are recommended for promotion. When a student shows strong growth but remains on the cusp of Level 2 in critical areas, the committee may

still promote with an additional academic support plan to address any remaining gaps in knowledge or skills.

Retention is considered only after ongoing interventions have been provided throughout the year and there is compelling evidence that an additional year at the current grade would best serve the student's long-term growth. In such cases, the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) team which includes faculty, administrators, the student, and their family must unanimously agree that retention is the most beneficial option. A detailed plan is then developed to ensure the student receives intensified support in the repeated grade.

Parents and guardians are essential partners in all promotion and retention decisions. Families are notified early and consistently if their child is at risk of not meeting promotion criteria through Personalized Learning Plan reviews, report cards, progress reports and parent-teacher conferences. Prior to any retention consideration, the school convenes a formal meeting with the student's parents or guardians, classroom teachers, and school leadership to review mastery data, interventions provided, and recommended next steps. Parents are given the opportunity to provide input, ask questions, and collaborate with the school to determine the best course of action for their child. Promotion decisions are never made without family notification, and retention decisions require documented evidence of interventions, family communication, and a collaborative support plan. Final promotion and retention determinations are communicated to parents in writing, along with a detailed academic support plan when applicable, ensuring transparency, shared understanding, and continued partnership in supporting student success.

Continuous Family Engagement

We believe that meaningful family engagement is essential to student success. We communicate our standards-based and personalized learning approaches during summer parent orientation sessions, where families participate in educational workshops introducing mastery-based learning, standards-based grading, and how to interpret both mastery-based report cards and Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs). During these sessions, families are provided access to their child's initial diagnostic results from all beginning-of-year (BOY) assessments, and we explain how these results inform the creation of each student's Personalized Learning Plan and Personalized Learning Portfolio. Parents are given opportunities to review their child's PLP, provide feedback, and collaborate with teachers on setting academic and personal growth goals. Research underscores that early family involvement in personalized goal-setting significantly improves student motivation and achievement outcomes (Henderson & Mapp, 2022).

Throughout the year, parents continue to have access to their child's updated PLP and Personalized Learning Portfolio to ensure transparency and foster accountability between school and home. Families receive quarterly standards-based report cards that provide detailed information on individual skill mastery and progression across core subjects. Unlike traditional grade averages, standards-based reporting allows parents to clearly see specific skills their child has mastered and which areas need additional support, enabling families to target practice at home more effectively (Guskey, 2020). To further support learning at home, parents are also able to access instructional videos aligned with classroom lessons, empowering them with tools to reinforce skills in ways that are consistent with school instruction.

We also host mandatory parent-teacher conferences where the Personalized Learning Plan, Personalized Learning Portfolio, and standards-based report cards are formally reviewed, discussed, and updated collaboratively with families. Parents are required to attend at least two out of four conference opportunities. In addition to these conferences, parents and guardians are invited to "Parent emPOWERMENT" workshops designed to empower them with strategies to support student learning at home, including deeper sessions on mastery-based learning, interpreting report cards, and reinforcing targeted academic growth strategies. Regular family education opportunities are a proven best practice for promoting both academic success and strong home-school partnerships (Weiss et al., 2021). We also hold an annual Open House where families can engage with teachers, curriculum materials, and instructional technology to strengthen their understanding of academic expectations and instructional support.

Additionally, we conduct periodic surveys, seeking feedback on how well our policies and practices meet the diverse needs of our community. This ongoing dialogue ensures that every family is

informed, involved, and ready to partner with us in their child's academic journey. Research shows that when schools maintain frequent, two-way communication and build families' understanding of school practices, students achieve at higher levels (Jeynes, 2018).

By focusing on mastery rather than simple averages, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy guarantees that students progress when they have demonstrated the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed at the next level. Our commitment to high standards, targeted support, and strong family partnerships ensures that each student is equipped for success in high school and beyond.

Citations

1. Anne T. Henderson and Karen L. Mapp, Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships. NCASE/SEDL, 2022.
2. Thomas Guskey, Get Set, Go! Creating Successful Grading and Reporting Systems. Corwin, 2020.

Promotion Policy	File name:	xMA Promotion & Retention Policy.pdf
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	Uploaded by:	Melissa Capehart

b) Describe the system used to identify students at risk of being retained in grade level, the time of year that student will be identified, and the support in place to help that student succeed and remain on track. Include the timing of parental notification and involvement.

At-Risk Narrative

System for Identifying and Supporting Students at Risk of Retention

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) uses a proactive, data-driven Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) to identify and support students at risk of academic failure or retention. Our MTSS framework integrates mastery-based learning, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), blended learning, and social-emotional learning to ensure early identification and targeted intervention for students who need additional support. Research confirms that early identification combined with tiered academic interventions significantly improves student achievement and reduces retention rates (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). At xMA, academic intervention is framed as a normal and empowering part of our P.O.W.E.R.S. culture, reinforcing the values of Ownership Now and Work Hard, and helping students build resilience and confidence as learners.

Students are identified as at risk of retention through a structured, year-round screening, assessment, and progress monitoring system. Universal screening is conducted three times per year at the beginning of the year (August/September), middle of the year (December/January), and end of the year (April/May) using i-Ready Diagnostic assessments aligned to Alabama Course of Study standards. In addition, student progress is formally monitored on a monthly basis through mastery checks, standards-based assessments, digital portfolio artifacts, teacher observations, and Personalized Learning Plan (PLP) progress reviews. Monthly progress monitoring serves as an early warning system to identify students who are not demonstrating Proficient/Mastery (Level 3) in priority standards or who are not making adequate academic growth. Students who demonstrate performance below mastery, limited growth on diagnostic assessments, or insufficient progress during monthly monitoring are flagged immediately for intervention through the MTSS process. The MTSS team which includes the Principal, Dean of Culture & Instruction, teachers, and student support staff meets monthly to review academic and behavioral data, adjust interventions, and identify students at risk of retention as early as September, ensuring timely intervention well before end-of-year promotion decisions.

At Tier I, all students receive high-quality, standards-aligned instruction delivered through xMA's personalized learning model, which integrates mastery-based progression, blended learning, UDL-aligned lessons, and small-group instruction. Teachers use real-time mastery data, monthly progress monitoring data, and formative assessments to differentiate instruction and provide immediate support. Students engage in personalized learning pathways aligned to their PLP and receive frequent feedback and opportunities for reassessment to ensure mastery of grade-level standards.

Students who require additional support are provided Tier II targeted interventions, which include daily small-group instruction during dedicated intervention blocks, such as the Red Station, using research-based resources including i-Ready Teacher Toolbox. These supports provide scaffolded instruction in literacy and mathematics aligned to individual skill gaps. Students continue to receive core instruction while receiving targeted intervention, ensuring access to grade-level content while closing foundational skill gaps.

Students who require intensive intervention receive Tier III support, including individualized intervention plans and daily small-group or one-on-one instruction using evidence-based programs such as Read 180 for literacy and Do the Math for mathematics. These programs provide structured, systematic intervention to accelerate student learning and build foundational skills. Progress for Tier II and Tier III students is monitored biweekly through intervention-specific assessments and formally reviewed monthly by the MTSS team to evaluate effectiveness and make instructional adjustments. Parents are essential partners in supporting students at risk of retention and are notified early and consistently when academic concerns arise. Initial parent notification occurs as early as October following the first cycle of universal screening and monthly progress monitoring if a student is identified as at risk. Formal written notification is provided no later than the end of the first semester in January for any student demonstrating ongoing risk of not meeting grade-level promotion criteria. Additional written notifications and intervention plan updates are provided in March following mid-year diagnostic assessments and progress reviews. Parents are invited to participate in intervention planning meetings, Personalized Learning Plan reviews, and parent-teacher conferences to collaboratively develop support strategies. Final notification of promotion status and any retention consideration is provided in May following end-of-year diagnostic assessments and Promotion Review Committee meetings. Throughout the year, parents receive ongoing updates through quarterly standards-based report cards, digital portfolio access, and monthly progress updates, ensuring continuous transparency and partnership.

In addition to academic support, xMA integrates social-emotional and behavioral supports aligned to PBIS and the P.O.W.E.R.S. framework. Students may receive Tier II support such as mentoring, SEL small groups, and structured check-ins, or Tier III individualized support plans, including counseling or behavioral intervention plans. Research demonstrates that integrated MTSS frameworks combining academic and behavioral supports significantly improve student engagement, academic outcomes, and long-term success (Sugai & Horner, 2009; McIntosh & Goodman, 2016).

Through universal screening, monthly progress monitoring, targeted intervention, and consistent parent communication beginning early in the school year, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy ensures that students receive timely and effective support to achieve mastery of grade-level standards and remain on track for promotion. This proactive and personalized approach ensures that retention is rare and used only when it is in the best academic interest of the student and supported by clear data, intervention history, and family collaboration.

Citations

1. Heather Weiss et al., *The Family Engagement Playbook*. Harvard Family Research Project, 2021.
2. William Jeynes, *Parental Involvement and Academic Success*. Routledge, 2018.

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

6. High School Graduation Requirements (if applicable)

Reviewer Instructions

Please rate the application using the provided rubric.

Status: Completed

Form Result

High schools will be expected to meet the state graduation standards as established by the Alabama State Board of Education (ALSDE).

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Compelling evidence of how the proposed high school's standards will directly and consistently meet or exceed Alabama State standards.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

Course Offerings Narrative

This question does not apply as we are a K-8 school.

b) Explain how the graduation requirements for the school will meet or exceed Alabama State Standards. If graduation requirements for the school exceed Alabama State Standards, explain the additional requirements.

Graduation Requirements Narrative

This question does not apply as we are a K-8 school.

At-Risk Narrative

This question does not apply as we are a K-8 school.

Transcript Narrative

This question does not apply as we are a K-8 school.

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

7. School Calendar and Schedule

Reviewer Instructions

Please rate the application using the provided rubric.

Status: Completed

Form Result

Provide information on the typical school day schedule and the academic calendar.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Compelling evidence of how the school day schedule and academic calendar will directly and consistently meet the needs of the educational program and how it will optimize student learning.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

a) Discuss the annual academic calendar for the school. Explain how the calendar reflects the needs of the educational program. Attach the school's proposed calendar for the first year of operation,

including total number of days/hours of instruction, holidays, make-up days and state assessment days.

Academic Calendar Narrative

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy’s calendar and schedule maximize instructional time for students while also providing teachers with ample opportunities to plan and collaborate. Our academic calendar (Attachment-xMA School Calendar) reflects 180 instructional days. In the event of inclement weather, we plan to convert designated teacher workdays in the spring into full instructional days or transform early-release days into full days to preserve our high level of instructional time. Research demonstrates that ongoing, specialized professional development (PD) is pivotal for delivering high-quality instruction, particularly for neurodiverse learners. Consequently, we dedicate 15 days of intensive PD before the first day of school, during which teachers receive training in our personalized learning and social emotional learning model. Because our approach emphasizes continuous improvement and data-driven differentiation, teachers also have 60 minutes of meeting-free planning time Monday through Thursday and 90 minutes of planning time on Friday, as well as an additional hour and half weekly for PD and staff meetings on each Friday. This structure allows teachers to review student data, monitor progress toward academic and IEP goals, and adapt lessons to meet diverse learning needs. The school calendar is attached

Proposed School Calendar **File name:** xMA School Calendar (2).pdf
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 Uploaded by: Melissa Capehart

b) Describe the structure of a typical school day and week. Include the number of instructional hours/minutes in a day for core subjects such as language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Note the length of the school day, including start and dismissal times. Explain why the school’s daily and weekly schedule will be optimal for student learning. Provide the minimum number of hours/minutes per day and week that the school will devote to academic instruction in each grade. Attach a sample daily and weekly schedule for each division of the school.

Our daily schedule ensures students benefit from dedicated blocks for reading, math, science, social studies, enrichment, and social-emotional learning. K–5 students participate in daily reading and math enrichment to reinforce fundamental skills, while all students engage in S.T.R.E.A.M. electives each day. Students in both K-5 and 6-8 receive between 1,580 and 1,875 minutes of weekly instruction. Instruction includes literacy, math, and S.T.R.E.A.M. and is tailored to each student's individual learning goals. K-5 students receive instruction from 8:15 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., while 6-8 students receive instruction from 8:15 a.m. to 3:15 p.m. On Fridays, K–5 students enjoy a Fine Arts Friday rotation (music, art, and dance), and 6–8 students have extended blocks in their chosen S.T.R.E.A.M. electives, promoting hands-on, project-based learning that capitalizes on student interests. Figure (19) below outlines the daily and weekly minimum instructional minutes dedicated to each core subject area in K–5 and 6–8, reflecting our commitment to a rigorous and inclusive curriculum that meets the needs of every learner. Our daily and weekly schedule outlines the daily and weekly structure for students which includes our early release Friday can be found in xMA School Schedule Attachment ().

[xMA School Schedule](#)

Figure (23): Instructional Time in Minutes

Elementary (K-5) Instructional Minutes			
Content Area	Daily Minutes (M, T, W, Th)	Daily Minutes (Friday)	Weekly Minutes
Literacy	150	75	675
Mathematics	75	90	390

Science or Social Studies	30	0	120
Physical Education (Fine Arts Rotation on Fridays)	30	0	120
S.T.R.E.A.M.	30	0	170
Social Emotional Learning/Advisory	30	15	135
Fine Arts Friday (Art, Music, Dance)	0	90	90
Total Instructional	345	270	1,580

Middle School (6–8) Instructional Minutes

Content Area	Daily Minutes (M, T, W, Th)	Daily Minutes (Friday)	Weekly Minutes
Literacy	60	30	270
Mathematics	60	30	270
Science	60	30	270
Social Studies	60	30	270
Physical Education	30	0	240
Social Emotional Learning/Advisory	30	15	255
S.T.R.E.A.M. Electives	60	60	300
Total Instructional	360	195	1,875

How the xMA schedule meets our needs

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy’s schedule is intentionally designed to maximize instructional time, support mastery-based learning, and provide equitable access to a well-rounded education aligned to the learning needs of Birmingham’s diverse student population. The length, sequencing, and structure of each day reflect research-based practices in personalized learning, extended literacy and math instruction, and whole-child development.

1. Extended Time in Literacy & Math Ensures Early Skill Mastery

Birmingham’s student data show significant gaps in foundational reading and mathematics. To address this, xMA dedicates:

- 150 minutes of daily literacy and 75–90 minutes of math in K–5, well above the state average
- Two daily core instructional blocks in 6–8, ensuring students deeply engage in standards-based instruction and targeted supports

This structure aligns with research demonstrating that increased time in core instruction leads to accelerated growth, particularly for students entering below grade level. Studies show that extended literacy and math blocks significantly improve achievement, especially for students from low-income communities and historically underserved groups (Dobbie & Fryer, 2013; Kidron & Lindsay, 2014). Additional time allows for reteaching, targeted intervention, and mastery-based learning all essential for closing achievement gaps.

2. Daily S.T.R.E.A.M. Ensures Early Exposure, Creativity, and Career Pathways

Unlike traditional models where STEM or electives appear only weekly, xMA offers daily S.T.R.E.A.M. instruction across K–8. This ensures:

-

Regular opportunities for hands-on learning

- Early exposure to coding, engineering, digital literacy, robotics, animation, and design
- A direct connection between core academics and real-world applications

Research shows that frequent STEM and arts integration boosts problem-solving, creativity, persistence, and long-term interest in STEM fields (Becker & Park, 2011; Honey, Pearson & Schweingruber, 2014). Daily integrated S.T.R.E.A.M. learning helps students apply academic content through inquiry and design-thinking, strengthening teamwork, communication, and critical reasoning, core components of xMA's Portrait of a Graduate.

3. Built-In Enrichment and Intervention for Personalized Learning

The daily schedule integrates:

- Reading and math enrichment blocks
- Personalized Learning Plan (PLP) pathway time built into reading and math
- Individual goal-setting and progress monitoring

This structure supports xMA's personalized learning model by allowing students to work at their own pace, revisit unfinished learning, and extend beyond grade-level expectations. Research demonstrates that personalized learning combined with small-group instruction produces higher academic gains than traditional whole-group instruction (Pane et al., 2015; Puzio & Colby, 2013). Daily embedded enrichment and intervention ensure students receive the targeted instruction they need in real time.

4. Social-Emotional Learning Daily to Strengthen School Culture

Every grade receives dedicated SEL/Advisory minutes each day, aligned to the P.O.W.E.R.S. values.

This daily routine:

- Builds belonging and predictable structure
- Strengthens emotional regulation and interpersonal skills
- Increases engagement and readiness to learn

Research consistently shows that schools that implement daily SEL routines experience improved academics, behavior, and student well-being, with average academic gains of 11 percentile points (Durlak et al., 2011; Jones & Kahn, 2017). Daily SEL provides the relational and emotional foundation students need for rigorous academics.

5. Weekly Fine Arts and Friday Extensions Support Engagement and Mastery

The Fine Arts Friday model in K–5 and extended S.T.R.E.A.M. Friday electives in grades 6–8 create space for project-based learning, creativity, and choice-based experiences. These weekly extensions:

- Boost student motivation
- Deepen mastery of skills through multi-hour projects
- Provide equitable access to arts, dance, music, and technology pathways

This approach aligns with research showing that project-based learning improves conceptual understanding, engagement, and problem-solving skills, especially when students experience longer uninterrupted blocks (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Condliffe et al., 2017). Fine arts access is also linked to improvements in academic achievement and school attendance (Catterall, 2009).

6. Early Release Friday Protects Teacher Planning, Collaboration, and Data Use

The schedule includes built-in early release each Friday to protect time for:

- Teacher planning
- PLCs and data meetings
- Co-teacher collaboration
- Intervention and enrichment planning
- Real-time adjustments to PLPs and mastery trackers

Research shows that high-quality teacher collaboration improves instructional effectiveness and student outcomes, particularly when paired with regular data analysis and shared planning time (Ronfeldt et al., 2015; Kraft, Blazar & Hogan, 2018). Weekly protected collaboration ensures instruction stays cohesive, responsive, and aligned to students' personalized learning goals.

Citations

1. Roland G. Fryer and Will Dobbie, "Getting Beneath the Veil of Effective Schools," *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 5, no. 4 (2013): 28–60; Yael Kidron and Jim Lindsay, *The Effects of Increased Learning Time on Student Academic and Nonacademic Outcomes*. U.S. Department of Education, 2014.
2. Kathy Becker and Hyeju Park, "Effects of Integrative Approaches in STEM Education," *Journal of STEM Education* 12, no. 5 (2011): 23–37; Margaret Honey, Greg Pearson, and Heidi Schweingruber, *STEM Integration in K–12 Education*. National Academies Press, 2014
3. John F. Pane et al., *Continued Progress: Promising Evidence on Personalized Learning*. RAND Corporation, 2015; Kennan Puzio and Glenn Colby, "Small-Group Instruction and Reading Achievement," *Elementary School Journal* 113, no. 3 (2013): 423–440.
4. John F. Pane et al., *Continued Progress: Promising Evidence on Personalized Learning*. RAND Corporation, 2015; Kennan Puzio and Glenn Colby, "Small-Group Instruction and Reading Achievement," *Elementary School Journal* 113, no. 3 (2013): 423–440.
5. Joseph Durlak et al., "The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning," *Child Development* 82, no. 1 (2011): 405–432; Stephanie Jones and Jennifer Kahn, *The Evidence Base for How We Learn*. Aspen Institute, 2017.
6. Brigid Barron and Linda Darling-Hammond, "Teaching for Meaningful Learning," *Edu-topia/George Lucas Educational Foundation*, 2008; Barbara Condliffe et al., *Project-Based Learning Literature Review*. MDRC, 2017.
7. James Catterall, *Doing Well and Doing Good by Doing Art*. I-Group Books, 2009.

Sample Daily & Weekly Schedules

File name: xMA School Schedule (1).xlsx
Uploaded: 03/11/2026 09:30 PM
Uploaded by: Melissa Capehart

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

8. School Culture

Reviewer Instructions

Please rate this section using the provided rubric.

Status: Completed

Form Result

Provide details on the overall school culture planned for the school, how this culture aligns with the mission and vision statements, and how the culture will promote academic growth and achievement.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Compelling evidence of how the school culture or ethos will directly and consistently promote a positive academic environment and abundantly reinforce student intellectual and social development.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

a) Give a brief description of the planned culture, how it aligns with the mission statement and vision of the school, and how it will support students and staff.

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy's mission is to reimagine the K–8 learning experience for all learners through S.T.R.E.A.M. exploration, personalized learning, and social-emotional growth. To fulfill this mission, xMA is committed to cultivating a positive, inclusive, and structured school culture that empowers students to take ownership of their learning, develop strong character, and thrive academically and socially. Our culture is grounded in our core P.O.W.E.R.S. values Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, and Safety First which serve as the foundation for student behavior, staff practices, and schoolwide systems. By intentionally aligning culture with our personalized, mastery-based instructional model and social-emotional learning priorities, xMA ensures that students develop the skills, confidence, and character necessary to succeed in school and beyond.

A strong, mission-aligned culture does not happen by chance it is intentionally designed, explicitly taught, and continuously reinforced across classrooms, hallways, family partnerships, and daily interactions. At xMA, culture is a shared way of being, one that requires students, families, and staff to understand not only what our values are, but how to live them. To ensure full alignment from the first day of school and throughout the year, we implement a multifaceted onboarding and maintenance plan that equips all members of the school community including those who join mid-year with the knowledge, skills, and systems to contribute positively to our culture.

xMA's Vision for School Culture & Core Culture Systems

To understand how xMA's full culture ecosystem operates, it is essential to articulate our vision for culture and the core systems that bring this vision to life daily. These foundational components ensure consistency, clarity, and alignment across all K–8 classrooms, enabling every student and adult to thrive in a predictable, supportive, and value-driven learning environment.

xMA's culture framework is anchored in five core systems:

1. P.O.W.E.R.S. Values

Our schoolwide character framework Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, Safety First guides student behavior, adult modeling, leadership development, and decision-making.

2. PBIS Structures & Reinforcements

A proactive, strengths-based behavior system that promotes clarity, consistency, celebration, and preventative support, ensuring students receive clear expectations and positive reinforcement.

3. Predictable Learning Environments

Classrooms designed with clear routines, visual supports, structured transitions, and stu-

dent-centered instructional systems that create safety, belonging, and access for all learners.

4. Schoolwide Routines & Rituals

Daily and weekly structures including advisory circles, goal setting, recognition systems, and community celebrations that build identity, belonging, and shared purpose across the school community.

5. Intentional Culture & Instructional Systems

Tools such as progress trackers, student goal-setting structures, restorative conversations, and reflection routines that build ownership, accountability, and student empowerment while supporting teachers in creating strong, structured classroom communities.

With these systems as the foundation, culture at xMA supports both students and staff by creating a clear, consistent, and supportive environment where expectations are understood, relationships are prioritized, and growth is celebrated. Students benefit from predictable routines, strong relationships, and opportunities to develop ownership, resilience, and confidence, while staff are supported through clear culture systems, shared language, professional development, and collaborative structures that enable them to focus on high-quality instruction and student success.

Through this intentional alignment between mission, culture, and instructional systems, xMA creates a learning environment where every student is empowered to develop into a Creative Thinker, Problem-Solver, Resilient Individual, Empathetic Citizen, and Self-Reliant Learner, fully aligned to our Portrait of a Graduate and prepared to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

b) Explain how the school will create and implement this culture for students, teachers, administrators, and parents starting from the first day of school. Describe the plan for enculturating students who enter the school mid-year. Provide specific events which support the culture.

Creating and sustaining a strong, mission-aligned culture at xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy begins before the first day of school and is intentionally implemented through clearly defined systems, onboarding experiences, and ongoing practices that ensure consistency for all stakeholders. Rooted in our P.O.W.E.R.S. values and aligned to our mission of reimagining the K–8 learning experience through S.T.R.E.A.M. exploration, personalized learning, and social-emotional growth, our culture is explicitly taught, modeled, and reinforced through daily routines, advisory structures, predictable classroom environments, and meaningful recognition systems. These structures ensure that students, staff, and families understand expectations, develop strong relationships, and feel empowered as members of the xMA community. With these systems as the foundation, the following sections describe how culture is intentionally built, taught, and sustained for:

1. Students
2. Faculty & Staff
3. Families
4. Students & Families Entering Mid-Year

beginning on day one and continuing throughout the school year. This approach ensures that every member of the xMA community feels welcomed, supported, and aligned with our mission from the moment they step onto campus.

1. Culture Implementation for Students

Students are at the heart of xMA's culture. The P.O.W.E.R.S. values are explicitly taught, modeled, and reinforced through advisory lessons, classroom routines, progress trackers, and accountability systems that empower students to lead their own learning and behavior. By teaching and modeling positive behavioral norms, we foster a welcoming culture where all students can thrive. Research shows that when students, staff, and families feel a sense of belonging, they are more engaged in learning, develop stronger social connections, and reach their full potential (National Center for Special Education Research, 2023). Inclusive classrooms where students feel connected to peers and teachers help cultivate a positive self-image, meaningful relationships, and deeper engagement

in learning for all students. Our xMA core P.O.W.E.R.S.: Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, and Safety First serve as the foundation of our school culture. These values, which are explicitly taught and reinforced, guide our daily interactions and shape our vibrant and inclusive community. We encourage students and faculty to uncover, develop, and showcase their unique superpowers, the strengths, talents, and passions that contribute to the fabric of our school. By empowering students to explore their identities and pursue their interests, we create space for every child to thrive. Our Portrait of an xMA Graduate emphasizes six core competencies: creativity, problem-solving, resilience, self-reliance, empathy, and curiosity. To bring this vision to life, we prioritize the consistent implementation of our P.O.W.E.R.S. values and the creation of inclusive, predictable, and engaging learning environments.

xMA Core P.O.W.E.R.S. + Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports (PBIS)

At xMA, we are committed to cultivating a school culture where every student regardless of background, learning profile, or ability is known, valued, and supported. Our Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework reinforces our core P.O.W.E.R.S. values: Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, and Safety First. These values are intentionally embedded into every aspect of school life from classroom routines to hallway interactions guiding behavior and fostering a unified, respectful learning community. Our PBIS system creates opportunities for all students to experience success and belonging, reinforcing behaviors that align with a culture of collaboration, empathy, and shared responsibility. Research shows that when schools build culture around clearly communicated and reinforced expectations, students' academic engagement, social development, and sense of belonging significantly increase (Osterman, 2000). At xMA, our PBIS model supports students, staff, and families in learning and living our values through consistent modeling, intentional reinforcement throughout the day, and structured SEL routines during daily morning and afternoon advisory periods, which are led by the classroom co-teacher. These touchpoints ensure that every student has opportunities to reflect on, practice, and celebrate the values that define our school community.

Positive Attitude

A positive attitude fosters resilience, motivation, and openness to growth all essential traits for learners navigating academic challenges, social dynamics, and personal development. Research shows that teacher-student interactions grounded in positivity, encouragement, and high expectations contribute to stronger self-esteem and improved academic outcomes (Dweck, 2006). At xMA, we embed growth mindset practices into daily classroom routines and activities, helping students develop a belief in their ability to learn, overcome obstacles, and support one another. These practices include goal-setting, reflection journals, daily affirmations, and structured discussions about perseverance. Throughout the day and especially during dedicated SEL and advisory time classroom co-teachers guide students through activities such as role-playing, reframing negative thoughts, and celebrating moments of growth. Students reflect on challenges and successes during morning and afternoon meetings, building a habit of positivity and resilience. Through this consistent focus on mindset and optimism, xMA fosters a culture where all students across diverse strengths and needs develop the confidence and emotional tools needed to thrive. A positive school climate has been shown to improve student well-being and academic performance across all grade levels and learning profiles (Thapa et al., 2013).

Figure (24):xMA P.O.W.E.R.S. Value-Positive Attitude

P.O.W.E.R.S. Value	Description	How It Is Taught	How It Is Reinforced
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P – Positive Attitude	Students approach situations with optimism, use positive and respectful language, and demonstrate resilience in the face of challenges. This contributes to a supportive, encouraging, and welcoming school environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Co-teachers lead daily SEL/advisory activities focused on growth mindset, emotional regulation, and handling setbacks. - Bellringers prompt students to write or share affirmations, gratitude reflections, or positive actions they've taken. - Role-playing scenarios help students practice responding to challenges with optimism. - Teachers and staff model positive language and behaviors throughout the day. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students receive verbal praise, shout-outs, and HERO Bucks/Power Credits when demonstrating a positive mindset. - Recognition during daily meetings, peer shout-outs, and schoolwide Power-House Celebrations. - Visual affirmations and posters displayed in learning spaces to reinforce positivity as a daily habit. - Students reflect on how they demonstrated a positive attitude during afternoon advisory or journal time.
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Ownership Now

Teaching students to take ownership of their behavior and learning builds self-awareness, accountability, and independence skills that are essential for long-term academic and personal success. When students reflect on their choices, learn from mistakes, and set meaningful goals, they become more engaged and invested in their learning journey. Research supports that fostering self-regulation and goal-setting increases motivation, deepens learning, and prepares students for future challenges (Zimmerman, 2002; Duhon et al., 2009).

At xMA, ownership is embedded into our personalized learning model. In every classroom, students use personalized progress trackers daily to monitor mastery of learning objectives. These trackers serve as both a visual guide and a tool for time management informing students which “Must Do, Should Do, Aspire to Do” tasks they need to complete and directing their schedule within the color-coded station rotation model. As students move through small group rotations, their visual schedules and trackers guide them to the appropriate stations and help them stay focused on their learning targets. Each student also maintains a Personalized Learning Portfolio that includes progress trackers, unit reflections, and SMART goals aligned to their Personalized Learning Plan (PLP), which is co-created with teachers at the beginning of the year. These portfolios are used regularly in morning and afternoon advisory periods, led by the classroom co-teacher, for self-reflection and peer collaboration. Students use their portfolios to monitor their growth, track progress toward goals, and prepare for student-led conferences throughout the year.

Our instructional approach is further supported by the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, which emphasizes providing students with multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression. One way this comes to life is through the use of choice boards that allow students to select how they learn content and demonstrate mastery whether through writing, visuals, presentations, or hands-on projects. These choices empower students to take more ownership of their learning based on their interests, strengths, and learning preferences. In this mastery-based, student-centered environment, students understand that learning is not about speed or comparison, but about progressing at their own pace toward personal excellence. By embedding structured reflection, data-driven goal-setting, and learner choice into daily instruction, xMA fosters a culture of ownership and independence that supports all students in achieving success.

Figure (25):xMA P.O.W.E.R.S. Value-Ownership Now

P.O.W.E.R.S. Value	Description	How It Is Taught	How It Is Reinforced
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O – Ownership Now	Students take responsibility for their actions, decisions, and learning. They reflect on their behavior, track academic progress, and work toward personal goals using their preferred learning strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Co-teachers lead daily advisory sessions with SMART goal-setting, self-reflection, and progress monitoring. - Students use Personalized Learning Portfolios that include unit reflections, mastery trackers, and personal goals. - Choice boards and flexible pathways aligned to UDL allow students to choose how they engage with content and show understanding. - Visual schedules and trackers guide students through station rotations and help them manage their daily learning plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students are recognized during daily meetings and PowerHouse Celebrations for meeting goals and demonstrating accountability. - Student-led conferences highlight ownership of academic growth and personal development. - Teachers provide real-time feedback on tracker use, goal progress, and responsible decision-making. - Visual data walls, portfolio showcases, and reflection journals reinforce and celebrate student ownership.
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Work Hard

At xMA, students are taught that perseverance, effort, and resilience are essential ingredients for growth and achievement. Emphasizing effort over outcome aligns with growth mindset principles and supports the development of grit and determination across all learner profiles. Research shows that students who believe their effort drives success are more likely to persist through challenges and achieve long-term academic gains (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007; Duckworth et al., 2007). Students are explicitly taught to set goals, embrace challenges, and reflect on the process of working hard, not just the product. Co-teachers facilitate weekly goal-setting and check-ins during morning and afternoon advisory sessions, helping students build motivation and develop personalized strategies to overcome obstacles. Daily bell ringers, reflection journals, and collaborative class discussions reinforce the idea that effort is celebrated and rewarded.

Students progress at their own pace, receiving scaffolds and feedback aligned to their current mastery level. Teachers use ongoing formative data to differentiate instruction and ensure that all students can access rigorous tasks with appropriate support. When faced with complex assignments, learners are guided in breaking tasks into manageable steps, strengthening their confidence through meaningful practice, modeling, and feedback. Through the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, students are provided multiple options for demonstrating their effort and perseverance, including hands-on projects, verbal explanations, collaborative tasks, and self-paced learning activities. Gamified challenges, shared class goals, and weekly recognition rituals foster a culture where working hard is visible, celebrated, and deeply valued. Teachers model resilience by showing vulnerability, sharing personal growth stories, and celebrating progress consistently. By emphasizing effort, persistence, and a growth mindset, xMA empowers all students to believe in their potential and push themselves toward higher levels of mastery.

Figure (26):xMA P.O.W.E.R.S. Value-Work Hard

P.O.W.E.R.S. Value	Description	How It Is Taught	How It Is Reinforced
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W – Work Hard	Students demonstrate perseverance, grit, and a commitment to doing their best especially when tasks are challenging. They recognize that effort leads to growth and long-term success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Co-teachers lead weekly goal-setting, grit-building activities, and academic reflections during advisory. - Bellringers prompt students to reflect on tasks they worked hard on and what they learned. - Lessons feature real-world examples and success stories that emphasize effort over ability. - Teachers scaffold rigorous tasks and help students develop strategies for overcoming academic challenges. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognition through HERO Bucks/Pow-er Credits, classroom shout-outs, and Pow-erHouse Celebrations. - Students track progress and effort in their Personalized Learning Portfolios. - Teachers provide timely, specific feedback on perseverance and problem-solving strategies. - Peer-to-peer recognition and classroom reflection circles spotlight hard work and growth mindset in action.
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Encourage Others

Encouragement is a cornerstone of a positive, empowering school culture where every student feels uplifted, supported, and capable of success. At xMA, students learn that their words and actions can positively influence others’ confidence, motivation, and sense of belonging. A culture of encouragement strengthens peer relationships, increases student resilience, and promotes a collaborative community mindset. Research shows that environments that foster peer encouragement and belonging lead to improved academic engagement, stronger social skills, and higher motivation among students (Durlak et al., 2011; Walton & Cohen, 2011).

Encouragement is intentionally taught, modeled, and embedded across all classrooms and shared learning spaces. Co-teachers guide SEL and advisory lessons that focus on empathy, positive peer communication, growth mindset, and supportive teamwork. Through activities such as peer shout-outs, partner work, collaborative challenges, and restorative conversations, students practice noticing strengths in others, offering constructive feedback, and celebrating individual and collective successes. Teachers model affirming language, acknowledge supportive interactions, and highlight examples of students lifting one another up.

In xMA’s personalized learning environment, encouragement plays a key role as students collaborate in small groups, support one another during must-do and aspire-to-do tasks, and provide peer feedback aligned to learning goals. Daily rituals such as bellringers focused on kindness, end-of-day reflection circles, and classroom celebrations reinforce the value of building each other up. SEL research from CASEL (2020) emphasizes that peer encouragement strengthens students’ sense of community, boosts self-efficacy, and improves emotional well-being. By cultivating a culture of encouragement, xMA ensures every student feels supported, confident, and empowered to take academic and social risks.

Figure (27):xMA P.O.W.E.R.S. Value-Encourage Others

P.O.W.E.R.S. Value	Description	How It Is Taught	How It Is Reinforced
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E – Encourage Others	Students uplift their peers by offering positive words, recognizing strengths, collaborating effectively, and supporting others' efforts and successes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Co-teachers lead SEL and advisory lessons on empathy, positive peer communication, and growth mindset. - Students practice giving affirmations, peer shout-outs, and encouraging feedback during group work. - Role-playing and partner activities help students learn how to motivate and support classmates. - Teachers model encouraging language during instruction and collaborative tasks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encouraging interactions are highlighted during class meetings, shout-outs, and PowerHouse Celebrations. - Peer recognition rituals, such as "Hero Shout-Outs," reinforce supportive behavior. - Reflection journals and bellringers prompt students to record how they encouraged others or were supported by peers. - Collaborative activities and team challenges reward positive peer support and teamwork.
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Respect All

Respect is the foundation of an inclusive and thriving school culture. At xMA, students are taught to value others' differences, treat everyone with kindness, and engage in respectful communication. A culture of mutual respect strengthens peer relationships, improves classroom climate, and fosters a deep sense of belonging. Research shows that schools with high levels of mutual respect see reduced conflict, lower incidents of bullying, and improved academic and social outcomes (McEvoy & Welker, 2000; Hehir et al., 2016).

Respect is explicitly taught and modeled across all settings from classrooms to hallways to shared learning spaces. Co-teachers lead SEL and advisory lessons that explore empathy, identity, and cultural awareness, helping students develop inclusive mindsets and interpersonal skills. Activities such as restorative circles, role-playing, and class meetings provide safe spaces for students to reflect on their actions and understand diverse perspectives. Teachers co-create classroom norms with students to build shared expectations around respectful behavior, and they model inclusive language and dialogue throughout instruction.

In our personalized learning environment, students also practice respect by giving peer feedback, collaborating in small group settings, and honoring classmates' learning styles and voices. Respect is embedded into daily routines through bellringers, reflections, and community rituals like classroom shout-outs and PowerHouse Celebrations. SEL research from CASEL (2020) emphasizes that explicitly teaching empathy and respect helps students develop meaningful relationships and a greater appreciation for diversity, which are key goals of xMA's school culture. By consistently reinforcing respectful behavior, xMA creates an environment where all students feel seen, safe, and valued.

Figure (28):xMA P.O.W.E.R.S. Value-Respect All

P.O.W.E.R.S. Value	Description	How It Is Taught	How It Is Reinforced
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R – Respect All	Students show kindness and empathy, listen attentively, and honor the feelings, ideas, property, and identities of others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Co-teachers lead SEL and advisory lessons focused on empathy, cultural awareness, and inclusive behavior. - Role-playing and restorative circles are used to teach conflict resolution and perspective-taking. - Bellringers prompt students to reflect on how they showed or witnessed respect. - Teachers and students co-create classroom norms and revisit them regularly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Positive interactions are celebrated during class meetings, shout-outs, and PowerHouse Celebrations. - Teachers model respectful communication and acknowledge students who exemplify it. - Schoolwide events and classroom discussions celebrate diversity and build a culture of inclusion. - Reflection journals and peer recognition help reinforce respectful behavior in both academic and social settings.
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Safety First

A physically and emotionally safe environment is essential for students to thrive academically, socially, and behaviorally. When students feel secure, they are more likely to engage in learning, take healthy risks, and build positive relationships. Research confirms that school environments that prioritize safety and predictability lead to increased academic performance and stronger student-teacher relationships (Gottfredson et al., 2005; Sprague & Walker, 2000).

At xMA, safety is viewed as both a collective responsibility and a daily practice. Teachers and students co-create classroom norms that promote mutual care and respectful behavior. Safety protocols ranging from physical procedures like fire drills to emotional regulation strategies are taught, modeled, and reinforced consistently. Co-teachers lead discussions and activities during morning and afternoon advisory time to build student awareness around personal safety, emotional regulation, and peer support.

Students are also given leadership roles, like “Safety Captains,” to build ownership and reinforce peer responsibility. Teachers collaborate to create individualized safety supports for students who may need more structure, including buddy systems, visual cues, or flexible movement plans. By prioritizing both physical and emotional safety, xMA fosters a calm and supportive environment where all students regardless of their needs can focus on learning, build trust, and feel cared for.

Figure (29):xMA P.O.W.E.R.S. Value-Safety First

P.O.W.E.R.S. Value	Description	How It Is Taught	How It Is Reinforced
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S – Safety First	Students prioritize their own well-being and the safety of others by following expectations, moving responsibly, and supporting a calm, secure school environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Co-teachers lead advisory lessons focused on physical and emotional safety routines (e.g., transitions, hallway behavior, emergency procedures). - Bellringers include safety scenarios for students to analyze and reflect on. - Teachers model safe behaviors and explain the importance of rules and mutual care. - Students take on leadership roles such as “Safety Captain” during classroom routines. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students are recognized for following safety expectations during class meetings and PowerHouse Celebrations. - Teachers provide specific praise for safe choices and reinforce routines during transitions. - Consistent classroom systems (e.g., clear traffic patterns, visual cues) help students internalize safe behaviors. - Teachers and students revisit safety norms regularly to build community responsibility.
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Core P.O.W.E.R.S. In Action

xMA rituals are intentionally designed to build a strong sense of belonging and reinforce classroom culture and community, all aligned to our Core P.O.W.E.R.S. values. These daily and schoolwide practices help develop student identity, build pride, and foster meaningful connections among peers, staff, and families.

School-Wide Kickoff and Ongoing Reinforcement:

During the first week of school, each classroom at xMA hosts a POWERHOUSE Classroom Kickoff Celebration to introduce and explore the core values that shape our school community: Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, and Safety First. The POWERHOUSE Kickoff sets the tone for the year, building a strong cultural foundation. Students leave the celebration feeling connected, empowered, and excited to live out our shared values. This week-long celebration is designed to be welcoming, inclusive, and engaging, ensuring all students are active participants in building the school culture.

Classroom Kickoff:

For the first two weeks of school, teachers lead a fun, interactive, and structured Unit 0, an introduction to xMA’s personalized learning model. During this time, students learn how to use the “Must Do, Should Do, Aspire to Do” framework and practice navigating tools such as progress trackers and choice boards to guide their daily work. Teachers also model expectations for small-group station rotations and explicitly teach students how to manage their time, set goals, and monitor their progress in a mastery-based learning environment. This intentional onboarding ensures that every student begins the year with the routines, skills, and confidence needed to thrive in xMA’s personalized, student-centered classrooms.

As part of Unit 0, students also learn how to embody and track the P.O.W.E.R.S. values each day. Teachers explicitly teach what each value looks like in action and how students can earn HERO Bucks or Power Credits for demonstrating these behaviors. These are tracked on Hero Boards, which serve as personal dashboards for recognizing effort and character. Students use these boards to reflect on their day, set goals for growth, and celebrate when they consistently demonstrate our core values. This system connects their daily decisions to our broader school culture and promotes intrinsic motivation and accountability.

Hero Oath:

Students learn and recite the xMA Hero Oath, which is based on our core P.O.W.E.R.S. values.

As they internalize these values, students begin to outline how they will personally embody them throughout the year. The Hero Oath is displayed visually in every classroom and serves as a daily reminder of our shared commitments.

The Hero Code:

The Hero Code is our shared language for what it looks, sounds, and feels like to live out the P.O.W.E.R.S. values throughout the school day. It is explicitly taught during the first weeks of school and reinforced through classroom instruction, advisory, and real-time modeling. The Hero Code is posted in every learning space, hallway, restroom, and common area to ensure consistency and visibility.

Recognition Circle:

Each day of the kickoff, teachers host a Recognition Circle, where students are encouraged to share specific examples of themselves or classmates demonstrating the P.O.W.E.R.S. values. These daily circles promote empathy, appreciation, and positive peer feedback, which are essential to cultivating an inclusive and supportive culture.

Personalized Recognition:

Throughout the year, teachers continue to celebrate students who exemplify the P.O.W.E.R.S. values in personalized and meaningful ways. This may include verbal praise, class shout-outs, tokens, HERO Bucks, or earned privileges helping every student feel seen, valued, and recognized for their contributions.

Ongoing Feedback:

Teachers provide regular, specific feedback on behavior and academic effort aligned to the P.O.W.E.R.S. values using systems such as Hero Boards, progress trackers, and reflection journals. This feedback is delivered through 1:1 conferences, small group check-ins, and daily advisory discussions to ensure clear communication and individual support.

The Hero Code

The Hero Code defines how each P.O.W.E.R.S. value is lived out in different areas of the school. By aligning expectations across all settings, xMA ensures that every student understands how to contribute to a positive, respectful, and inclusive school culture no matter where they are.

Figure (30):xMA Hero Code

Core P.O.W.E.R.S.	Learning Spaces	Hallways	Restrooms	Gym and Play Area	Cafeteria
Positive Attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Show appreciation through kind words or gestures - Listen actively to teachers and peers - Celebrate your learning and the learning of others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Smile, greet others, and offer help - Use positive language - Stay calm and respectful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use polite language and stay patient - Handle frustration appropriately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cheer on classmates - Stay positive during games and challenges - Include others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Show gratitude - Be courteous and patient - Invite others to join you

Ownership Now	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Take responsibility for your learning - Follow through on tasks and manage your time - Keep your space clean and organized 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Move directly to your destination - Keep hallways clean - Stay focused on your responsibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clean up after yourself - Use restroom time appropriately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Care for shared equipment - Play responsibly and fairly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clean up after eating - Follow cafeteria expectations
Work Hard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stay focused on your learning - Keep trying even when it's challenging - Complete your Must Do tasks with effort 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Walk with purpose - Avoid distractions to help yourself and others stay on track 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use restroom time wisely and return promptly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Give your best effort - Encourage others to keep trying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make healthy choices - Stay in your seat and follow routines
Encourage Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Celebrate your classmates' growth - Give kind feedback during group work - Share your ideas and support others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Greet others with a smile - Use kind, encouraging language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be patient with others - Respect others' privacy and space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Take turns - Help others during play - Include everyone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Say kind things - Praise others for good choices - Build friendships
Respect All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use respectful language - Value differences in opinions and learning styles - Care for materials and shared spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Respect personal space - Use quiet voices - Follow hallway norms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Respect the privacy of others - Keep the restroom clean 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use equipment safely and responsibly - Show good sportsmanship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Show good manners - Respect food choices and preferences
Safety First	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Follow directions - Use materials and tools properly - Keep hands and feet to yourself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Walk calmly and stay to the right - Be aware of your surroundings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wash hands with soap - Move carefully and respectfully 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Follow rules during games - Watch out for others' safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sit safely - Eat carefully and follow safety routines

Celebrating Our P.O.W.E.R.S.

Weekly, Monthly & Yearly PowerHouse Celebrations:

To maintain a consistent and positive school culture throughout the year, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy implements Weekly PowerHouse Celebrations for K–5 and Monthly PowerHouse Celebrations

for grades 6–8. These schoolwide rituals reinforce our P.O.W.E.R.S. values by publicly celebrating students and staff who exemplify our core principles: Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, and Safety First.

Every Friday (K–5) or the last Friday of each month (6–8), students are honored in a celebratory atmosphere that highlights their positive contributions to the school community. These recognitions build community pride and reinforce shared values, helping students feel seen, motivated, and empowered. We recognize that every student is unique and ensure that our celebrations are inclusive. Recognition methods are flexible and responsive to individual communication preferences and strengths, such as through visual announcements, personalized certificates, or other student-friendly acknowledgments.

Daily & Weekly Incentives – PowerHouse Celebration:

xMA K–5

To foster daily consistency in our positive culture, K–5 students track their behavior using Hero Boards and earn HERO Bucks for demonstrating the P.O.W.E.R.S. values. Students reflect on their performance during advisory and calculate their tokens weekly to shop at the Hero Hub, where they can trade HERO Bucks for prizes, classroom privileges, or experiences. Teachers also communicate daily, weekly, and monthly behavior updates with families to keep them engaged and informed. Recognition is tailored to ensure all students are acknowledged in a way that aligns with their strengths and preferences.

xMA 6–8

Students in grades 6–8 manage a virtual Power Bank account, where they track Power Credits earned through academic effort, leadership, collaboration, and positive behavior. Weekly, students review their data to determine whether they are meeting personal goals and adjust accordingly. This promotes student-led reflection, goal-setting, and decision-making skills essential for success in and beyond school.

Monthly & Yearly Incentives – PowerHouse Celebration:

xMA K–5

Throughout the year, students are recognized not only for their behavior but also for their academic achievement and character. Teachers nominate a SuperHero of the Month and a SuperHero of the Year, while staff and students also nominate peers and faculty members who exemplify the xMA culture. At the end-of-year awards ceremony, students and families are celebrated for accomplishments including perfect attendance, honor roll, and living the P.O.W.E.R.S. values.

xMA 6–8

At monthly PowerHouse meetings, middle school students receive Power Promotions based on accumulated Power Credits. Promotions unlock privileges such as exclusive events, leadership roles, and public recognition as the P.O.W.E.R. Player of the Month or Year. These milestones not only reward long-term commitment to xMA's core values but also position students for leadership opportunities, resume-building experiences, and a deeper sense of responsibility. Celebrated students often take on visible roles in school-wide events and serve as mentors or team leaders, further reinforcing their growth and impact within the school community.

By intentionally teaching, reinforcing, and celebrating our core P.O.W.E.R.S. values, we create a consistent, inclusive culture of accountability and pride. These recognition systems help nurture the core competencies of resilience, empathy, and self-reliance that we expect of all students, staff, and families who are part of the xMA community.

Predictable Learning Environment

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA), structured routines, intentional systems, and supportive classroom setups are the foundation of a predictable learning environment that reinforces both academic success and school culture. From arrival to dismissal, students navigate a clearly defined structure that fosters independence, accountability, and community. This consistency is essential to our culture of ownership, and it empowers all students to thrive academically and socially.

xMA's approach to predictable environments is grounded in the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework and supported by consistent, schoolwide routines that ensure all students have equitable access to content, tools, and support. Visual systems such as color-coded station rotations and unit-based progress trackers replace traditional schedules, giving students dynamic, student-owned

structures that clarify what to do, when to do it, and why it matters. Daily reflection tools including the Hero Board and our Hero Code Matrix help students consistently connect their choices and actions to xMA's P.O.W.E.R.S. values: Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, and Safety First.

Structured Routines

At xMA, structured routines create a sense of clarity, purpose, and rhythm to the school day. Every classroom, regardless of grade level, follows a common instructional flow rooted in self-paced learning and mastery-based progression. These routines promote emotional regulation, engagement, and autonomy, while helping students internalize expectations and connect their academic efforts to schoolwide culture.

- Daily Meetings:

To support social-emotional development and reinforce our shared culture, students begin and end their day in structured morning and afternoon meetings. These sessions, led by teachers and co-teachers, include daily goal-setting, check-ins, and reflection tied to students' Hero Boards. During these meetings, students identify how they've embodied P.O.W.E.R.S. values and recognize peers who've done the same. In grades 6–8, this becomes a formal Advisory class, where students also track progress in their Personalized Learning Portfolios, revisit SMART goals, and reflect on mastery progress.

- Small Group Instruction – Color-Coded Station Rotation System:

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy, small group instruction is organized through a consistent, schoolwide color-coded station rotation system that supports personalized learning and predictable classroom routines. Each classroom includes four core stations: Blue for teacher-led direct instruction, Red for intervention, enrichment, or PLP/IEP goal support with the co-teacher, Yellow for assessments and mastery checks, and Green for independent work, practice, or “Should Do” and “Aspire to Do” tasks. Students use their progress tracker which serves as both a learning roadmap and visual schedule to determine where they go and what tasks to complete. This system creates a calm, focused environment where transitions are smooth, expectations are clear, and all students are empowered to move at their own pace while receiving the targeted support they need. This structure creates a calm and productive classroom culture where expectations are clear, learning is personalized, and every student feels empowered to take ownership of their learning journey.

- Visual Tools and Progress Trackers:

In place of traditional visual schedules, students at xMA use unit progress trackers to organize their daily flow. These trackers serve as visual guides, helping students understand where they are in the unit, what they've accomplished, and what comes next. At the end of each class block, students pause to update their tracker recording progress, reflecting on effort, and setting goals for the next day. This routine not only promotes academic accountability but also reinforces our Ownership Now and Work Hard values as part of the daily classroom culture. Teachers use tracker data to make instructional decisions, form flexible groups, and guide mastery conversations. Students revisit this information during advisory and use it as a central part of student-led conferences with families, showcasing their learning, reflection skills, and growth over time.

Intentional Systems

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA), intentional systems are foundational to sustaining a cohesive, predictable, and inclusive culture that empowers every student to grow both academically and personally. These systems don't operate in isolation; they are woven into the daily fabric of our school and deeply aligned to our P.O.W.E.R.S. values: Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, and Safety First. By creating shared expectations and consistent routines, we ensure that all students understand not only what to do, but who they are becoming as part of our superhero learning community.

- Shared Communication for Unified Language- xMA students and staff use a common language rooted in visual, verbal, and symbolic cues to communicate expectations across all spaces. Gestures such as a thumbs-up for “Positive Attitude” or an open palm for “Respect” are modeled

and reinforced schoolwide. These universal signals reduce confusion and provide all students including emerging communicators with accessible tools for success. Visual communication boards placed throughout the school reinforce this shared understanding and serve as a constant reminder of our Hero Code. These tools cultivate an environment where positive behaviors are easy to recognize, practice, and celebrate.

- Hero Board Rewards System-To reinforce and celebrate our school values, xMA implements a tiered token economy system that allows students to earn recognition for demonstrating P.O.W.E.R.S. values throughout the day.
 - In grades K–5, students use a Hero Board to track daily behavior and earn Hero Bucks for specific, value-aligned actions. These are redeemed weekly at the Hero Hub, encouraging students to take pride in their behavior and effort while learning to make thoughtful choices.
 - In grades 6–8, students maintain a virtual Power Bank, tracking Power Credits earned through leadership, initiative, and consistent demonstration of core values. These credits can be redeemed for privileges or Power Promotions at monthly Power House Celebrations.
- Self-Paced Progress Check-Ins-In our personalized learning model, xMA students are taught to own their pace, their progress, and their learning outcomes. Each day, students update their unit progress tracker, which serves as both a visual guide and accountability tool for what they've mastered and what's next. These trackers not only guide students' movement through the day especially during station rotations but also inform the teacher and co-teacher about each student's needs. Teachers and co-teachers review trackers daily, identifying who may need additional support or small group re-teaching the following day. This creates a built-in loop of real-time responsiveness, allowing instructional support to be timely, targeted, and personalized. In addition to daily updates, students also revisit their Personalized Learning Portfolios (PLPs) during advisory, reflecting on their long-term SMART goals and evaluating how their progress aligns with what they set out to achieve. These self-paced systems, embedded into both academic and advisory routines, reinforce a culture of Ownership Now, Work Hard, and Positive Attitude, encouraging students to see themselves as active participants in their learning journey. Rather than waiting to be told how they're doing, students learn to assess, adjust, and advocate for what they need skills that support long-term success well beyond the classroom.
- Student-Led Goal Setting & Conferences-Every student at xMA maintains a Personalized Learning Portfolio (PLP), which includes SMART goals, unit reflections, and progress trackers aligned to their learning path. These portfolios are not only used for self-monitoring but are central to quarterly student-led conferences, where students present their growth to families and staff. This process fosters student agency, enhances communication skills, and deepens understanding of academic progress. By reflecting on both academic and behavioral goals, students begin to see themselves as leaders of their own learning reinforcing our commitment to resilience, self-reliance, and real-world readiness.
- Peer Acknowledgment System-At xMA, celebrating one another is part of our daily rhythm. Students use shout-out slips, digital forms, or classroom walls to recognize peers who have demonstrated the P.O.W.E.R.S. values. These moments of encouragement are shared during advisory, class transitions, or Power House Celebrations. This peer-driven system builds a culture of gratitude and belonging, where students are empowered to see and uplift each other's strengths. It also reinforces our "Encourage Others" and "Respect All" values in ways that feel authentic, student-led, and deeply community-oriented.
- Advisory Culture Reflections-Our morning and afternoon meetings or Advisory in grades 6–8 aren't just check-ins; they are intentional moments to reflect on values, identity, and growth. Teachers pose weekly prompts such as: "How did I take ownership this week?" or "How did I help create a safe space for others today?" These guided reflections help students internalize their daily behaviors in connection to our school values and their personal goals. Over time,

this cultivates a community of reflective learners who don't just perform positive behavior but understand its impact.

1. Culture Implementation for Faculty and Staff

At xMA, our staff play an essential role in living, modeling, and embedding the P.O.W.E.R.S. values into everyday teaching and learning. These values Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, and Safety First form the foundation of our school's culture and are explicitly taught and reinforced in every classroom, every day. Teachers model these values through instructional interactions, character-building conversations, and daily use of systems like the Hero Board, culture tracker, and progress reflection time during morning and afternoon advisory. To ensure our culture systems are implemented consistently and effectively, all staff engage in robust professional development beginning in summer training and continuing throughout the school year. These sessions are led by our Principal and Dean of Culture & Instruction and focus on topics such as:

- Teaching and modeling each of the P.O.W.E.R.S. values with fidelity
- Embedding restorative conversations aligned with each core value
- Using the Hero Board and token economy system with consistency and intention
- Building a classroom climate that supports individual ownership, self-reflection, and peer encouragement
- Facilitating advisory circles, recognition moments, and student-led goal-setting
- Implementing progress trackers to build accountability and transparency

Co-teachers receive additional, targeted training on how to lead social-emotional learning (SEL) and character development lessons tied to each of the P.O.W.E.R.S. values. These lessons, developed by the Dean of Culture & Instruction and counselor, are integrated into daily advisory time and focus on key skills such as empathy, resilience, goal-setting, accountability, and self-advocacy. Through modeling, discussion, role-play, and reflection, students connect each value to real-life situations and learn how to apply them across school, home, and peer interactions.

Restorative practices are embedded into the school's relational discipline model and are introduced during summer PD and reinforced in weekly coaching and team huddles. Teachers are trained to lead restorative conversations that align with our values focusing not only on repairing harm, but on helping students grow through reflection and responsibility. For example, a conversation about disrespect may guide a student to reflect on how they can better show "Respect All," while one about classroom disruptions may focus on how to "Own Now" and reset their actions. This value-aligned framework allows students to connect behavior to culture and see themselves as active participants in building a positive learning environment.

To recognize and sustain strong culture, staff are celebrated monthly during POWERHOUSE Celebrations, where team members who model the core values are acknowledged publicly. These celebrations, along with regular team-building activities and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), help cultivate camaraderie and shared purpose among staff. PLCs also serve as a space for educators to co-plan SEL lessons, reflect on student culture data, and share strategies that support student engagement, relationship-building, and accountability.

If students require additional behavioral support, our school's behavior leadership team composed of the Executive Director, Principal, Dean of Culture & Instruction, Director of Student Supports, and school counselors collaborates with the teaching team to develop clear, individualized strategies. These plans are integrated seamlessly into the classroom culture using the same P.O.W.E.R.S.-aligned language, reflection prompts, and supports, ensuring that students feel seen and supported without being singled out.

Over the course of the year, culture development remains a priority through ongoing modeling, consistent coaching, daily reinforcement of systems, and alignment across classrooms. At xMA, we believe culture is not a program, it is a shared way of being. Through intentional systems, strong adult modeling, and student ownership, we create a school environment where every child and adult is empowered to live the P.O.W.E.R.S. values and grow together.

1. Culture Implementation for Families

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA), building a strong school culture begins with the home-school connection. From the very first parent orientation, families are introduced to our P.O.W.E.R.S. framework Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, and Safety First and are given practical strategies for reinforcing these core values at home. These conversations help set the tone for a shared commitment to student growth, behavior, and academic success.

Throughout the year, families participate in Parent emPOWERment Workshops, led by our Student Support Team, which includes our Special Education staff, Counselor, Executive Director, Principal and Dean of Culture & Instruction. These sessions equip parents with strategies to support behavior at home, reinforce positive routines, and understand how restorative conversations and culturally responsive practices are embedded in xMA's discipline approach. These workshops also help families explore how to model the P.O.W.E.R.S. values in day-to-day life, from conflict resolution and praise to ownership and accountability.

To further deepen engagement, Parent POWERHouse Meetings are held quarterly. These meetings provide space for families to ask questions, give feedback on culture and discipline systems, and collaborate with school leaders on how to maintain consistency across school and home. By ensuring transparency and shared expectations, families become active partners in supporting a unified, value-driven environment.

Celebration is central to our school culture and families are part of it. Students are recognized through weekly, monthly, and quarterly assemblies and POWERHouse Celebrations for demonstrating the P.O.W.E.R.S. values in academics, behavior, and leadership. Events like P.O.W.E.R.S. Family Night brings families together for interactive games, community-building, and learning experiences focused on our values. Our K–5 Hero Boards and 6–8 Power Bank systems serve as visual and tangible reminders of each student's growth. Families receive regular communication on their child's progress, and students can redeem their rewards for privileges, experiences, or participation in special events like "Hero Day."

Families are also invited to volunteer in classrooms, lead career days, attend student-led conferences, and contribute to school-wide events. These experiences allow them to see the culture in action and play a vital role in reinforcing behavioral and academic expectations. Parents who contribute meaningfully to school improvement committees and cultural events are honored as valued members of our xMA community.

For families who need more targeted support, xMA connects them with wraparound services such as counseling referrals, community resource partners, and additional meetings with the Student Support Team. This ensures that every family feels seen, supported, and empowered no matter their background or circumstance.

1. Culture Implementation for Students and Families Entering Mid-Year

xMA ensures that students and families who join mid-year are fully integrated into the culture through a structured and personalized onboarding process. xMA ensures that students and families who join mid-year feel welcomed, known, and aligned with our culture from their very first day. To support a smooth transition, we implement a structured, personalized onboarding process designed to help students quickly learn routines, understand expectations, and feel a sense of belonging within our P.O.W.E.R.S.-aligned community.

Every mid-year student receives a superhero-themed welcome kit that includes a personalized note, P.O.W.E.R.S. visuals, classroom routines, and key culture tools such as progress trackers, goal folders, and Hero Board/Power Bank information. Students are also paired with a peer buddy who exemplifies strong P.O.W.E.R.S. values and helps them navigate schedules, transitions, and social connections during their first weeks on campus.

Teachers and co-teachers provide a teacher-led culture orientation, meeting individually with each new student to introduce classroom norms, explain the station-rotation structure, and guide them through a “Unit 0” onboarding module. This ensures students can immediately begin using trackers, goal folders, and advisory routines with confidence.

Families receive a mid-year culture meeting where staff review the P.O.W.E.R.S. framework, restorative practices, behavior expectations, communication systems, and ways families can reinforce culture at home. This ensures that home and school remain aligned from the start.

During the first month, advisory teachers and co-teachers conduct regular academic and social-emotional check-ins to monitor adjustment, build relationships, and ensure both cultural and academic integration.

Through these intentional systems, warm relational practices, and high-touch support, every mid-year student and family is welcomed into the xMA community with clarity, dignity, and care never feeling like late additions, but full members of our superhero-learning culture.

Culture Implementation for Administrators and School Leadership & Sustainability

Administrators at xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) play a vital role in fostering a positive, inclusive school culture through their daily visibility and engagement across classrooms and common spaces. By participating in learning celebrations, advisory time, classroom walk-throughs, and check-ins with staff and students, administrators model and reinforce the P.O.W.E.R.S. values and maintain alignment with the school’s mission. This intentional presence promotes a collaborative, student-centered environment where every member of the school community feels known, valued, and supported.

To ensure that our P.O.W.E.R.S. values remain active and authentic across the school, xMA implements structured, ongoing systems for feedback and reflection. Regular surveys are distributed to students, staff, and families to gather insights about school culture, identify strengths, and uncover opportunities for improvement. Focus groups are held throughout the year to provide more personal dialogue and reflection, creating space for honest conversations and collaborative planning. These inputs are analyzed and used to inform schoolwide action steps that are shared with stakeholders to promote transparency, accountability, and trust.

In addition to surveys and focus groups, xMA conducts recurring “Culture Checks,” where leadership teams conduct walk-throughs using a standardized rubric to assess how consistently our culture systems and classroom environments reflect our shared values. These checks examine routines, classroom setup, behavior systems, and the presence of our core structures such as Hero Boards, progress trackers, and clear implementation of our P.O.W.E.R.S. expectations.

This continuous feedback loop ensures that our school remains responsive to the needs of our community and that the positive behaviors, rituals, and routines we’ve established are sustained throughout the year. Our inclusive approach ensures that every student, staff member, and family feels heard, celebrated, and empowered, strengthening the foundation of a culture where P.O.W.E.R.S. values are lived daily.

Measuring Our Culture Through Our P.O.W.E.R.S. Values

At xMA, our vision is to cultivate graduates who embody the core competencies of creative thinkers, problem solvers, resilient individuals, empathetic citizens, and self-reliant learners. Our P.O.W.E.R.S. values, in combination with our S.T.R.E.A.M. focus and personalized learning model, serve as the cultural backbone that drives these competencies. Each value aligns directly with a trait in our Portrait of a Graduate competencies of Creativity, Problem Solving, Resilience, Self-reliance and Empathy:

- P (Positive Attitude): Fosters resilience and empathy by promoting a growth mindset and perseverance.

- O (Ownership Now): Develops self-reliant learners and creative thinkers through goal setting, self-monitoring, and accountability.

- W (Work Hard): Builds problem solvers and resilient individuals by emphasizing effort, strategy use, and reflection.

-

E (Encourage Others): Nurtures empathetic citizens through peer feedback, collaboration, and emotional support.

- R (Respect ALL): Strengthens inclusive communities through kind communication, cultural humility, and respect for all voices.
- S (Safety First): Creates a stable and secure environment where students are empowered to take risks and thrive.

To evaluate the effectiveness of our culture systems, xMA uses the following tools and metrics:

- Hero Boards and Daily Recognition Charts: Track real-time implementation of P.O.W.E.R.S. values by students.
- Advisory Reflections and Journals: Support goal tracking and self-reflection aligned to character development.
- Culture Observation Rubric: Used during walk-throughs to measure consistency of routines, values, and systems.
- Twice-Yearly Surveys: Administered to students, families, and staff to assess climate, belonging, and behavioral culture.
- Hero Wall Celebrations and Power House Events: Provide data on recognition frequency and representation of core values.

School culture will be monitored through several methods. These include daily boards, reflection feedback from morning and afternoon meetings, and culture observation rubrics and feedback forms which will be distributed to students, staff, and families twice annually. Additionally, the leadership team will conduct "xMA Culture Checks" several times each year. These checks will include school walk-throughs to ensure consistent and predictable routines, classroom checklist setup, and PBIS system implementation. Aiming to have a positive, inclusive and supportive school culture we use the following metrics to measure our impact:

- Positive Attitude:
Goal: 90–100% of students will demonstrate a minimum of three instances monthly of encouraging language or supportive actions, as recorded on the Hero Board and confirmed during xMA Culture Checks.
- Ownership Now:
Goal: 90–100% of students will complete all assigned work and maintain progress trackers that are updated daily. Progress will be monitored during class and advisory, and assessed using the Culture Observation Rubric.
- Work Hard:
Goal: 90–100% of students will submit assignments on time and demonstrate at least one perseverance strategy weekly, validated through teacher observation and tracker reflection.
- Encourage Others:
Goal: 90–100% of students will provide at least one piece of positive peer feedback during collaborative tasks, recorded on peer shout-out boards and confirmed through walk-throughs.
- Respect All:
Goal: 90–100% of students will demonstrate respectful interactions (e.g., listening, kindness, inclusivity) in at least 90% of observed exchanges, as recorded in advisory notes and Culture

Check data.

- Safety First:

Goal: 90–100% of students will report feeling safe in the school environment through climate surveys. Walk-throughs will show consistent adherence to classroom safety routines and emergency procedures.

xMA Culture Observation Rubric

The administrative team, led by the Executive Director, Principal and Dean of Culture & Instruction, uses the xMA Culture Observation Rubric to assess how deeply the P.O.W.E.R.S. values are embedded into classroom routines, student behavior, and teacher-student interactions. This rubric provides a clear, developmental guide for supporting classrooms in building an inclusive, empowering, and predictable culture where all students thrive.

Figure (31):xMA Culture Observation Rubric

Indicator	Level 1: Emerging	Level 2: Developing	Level 3: Proficient	Level 4: Exemplary
Positive Attitude	Few students show positive language or optimism; classroom tone is often negative or disengaged.	Some students use encouraging language or demonstrate positive behaviors, though inconsistently.	Most students regularly model optimism, use supportive language, and respond to challenges with a growth mindset.	Nearly all students consistently use positive language, praise peers, and demonstrate a solution-oriented mindset in learning and social settings.
Ownership Now	Students do not engage with progress trackers, goal-setting, or personal reflection; lack of self-direction.	Students sometimes reference trackers or goals, with limited evidence of follow-through.	Most students consistently update progress trackers, reflect on goals, and use them to guide their learning and behavior.	All or nearly all students demonstrate strong self-regulation by actively using trackers, reflecting on progress, and setting meaningful, personalized learning goals.
Work Hard	Assignments are often incomplete or lack effort; students give up quickly when challenged.	Students show some effort and persistence, with occasional task completion or follow-through.	Students complete most tasks on time, seek support when needed, and show consistent effort across activities.	Students go above expectations, consistently persist through challenges, and model a strong work ethic that inspires peers.

Encourage Others	Few examples of peer support or encouragement; some negative peer interactions observed.	Some students offer encouragement, but it is limited in frequency or authenticity.	Most students engage in positive peer interactions, celebrate each other's success, and offer help in collaborative settings.	A culture of mutual encouragement is clearly evident; students consistently uplift peers and create a safe, affirming classroom community.
Respect All	Disrespectful language, interruptions, or disregard for others' space or perspectives are frequent.	Students occasionally demonstrate respectful behaviors, but these are not yet consistent.	Most students treat peers and adults with kindness, actively listen, and respect differences.	Respect is embedded in all interactions; students model empathy, inclusivity, and responsibility in both speech and actions.
Safety First	Students frequently ignore physical or emotional safety expectations, creating unsafe conditions.	Some students follow safety expectations, but reminders are often needed.	Students follow safety protocols and classroom routines with minimal prompting.	Safety is internalized; students proactively follow and promote safety norms and support others in doing the same.

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy, the P.O.W.E.R.S. Values are more than classroom tools; they are the threads that connect our entire community. By equipping staff through intentional professional development, empowering families with practical tools, and celebrating each individual's growth throughout the year, we create a culture that is vibrant, inclusive, and empowering. Whether a student joins on the first day or mid-year, they are welcomed into a supportive environment that celebrates differences, encourages ownership, and helps every learner grow into their own unique version of a superhero. Together with staff, students, and families we live in the P.O.W.E.R.S. values, building a community where every child can thrive.

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c) Explain how the school culture will take account of and serve students with special needs, including students receiving special education services, English Language Learners, gifted, and any students at risk of academic failure.

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA), inclusivity, empowerment, and equity are central to our school culture and instructional model. Our P.O.W.E.R.S. values Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, and Safety First serve as the foundation of a community where all learners, including students with disabilities, English Language Learners (ELLs), and those at risk of academic failure, are supported through responsive systems and personalized learning structures. These values are explicitly taught during advisory, reinforced through daily language in classrooms and hallways, and celebrated through HERO Boards, PowerHouse Celebrations, and public recognition so that students from all backgrounds see themselves as integral members of the xMA community. By implementing a robust Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), aligned to both academic (RTI) and behavioral (PBIS) needs, and grounded in Universal Design for Learning (UDL), xMA ensures every student has equitable access to the tools, relationships, and strategies they need to succeed. Our culture systems (P.O.W.E.R.S. lessons, advisory circles, class charters, and schoolwide routines) are intentionally designed so that students with special needs, ELLs, and students at risk of academic failure are not only accommodated, but visibly included, celebrated, and empowered as leaders within the school.

Supporting Students with Special Needs

Students with disabilities thrive in structured, predictable environments where routines are consistent and expectations are clearly communicated (Hume et al., 2009). At xMA, these structures are embedded within our culture: P.O.W.E.R.S. Language is used to teach and reteach expectations, calm-down corners and visual norms are available in every classroom, and students with disabilities participate in the same HERO Bucks and Power Credits systems, assemblies, and celebrations as their peers so they are fully included in the life of the school. At xMA, these supports are embedded into the daily culture: students use visual progress trackers instead of traditional visual schedules, receive regular feedback aligned to their personal goals, and participate in co-taught lessons that include flexible pathways for learning.

Classroom instruction is designed using UDL principles to meet the needs of all learners by offering multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression (CAST, 2018). This includes choice boards, flexible seating, multimodal instruction (visual, auditory, kinesthetic), and student ownership through progress tracking. Research shows that UDL increases access and engagement for students with learning differences by reducing barriers to content and allowing for personalized support (Rao, Ok & Bryant, 2014). To strengthen belonging, teachers connect UDL practices to our P.O.W.E.R.S. values by praising how students demonstrate "Work Hard" and "Ownership Now" when they use accommodations, advocate for themselves, or persist through challenging tasks.

Students with IEPs receive services integrated into the general education setting through inclusive teaching practices, small group instruction at the Blue Station, and collaboration between general and special education staff. Instruction is delivered in alignment with each student's Individualized Education Program (IEP), with accommodations embedded into everyday routines. The use of data-informed instructional groupings ensures that IEP goals and progress monitoring are not isolated but part of the student's holistic experience. Students with special needs also have opportunities to serve as classroom helpers, peer partners, and "POWER Captains," reinforcing that they are culture leaders, not just recipients of support.

Social-emotional development is also prioritized for students with disabilities through daily advisory time, character lessons, and restorative conversations that promote self-regulation and connection.

Visual tools, communication boards, and behavior reflection prompts help students navigate expectations independently, which research supports as critical for self-determination and long-term academic achievement for students with disabilities (Wehmeyer et al., 2003). Advisory circles, class meetings, and P.O.W.E.R.S.-themed lessons explicitly address empathy, inclusion, and respect so that peers understand different learning and communication needs and actively practice “Respect All” and “Encourage Others” in their interactions.

Supporting English Language Learners (ELLs)

xMA supports ELLs through culturally responsive pedagogy, differentiation, and a schoolwide focus on inclusive communication. ELLs are engaged through scaffolding strategies such as visuals, graphic organizers, modeling, sentence stems, and explicit vocabulary instruction, which have been shown to improve language acquisition and comprehension (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2017). The use of bilingual resources, vocabulary walls, and peer modeling helps ensure content is accessible while promoting literacy development in both English and students’ home languages. Within our culture systems, students’ languages and cultures are honored through morning meetings, bilingual announcements, multicultural celebrations, and student showcases where ELLs are encouraged to share their heritage, reinforcing that their identities are an asset to the school.

Teachers receive professional development in culturally responsive teaching and UDL to differentiate content while building relationships with students and families from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. ELLs benefit from peer relationships through classroom buddy systems and collaborative learning, which research shows enhances both language development and social-emotional well-being (Thomas & Collier, 2002). Schoolwide visuals, HERO Boards, and progress trackers are intentionally designed with accessible icons and dual-language supports to reduce linguistic barriers and increase engagement. P.O.W.E.R.S. Lessons emphasize “Respect All” and “Encourage Others” by teaching students to value multilingualism, listen actively to peers, and support classmates who are learning English, ensuring ELLs are fully included in classroom discussions, group work, and celebrations.

Family engagement is a central part of our model for supporting ELLs. Parents are offered translation services, culturally relevant school events, and regular communication in their home language. This aligns with research showing that ELLs perform better when families are actively involved in their learning and when schools maintain consistent communication across cultural contexts (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Our community events, advisory projects, and family nights highlight the cultures represented in our school, sending a clear cultural message that ELL families are partners and co-creators of xMA’s identity, not visitors on the margins.

Supporting Students At Risk of Academic Failure

xMA uses a proactive and responsive Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) to identify and address the academic and behavioral needs of students at risk of failure. Research indicates that early intervention, combined with tiered supports, significantly improves outcomes for struggling learners (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Through universal screening, progress monitoring, and tiered academic interventions, students are supported within a data-informed model that personalizes learning based on demonstrated need. Importantly, supports are framed as a normal and celebrated part of our P.O.W.E.R.S. Culture students learn that asking for help, using strategies, and returning to skills they have not yet mastered are examples of “Work Hard” and “Ownership Now,” which reduces stigma and normalizes intervention as part of every learner’s journey.

Tier 1 instruction is delivered through xMA’s schoolwide personalized learning model, which emphasizes mastery-based instruction, blended learning, UDL-aligned lesson design, and high-quality core teaching for all students. Students navigate personalized pathways using unit progress trackers that function as visual schedules, enabling teachers to differentiate content, monitor pacing, and provide timely support.

Tier 2 supports include targeted small-group re-teaching, skill-based intervention groups, and peer tutoring opportunities, often delivered during dedicated intervention blocks such as the Red Station. These interventions are fluid and data-driven, ensuring students receive additional support as soon as they demonstrate a need.

Tier 3 services provide intensive, individualized assistance through coordinated collaboration among teachers, instructional specialists, and, when appropriate, special education staff. Supports may

include individualized intervention plans, increased frequency of small-group instruction, or targeted skill remediation.

All academic interventions are fully integrated into the broader school culture. Students receiving Tier 2 or Tier 3 academic support continue to participate in advisory, P.O.W.E.R.S. lessons, schoolwide celebrations, and leadership opportunities reinforcing their belonging and emphasizing that support is a normal part of growth, not a marker of deficit.

In parallel, behavior interventions align to PBIS and are scaffolded through daily culture routines such as advisory reflections, peer acknowledgments, and restorative conversations. Students with emerging behavior challenges may receive Tier 2 supports such as structured check-ins, SEL groups, or mentorship. Tier 3 interventions may involve behavior support plans, team-based case management, and individualized SEL coaching. This approach reflects research showing that integrated MTSS frameworks braiding RTI and PBIS improve engagement, reduce discipline incidents, and close achievement gaps (Sugai & Horner, 2009; McIntosh & Goodman, 2016). At xMA, PBIS and P.O.W.E.R.S. are woven together so expectations are taught, practiced, and reinforced in ways that are culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and accessible to students with special needs, ELLs, and students with a history of academic struggle.

Instructionally, students are recognized for their effort, progress, and engagement not just final outcomes through a system of daily HERO Bucks (K–5) or Power Credits (6–8). These systems reinforce a growth mindset and encourage students to persist through academic and behavioral challenges. Research shows that students who adopt a growth mindset are more likely to overcome academic failure and increase motivation (Dweck, 2006; Blackwell et al., 2007). Because HERO Bucks and Power Credits are tied directly to P.O.W.E.R.S. behaviors, all students including students with disabilities, ELLs, and those at risk of academic failure have frequent, visible opportunities to be acknowledged, celebrated, and showcased as culture bearers and leaders within the school community.

Unified Systems for Equity and Culture

All systems at xMA from instructional practices to student-led conferences to progress monitoring are designed with equity in mind. Teachers receive ongoing professional development on inclusive instructional practices, trauma-informed approaches, and differentiation for learners with exceptional needs. Students reflect on their academic and behavioral progress daily during advisory and update their Personalized Learning Portfolios, fostering ownership and real-time self-regulation.

Families are engaged through quarterly Student-Led Conferences, Parent emPOWERment Workshops, and home-school communication aligned to our P.O.W.E.R.S. values. This shared culture helps ensure that students with disabilities, ELLs, and students at risk of failure are not just supported academically, but celebrated as integral members of our school community. xMA's school culture is intentionally designed to meet the needs of diverse learners through inclusive instructional practices, MTSS-aligned supports, and systems that promote student ownership, agency, and reflection. By integrating UDL, MTSS/ RTI, PBIS, and family partnerships into every layer of school life, xMA ensures that students with special needs, English Language Learners, and those at academic risk are equipped to thrive both academically and socially.

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy, our culture is not an overlay to instruction, it is the foundation that ensures students with special needs, English Language Learners, and those at risk of academic failure are known, included, and empowered. Through personalized support, MTSS-aligned systems, and an intentional focus on inclusive instructional practices, xMA actively dismantles barriers to learning. We prioritize student agency, family partnership, and equity, ensuring that every learner regardless of ability, language, or background can access rigorous learning, build meaningful relationships, and develop the competencies to thrive. This commitment is embedded in our P.O.W.E.R.S. values and visible in every classroom, every day.

Citations

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d) Describe a typical school day from the perspective of a student in a grade that will be served in the first year of operations.

A Day in the Life of Mia at xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy

Student: Mia, Kindergarten Scholar

8:00–8:15 AM | Arrival & Morning Preview

Mia enters xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy with purpose and pride. "Good morning, superhero!" says her greeter as she walks past college banners and student work displays lining the halls.

Once in her classroom, she puts away her backpack and checks her progress tracker to preview the day's Must Do, Should Do, and Aspire to Do goals. Today, she starts Phonics in the Blue Station and will visit two other stations as part of her learning path. Her Hero Board is set up on her desk. She's ready to collect stickers for Ownership Now and Work Hard.

8:15–8:30 AM | Morning Circle & SEL

Morning Circle begins with greetings and a review of today's P.O.W.E.R.S. value: Work Hard. "What does working hard look like when things are tricky?" the teacher asks. Mia reflects, then shares her goal with her partner: "I will try again if I get stuck when I'm reading." She closes her eyes and takes three slow, calming breaths before joining her classmates in a cheerful affirmation chant.

8:30–9:00 AM | Phonics Stations

The classroom transitions smoothly into Phonics rotations. Today, Mia completes three targeted stations:

- ~~Blue~~ Blue Station (Must Do – Teacher-Led Instruction): Mia works closely with her teacher to build and decode CVC words. She uses magnetic letters to spell "man," "sun," and "zip," tapping each sound and blending fluently.
- ~~Yellow~~ Yellow Station (Aspire to Do – Sentence Building): At her choice station, Mia selects an Aspire to Do challenge. She builds a full sentence using sight words: "The cat can run." She illustrates it and practices reading it aloud to a peer.
-

~~Green~~ Station (Mastery Check – Assessment): To wrap up, Mia completes a sound-matching activity independently, demonstrating that she can identify beginning sounds on her own.

With each station, Mia updates her progress tracker and earns a sticker for trying a new word without giving up.

9:00–10:00 AM | Reading Comprehension Stations

Today, Mia focuses on three stations during Reading Comprehension block:

- ~~Blue~~ Station (Must Do – Teacher-Led Reading): During the read-aloud, Mia listens for the character’s emotions and setting details. She answers a question using evidence from the pictures and earns a Hero Buck for tracking the speaker and using a complete sentence.
- ~~Yellow~~ Station (Should Do – Sequencing Task): Mia sequences story events using picture cards. She works with a partner to explain what happened “first, next, and last,” and adds a drawing to her page.
- ~~Red~~ Station (PLP Time): During PLP time, Mia logs into her i-Ready Learning Pathway and completes two Reading lessons, including a phonics lesson focused on blending CVC words based on her most recent progress data.

She checks her tracker and beams two reading goals complete, and her Hero Board is filling up.

10:00–10:15 AM | Snack & Brain Break

Mia recharges with her snack and joins her friends for a silly GoNoodle dance break. Her teacher reminds the class, “Math is next! Check your tracker to see where you’re starting.” Mia sees she’ll begin at Yellow Station.

10:15–11:15 AM | Math Stations

Mia rotates through three math stations today:

- ~~Yellow~~ Station (Aspire to Do – Number Line Challenge): Mia builds a 1–20 number line using beads and string. She explains her spacing and sequence to a peer: “There are 10 numbers on this side, so the halfway point is here.”
- ~~Blue~~ Station (Must Do – Teacher-Led Instruction): She works with her teacher using number bonds to make different combinations of 8. “5 and 3 make 8!” she announces proudly.
- ~~Red~~ Station (PLP Time): On iReady Math, Mia completes a comparing numbers challenge. She smiles when she earns a digital badge for finishing the task on her first try.

She checks off her Math Must Do and Aspire to Do goals, then adds a sticker to her Hero Board for Ownership Now.

11:15–11:30 AM | Math Enrichment / PLP Block

During enrichment, Mia chooses a partner puzzle activity with additional tiles. Around her, some students are in small IEP goal groups or working independently. Mia explains her thinking aloud while solving: “I need a 4 and a 6 to make 10!” She checks her tracker math goals complete!

11:30 AM–12:00 PM | Lunch

Lunch is filled with laughter, food, and kindness. Mia helps a classmate open their snack and earns a Hero Buck for Respect All. She talks excitedly about the S.T.R.E.A.M. challenge ahead and make sure she’s ready to build.

12:00–12:30 PM | S.T.R.E.A.M. Challenge Block

Mia is thrilled it’s bridge-building day in S.T.R.E.A.M. class!

Her group begins by planning their bridge. Mia sketches the design, labeling “legs,” “top,” and “base.” They build it using popsicle sticks and tape, testing it with a rubber animal. It holds... then tips! “Let’s try taping the base tighter,” Mia suggests. They adjust, test again, and cheer as the bridge holds three animals.

Afterward, she draws her design and writes what made it stronger. Her teacher awards her a Hero Buck for Encouraging Others and Creative Problem-Solving.

12:30–1:00 PM | Physical Education

In P.E., Mia zooms through a superhero obstacle course balancing on beams, leaping over cones, and cheering on her classmates. She earns two more Hero Board stickers for Safety First and Positive Attitude.

1:00–1:30 PM | Writing Stations

Mia completes two writing stations this afternoon:

- ~~Blue~~ Station (Must Do – Sentence Writing): She writes with her teacher using a sentence starter: “My bridge held a…” and completes it with “tiger.” She reads it aloud and smiles.
- ~~Yellow~~ Station (Aspire to Do – Story Writing): Mia builds on her sentence to write a full three-sentence story about building a stronger bridge. She illustrates it with bold colors.

She adds a sticker for Work Hard, having completed both her Must Do and Aspire to Do writing goals for the day.

1:30–1:45 PM | Snack

While enjoying a granola bar and chatting with a friend, Mia reviews her progress tracker. She has just one more learning block before the day wraps up and she’s on track to finish strong.

1:45–2:15 PM | Science & Social Studies Stations: Community Helpers

Today, Mia rotates through three learning stations about Community Helpers:

- ~~Blue~~ Station (Must Do – Read-Aloud & Discussion): The teacher reads about EMTs and paramedics. Mia listens intently, then shares, “They help people get to the hospital fast.”
- ~~Yellow~~ Station (Should Do & Aspire to Do – City Map + Sorting): Mia completes a Should Do sorting activity, matching helpers with their tools. Then she chooses an Aspire to Do challenge designing a paper city with labeled buildings: “School,” “Clinic,” “Post Office.” She adds roads and stop signs to her drawing.
- ~~Green~~ Station (Mastery Check – Assessment): Mia completes a short match-up worksheet identifying community helpers based on job descriptions.

By the end, her Hero Board is nearly full, and she proudly checks her tracker: all Science/Social Studies goals are met!

2:15–2:30 PM | Reading Enrichment / PLP Block

Mia logs into iReady ELA to continue working on her personalized learning pathway. Today’s lesson focuses on vowel teams, and Mia carefully listens, completes the activity, and checks her progress. She loves seeing how the iReady program adapts just for her; it makes her feel like the learning is built around her brain.

Elsewhere in the room, some classmates are working on IEP goals in small groups, while others complete enrichment texts or phonics challenges. Mia finishes her pathway lesson independently, proud of how far she’s come.

Her teacher leans over and whispers, “That’s real ownership, Mia.” She beams, updates her tracker, and adds her final sticker of the day.

2:45–3:00 PM | Closing Circle & SEL Reflection

As the class returns to the carpet, Mia reflects on her entire day.

- “In Phonics, I kept trying even when the sounds got tricky.”
- “In Reading, I finished the new ending to the story.”
- “In Math, I made a number line that was perfectly spaced.”
- “In Writing, I wrote three full sentences about my bridge!”
-

“And in Science and Social Studies, I built a city map with helpers!”

Her classmates snap and cheer as she adds her final sticker to her Hero Board.

Before packing up, Mia checks her tracker and records where she'll begin tomorrow:

- Phonics: Green

- Reading: Yellow

- Math: Blue

She's ready to level up again.

3:00–3:15 PM | Dismissal

Backpack zipped, Hero Bucks in hand, Mia gives a final wave. “See you tomorrow, Mia! You crushed it today!” her teacher says. Mia heads out the door knowing she worked hard, encouraged others, and owned her day like a true xS.T.R.E.A.M. superhero.

School Day Narrative - Teacher Perspective

A Day in the Life of Ms. Johnson & Mr. Brown

Kindergarten Teachers at xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy

Lead Teacher: Ms. Johnson | Co-Teacher: Mr. Brown

7:30 – 7:45 AM | Staff Huddle

The day kicks off with a burst of energy in the staff lounge. Teachers circle up for the daily huddle, and the culture coach opens with celebratory shout-outs. Mr. Brown is recognized for inspiring a student to persevere during S.T.R.E.A.M.. Ms. Johnson is praised for her commitment to pushing her math group to stretch beyond their comfort zone. The P.O.W.E.R.S. The value of the day Ownership Now is spotlighted, and the leadership team encourages all staff to model intentional reflection and self-direction.

7:45 – 8:00 AM | Arrival Post

The front doors swing open, and Mr. Brown stands ready, offering high-fives, hugs, and cheerful greetings. Inside, Ms. Johnson welcomes each student by name, kneeling beside them as they unpack, checking their progress trackers, and updating daily goals. Students glance at their “Must Do” tasks, set intentions, and proudly mark where they're starting.

Ms. Johnson quietly celebrates students on pace and ahead of pace, while Mr. Brown highlights Challenge Board crushers setting a tone of excitement and ownership from the moment students arrive.

8:00 – 8:15 AM | Morning Circle & SEL

Students form a full circle, signaling mindfulness time. Ms. Johnson lights the candle lamp. They reflect on the P.O.W.E.R.S. value of Ownership Now, setting daily SEL goals:

- "Today, I will ask for help if I'm stuck."

- "I will use kind words in my reading group."

Mr. Brown records class goals on the Hero Board. Students log personal goals on trackers.

They also preview today's small groups based on tracker data, celebrating students who leveled up or showed resilience yesterday. A short breathing exercise closes the circle, anchoring students' emotional regulation before launching academics.

8:30 – 9:15 AM | ELA Block – Phonics & Reading Comprehension

Stations launch with excitement. Before rotating, Ms. Johnson announces small group changes, honoring students who made progress. Students rotate through three literacy stations:

~~Blue~~ Station – Must Do (Teacher-Led Instruction):

At the kidney table, Ms. Johnson teaches CVC blending (short vowels) using magnetic letters aligned to Alabama ELA Standard K.RF.3 (Demonstrate understanding of spoken words, syllables, and sounds).

~~Yellow~~ Station – Choice-Based Learning (Should Do/Aspire to Do):

Students access phonics videos and letter-sound matching games aligned to Standard K.RI.1 (Ask and answer questions about key details in a text), extending learning with creative Aspire activities.

~~Green~~ Station – Mastery Check (Assessment):

Students complete a sound-symbol picture sort assessing initial, medial, and final sounds (Standard K.RF.3).

~~Red~~ Station – PLP Time:

Mr. Brown pulls 3 students into a small group to review a lesson blending sounds. Ms. Johnson reviews progress trackers and mastery checks for the day to update progress trackers.

Students update trackers, celebrate growth, and encourage peers to reach their goals.

10:00 – 10:15 AM | Snack & Brain Break

Students munch on fruit and crackers while dancing to brain break videos. Ms. Johnson reviews literacy trackers and flags students needing 1:1 coaching or enrichment tomorrow. Mr. Brown prepares shout-outs for students demonstrating stamina.

10:15 – 11:15 AM | Math Block

Math stations launch with a quick tracker review. Group assignments are posted, and students excitedly find out if they "leveled up."

~~Blue~~ Station – Must Do (Teacher-Led Instruction):

Ms. Johnson uses two-color counters to compose and decompose numbers within 10 aligned to Alabama Math Standard K.OA.1 (Represent addition and subtraction).

~~Yellow~~ Station – Choice-Based Learning:

Students complete number comparison tasks (K.CC.6 Compare numbers between groups of objects).

~~Green~~ Station – Mastery Check:

Students demonstrate ways to make a given number within 10 (K.OA.5).

~~Red~~ Station – PLP Time:

Mr. Brown pulls a small group of students for a mini intervention lesson.

11:15 – 11:30 AM | Math Enrichment / PLP Block

Ms. Johnson leads an enrichment group creating AB/ABC patterns with pattern blocks. Mr. Brown assists students finalizing digital math work and clarifying mistakes.

11:30 – 12:00 PM | Lunch & Recess

Students embody the P.O.W.E.R.S. values during free time, practicing inclusion, sharing, and teamwork.

12:00 – 12:30 PM | S.T.R.E.A.M. Class (Teacher Co-Planning)

While students engineer floating boats in S.T.R.E.A.M. class, Ms. Johnson and Mr. Brown:

- Analyze tracker and Hero Board data
- Plan flexible groups for the next day
- Record short teacher instructional videos for Must Do and Should Do tasks
- Locate high-quality curriculum videos for Aspire to Do options
- Update the Hero Board goals and SEL behavior supports

12:30 – 1:00 PM | P.E. with Coach Thompson (Continued Co-Planning)

During P.E., teachers:

- Finalize next day's station rotations
- Confer briefly with curriculum specialists
- Tighten interventions and enrichment plans

- Ensure SEL goals remain woven into academics

1:00 – 1:15 PM | Writing Stations

Students rotate through writing stations aligned to Alabama ELA Standard K.W.3 (Use drawing, dictating, and writing to narrate a single event):

~~Blue~~ Station – Must Do:

Students co-create sentences describing their boat-building experience in S.T.R.E.A.M.

~~Yellow~~ Station – Choice-Based:

Students independently illustrate, label, and expand on their boat-building stories.

1:15 – 1:45 PM | Science & Social Studies Stations

Focus: Citizenship and Responsibility aligned to Alabama Social Studies Standard K.2 (Identify rules and responsibilities):

~~Blue~~ Station – Must Do:

Ms. Johnson reads *What If Everybody Did That?* and discusses classroom rules.

~~Yellow~~ Station – Creative Application:

Students design "Good Citizen" badges showing acts of responsibility.

~~Green~~ Station – Mastery Check:

Students complete a responsibility picture sort and self-assessment.

2:15 – 2:45 PM | Reading Enrichment / PLP Block

Students independently pursue personalized literacy pathways:

- iReady Reading
- Small group fluency coaching with Mr. Brown
- Book conferences with Ms. Johnson targeting Standard K.RL.2 (Retell familiar stories, including key details)

Students track their literacy growth daily, celebrating small milestones.

2:45 – 3:00 PM | Closing Circle & Reflection

Students gather to reflect meaningfully:

- "Who used encouraging words today?"
- "Who met their reading tracker goal?"
- "Who solved a math problem by trying a new strategy?"

Students proudly share both SEL and academic wins.

Mr. Brown announces Hero Board champions, and Ms. Johnson highlights students showing perseverance, kindness, or leadership.

Students end with a goal-setting moment: "Tomorrow, I will..."

3:00 – 3:15 PM | Dismissal

Students collect Hero Bucks, reflect on the day's goals, and exit with confidence and excitement for tomorrow.

3:15 – 3:30 PM | Teacher Debrief & Prep

Ms. Johnson and Mr. Brown:

- Review daily trackers and mastery checks
- Identify students for reteach, enrichment, or SEL check-ins
- Organize materials for Must Do, Should Do, and Aspire to Do tasks
-

Adjust flexible group lists based on performance

- Finalize next day's instructional videos and Choice Board supports

Their intentional planning ensures the next morning launches with clarity, precision, and positivity.

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

9. Supplemental Programming

Reviewer Instructions

Please rate this section using the provided rubric.

Status: Completed

Form Result

Provide details on planned supplemental programming that will augment the academic program for students and support intellectual growth and academic achievement. These include clubs and sports teams supported by the school, as well as non-academic support for students..

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Compelling evidence of how supplemental programming will directly and consistently enrich a positive, high-quality academic program and overall school program.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

Co-Curricular and Extra-Curricular Programming

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA), co-curricular and extra-curricular programming is an essential extension of the academic program and reflects our mission to reimagine the K–8 learning experience through S.T.R.E.A.M. exploration, personalized learning, and social-emotional growth. These opportunities provide students with meaningful ways to explore their interests, develop leadership skills, and apply their learning in real-world contexts while reinforcing the school's P.O.W.E.R.S. values: Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, and Safety First. All programming is designed to support the development of xMA's Portrait of a Graduate competencies: Creative Thinkers, Problem-Solvers, Resilient Individuals, Empathetic Citizens, and Self-Reliant Learners.

S.T.R.E.A.M. and Fine Arts Programming

xMA provides daily S.T.R.E.A.M. instruction for all students through its core instructional model using the WOZED curriculum, which is fully integrated into the school's academic program and included in the annual operating budget. Through WOZED, students engage in hands-on, career-connected learning experiences in robotics, coding, animation, artificial intelligence, engineering, data science, cybersecurity, and digital design. This structured and scaffolded curriculum allows students to progressively build technical knowledge and problem-solving skills aligned to Alabama Digital Literacy and Computer Science Standards and prepares students for future academic and career opportunities.

In addition to STREAM instruction, Fine Arts programming is a central component of the school's co-curricular model. xMA will partner with The Flourish, a local arts education organization, to provide a weekly Fine Arts rotation for students. Through this partnership, teaching artists will deliver structured instruction in music, visual arts, theater, and dance on a rotating weekly basis, ensuring that all students have consistent exposure to multiple forms of artistic expression throughout the

school year. This weekly rotation allows students to explore creative disciplines in depth, build artistic confidence, and develop skills in performance, collaboration, and creative expression.

Elementary students will participate in weekly Fine Arts programming through this structured rotation, while middle school students will have opportunities to select Fine Arts and STREAM electives each semester, allowing them to pursue deeper learning aligned with their interests and talents. This elective model supports student agency and identity development while reinforcing creativity, innovation, and communication skills.

Student Clubs and After-School Programming

Student clubs and after-school programming serve as the primary extra-curricular opportunities at xMA and provide structured enrichment beyond the school day. These programs allow students to explore personal interests, build leadership skills, and deepen academic and creative learning in supportive, student-centered environments aligned to the school's mission and P.O.W.E.R.S. values. After-school clubs and enrichment programs will primarily be facilitated by xMA teachers and staff and will typically occur weekly or monthly for approximately one hour after school, depending on student interest, staff availability, and program structure. Middle school clubs and activities may meet for extended durations based on the nature of the program, such as robotics teams, leadership groups, or performance-based programs.

Examples of after-school clubs and enrichment opportunities may include robotics, coding and computer science, visual arts, theater, student leadership council, debate, STEM competition teams, and academic tutoring or enrichment. These clubs provide students with opportunities to develop leadership, collaboration, and problem-solving skills while building strong relationships with peers and staff.

These after-school programs also provide targeted academic support opportunities, including tutoring, homework assistance, and intervention-based enrichment aligned to students' Personalized Learning Plans. This ensures students receive both enrichment and academic reinforcement in a structured and engaging setting.

As the school expands, middle school students will also have opportunities to participate in extended after-school enrichment and athletic programming that promotes teamwork, physical wellness, leadership development, and student engagement.

Access and Inclusion for Special Populations

xMA is committed to ensuring that all students, including students with disabilities, English Learners, and students identified as academically at risk, have equitable access to all co-curricular and extra-curricular programming. Students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), 504 Plans, or English Learner plans will receive appropriate accommodations and support to ensure full participation, consistent with their individualized learning plans and instructional needs.

Participation in enrichment activities is not restricted based on academic performance, disability status, or language proficiency. Supports such as accommodations, assistive technology, and modified instruction will be provided as needed to ensure full inclusion. This inclusive approach ensures that all students benefit from enrichment opportunities that support academic growth, confidence, and social-emotional development.

Partnerships Supporting Programming, Professional Development, and Funding

xMA will leverage strategic partnerships to enhance programming quality, expand student opportunities, and ensure sustainability. Key partnerships include The Flourish, which provides weekly Fine Arts instruction through rotating music, art, theater, and dance programming delivered by teaching artists. xMA will also partner with AMSTI (Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative) and ATIM (Alabama Technology in Motion), which provide instructional resources, STEM materials, professional development, and support for technology integration.

Additionally, the WOZED curriculum provides ongoing STREAM curriculum support and professional development, ensuring that students have access to high-quality, career-connected learning experiences and that teachers are supported in delivering innovative instruction.

These partnerships strengthen instructional quality, expand enrichment opportunities, and provide access to additional funding and resources.

Funding and Sustainability

Co-curricular and extra-curricular programming will be supported through multiple funding sources to ensure long-term sustainability. The school's general operating budget includes funding for enrichment staffing, STREAM curriculum, and elective programming. The WOZED curriculum is fully funded within the school's instructional budget.

Additional funding will be secured through state and federal grants, including Alabama Arts Education grants, STEM-related grants, and potential 21st Century Community Learning Center funding. Partnerships with organizations such as The Flourish, AMSTI, and ATIM provide additional instructional resources, professional development, and access to enrichment programming.

This diversified funding approach ensures that enrichment opportunities remain sustainable, accessible, and equitable for all students.

Program Frequency

Programming will occur with the following frequency:

- STREAM instruction: Daily for all students
- Fine Arts instruction (through The Flourish partnership): Weekly rotating instruction in music, art, theater, and dance
- After-school clubs and enrichment programming: Weekly or monthly, typically one hour after school
- Extended middle school clubs and enrichment activities: Weekly or seasonal, depending on program availability
- Performances, showcases, and enrichment events: Multiple times per year

Through this comprehensive co-curricular and extra-curricular program, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy ensures that all students have access to high-quality enrichment experiences that foster creativity, leadership, academic growth, and social-emotional development, preparing them to thrive as Creative Thinkers, Problem-Solvers, Resilient Individuals, Empathetic Citizens, and Self-Reliant Learners.

b) Describe the programs or strategies to address students' mental, emotional, and social development and health. Please include funding sources for these programs if known.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) & Core P.O.W.E.R.S.

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA), supporting the mental, emotional, and social development of students is a central pillar of our whole-child approach. We implement a comprehensive, multi-tiered Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) framework aligned to the CASEL competencies and designed to foster resilience, empathy, goal-setting, and healthy relationships across all grade levels. This framework is embedded within our daily culture and academic systems through a combination of explicit instruction, behavioral reinforcement, and personalized support. Because our proposed student population includes students who have historically experienced academic gaps, inconsistent school experiences, and higher levels of trauma or instability, embedding SEL into daily routines not as an add-on is essential for establishing the predictable, supportive, and empowering environment research shows these learners need to thrive.

Our core SEL curriculum is CharacterStrong, an evidence-based program recognized for improving student well-being, reducing discipline referrals, and strengthening school climate. At xMA, CharacterStrong is delivered daily during Morning and Afternoon Meetings (grades K–5) and Advisory (grades 6–8), and fully aligned to our daily P.O.W.E.R.S. values Positive Attitude (Monday), Ownership Now (Tuesday), Work Hard (Wednesday), Encourage Others (Thursday), and Respect & Safety (Friday). Each day begins with a short P.O.W.E.R.S. bellringer, designed by our Dean of Culture & Instruction and counselor, to introduce and reinforce the daily SEL theme. Lessons promote CASEL-aligned skills such as emotional regulation, perspective-taking, decision-making,

and self-management while also building identity, belonging, and purpose. For students in Birmingham who may enter with diverse experiences, including trauma, housing instability, or interrupted academic learning, daily SEL routines create stability and belong to critical predictors of improved academic engagement and reductions in behavior incidents.

The xMA SEL Do Now Journal (Figure 20) is a daily, schoolwide routine completed at the start of every class that supports both academic ownership and emotional well-being. Rooted in our SEL school design element and aligned with xMA's P.O.W.E.R.S. and Portrait of a Graduate competencies, the journal helps students begin each lesson with clarity, focus, and purpose. Each journal entry prompts students to update their current learning status by identifying whether they are engaging with lesson notes, working through independent practice, or preparing for a Mastery Check. They also evaluate their academic pacing, indicating whether they are ahead, on track, or behind and, if behind, how many lessons they need to catch up.

To support emotional awareness and regulation, students complete an "internal weather check," using simple, student-friendly terms like Sunny, Windy, or Stormy to describe how they're feeling that day. They then set a daily P.O.W.E.R. goal by selecting one or more core values Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, Safety First to guide their behavior and mindset throughout the class. Students also respond to a class-specific bellringer prompt, articulate a focused learning goal, and choose one or more practical strategies to help them succeed, such as reviewing notes, using time wisely, or calmly asking for help.

Finally, each journal offers space for students to communicate directly with their teacher, sharing reflections, asking for support, or celebrating progress fostering strong relationships and a culture of trust and responsiveness. Journals are submitted weekly via Google Classroom or on paper and are used to draft reflective emails or student letters home. Each entry is also added to the student's Personalized Learning Portfolio, creating a meaningful record of their academic and social-emotional growth. The xMA SEL Do Now Journal (Figure) builds consistency, self-awareness, and intentional learning habits equipping students to take ownership of their growth across all content areas and classrooms. For the diverse learners we expect to serve, including students with disabilities, multilingual learners, and students performing below grade level, the journaling process offers structured opportunities for language development, reflective practice, and emotional communication, increasing access for students who may struggle to express themselves verbally.

Figure (20):xMA SEL Do Now Journal



Math Do Now Journal

Directions: Complete the Do Now Bellringer daily. These will be turned into Google Classroom every Friday and used to draft your weekly emails to your parents.

Name: Erica Noel	Today's date: 9/09/2025	I am on lesson: <input type="checkbox"/> notes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> classwork/practice <input type="checkbox"/> Mastery check
I am <input type="checkbox"/> ahead of pace! <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> on pace <input type="checkbox"/> not on pace (___ lessons behind where I should be)		
My internal weather check: Today I am feeling: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sunny! <input type="checkbox"/> Partially cloudy <input type="checkbox"/> Windy <input type="checkbox"/> Stormy		
P.O.W.E.R. Goal(s) of the Day (check all that apply): I will commit today to... <input type="checkbox"/> Positive Attitude <input type="checkbox"/> Ownership Now <input type="checkbox"/> Work Hard <input type="checkbox"/> Encourage Others <input type="checkbox"/> Respect All <input type="checkbox"/> Safety First		
Number Bellringer Question:		
My Math goal today: To complete my Should Do lesson 1.3 practice ahead of pace so I can prepare myself for my mastery check.		
Strategies that will help me accomplish my goal today (choose one or more options): <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Take deep breaths (breath in for five seconds, breath out for five seconds) to calm and focus myself <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Avoid talking to classmates, so I use time well <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Use technology responsibly, so I can finish my work faster <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Review my notes or a video to better understand this lesson <input type="checkbox"/> Calmly ask for help with _____ (Be specific!) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> My own strategy: Have faith in myself that I CAN do anything that I put my mind to		
Explain how this strategy will help you today: The strategy will help me motivate myself to work harder on staying on pace and focus on staying ahead of my work.		
Anything I want to share with my teacher? I am doing my best to complete my Should Do practice activities so I can be ahead of my lessons.		

To support student mental health, we utilize the Social, Academic, and Emotional Behavior Risk Screener (SABERS) three times annually (BOY, MOY, EOY) to identify students who may need additional support. Research shows SABERS is over 90% effective in identifying students at risk for behavioral or emotional challenges (Kilgus et al., 2014). Data from SABERS informs a responsive Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS):

- Tier 1: Universal SEL instruction and behavior reinforcement through CharacterStrong, P.O.W.E.R.S. reflections, and Hero Boards
- Tier 2: Targeted SEL interventions such as small group check-ins, co-teacher coaching, or structured social groups led by our Dean of Culture & Instruction and counselor

- Tier 3: Individualized support plans that may include behavior coaching, goal-focused counseling sessions, and integrated SEL goals within the student's Personalized Learning Plan and Portfolio (PLP)

This tiered system directly aligns with the anticipated needs of our student population, where early identification and consistent intervention are essential for preventing disengagement, reducing discipline inequities, and addressing the social-emotional impacts of poverty, trauma, and learning gaps present in many Birmingham communities.

These supports are scaffolded to ensure accessibility for all learners, including students with disabilities, ELLs, and those at risk of academic failure. Our classrooms use trauma-informed strategies, visuals, reflection prompts, and calm-down spaces to support self-regulation and re-engagement throughout the day. Teachers and co-teachers are trained to lead restorative conversations that help students process challenges and reset in alignment with our P.O.W.E.R.S. values a practice grounded in research that shows relational discipline improves behavior and reduces exclusionary consequences (Gregory et al., 2016). Because Birmingham youth disproportionately experience exclusionary discipline, the use of restorative practices and predictable SEL routines directly addresses a known community need and supports students in developing the emotional tools necessary to remain engaged in learning.

Mental and emotional well-being is celebrated and reinforced through our PBIS-aligned recognition systems, including Hero Bucks (K–5) and Power Credits (6–8), which are tracked daily and celebrated weekly during PowerHouse Celebrations. These events recognize both academic and SEL growth, reinforcing positive peer modeling and school connectedness. Staff are also celebrated for implementing strong SEL practices during team meetings, further reinforcing a culture of shared responsibility and adult modeling, a key condition for sustainable SEL implementation (Brackett et al., 2019; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). These recognition systems are particularly beneficial for students with learning differences or prior academic struggles, as they create frequent opportunities for positive reinforcement and identity building counteracting the negative school experiences that many underserved students may have encountered.

These programs are fully supported through xMA's operating budget and staffing plan to ensure consistent, sustainable implementation. The CharacterStrong SEL curriculum is included as a funded instructional resource within the school's annual budget, and all teachers, co-teachers, and administrators will receive initial and ongoing professional development on SEL implementation, restorative practices, and trauma-informed instructional strategies. This training will be provided through CharacterStrong's professional development resources, internal training led by the Dean of Culture & Instruction and counselor, and ongoing coaching during professional learning communities and instructional coaching cycles. In addition to general operating funds, xMA will leverage federal, state, and grant-based funding sources, including Title I, Title II, and Title IV funds, which support student well-being, safe and healthy schools, and professional development, as well as potential mental health and school climate grants available through the Alabama State Department of Education. Staffing positions funded within the school's budget, including the Dean of Culture & Instruction and school counselor or mental health support personnel as the school grows, will further support SEL instruction, student mental health screening, intervention, and staff coaching. These resources ensure that SEL is not a supplemental program but a fully funded, integrated, and sustainable component of daily instruction and school culture.

Together, these strategies create a school environment where students feel seen, supported, and safe fostering the emotional strength, social confidence, and mental wellness necessary for lifelong success. Post-pandemic research underscores this importance: SEL-integrated schools report improved attendance, reduced behavior issues, and higher academic growth, particularly for students impacted by trauma or instability (Hamilton et al., 2022; Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). At xMA, our model reflects this urgency ensuring that mental and emotional health are not supplemental, but central to the learning experience. By intentionally integrating SEL into every classroom, routine, and cultural system and by designing supports aligned with the needs of underserved, multilingual, and neurodiverse students we ensure xMA's mental, emotional, and social development strategies directly meet the needs of our proposed student population in Birmingham

Citations

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3. Marc Brackett, *Permission to Feel* (New York: Celadon Books, 2019); Patricia A. Jennings and Mark T. Greenberg, "The Prosocial Classroom: Teacher Social and Emotional Competence in Relation to Student and Classroom Outcomes," *Review of Educational Research* 79, no. 1 (2009): 491–525.

Social Emotional Learning

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA), student development is at the heart of our educational approach. We believe that academic success is deeply connected to a student's mental, emotional, and social well-being. Research continues to affirm that SEL competencies including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making are critical predictors of both academic outcomes and long-term success (CASEL, 2023; Jones et al., 2022). To support the whole child, we implement a comprehensive, culturally responsive Social Emotional Learning (SEL) program that is embedded into the daily rhythm of school life and fully aligned with our school's mission and core P.O.W.E.R.S. values: Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, and Safety First.

All students in grades K–5 participate in daily SEL lessons during Morning Circle and Closing Circle advisory blocks, led by the classroom co-teacher. These lessons are developed by the Dean of Culture & Instruction and counselor and implemented using the CharacterStrong curriculum, a research-based program recognized nationally for cultivating essential SEL and character skills through practical, developmentally appropriate strategies (CharacterStrong, 2023). Lessons are interactive and designed to build key competencies such as empathy, perseverance, emotional regulation, and leadership. Research shows that SEL programs like CharacterStrong, when embedded daily into school routines, significantly improve student behavior, emotional regulation, and academic achievement (Mahoney et al., 2021; Durlak et al., 2020). Co-teachers receive ongoing training and coaching on how to facilitate SEL conversations and consistently link daily behaviors back to our P.O.W.E.R.S. framework.

In grades 6–8, SEL instruction is delivered through a structured Advisory class led by core content or elective teachers. These classes use weekly themes, CharacterStrong lessons, and culturally relevant discussion prompts created by the Dean of Culture & Instruction and counselor to foster deeper reflection on identity, peer relationships, and real-world social dynamics. Students engage in daily goal-setting bellringers, journaling, and restorative dialogue, building metacognitive skills proven to enhance both academic performance and socio-emotional growth (Zimmerman, 2020; Yeager et al., 2022).

CharacterStrong is a natural fit for xMA's model because it emphasizes building practical social-emotional skills and character traits that directly align with our mission of cultivating confident, compassionate, and future-ready learners through S.T.R.E.A.M. education, personalized learning, and social-emotional development. CharacterStrong's focus on kindness, ownership, perseverance, and relationship skills mirrors the values we aim to instill through our P.O.W.E.R.S. values and directly supports the competencies outlined in our Portrait of a Graduate (POG). Its structure empowers students to become Resilient Individuals, Self-Reliant Learners, Compassionate Citizens, Effective Communicators, Collaborative Problem-Solvers, and Innovative Thinkers all of which are critical for success in today's complex, global society (Aspen Institute, 2021; World Economic Forum, 2023). To extend this work, xMA integrates restorative practices as part of our schoolwide relational discipline model. Instead of punitive consequences, students are guided through structured reflection using prompts aligned to our P.O.W.E.R.S. values. Research shows that restorative approaches not only improve school climate but also reduce suspension rates and promote emotional resilience (Anyon et al., 2021; Gregory et al., 2020). These conversations, facilitated by teachers, co-teachers,

counselors or the Dean of Culture & Instruction, help students understand the impact of their actions, repair relationships, and rejoin the classroom community with purpose. Circle practices, peer mediation, and daily Recognition Circles are also used to build empathy, gratitude, and shared accountability among students.

For students in need of additional emotional or behavioral support, Tier 2 and Tier 3 SEL interventions are provided through our Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). These supports may include targeted small group sessions focused on social skills, emotional regulation strategies, restorative conferencing, or individualized check-in/check-out systems facilitated by the counselor or Dean of Culture & Instruction. Evidence-based SEL interventions at Tier 2/3 levels are associated with significant gains in emotional self-regulation, social competencies, and academic persistence (Cook et al., 2022).

At xMA, our SEL program is not only aligned to our values, it is directly aligned to our ultimate vision for students as defined by our Portrait of a Graduate (POG). Each SEL structure is designed to nurture these six competencies through daily student experiences:

- Daily CharacterStrong lessons and goal-setting bellringers foster Self-Reliant Learners by helping students reflect on personal goals, take ownership of their progress, and track their emotional growth.
- Restorative practices and peer mediation cultivate Compassionate Citizens and Effective Communicators by teaching students how to repair harm, use conflict resolution strategies, and express their feelings constructively.
- Morning and Closing Circles develop Collaborative Problem-Solvers by creating safe spaces where students learn to actively listen, support peers, and solve challenges as a team.
- Reflection journals, advisory discussions, and challenge-based SEL activities promote Innovative Thinkers by encouraging students to apply creativity and empathy to real-life scenarios.
- Weekly P.O.W.E.R.S. Theme Days and daily P.O.W.E.R.S. Bellringers, created by the Dean of Culture & Instruction, spotlight one P.O.W.E.R. value each day with practical examples and reflection prompts. These help students internalize our values and build the resilience, optimism, and leadership qualities that define a Resilient Individual.

This deliberate integration ensures that SEL is not isolated from academic learning but serves as a driving force for personal growth, leadership, and schoolwide culture. Longitudinal studies confirm that graduates from SEL-embedded schools are significantly more likely to demonstrate higher educational attainment, career success, and civic engagement (Taylor et al., 2022) further affirming that xMA's investment in SEL and character development is an essential pillar of our educational model.

These programs are fully supported through xMA's operating budget and staffing plan to ensure consistent, sustainable implementation. The CharacterStrong SEL curriculum is included as a funded instructional resource within the school's annual budget, and all teachers, co-teachers, and administrators will receive initial and ongoing professional development on SEL implementation, restorative practices, and trauma-informed instructional strategies. By building a school culture rooted in shared values, daily reflection, and relational support, and fully aligned to our mission and vision, we prepare students to lead with empathy, communicate with confidence, and grow into strong, compassionate citizens ready to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

Citations

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3. CharacterStrong. Curriculum Overview and Research Base. CharacterStrong, 2023.
4. Joseph A. Mahoney et al., "SEL and Character Education Integration Post-COVID," *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 75 (2021): 101309; Joseph A.
5. Barry J. Zimmerman, "Becoming a Self-Regulated Learner: An Overview," *Theory Into Practice* 41, no. 2 (2020): 64–70; David S. Yeager et al., "A Toolkit for Motivation and Learning," *Annual Review of Psychology* (2022).
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7. Anyón, Yolanda et al., "Restorative Practices in U.S. Schools: A Research Review," *Children and Youth Services Review* 121 (2021): 105–864; Anne Gregory, Kathleen Clawson, Alycia Davis, and Jennifer Gerewitz, "The Promise of Restorative Practices to Transform Teacher-Student Relationships and Achieve Equity in School Discipline," *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation* 30, no. 2 (2020): 1–29.
8. Clay Cook et al., "Multi-Tiered Systems of Support for Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Needs," *School Psychology Review* 51, no. 3 (2022): 300–316.
9. Taylor, Rebecca D., Eva Oberle, Joseph A. Durlak, and Roger Weissberg. "Promoting Positive Youth Development Through SEL." *Review of Educational Research* (2022).

d) If summer school will be offered, describe the program(s). Explain the schedule and length of the program including the number of hours and weeks. Discuss the anticipated participants, including number of students and the methods used to identify them. What are the anticipated resources and staffing needs for these programs?

Summer Learning Academy

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) will offer a Summer Learning Academy designed to reinforce core academics, accelerate unfinished learning, and provide equitable access to enrichment opportunities aligned to the school's mission of personalized, mastery-based learning and S.T.R.E.A.M. exploration. Research shows that students from historically marginalized backgrounds, including students with disabilities, multilingual learners, and students from low-income communities, are disproportionately impacted by summer learning loss. xMA's Summer Learning Academy directly addresses this need by offering a four-week program operating in June meeting Monday through Thursday for four hours per day, for a total of 16 hours per week and 64 instructional hours. Instruction will focus on literacy, math, S.T.R.E.A.M., Fine Arts, and social-emotional learning, reinforcing both academic mastery and Portrait of a Graduate competencies. Through our continued partnership with The Flourish, students will participate in weekly rotations in music, visual arts, theater, and dance, ensuring access to high-quality arts instruction that supports creativity, identity development, and student engagement.

Summer Learning Academy participation will be open to all enrolled students; however, participation will be required for students who have not demonstrated Proficient/Mastery (Level 3) or higher in literacy and/or math, as measured by standards-based report cards, mastery tracker data, digital portfolios, i-Ready diagnostic assessments, and teacher recommendations. We anticipate serving approximately 60–75% of enrolled students, with priority placement for students performing below grade level, English Language Learners, students with disabilities, and students identified through MTSS intervention data. Instruction will reflect xMA's personalized learning model, including mastery-based progression, small group instruction, blended learning, and targeted intervention using platforms such as i-Ready and Discovery Education, ensuring alignment with Alabama Course of Study Standards and continuity with the school-year instructional program.

The Summer Learning Academy will be coordinated by the Executive Director or designee and staffed by certified teachers, and enrichment instructors. Staffing will include certified classroom

teachers delivering literacy and math instruction, providing targeted Tier 2 and Tier 3 academic support, and enrichment instructors and partners such as The Flourish to support arts programming. Teachers will utilize existing curriculum resources already accounted for in the school's operating budget, including ALSDE-approved core curriculum, CharacterStrong SEL curriculum, and WOZed S.T.R.E.A.M. curriculum, ensuring instructional continuity and fidelity. Instruction will be aligned with students' Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs), and IEP accommodations and English Learner supports will be fully implemented.

Summer programming will be funded through a combination of the school's general operating budget and external funding sources. xMA will apply for funding through the Alabama Summer and Afterschool Program (ASAP) Grant, which supports academic acceleration and enrichment opportunities for Alabama students. Additional funding will be pursued through the federally funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program, which provides funding to support extended learning opportunities for students in high-need communities. Arts programming will be supported through grant opportunities from the Alabama State Council on the Arts, including Arts in Education Grants and Alabama Arts License Tag Grants, which fund school-based arts instruction and partnerships. Additional funding may be secured through the Alabama STEM Council, AMSTI (Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative), and ATIM (Alabama Technology in Motion), which provide curriculum support, professional development, and instructional resources. These combined funding sources will support staffing, instructional materials, enrichment programming, technology, and operational costs associated with the Summer Learning Academy.

Through this comprehensive Summer Learning Academy, xMA will ensure students maintain academic progress, close learning gaps, and continue developing the academic, creative, and social-emotional skills necessary for long-term success, while reinforcing the school's mission to prepare students to thrive academically and beyond.

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

10. Special Populations and At-Risk Students

Reviewer Instructions

Please rate this section using the provided rubric.

Status: Completed

Form Result

Describe programming that specifically addresses and supports special populations, including efforts to hire personnel with relevant expertise. Identified populations include students with special needs, English Language Learners, students identified as intellectually gifted, and students at risk of withdrawal.

Preference: Preference will be given to applications that employ proven methods for educating at-risk students or students with special needs.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Compelling evidence of how the school will directly and consistently ensure that it hires licensed, endorsed, experienced, and well-qualified special educators pursuant

to law and how it will ensure compliance with applicable laws and regulations for programming requirements of these populations.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

a) Identify the anticipated size of the various special populations and/or at-risk groups that the school expects to serve. Justify the estimates using data from a specifically targeted school, neighborhood, or more generalized analysis of the population to be served. Discuss how the course scope and sequence, daily schedule, staffing plans, and support strategies and resources will meet or be adjusted for the expected size of the groupings and the diverse needs of these students. Identified groups include Students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or Section 504 plans (504s); English Language Learners (ELL); students identified as intellectually gifted (Gifted); and students at risk of academic failure or dropping out (At-Risk).

Special Populations and At-Risk Students

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy in Birmingham, Alabama, our mission is to reimagine the learning experience for all learners. We are committed to cultivating an innovative, personalized, and supportive learning environment where students develop creativity, critical thinking, and real-world problem-solving skills. Through a hands-on, S.T.R.E.A.M.-focused curriculum integrating Science, Technology, Reading, Engineering, Arts, and Math, we aim to ignite curiosity and provide students with early exposure to a wide range of S.T.R.E.A.M. career pathways. Our school exists to ensure that every child, regardless of background or ability, is empowered to thrive in a world that is constantly evolving.

According to the Alabama State Department of Education's 2024–2025 report card, Birmingham City Schools received a score of 77 (C), with the district continuing to serve a high-needs population. Approximately 87% of students are economically disadvantaged, 8% are English Language Learners, and only 12.9% of students with disabilities are proficient in ELA and 9.3% in Math. xMA's projected student population is based on enrollment trends in the specific neighborhoods the school intends to serve, including North Birmingham, East Birmingham, and surrounding communities zoned for Birmingham City Schools such as Huffman Academy, Tuggle Elementary, and Barrett Elementary. These schools serve student populations that are over 85% economically disadvantaged, with disability identification rates ranging from approximately 14–18% and growing multilingual learner populations. Because charter schools serving similar communities often enroll higher proportions of students with disabilities and students requiring academic support, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) anticipates serving a diverse student population with a range of academic and social-emotional needs. Based on community engagement data, enrollment interest forms, and the demographic profile of Birmingham City Schools, xMA conservatively projects serving approximately 20% students with disabilities, 5% English Language Learners, and approximately 5% of students requiring Tier II or Tier III MTSS intervention supports (approximately 3% Tier II and 2% Tier III). In addition, xMA anticipates that approximately 85% of students will qualify as economically disadvantaged, reflecting the broader socioeconomic landscape of East Birmingham. These projections align with the school's mission to expand access to high-quality, personalized STREAM learning opportunities for historically underserved students. Based on these indicators, xMA anticipates the following student demographics::

Figure (32): Projected Special Populations

Student Group	Projected %	Students
Students with Disabilities (IEPs)	20%	28
English Language Learners (ELLs)	5%	7

Economically Disadvantaged	85%	119
504 Plans	5–8%	7–11
Gifted / Twice-Exceptional	5–7%	7–10
Tier 2 (MTSS)	3%	4
Tier 3 (MTSS)	2%	3

Projected Enrollment Numbers by Student Group

These projections align with district and neighborhood demographic trends and inform xMA’s staffing, scheduling, and intervention structures to ensure adequate capacity and support.

Based on national MTSS benchmarks and the demographic profile of Birmingham City Schools, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy anticipates serving students with varying levels of academic support needs. Research indicates that approximately 75–90% of students respond successfully to Tier I core instruction, while approximately 5–15% require Tier II targeted intervention, and 1–5% require Tier III intensive individualized support (Sugai & Horner, 2009; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017). Birmingham City Schools serves a student population in which approximately 87% of students are economically disadvantaged and approximately 14% are identified as students with disabilities, along with a growing multilingual population. In alignment with these local indicators, xMA projects serve approximately 20% students with disabilities, 5% English Language Learners, and approximately 5% of students requiring Tier II or Tier III intervention support (approximately 3% Tier II and 2% Tier III). These projections reflect a student population that may require targeted support while also demonstrating the capacity of xMA’s personalized learning, mastery-based instruction, and MTSS framework to ensure that the majority of students succeed within Tier I core instruction..

Identifying and Supporting Special Populations

Our instructional model is grounded in personalized learning through Universal Design for Learning (UDL), differentiation, mastery-based learning, blended learning, and small group instruction. These approaches work together to ensure flexible pathways, student agency, and equitable access to grade-level content for every learner. Students engage with rigorous material through a combination of direct instruction, teacher-created instructional videos, high-quality tasks, targeted practice, and mastery checks that measure true understanding.

Learning is personalized through the use of Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs), developed collaboratively by students and teachers at the beginning of the year. Each PLP identifies mastered and unmastered standards, individual goals, and tailored intervention needs based on i-Ready diagnostics, classroom assessments, and when applicable IEP goals. This process ensures that instruction is responsive, intentional, and aligned with each learner’s unique pathway to mastery. xMA’s Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) ensures that students receive the right support at the right time across academic, behavioral, and social-emotional domains. At Tier I, all students engage in high-quality, universally designed instruction and schoolwide SEL practices. Tier II supports include targeted small-group interventions, while Tier III provides individualized and intensive interventions, including specialized instruction and behavior plans aligned to students’ IEPs or intervention needs.

These PLPs are actively updated mid-year and end-of-year to reflect progress, inform support, and guide instructional adjustments. Every student also maintains a Personalized Learning Portfolio to track their progress toward goals. This portfolio includes work samples, assessments, goal reflections, and data trackers, serving as a central tool for conferences, Student Support Team (SST) meetings, and IEP reviews. Special populations including students with disabilities, ELLs, and at-risk learners benefit immensely from this model because it enables them to work at their own pace, receive instruction in multiple formats, and access scaffolded supports embedded within the general education setting.

Students with Section 504 Plans receive accommodations and access supports consistent with their documented needs, ensuring they can fully engage in the general education setting. Gifted and twice-exceptional students are identified through a combination of academic data, teacher recom-

mentations, and interest inventories, and are provided with personalized enrichment opportunities through project-based learning and advanced tasks.

Instructional Strategies and Support Structures

The flexibility built into xMA's personalized learning model and mastery-based grading system ensures equitable access to rigorous, standards-aligned instruction while providing multiple pathways for students to demonstrate understanding. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles guide instructional design, ensuring accessibility through multiple means of representation (visuals, videos, text-to-speech), expression (projects, writing, discussion, digital products), and engagement (collaboration, movement, and real-world applications). Differentiation strategies, including flexible grouping, scaffolded assignments, accommodations, and extension opportunities, ensure that instruction is responsive to the diverse cognitive, linguistic, and developmental needs of students, including students with IEPs, 504 Plans, English Language Learners, and gifted learners.

Blended learning and mastery-based instructional practices create dedicated time for teachers to provide daily small-group instruction, individualized conferencing, and targeted intervention or enrichment aligned to each student's Personalized Learning Plan (PLP). These structures ensure that students receive the precise level of support needed to progress toward mastery while maintaining access to grade-level standards. Course units are designed to allow flexible pacing, enabling students who require additional support to receive scaffolded instruction while allowing advanced learners to engage in enrichment and acceleration.

Teachers collect academic and behavioral data daily through student and teacher progress trackers, formative assessments, and mastery checks. This real-time data enables teachers and instructional leaders to make immediate adjustments to instruction, intervention, grouping, and pacing. Standards-based grading further ensures transparency by clearly identifying mastered and emerging skills, empowering students to take ownership of their learning and enabling educators to provide targeted support aligned to individual needs.

Course Scope and Sequence Adjustments for Special Populations

xMA's course scope and sequence is fully aligned to the Alabama Course of Study Standards and intentionally designed to support the projected number and needs of special populations. Based on projected enrollment, approximately 20% of students are expected to have IEPs, 5% will be English Language Learners, 5–7% will be identified as gifted or twice-exceptional, and approximately 3% of students may require Tier II intervention, with 2% requiring Tier III intensive support at any given time. To address this range of needs, curriculum units incorporate scaffolded entry points, prioritized standards, flexible pacing, and adapted instructional materials to ensure all students can access grade-level content.

Students requiring intervention receive additional targeted instruction aligned directly to core standards, ensuring that intervention accelerates progress toward grade-level mastery rather than replacing core curriculum. Likewise, gifted and advanced learners engage in extension tasks, advanced projects, and accelerated pathways aligned to the same standards. This approach ensures that all students regardless of ability level remain engaged in rigorous academic content while receiving the individualized support necessary for success.

Academic and Therapeutic Specialized Program for Students with Moderate to Severe Disabilities

For students with moderate to severe disabilities, we utilize a specialized academic and Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) -infused program that combines adapted core content with evidence-based behavioral strategies. Our academic and ABA-infused program for students with moderate to severe disabilities is grounded in a structured, supportive, and therapeutic classroom model inspired by the National Accelerator of Autism Charter Schools, specifically the successful practices of Arizona Autism Charter School and South Florida Autism Charter School. Designed for students with autism and other significant disabilities, this model combines personalized academic instruction with embedded (ABA) strategies to promote growth across academic, behavioral, and life skill domains. Classrooms are led by a certified Special Education Teacher and supported by a paraprofessional who is a Registered Behavior Technician (RBT), with oversight and guidance from a contracted Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) if necessary. We will prioritize hiring a Director of Student Supports who is dual certified in Special Education and as a BCBA to save on consultation costs. Instruction is delivered using a three-station rotation model, maximizing structure, predictability, and

engagement. In Station 1, students receive small-group direct instruction from the Special Education Teacher focused on foundational academic skills aligned to their IEPs. In Station 2, students work one-on-one with the RBT on individualized IEP goals using TeachTown, a research-based digital and hands-on curriculum specifically designed for students with moderate to severe disabilities. TeachTown blends standards-aligned academic content with ABA methodologies including reinforcement, repetition, and data tracking supporting the development of both cognitive and functional skills. In Station 3, students complete independent practice and mastery checks using adapted digital and tactile learning materials, reinforcing progress toward standards and goals.

Throughout the day, evidence-based ABA strategies such as Discrete Trial Training (DTT), errorless teaching, task boards, visual schedules, and positive reinforcement systems are embedded across all routines and lessons. The learning environment is highly structured to promote communication, independence, and behavioral self-regulation, with each student's IEP, Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP), and developmental goals guiding all instructional decisions. Students use AAC devices, picture exchange systems, or communication boards to access learning and participate in classroom routines, with staff scaffolding support to build autonomy. By aligning rigorous academics with therapeutic support and a consistent data-informed structure, this model ensures that students with the most significant needs receive individualized, high-quality instruction in a nurturing setting where they can grow academically, socially, and emotionally.

Instruction, Schedule, and Staffing Support Special Populations

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy's daily schedule is intentionally designed to ensure that all students including students with disabilities, English Language Learners, gifted students, and those at risk of academic failure receive the time, support, and instructional access needed to meet grade-level standards and achieve their individualized goals. Each day includes dedicated time for students to work toward goals outlined in their Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs), Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), or intervention plans. Within core reading and math blocks, goal-focused small group instruction and personalized learning pathways ensure that targeted skill development is embedded directly within instruction rather than isolated from the general education setting.

In addition, all students participate in a daily intervention and enrichment block lasting approximately 30–60 minutes. This structure allows the school to serve the anticipated 3%% of students requiring Tier II support and 2% requiring Tier III intensive intervention through targeted small-group instruction, individualized support, and skill-based remediation or acceleration. English Language Learners receive additional language development support during small-group instruction and intervention blocks, while gifted and twice-exceptional students access enrichment opportunities, accelerated content, and advanced project-based learning aligned to their strengths and interests.

xMA's staffing model ensures that student support is collaborative, coordinated, and responsive. General education teachers, special education teachers, paraprofessionals, and behavior support staff work together during common planning periods and Student Support Team meetings to analyze data, adjust instruction, and monitor student progress. Inclusive classrooms utilize co-teaching and push-in support models to ensure students with disabilities remain engaged in grade-level instruction while receiving necessary accommodations and specialized support.

For students with more intensive needs, specialized multi-grade classrooms provide highly structured, individualized instruction aligned with students' IEP goals. These classrooms are led by certified special education teachers and supported by Registered Behavior Technicians (RBTs), integrating adapted academic instruction, assistive technology, communication supports, and evidence-based instructional strategies. Students use visual schedules, communication boards, and individualized supports to build independence, access academic content, and develop critical academic, social, and life skills, with the ultimate goal of increasing independence and maximizing inclusion whenever appropriate.

Together, xMA's flexible schedule, collaborative staffing model, and personalized instructional framework ensure that the school can effectively serve the projected number of students across all special populations while maintaining access to rigorous, standards-aligned instruction for every learner.

b) Describe the overall academic and organizational framework that will serve students in these groupings. Specifically address how the plans for individual groupings interrelate.

Populations Framework Narrative

Overall Academic and Organizational Framework for Special Populations

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA), all students including students with disabilities, English Language Learners, gifted students, and students at risk of academic failure are served within a unified academic and organizational framework grounded in Universal Design for Learning (UDL), personalized learning, mastery-based instruction, and a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). Universal Design for Learning serves as the foundational instructional framework at xMA because it was originally developed to ensure students with disabilities could access rigorous academic content alongside their peers and has since been validated as an effective framework for supporting all learners. UDL is explicitly recognized in federal education policy, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), as an evidence-based approach for improving access to grade-level curriculum and ensuring equitable learning opportunities for students with disabilities and diverse learning needs (U.S. Department of Education, 2017; CAST, 2018). UDL was pioneered by CAST based on neuroscience research demonstrating that learner variability not learner ability is the norm, and that instructional environments must be proactively designed to remove barriers to learning (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014; CAST, 2018). Research shows that UDL-based instructional design improves access, engagement, and academic outcomes for students with disabilities, multilingual learners, and at-risk students while simultaneously benefiting general education and gifted learners by providing multiple pathways for engagement, representation, and expression (Al-Azawei, Serenelli, & Lundqvist, 2016; Ok et al., 2017). At xMA, UDL is not an intervention used only for special populations; it is the core instructional framework used across all classrooms to ensure that every student especially students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and at-risk students can access grade-level standards and progress toward mastery within inclusive learning environments.

Rather than creating separate instructional systems for different student groups, xMA's model is intentionally designed so that core instruction, intervention, enrichment, and specialized supports operate as an integrated continuum. This approach reflects best practices in inclusive education, which demonstrate that integrated instructional systems improve academic outcomes, increase access to grade-level curriculum, and strengthen long-term student achievement (Hehir et al., 2016; Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). This ensures that every student receives the level of support and challenge they need while maintaining access to rigorous, grade-level content aligned to Alabama Course of Study Standards.

At the center of this framework is xMA's personalized learning model, which provides flexible pathways for all learners through small-group instruction, blended learning, and mastery-based progression. Research shows that personalized learning improves student growth, particularly for students performing below grade level, by allowing instruction to respond directly to individual student needs, pacing, and readiness levels (Pane et al., 2015; Pane et al., 2017). Students work toward clearly defined mastery targets using progress trackers, Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs), and ongoing formative assessment data. This structure allows students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and at-risk students to receive scaffolded instruction and targeted intervention within the general education setting, while gifted and advanced learners engage in enrichment, acceleration, and deeper application of standards. Because instruction is designed using UDL principles, all lessons include multiple methods of engagement, representation, and expression, ensuring accessibility and appropriate challenge for diverse learners within the same instructional framework.

xMA's Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) serves as the organizational structure that connects core instruction, intervention, and specialized services across all student groupings. MTSS is widely recognized as a research-based framework for improving academic achievement and reducing learning gaps through early identification and tiered intervention (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; National Center on Intensive Intervention, 2016). At Tier I, all students receive high-quality, standards-aligned core instruction through personalized learning and small-group instruction. Students requiring additional support receive Tier II targeted interventions during daily intervention blocks, where special educators, and classroom teachers provide focused instruction aligned to individual needs. Students requiring intensive support receive Tier III individualized interventions, which may include specialized

instruction aligned to Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), language development support for English Language Learners, or individualized intervention plans based on academic and behavioral data. Gifted and advanced learners are similarly supported within this framework through enrichment, extension, and accelerated pathways aligned to grade-level standards. Research confirms that tiered systems like MTSS improve student achievement, reduce retention rates, and increase access to appropriate support for diverse learners (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016; Balu et al., 2015). The school's daily schedule and staffing model are intentionally designed to operationalize this framework. Daily small-group rotations, intervention and enrichment blocks, and co-teaching structures allow general education teachers, special education teachers, and support staff to collaboratively serve students across all tiers of support. Inclusive classroom models ensure that students with disabilities and English Language Learners remain connected to core instruction while receiving appropriate accommodations and targeted instruction. Research shows that inclusive instructional models improve academic outcomes, social development, and long-term success for students with disabilities without negatively impacting general education students (Hehir et al., 2016; Ruijs & Peetsma, 2009). Specialized classrooms provide intensive, individualized support for students with moderate to severe disabilities while maintaining alignment with grade-level academic standards and schoolwide instructional systems.

These systems interrelate through continuous data-driven decision-making and collaborative planning. Teachers and support staff use daily progress monitoring, mastery checks, and diagnostic assessments to identify student needs and adjust instruction, intervention, and enrichment accordingly. Frequent progress monitoring and data-based instructional decision-making are essential components of effective intervention systems and are strongly associated with improved student achievement and accelerated learning gains (Stecker, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2005; Hamilton et al., 2009). Student Support Team meetings, co-planning sessions, and progress reviews ensure coordination across instructional staff, intervention providers, and student support personnel. Because all students operate within the same personalized learning and mastery-based framework, movement between tiers of support is fluid and responsive, allowing students to receive intervention when needed and return to independent mastery progression as they demonstrate growth.

Together, xMA's integrated academic and organizational framework ensures that students across all special populations are served through a cohesive system that prioritizes access, equity, rigor, and individualized support. Research shows that schools implementing integrated systems combining UDL, personalized learning, MTSS, inclusive instruction, and strong data systems demonstrate higher academic growth, improved student engagement, and stronger long-term outcomes, particularly for students from historically underserved populations (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019; Pane et al., 2017). By aligning Universal Design for Learning, personalized learning, MTSS, inclusive instructional practices, specialized services, and collaborative staffing structures, xMA ensures that every student receives the precise level of support and challenge needed to achieve mastery, develop independence, and progress toward the school's Portrait of a Graduate competencies as Creative Thinkers, Problem-Solvers, Resilient Individuals, Empathetic Citizens, and Self-Reliant Learners.

This unified framework ensures that all student populations are served through a single, coherent academic system rather than separate or fragmented programs, allowing support to be delivered efficiently, inclusively, and responsively while maintaining high expectations and access to rigorous, grade-level instruction for every learner.

- c) Explain how the school will provide equitable access for all students to all programming supported by the school, including supplemental programming like clubs or sports teams.

Text

Equitable Access to Supplemental Programming and School-Supported Activities

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) is committed to ensuring that all students including students with disabilities, English Language Learners, gifted students, and students at risk of academic failure have full and equitable access to all school programming, including academic enrichment, clubs, athletics, leadership opportunities, field experiences, and after-school programming. Equitable access at xMA means that all students are provided the supports, accommodations, and resources

necessary to participate meaningfully in all aspects of the school experience, consistent with federal and state requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, and Title III for English Language Learners. At xMA, equitable access begins with inclusive program design. All supplemental programming including student clubs, enrichment programs, arts programming through our partnership with The Flourish, S.T.R.E.A.M. clubs aligned to the WOZED curriculum, and after-school athletics and enrichment is designed using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles. Because UDL proactively removes barriers to participation, students are provided multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression, ensuring accessibility for students with disabilities, multilingual learners, and students with diverse learning profiles (CAST, 2018; Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014). This ensures that supplemental programs are designed to include all learners from the outset, rather than requiring retroactive modifications.

Students with disabilities will receive accommodations and support in supplemental programming consistent with their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or Section 504 Plans. These supports may include assistive technology, paraprofessional assistance, adapted materials, visual supports, behavioral supports, and communication accommodations such as AAC devices. Special education staff and program facilitators collaborate to ensure that accommodations and support are implemented across all school-sponsored activities, including after-school programs, clubs, field trips, and athletics. Research shows that participation in extracurricular activities improves academic achievement, social development, and self-confidence for students with disabilities and supports long-term positive outcomes (Hehir et al., 2016; Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012).

English Language Learners are similarly supported to ensure full access to all programming. Language supports including visual aids, simplified language supports, peer partnerships, and bilingual communication when available are incorporated into extracurricular and enrichment activities. These inclusive practices ensure that English Language Learners can participate fully while continuing to develop language proficiency in authentic, engaging environments. Research demonstrates that participation in extracurricular activities improves language acquisition, peer integration, and academic engagement for multilingual learners (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016).

Equitable access is also ensured through intentional scheduling, staffing, and financial accessibility. Supplemental programs including clubs, enrichment activities, arts programming, and athletics are scheduled at times that allow all students to participate, including after school and during designated enrichment periods. Transportation barriers are minimized through strategic scheduling and partnerships whenever feasible, and the school will not charge participation fees that would prevent economically disadvantaged students from participating. When program costs exist, they will be covered through the school's general operating budget, grant funding, and philanthropic partnerships, including funding from the Alabama State Department of Education, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, arts education grants, and partnerships such as The Flourish.

xMA's Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) further ensures equitable participation by addressing academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs that could otherwise limit student access to extracurricular opportunities. Students receiving Tier II or Tier III support continue to participate fully in extracurricular activities while receiving necessary interventions during designated academic support blocks. This ensures that students are not excluded from enrichment opportunities due to academic or behavioral support needs. Research confirms that inclusive extracurricular participation strengthens student engagement, improves school connectedness, and contributes to improved academic and behavioral outcomes (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006).

Gifted and advanced learners also have equitable access to advanced enrichment opportunities through specialized S.T.R.E.A.M. clubs, leadership opportunities, academic competitions, and advanced project-based learning opportunities aligned to their strengths and interests. These opportunities ensure that gifted and twice-exceptional students receive appropriate academic challenge and enrichment beyond core instruction.

To ensure equitable access across all student groups, xMA will monitor participation data for extracurricular and supplemental programming, including participation rates among students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and economically disadvantaged students. School leaders

and the Student Support Team will review participation data to identify and address any participation gaps and ensure that all student groups are equitably represented in extracurricular programming. Through inclusive program design, individualized supports, equitable funding structures, inclusive scheduling, and continuous monitoring, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy ensures that all students regardless of ability, language background, or academic need have full access to the enrichment, leadership, and extracurricular opportunities that support their academic success, social-emotional development, and growth as Creative Thinkers, Problem-Solvers, Resilient Individuals, Empathetic Citizens, and Self-Reliant Learners.

d) Explain more specifically how the school will identify and meet the learning needs of students with mild, moderate, and severe disabilities in the least restrictive environment possible. Specify the programs, strategies, and support the school will provide, including the following:

- i) Methods for identifying students with special education needs (and avoiding misidentification), including use of school personnel to participate in developing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), identify and refer students for assessment of special education needs, maintain records, and cooperate in the delivery of special education instruction and services, as appropriate.
- ii) Specific instructional programs, practices, and strategies the school will employ to provide a continuum of services; ensure students' access to the general education curriculum; and ensure academic success for students with special education needs;
- iii) Plans for monitoring and evaluating the progress and success of special education students with mild, moderate, and severe needs to ensure the attainment of each student's goals as set forth in the Individualized Education Program (IEP);
- iv) Plans for promoting graduation for students with special education needs (high school only);
- v) Plans to have qualified staff adequate for the anticipated special needs population.

Identifying and Meeting the Needs of Students with Disabilities

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA), we are committed to ensuring that students with disabilities receive a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), in full compliance with federal and state law. Our model is designed to address the learning needs of students with mild, moderate, and severe disabilities through a comprehensive, inclusive, and evidence-based continuum of services. We integrate personalized learning with research-backed academic and behavioral strategies including Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to support diverse learner profiles.

Identifying Students with Disabilities

It is xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy's responsibility to create and sustain a nurturing, safe, and inclusive learning environment for all students. We commit to providing all students with a FAPE in the LRE to ensure equitable access to the general curriculum. We serve students with IEPs and 504 Plans in the general education setting to the maximum extent appropriate and provide support based on individual student needs.

We fully comply with federal, state, and local laws and regulations, including:

- The Family Educational Rights Privacy Act (FERPA)
- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Alabama Administrative Code 290-8-9 (Special Education Services)

In alignment with the IDEA "Child Find" mandate, xMA conducts ongoing efforts to identify, locate, and evaluate all students who may need special education services. Referrals can be initiated by

educators or families at any time. Upon referral, a multidisciplinary Student Support Team (SST) convenes to review existing data, recommend evaluations, and determine eligibility. Our Student Support Team (SST), composed of the Director of Student Support, special education (SPED) teachers, general education teachers, related service providers, and family members, oversees the referral and eligibility determination process. Referrals for evaluation may originate from teachers, parents, or other stakeholders, and once initiated, the SST collects data, reviews student performance, and recommends formal evaluations. If the student qualifies for services under IDEA, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is developed to address academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs.

Promoting Equity: Monitoring Disproportionality of Special Education Services

Aligning with our mission and vision to ensure all xMA students excel in high school and beyond, we actively seek ways to interrupt bias, prejudice, and stereotypes that limit access and success for all students. We are intentionally attentive to groups most often overrepresented in high-incidence disabilities or underrepresented in gifted and talented programs. To prevent over or underrepresentation of students identified for special education services, we commit to:

- Targeted professional development around bias and stereotypes in identifying students with special needs
- Monthly academic and behavior data reviews, particularly monitoring student subgroups
- Comprehensive review and data analysis for students referred to the MTSS team
- Comprehensive review and data analysis for students referred for special education services, including gifted and talented services

Serving Students in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

xMA is committed to serving students in the Least Restrictive Environment to the maximum extent appropriate, as determined by each student's IEP team. For many students with disabilities, the LRE is within the general education classroom. In grades K-2, co-teaching models ensure that students receive differentiated instruction from both a general education and SPED teacher, allowing real-time modifications, scaffolding, and support. In grades 3-8, inclusive models are supported through push-in services, small-group instruction, and targeted accommodations.

For students whose needs exceed what can be met in a general education environment, xMA provides a range of pull-out services and, where necessary, placement in a specialized self-contained setting. According to the Alabama Administrative Code, students placed in a special education setting for more than 21% but less than 60% of the school day are considered partially included; those placed in such settings for more than 60% are considered to be in a more restrictive setting, and such placements must be justified with data and reviewed regularly.

Instructional Strategies and Continuum of Services

xMA delivers a continuum of services tailored to the severity of student needs, using a layered instructional approach that emphasizes personalization, engagement, and mastery. Across all classrooms, instruction is grounded in the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework and supported through mastery-based learning, blended learning, differentiation, and small group instruction. UDL ensures that learning is accessible through multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression, while blended learning provides students with flexible access to content through both direct instruction and teacher-created videos. This combination allows students to interact with material in ways that match their readiness, strengths, and learning profiles, ensuring equitable access to rigorous grade-level content for all learners.

All core academic classes implement blended learning and small-group rotations, ensuring targeted support for all learners. Students receive direct instruction, engage with adaptive digital tools like i-Ready and TeachTown, and participate in guided practice sessions where misconceptions are addressed and mastery is tracked. This instructional design provides repeated opportunities to engage with content in ways that align with students' unique learning profiles.

Mild Disabilities

Students with mild disabilities such as specific learning disabilities, speech/language impairments, or mild ADHD are primarily served in the general education setting. Instruction is personalized through PLPs that target specific learning goals and provide accommodations such as extended

time, graphic organizers, audio-supported text, and scaffolded assignments. Teachers use flexible grouping, station teaching, and formative assessments to adjust instruction in real time. During daily PLP/IEP goal time and intervention blocks, students receive small-group instruction aligned to their goals.

Moderate Disabilities

Students with moderate disabilities including moderate autism, intellectual disabilities, and emotional disturbance may receive a combination of push-in and pull-out supports. Instructional strategies include the use of visual schedules, explicit modeling, task analysis, verbal and visual prompting, and social stories to support executive functioning, communication, and task completion. These students often benefit from embedded repetition, multi-sensory learning approaches, and behavior support co-designed with the contracted services of BCBA if necessary. Platforms such as i-Ready and TeachTown provide adaptive pathways tailored to students' academic levels and IEP goals. We will prioritize hiring a Director of Student Supports who is dual certified in Special Educations and as a BCBA to save on consultation costs.

Severe Disabilities

xMA will use a multigrade level classroom model for students with moderate to severe disabilities. Students with severe disabilities require intensive, highly structured environments. At xMA, these students are supported in self-contained classrooms modeled after research-based practices from the academic and therapeutic model classroom framework from Arizona Autism Charter School and South Florida Autism Charter School of the National Accelerator of Autism Charter Schools (NAACS) that has been proven to work with students with autism and other disabilities. Classrooms are staffed by a certified SPED teacher and paraprofessional Registered Behavior Technicians (RBTs) trained in ABA strategies. As a NAACS Fellow, I have been trained to implement this approach with fidelity while tailoring it to meet the unique needs of our Alabama learners. We will prioritize hiring a Director of Student Supports who is dual certified in Special Educations and as a BCBA to save on consultation costs.

Our classrooms are designed to foster predictability, reduce anxiety, and increase independence through the use of clearly defined physical spaces, visual supports, and structured routines. Students follow personalized visual schedules that guide them through each part of the day, with visuals and reinforcements integrated throughout the environment to support communication, behavior, and academic growth. Instruction follows a station rotation model, with students engaging in focused learning blocks that blend direct instruction, independent tasks, and ABA-based interventions. Transitions are smooth and predictable, supported by timers, visuals, and individualized prompting levels. Each classroom follows a three-station rotation:

Station 1: Direct Teacher Instruction - The SPED teacher delivers targeted academic and functional instruction in a small-group setting, aligned to Alabama Extended Standards and IEP goals.

Station 2: IEP Goal Work - RBTs implement structured activities using TeachTown print materials and manipulatives. Instruction is based on discrete trial training (DTT), errorless teaching, shaping, and prompting hierarchies.

Station 3: Independent Mastery Checks - Students work independently using TeachTown's digital curriculum, which uses immediate feedback, reinforcement systems, and progress monitoring dashboards.

TeachTown is an adaptive program that blends ABA-based instruction with academic content across domains including language, life skills, and cognition. It uses evidence-based strategies such as discrete trial teaching (DTT), positive reinforcement, prompting, shaping, and errorless learning. The curriculum allows for continuous tracking of progress across multiple skill domains and aligns with IEP goals.

All instruction in these classrooms is grounded in ABA strategies, including reinforcement schedules, token economies, functional communication training, and data-based decision making. BCBAs design and oversee behavior intervention plans (BIPs), model strategies for staff, and ensure implementation fidelity. RBTs support the behavioral and academic progress of each student by collecting data, delivering instruction, and implementing BIPs in real time. RBTs play a central role in these classrooms, providing 1:1 or small group ABA intervention under the supervision of the Director of Student Supports. They implement behavior plans, use data-based decision-making strategies,

reinforce positive behaviors, and collect data on both academic and behavioral objectives. The BCBA (if necessary) oversees implementation of BIPs, provides ongoing staff training, and ensures fidelity to ABA best practices.

Monitoring Progress for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities are monitored through daily academic and behavioral data collection directly aligned to their IEP goals. Teachers, support staff, and RBTs track progress during dedicated PLP/IEP goal time, small group instruction, and ABA-based interventions. Programs like i-Ready and TeachTown provide adaptive, standards-aligned instruction with built-in assessments to track mastery. In self-contained settings, RBTs collect real-time behavioral data aligned to students' BIPs under Director of Student Support supervision. Progress is formally reviewed during quarterly reporting cycles, and student data including goal tracking, assessments, and work samples is compiled in each learner's Personalized Learning Portfolio. IEP teams meet annually (or more often if needed) to revise services based on this comprehensive data set.

Students with Section 504 Plans

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy follows Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), ensuring that students with disabilities receive accommodations and support necessary to access their education on equal terms with peers. Students suspected of having a disability that substantially limits one or more major life activities (e.g., learning, seeing, hearing, walking) may be referred by a parent, teacher, or administrator to the Director of Student Supports (DSS), who serves as the 504 Coordinator. Students who complete the evaluation process and are not eligible for special education under IDEA may also be considered for a 504 Plan.

The 504 team comprising the DSS, general education teacher, parent/guardian, and others with knowledge of the student reviews medical, academic, and behavioral data to determine eligibility. If eligible, the team creates a customized 504 Plan with appropriate classroom and testing accommodations. The DSS ensures compliance through teacher training, ongoing monitoring, and communication with families.

Monitoring Progress of 504 Plans

Students with 504 Plans are monitored through teacher feedback, assignment data, and regular check-ins with the Director of Student Supports, who also serves as the 504 Coordinator. Classroom accommodations are reviewed quarterly, and team meetings are held to revise plans if needed. The DSS ensures all staff are trained in implementing accommodations and maintains records to track fidelity of services.

Student Support Services Staffing Model

Given the anticipated needs of our special education population estimated to reach 20% of total enrollment xMA's staffing model ensures robust, specialized, and developmentally appropriate support services. Our special populations team is equipped to support students with IEPs, 504 Plans, and ELL needs through a coordinated, multidisciplinary approach.

The Director of Student Supports (DSS) is responsible for the leadership, coordination, and compliance of all special education and Section 504 programming. The DSS oversees the development, implementation, and monitoring of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), ensures compliance with IDEA, Section 504, and the Alabama Administrative Code, and collaborates with the school's leadership and instructional teams to integrate special education services across the campus.

The DSS also provides training and coaching to general education and SPED staff on inclusive practices, IEP compliance, and intervention strategies. The DSS plays a dual role in supporting English Language Learners (ELLs), managing compliance and service coordination, and serving as the liaison with families and service providers.

SPED Teachers at xMA are certified in the State of Alabama and trained in both instructional and behavioral interventions. These teachers lead inclusive co-teaching classrooms (grades K–2), manage small-group instruction and pull-out services (grades 3–8), and facilitate specialized academic and ABA-infused instruction in self-contained settings for students with moderate to severe disabilities. SPED Teachers are also responsible for monitoring IEP progress, developing individualized learning pathways, collecting academic and behavioral data, and collaborating with

general education teachers to ensure access to the core curriculum through accommodations and modifications.

In self-contained special education classrooms for students with severe disabilities, xMA implements a specialized staffing model that pairs SPED Teachers with Registered Behavior Technicians (RBTs). RBTs are paraprofessionals specifically trained in behavior analysis and Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) strategies. They support both academic instruction and the implementation of behavior intervention plans (BIPs), and they are responsible for executing targeted interventions, collecting behavior data, and helping to maintain a structured, supportive classroom environment aligned with students' IEP and BIP goals.

xMA will contract with a Board Certified Behavior Analyst if necessary to provide behavioral support. A Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) provides oversight for students with moderate to severe behavioral needs. The BCBA helps develop and review BIPs, trains staff on evidence-based behavioral interventions, and ensures that ABA strategies are implemented with fidelity across all settings. The BCBA collaborates directly with SPED Teachers, RBTs, and general education staff to develop proactive supports aligned to student needs and to ensure consistency across the learning environment. xMA will use a multigrade level classroom model for students with moderate to severe disabilities

As our enrollment and special education population grows, we will scale staffing accordingly to ensure manageable caseloads and high-quality service delivery. We will also contract related service providers such as speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and vision/hearing specialists to provide services as mandated in students' IEPs. Educational evaluators will be contracted as needed to conduct psychoeducational assessments and reevaluations in coordination with the DSS and SST.

Professional development is central to our approach. All special education staff including general education co-teachers receive ongoing training on IEP writing, standards-based accommodations, progress monitoring, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), culturally responsive teaching, and ABA practices. We invest in staff development to ensure that all team members have the tools they need to implement xMA's inclusive, personalized, and rigorous model of instruction with fidelity.

Figure (33): Student Support Staffing Plan

Year	Student Supports Co-ordinator	SPED Teachers	Paraprofessional
2027–2028	1	1	1
2028–2029	1	1	1
2029–2030	1	2	1
2030–2031	1	2	2
2031–2032	1	3	2

Meeting the Needs of At-Risk Students through MTSS

To ensure all students thrive, especially those at risk of academic failure, xMA implements a robust, responsive Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) aligned with Alabama's framework. Our MTSS model infused with social-emotional learning, restorative practices, and developmentally responsive academic strategies is designed to proactively identify and address students' learning and behavioral needs in a structured, data-driven way.

At Tier I, every student receives high-quality core instruction that incorporates UDL principles, personalized learning via PLPs, and mastery-based assessments. Students engage in a mix of direct instruction, teacher-created videos, small group learning, and individual practice through blended learning. SEL is embedded into the daily Morning Meeting and reinforced throughout the day using our P.O.W.E.R.S. values. Teachers differentiate tasks and groupings based on frequent formative data and progress monitoring, ensuring that instruction is appropriately scaffolded for diverse learning needs.

Students who are not making adequate progress at Tier I are flagged through universal screeners (iReady diagnostics), teacher observations, and behavioral data, and receive Tier II targeted interventions. Tier II supports include 20–30 minutes of small group instruction each day during reading and math blocks using the i-Ready Teacher Toolbox a resource-aligned toolkit that provides scaffolded lessons for phonics, fluency, comprehension, number operations, and algebraic reasoning. The toolbox enables teachers to deliver precise, data-driven instruction aligned to students' placement levels. Behaviorally, Tier II students receive support through check-in/check-out systems, peer mentorship, behavior contracts, and daily SEL prompts or movement breaks.

For students who require intensive support beyond Tier II, Tier III interventions are provided daily in small group or one-on-one settings. These interventions use evidence-based programs including Read 180 and Do the Math. Read 180 is a blended literacy program designed to accelerate students who are two or more years below grade level by integrating high-interest texts, vocabulary development, comprehension scaffolds, and writing practice. Do the Math is a highly structured math intervention that uses explicit instruction and the concrete–semi-concrete–abstract (CSA) approach to help struggling learners build number sense and conceptual understanding. These Tier III academic interventions are paired with customized behavioral plans developed from Functional Behavior Assessments (FBAs), and may include wraparound support from the counselor or Dean of Culture & Instruction.

All Tier II and Tier III students are closely monitored through biweekly i-Ready Growth Monitoring reports and the Direct Behavior Rating – Single Item Scale (DBR-SIS). Teachers track both academic and behavioral data in shared student dashboards. The MTSS team comprising the Principal, Dean of Culture & Instruction, regular education teachers, the Math and Literacy Specialist, and the Dean of Culture & Instruction meets monthly to analyze i-Ready reports, behavior logs, lesson feedback, and other relevant data to evaluate progress. If a student is not responding to intervention despite sustained support, the MTSS team discusses the possibility of referral to the Director of Student Supports for additional assessment and potential eligibility for special education services.

Monitoring the Progress of At-Risk Students

Students identified as academically at risk are supported through our MTSS model. Universal screeners, classroom assessments, and behavior data help place students into Tier II or Tier III interventions. Tier II students participate in daily small-group instruction using i-Ready Teacher Toolbox resources, while Tier III students receive intensive, targeted support through Read 180 and Do the Math, which offer structured, research-based intervention aligned to grade-level content. Progress for these students is monitored biweekly using i-Ready growth data and observational checklists. The Student Support Team (SST) reviews student performance monthly to adjust interventions or initiate further evaluations when needed.

e) Explain how the school will meet the needs of English Language Learner (ELL) students, including the following:

- i) Methods for identifying ELL students (and avoiding misidentification);
- ii) Specific instructional programs, practices, and strategies the school will employ to ensure academic success and equitable access to the core academic program for these students;
- iii) Plans for monitoring and evaluating the progress and success of ELL students, including exiting students from ELL services;
- iv) Means for providing qualified staff for ELL students.

Serving English Language Learners (ELLs)

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA), we are committed to providing an inclusive, rigorous, and personalized learning environment that meets the needs of all students, including English Language Learners (ELLs). Our educational model embraces the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), personalized learning, and culturally responsive teaching all of which are essential for ensuring that ELL students have equitable access to the core academic curriculum and thrive within a diverse school community.

Identifying English Language Learner Students

xMA follows the Alabama State Department of Education's English Language Learner Policies and Procedures Manual to ensure the accurate identification and appropriate placement of ELL students. Upon enrollment, all families complete a Home Language Survey (HLS). If a language other than English is indicated, the student is screened using the WIDA-ACCESS Placement Test (W-APT), which assesses proficiency in the four language domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Based on W-APT results, students are either identified as ELL and placed into appropriate services, or determined to be proficient and placed on monitoring status. To avoid misidentification, we triangulate screening results with academic records, prior interventions, and family interviews. The ELL Student Support Team (ELL-SST) which includes the Director of Student Supports (SSC), general education teachers, related service providers (when appropriate), and parents meets to review placement decisions and ensure alignment with each student's linguistic and academic needs.

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Strategies for ELL Students

Our instructional approach integrates the personalized learning model used schoolwide with targeted supports designed specifically for ELL students. Instruction is grounded in Universal Design for Learning (UDL), allowing students multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression. The personalized learning framework further supports ELLs by allowing them to access instruction through teacher-created videos, direct instruction, and small-group support at their own pace. ELL students receive tiered support based on their English proficiency levels. Core content teachers differentiate instruction using scaffolding techniques such as sentence frames, anchor charts, vocabulary banks, and visual supports. During dedicated intervention/enrichment blocks and PLP time, ELL students may participate in small group instruction focused on language development, content comprehension, and academic vocabulary.

Teachers incorporate high-impact instructional strategies for language acquisition, including:

- **Previewing and Predicting:** Students explore text features (titles, visuals, headings) to activate prior knowledge.
- **Think-Pair-Share and Collaborative Dialogue:** ELL students build oral language fluency and comprehension by engaging in structured peer conversations.
- **Graphic Organizers:** Visual aids such as Venn diagrams and concept maps help students connect vocabulary and concepts.
- **Explicit Vocabulary Instruction:** Teachers use word walls, morphology lessons, and word sorts to build academic language.
- **Sentence Starters and Writing Frames:** These tools support structured writing development.
- **Sheltered Instruction Techniques:** Including visuals, modeling, guided practice, and cooperative learning structures.

Instruction is culturally responsive and tailored to students' background knowledge, interests, and experiences. All teachers are trained to integrate language objectives into lesson planning and to use formative assessment data to monitor ELL progress.

Monitoring and Evaluating Progress of ELL Students

ELL student progress is monitored through a combination of classroom performance data, formative assessments, and English language proficiency assessments. The ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 assessment is administered annually to evaluate students' proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Results from this assessment are reviewed by the ELL-SST to determine ongoing placement and support levels.

Students who demonstrate English proficiency (as defined by the Alabama exit criteria) are exited from ELL services but continue to be monitored for two additional years to ensure continued academic success. During this monitoring period, teachers document student performance and report any academic or language-related concerns to the SSC. If needed, reentry into ELL services is considered based on a team decision.

Progress is documented in each student's Personalized Learning Portfolio (PLP), which includes language assessment data, academic growth metrics, work samples, and teacher observations. This portfolio is used during SST meetings and parent conferences to track individual development and make data-driven instructional decisions.

Qualified Staffing to Serve ELL Students

The Director of Student Supports (SSC) serves as the primary ELL coordinator and is certified in either special education or ESL services. The SSC oversees compliance with state and federal ELL regulations, manages the W-APT and ACCESS assessments, and collaborates with general education teachers to ensure instructional accommodations are effectively implemented.

All teachers receive professional development on language acquisition, culturally responsive instruction, and strategies for supporting ELLs within a personalized learning environment. Our staffing model also includes SPED Teacher Associates who may assist in supporting ELL students within general education or small group settings.

As the ELL population grows, xMA will monitor staffing needs annually and consider hiring additional staff or contracting with certified ESL professionals to ensure every ELL student receives the support necessary to thrive. Through our personalized, data-informed, and inclusive model, xMA is committed to meeting the unique needs of English Language Learners and ensuring their academic and social success.

f) Explain how the school will identify and meet the needs of highly capable students, including the following:

- i) Methods for identifying highly capable students (and avoiding misidentification);
- ii) Specific research-based instructional programs, practices, strategies, and opportunities the school will employ or provide to enhance their abilities;
- iii) Plans for monitoring and evaluating the progress and success of highly capable students;
- iv) Means of providing qualified staff for intellectually gifted students.

Gifted and Talented Students

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy, we believe that gifted and highly capable students deserve rich, challenging learning experiences that tap into their creativity, accelerate their growth, and deepen their understanding across disciplines. Our instructional model is rooted in personalization, inquiry, and mastery ensuring that gifted students are not just supported, but inspired to thrive.

Identification and Planning

xMA follows Alabama's gifted identification process, which includes universal screening in second grade and ongoing opportunities for referral by educators or families. The Student Support Team (SST), led by the Director of Student Supports, evaluates a body of evidence that may include standardized test scores, performance data, teacher input, and work samples. Once identified, students receive a Gifted Education Plan (GEP), which outlines enrichment strategies and advanced learning opportunities aligned to their unique strengths.

Eligible students receive services in the following settings:

- Grades K–2: Students receive accommodations and differentiated instruction in the general education setting.
- Grades 3–5: Students participate in a pullout enrichment program for 3–5 hours weekly, engaging in inquiry-based projects and thematic challenges.
- Grades 6–8: Students participate in enrichment clusters during advisory time and take advanced courses in core academic subjects to ensure continued academic growth and challenge.

Instructional Strategies and Enrichment Pathways

Gifted students are served through an inclusive, tiered model of enrichment embedded into our core academic program. All instruction is guided by the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework and our personalized, mastery-based learning. This design enables gifted learners to move at their own pace, engage in higher-order thinking, and access advanced-level content when ready. A key feature of our approach is the integration of "Aspire to Do" assignments project-based, performance-driven extension tasks embedded within daily instruction. These assignments allow students to demonstrate above-mastery performance on specific standards by applying their learn-

ing in creative, real-world, and interdisciplinary ways. For example, a student mastering grade-level geometry might be challenged to design and construct a model of a sustainable city using geometric concepts, integrating S.T.R.E.A.M. elements into a meaningful extension task.

In grades K–5, gifted students receive differentiated instruction and participate in enrichment blocks that include inquiry-based challenges, design thinking tasks, and S.T.R.E.A.M.-based projects. Their Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs) are updated to include enrichment tasks and independent projects that foster deeper exploration and academic rigor across subjects.

In grades 6–8, students have access to accelerated learning pathways and advanced S.T.R.E.A.M. electives. Instruction is compacted and extended using tiered assignments, curriculum adaptations, and opportunities for interest-based exploration. These students are encouraged to pursue independent research, participate in school-wide innovation challenges, and lead peer-based inquiry groups.

Each student's progress is tracked through their Personalized Learning Portfolio, which includes enrichment reflections, work samples, and evidence of advanced mastery. Teachers meet regularly with students to review goals, provide feedback on Aspire to Do tasks, and ensure their GEP remains aligned with academic growth and personal interests. Student progress is reviewed formally at least once per semester, and adjustments are made to maintain appropriate levels of challenge and engagement.

The Director of Student Supports oversees gifted education services, ensuring alignment with state requirements and supporting instructional staff in planning and delivering enrichment. As enrollment grows, xMA will evaluate the need for a dedicated gifted specialist to coach teachers, facilitate mentorship opportunities, and support the development of advanced learning tracks. All classroom teachers receive ongoing professional development on differentiating instruction and designing meaningful enrichment to support high-achieving students. Through this integrated, inquiry-driven model, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy cultivates excellence in gifted learners by empowering them to explore deeply, think critically, and grow beyond the standards.

Monitoring Progress for Gifted Students

Gifted students are monitored through their Gifted Education Plans (GEPs) and personalized enrichment pathways. In grades K–2, students receive classroom-based differentiation. In grades 3–5, they participate in weekly pullout sessions, and in grades 6–8, they engage in enrichment clusters and advanced classes. Teachers monitor progress through performance on “Aspire to Do” extension projects, rigorous, standards-based tasks that demonstrate above-mastery understanding as well as advanced learning benchmarks in the PLP. Gifted students' pacing is flexible; our self-paced learning model allows them to move ahead and access higher-level standards as soon as they demonstrate mastery.

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA), we believe that consistent and intentional progress monitoring is essential to ensuring the success of every learner especially those in our special populations. Our systems are designed to capture real-time data and long-term trends for students with disabilities (SPED), students performing below grade level, English Language Learners (ELLs), students with 504 Plans, and gifted students. Through personalized learning portfolios, adaptive programs, frequent data cycles, and collaborative support teams, we ensure that no student's growth goes unnoticed or unsupported. Through these proactive efforts, xMA is building an inclusive school culture where identification for special education services is thoughtful, data-driven, and equity-centered ensuring that all students receive the support and challenge they need to thrive.

g) Explain how the school will identify and meet the needs of students who are at-risk of dropping out. At-risk indicators include students with declining grades, high absenteeism or tardiness, students who lack engagement, and students who do not complete assignments. Include the following:

- i) Methods for identifying students at-risk of dropping out.
- ii) Specific programs, strategies, and support provided to these students. Include any personnel resources specifically targeting this population;
- iii) Plans for monitoring and tracking students at risk of dropping out.
- iv) Interventions designed to keep these students engaged and enrolled, including triggers for the intervention.

Meeting the Needs of At-Risk Students through MTSS

To ensure all students thrive, especially those at risk of academic failure, xMA implements a robust, responsive Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) aligned with Alabama's framework. Our MTSS model, infused with social-emotional learning, restorative practices, and developmentally responsive academic strategies, is designed to proactively identify and address students' learning and behavioral needs in a structured, data-driven way.

At Tier I, every student receives high-quality core instruction that incorporates UDL principles, personalized learning via PLPs, and mastery-based assessments. Students engage in a mix of direct instruction, teacher-created videos, small group learning, and individual practice through blended learning. SEL is embedded into the daily Morning Meeting and reinforced throughout the day using our P.O.W.E.R.S. values. Teachers differentiate tasks and groupings based on frequent formative data and progress monitoring, ensuring that instruction is appropriately scaffolded for diverse learning needs.

Students who are not making adequate progress at Tier I are flagged through universal screeners (iReady diagnostics), teacher observations, and behavioral data, and receive Tier II targeted interventions. Tier II supports include 20–30 minutes of small group instruction each day during reading and math blocks using the i-Ready Teacher Toolbox a resource-aligned toolkit that provides scaffolded lessons for phonics, fluency, comprehension, number operations, and algebraic reasoning. The toolbox enables teachers to deliver precise, data-driven instruction aligned to students' placement levels. Behaviorally, Tier II students receive support through check-in/check-out systems, peer mentorship, behavior contracts, and daily SEL prompts or movement breaks.

For students who require intensive support beyond Tier II, Tier III interventions are provided daily in small group or one-on-one settings. These interventions use evidence-based programs including Read 180 and Do the Math. Read 180 is a blended literacy program designed to accelerate students who are two or more years below grade level by integrating high-interest texts, vocabulary development, comprehension scaffolds, and writing practice. Do the Math is a highly structured math intervention that uses explicit instruction and the concrete–semi-concrete–abstract (CSA) approach to help struggling learners build number sense and conceptual understanding. These Tier III academic interventions are paired with customized behavioral plans developed from Functional Behavior Assessments (FBAs), and may include wraparound support from the counselor or Dean of Culture & Instruction.

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Monitoring the Progress of At-Risk Students

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Element Review

Reviews is not provided

11. Student Recruitment and Enrollment

Reviewer Instructions

Please rate this section using the provided rubric.

Status: Completed

Form Result

Describe the recruitment efforts, including the marketing campaign, and measures to ensure fair enrollment opportunities for all interested students in the community.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Compelling evidence of how the school will directly and consistently recruit students and market the school in such a way as to adequately ensure equal access to interested students and families. In addition, provide ample evidence of the target plan for recruiting at-risk students.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

- a) Complete the attached enrollment projection spreadsheet that provides information on anticipated enrollments, with maximum and minimum bounds, for each grade served over the contract period.

Complete Enrollment Projections

File name: xMA Attachment - Complete Enrollment Projections-Application.xlsx

Uploaded: 03/11/2026 10:55 PM

Uploaded by: Melissa Capehart

- b) Describe the school's plans for recruitment, including activities to inform the public of the school and encourage families to enroll. Provide a timeline with targets for number of applications. Include information on planned enrollment materials with target completion dates (brochures, websites, etc.). Include any known or planned recruitment activities within the community.

Text

Student Recruitment Plan

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) will implement a comprehensive, multi-year recruitment strategy designed to inform the public, build awareness, and ensure full enrollment of 140 students for the school's opening in August 2027. Consistent with Alabama charter law and xMA's mission to serve all learners, recruitment efforts are inclusive, accessible, and designed to reach families across Birmingham, with intentional focus on historically underserved communities in East Birmingham and surrounding areas.

xMA's recruitment strategy is relationship-driven, community-based, and data-informed, combining in-person engagement, digital outreach, community partnerships, and targeted enrollment conversion efforts. These efforts are detailed fully in the attached xMA Recruitment and Engagement Plan, Enrollment Plan, and Enrollment Metrics and Contingency Plan, and summarized below.

Recruitment Strategy and Community Outreach Activities

xMA will utilize a hub-and-spoke recruitment model, concentrating engagement in East Birmingham neighborhoods including Roebuck, Huffman, Center Point, Woodlawn, and East Lake while ensuring equitable access across Birmingham through outreach in Clay, Pinson, Tarrant, Trussville, and additional areas. This geographic strategy reflects demonstrated family interest, community need, and the school's commitment to ensuring equitable access to enrollment for all students.

Recruitment activities described and in the attachments include: [xMA Enrollment Policy and Recruitment Plan](#) [xMA Community Engagement, Recruitment and Enrollment Plan 26-27](#)

Monthly Community Events and Family Engagement

xMA hosts recurring events designed to build trust, inform families, and provide opportunities to engage directly with the school model. These events include Fireside Chats, Coffee Chats, library information sessions, family engagement events such as the “Eggs-plore Your Options” event, STREAM camps, backpack giveaways, and seasonal community celebrations such as Trunk-or-Treat and Fall Festivals. These events allow families to interact with school leadership, experience the STREAM model, and receive enrollment assistance.

These events occur at least monthly and serve as a primary mechanism for converting interested families into applicants. Enrollment assistance is available at each event to ensure accessibility for families requiring support completing applications.

STREAM Team Canvassing and Neighborhood Outreach

Beginning May 2026, xMA’s STREAM Team composed of trained community ambassadors will conduct monthly neighborhood canvassing across Birmingham, targeting key enrollment zones including East Birmingham, Center Point, Pinson, Tarrant, Clay, Trussville, West Birmingham, and North Birmingham. The team will distribute recruitment materials, assist families with interest forms, and provide information about the school’s educational model.

The STREAM Team provides consistent, relationship-based outreach and ensures ongoing presence in priority recruitment communities.

Daycare and Early Childhood Outreach (“Diapers to Diplomas”)

xMA conducts bi-weekly outreach visits to childcare centers and Pre-K programs to build early awareness and ensure a strong Kindergarten pipeline. These visits provide informational materials, enrollment assistance, and partnership opportunities with early childhood providers. This early engagement strategy ensures families are aware of xMA well before the application window opens.

Community Partnerships and Organizational Outreach

xMA partners with local organizations, including Black Alabamians for Education (BA4E), libraries, housing authorities, youth sports leagues, pediatric clinics, and community organizations to host information sessions and recruitment events. These partnerships ensure access to diverse populations, including economically disadvantaged families, English Language Learners, and students with disabilities, and support equitable access to enrollment.

Digital Recruitment and Media Campaign

Digital outreach includes:

- School website with enrollment portal and application access- xstreammindsacademy.org
- Social media campaigns (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, YouTube)
- Email monthly newsletters to interest list families
- Targeted digital advertising by ZIP code
- Virtual information sessions and livestream Q&A events

This ensures broad access for families who may not attend in-person events and allows families to access enrollment information at any time.

Enrollment materials including the school website, brochures, flyers, and digital enrollment tools have been developed and will continue to be distributed and updated throughout the recruitment period.

Enrollment Timeline and Application Targets

xMA’s enrollment process follows a clearly defined timeline to ensure full enrollment prior to school opening:

- Interest Form Collection: Spring 2025 – August 2026
- Application Launch: September 1, 2026
- Early Application Deadline: October 31, 2026

- Final Application Deadline: November 30, 2026
- Enrollment Lottery (if necessary): December 4, 2026
- Enrollment Confirmation Deadline: December 11, 2026
- School Opening: August 2027

Quarterly Enrollment Goals and Benchmarks

To ensure full enrollment of 140 students, xMA has established clear quarterly enrollment targets aligned to recruitment and application milestones. [xMA Enrollment Plan Metrics and Contingency Plan](#)

Year 1 Enrollment Target: 140 Students

- Kindergarten: 60 students
- Grade 1: 40 students
- Grade 2: 40 students

Quarter 1: June 2026 – August 2026

Goal: 40% enrollment target (approximately 56 students)

Recruitment efforts during this phase focus on building awareness, collecting interest forms, and establishing early enrollment commitments through community events, STREAM Team outreach, daycare partnerships, and digital campaigns. The school expects to collect at least 400 interest forms during this phase.

Quarter 2: September 2026 – November 2026

Goal: 75% enrollment target (approximately 105 students)

Following application launch, recruitment efforts shift toward converting interest forms into completed applications. The Enrollment Team provides application assistance, conducts follow-up outreach, and hosts enrollment-focused events to support families through the application process.

Quarter 3: December 2026 – February 2027

Goal: 100% enrollment target (140 students)

Recruitment efforts focus on ensuring full enrollment and building a waitlist through targeted outreach, enrollment support, and continued community engagement.

Quarter 4: March 2027 – April 2027

Goal: Maintain full enrollment and establish waitlist of 30–40 students

During this phase, the school confirms enrollment commitments and continues recruitment efforts to maintain a waitlist, ensuring enrollment stability.

Monitoring, Reporting, and Continuous Improvement

xMA maintains a real-time Enrollment Dashboard to monitor recruitment progress, application conversion, and enrollment commitments. The Enrollment Team reviews progress monthly and provides updates to the Board of Directors to ensure accountability and enable timely adjustments.

Key metrics tracked include:

- Interest forms submitted
- Applications completed
- Enrollment confirmations
- Event participation
-

Recruitment effectiveness by geographic area

Contingency Plan for Under-Enrollment

If enrollment falls below projected targets, xMA will implement accelerated recruitment strategies, including:

- Increasing the frequency of community events and STREAM Team canvassing
- Expanding recruitment into additional geographic areas
- Increasing digital advertising and outreach efforts
- Strengthening partnerships with early childhood providers and community organizations
- Deploying additional enrollment support staff

Budget and staffing plans will be adjusted as needed to align with enrollment while maintaining financial sustainability and instructional quality.

Because recruitment efforts began more than two years prior to school opening and include continuous monitoring, clear benchmarks, and contingency planning, xMA is confident in its ability to meet and sustain full enrollment.

c) Describe the general enrollment policy and attach any preliminary materials on the school's enrollment policy. The policy should include the following:

- i) Tentative dates for application period, enrollment deadlines, and procedures;
- ii) Policies and procedures for student waiting lists, withdrawals, re-enrollment, and transfers;
- iii) Explanation of the purpose of any pre-admission activities for students or parents;
- iv) Policies and procedures if demand outweigh identified enrollment targets approved by the Commission in the charter contract. Please note a lottery system is required by law.

Enrollment Policy

xMA is a tuition-free public charter school that will open in August 2027. Aligned with our mission, xMA enrolls students without regard to ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender, income level, disability, proficiency in the English language, or academic or athletic ability. We fully comply with Section 16-6F-5 of the Alabama School Choice and Student Opportunity Act and all other applicable state and federal laws governing public charter schools. During its initial year (2027-2028), xMA will serve Kindergarten through 2nd grade, enrolling 60 students in kindergarten and 40 students in 1st and 2nd grade (a total of 140 students). Each subsequent year, we will add one new cohort of 60 Kindergarten students and promote current students to the next grade level. By full expansion (K-8), xMA will serve up to 540 students.

Figure: xMA Five-Year Enrollment Plan

Grade Level	Year 1 2027– 2028	Year 2 2028– 2029	Year 3 2029– 2030	Year 4 2030– 2031	Year 5 2031– 2032	Year 5 2031– 2032	Year 5 2031– 2032
Kinder- garten	60	60	60	60	60	60	60
1st Grade	40	60	60	60	60	60	60
2nd Grade	40	40	60	60	60	60	60
3rd Grade	0	40	40	60	60	60	60
4th Grade	0	0	40	40	60	60	60

- Reviewing prior academic records, report cards, and assessment history
- Administering beginning-of-year diagnostic assessments in literacy and math
- Meeting individually with families and students to understand strengths, interests, and goals
- Developing each student's initial Personalized Learning Plan (PLP), outlining academic goals, intervention needs, and enrichment opportunities
- Introducing families to personalized learning systems, mastery-based grading, and student progress monitoring

This process ensures that every student begins the school year with a clearly defined, individualized instructional pathway aligned to their current skill level.

Student Support and Special Population Evaluation Led by the Director of Student Supports

At the same time, the Director of Student Supports will lead the onboarding and evaluation process for students requiring additional services or support. This includes:

- Reviewing and implementing existing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and Section 504 Plans
- Conducting English Language Learner identification and placement screening using state-approved tools
- Reviewing prior intervention records, support plans, and relevant student data
- Conducting Student Support Team meetings when necessary to identify support needs
- Establishing accommodations, service schedules, and intervention plans aligned to student needs

This coordinated process ensures that students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and students requiring intervention receive appropriate support immediately upon enrollment, ensuring equitable access to instruction.

Phase 3: Family Orientation and Schoolwide Culture Onboarding

All newly enrolled families will participate in structured Family Orientation sessions designed to ensure alignment with xMA's instructional model, culture, and expectations. These sessions include:

- Overview of personalized learning, mastery-based grading, and instructional systems
- Introduction to P.O.W.E.R.S. values, PBIS structures, and school culture expectations
- Training on how to interpret Personalized Learning Plans, report cards, and student progress trackers
- Guidance on family communication systems and engagement opportunities
- Opportunities to meet school leadership and staff

These sessions equip families with the knowledge and tools needed to actively support their child's success.

Phase 4: First Weeks of School Instructional and Cultural Integration

During the first weeks of school, teachers and staff will continue onboarding students through structured instruction and culture-building routines. This includes:

- Explicit instruction on classroom routines, expectations, and schoolwide systems
- Training students on goal-setting, progress tracking, and Personalized Learning Plan use
- Advisory, Morning Meeting, and community-building activities
- Explicit teaching and reinforcement of P.O.W.E.R.S. values and behavior expectations

These systems ensure students build independence, confidence, and alignment with school culture.

Mid-Year Student Onboarding

Students enrolling mid-year will participate in an accelerated onboarding process that includes:

- Individual student and family onboarding meetings
- Diagnostic assessments and Personalized Learning Plan development
- Review and implementation of IEPs, 504 Plans, or ELL supports
- Family orientation and assignment of staff mentors to support transition

This ensures all students receive consistent onboarding regardless of enrollment timing.

How This Process Differs from Continuing Students

This comprehensive onboarding process is specifically designed for newly enrolled students and families. New students participate in individualized onboarding meetings, diagnostic assessments, Personalized Learning Plan development, and full orientation to the school's instructional model, culture, and support systems.

Continuing students do not require full onboarding because they are already familiar with school systems. Instead, returning students participate in beginning-of-year goal-setting meetings, diagnostic updates, and culture refresh activities. This allows staff to adjust Personalized Learning Plans while maintaining instructional continuity

Lottery Narrative

Enrollment Lottery Process

Aligned with Section 16-6F-5(a) of the Alabama School Choice and Student Opportunity Act, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) will conduct a public, random lottery if the number of applications exceeds available seats in any grade level. The lottery will be conducted in a fair, transparent, and equitable manner to ensure all applicants have an equal opportunity for enrollment consistent with state law.

Each eligible applicant will be assigned a unique lottery number generated through a secure, randomized selection process. The lottery will be conducted at a publicly announced meeting, with the date, time, and location shared with families at least two weeks in advance through multiple communication channels, including email, the school website, and public postings. During the lottery, numbers will be randomly drawn and seats will be offered in the order selected until all available seats are filled. Remaining applicants will be placed on a waitlist in the order drawn.

Enrollment preference will be applied only as permitted by Alabama law and in the following order:

- Students residing within Birmingham City Schools attendance zone(s)
- Students enrolled in the previous school year
- Siblings of students enrolled in the previous school year
- Children of xMA employees, Board of Directors members, and the founder, not to exceed 10% of total enrollment, as permitted by law

- Students residing outside Birmingham City Schools attendance zone(s)

Preference categories will be applied prior to the random lottery in accordance with Ala. Code § 16-6F-5(a). Within each preference category, student selection will be conducted through a random lottery process.

Ensuring Fairness, Transparency, and Equity

xMA will implement multiple safeguards to ensure the lottery process is fair, transparent, and equitable for all students and families:

Public and Transparent Process

The lottery will be conducted at a public meeting that families may attend in person or virtually. The process and procedures will be clearly explained in advance and reviewed at the start of the lottery to ensure transparency.

Equal Access to Application Process

Enrollment applications will be available online and in paper form, and support will be provided to families who need assistance completing applications. Materials and assistance will be provided in multiple languages as needed to ensure equitable access for English Language Learners and families with limited English proficiency.

Neutral and Random Selection Process

Lottery numbers will be generated using a secure, randomized system, and no student will receive preferential treatment beyond legally permitted preferences. Selection will not be influenced by academic performance, disability status, income, language proficiency, or any other protected characteristic.

Documentation and Recordkeeping

xMA will maintain detailed records of all lottery procedures, applicant lists, lottery results, and waitlists. These records will be securely stored and available for audit or review to ensure compliance with state law and authorizer requirements.

Clear Communication with Families

All applicants will receive written notification of their lottery results, including whether they have been offered a seat or placed on the waitlist. Families offered seats will be given a defined timeframe (typically five business days) to accept enrollment. If a seat is declined or not accepted within the timeframe, it will be offered to the next student on the waitlist.

Waitlist Management

The waitlist will remain active through the start of the school year and beyond. As seats become available, students will be offered enrollment in waitlist order, ensuring fairness and consistency.

Compliance with Alabama Charter Law

xMA's lottery process will be fully compliant with Ala. Code § 16-6F-5(a), ensuring that:

- Enrollment is open to all eligible students
- Admission decisions are made through a fair and random lottery when applications exceed capacity
- Only legally permitted enrollment preferences are applied
- No discrimination occurs based on disability, academic ability, income, race, language, or background

This transparent and equitable lottery process ensures that all families have a fair opportunity to enroll and that xMA operates in full compliance with Alabama charter school law.

f) Specifically describe the plan for outreach to families in poverty; academically low-achieving students; students with disabilities; and other youth at risk of academic failure.

At-Risk Student Outreach

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) is committed to ensuring that families in poverty, academically low-achieving students, students with disabilities, English Learners, and youth at risk of academic failure have full and equitable access to our school. Our approach combines current community-based engagement with planned expansion of support and partnerships, ensuring that the students who benefit most from high-quality public options are engaged early, informed clearly, and welcomed fully into our school community.

xMA is already building relationships in the communities we intend to serve by distributing enrollment materials in high-need neighborhoods, attending local festivals and outreach events in Roebuck and Center Point, and connecting with families at community gathering spaces such as Rochelle's Coffee, Zatie's Kitchen, and the Springville Library. As the school grows, we will deepen this work by partnering with housing authorities, community centers, churches, and nonprofits to host on-site enrollment pop-ups that offer direct application support. These events will provide families with assistance in completing applications, understanding required documents, and navigating the process regardless of their comfort with technology. Materials will be available in accessible, family-friendly language, and xMA will continue offering flexible enrollment pathways including online, paper-based, in-person, and mail-in options to reduce barriers related to transportation, device access, or scheduling constraints.

To reach academically low-achieving students, xMA uses messaging that clearly communicates our commitment to mastery-based learning, foundational literacy and math support, and personalized instruction that meets students at their current level. We are already connecting with families at community events and will continue building partnerships with youth organizations, after-school programs, and recreation centers that work with students needing additional academic support. Our ongoing "Parent emPOWERment Workshops" help families understand charter school options and build strong home-school connections, and future sessions will focus on reading levels, academic interventions, and navigating progress monitoring tools such as iReady, PLPs, and student portfolios. xMA is equally committed to reaching students with disabilities. Current materials clearly state that the school welcomes all learners and is committed to providing a full continuum of services for students with IEPs and 504 Plans. As we continue developing our model, xMA will provide families with clear, accessible explanations of how special education services are implemented, how related services are delivered, and how the school collaborates with families to ensure continuity of support. As enrollment approaches, we will deepen partnerships with early childhood programs, therapy providers, and community disability organizations to help families understand the services available at xMA. A designated staff member will support families of students with disabilities during the enrollment process by reviewing documents, answering questions, and coordinating transitions.

To ensure equitable access for English Learners and bilingual families, xMA will provide enrollment materials in the most commonly used languages in our target communities and make key documents available in translated formats throughout the enrollment cycle. The school will use translation tools and interpreter support as needed at family events, open houses, and interest sessions so that non-English-speaking families can fully participate. As recruitment expands, we will connect with local ESL programs, culturally centered community groups, and faith-based organizations that serve multilingual families to ensure they understand the enrollment process. xMA will also maintain clear, simple digital communication accessible on mobile devices, allowing multilingual families to learn about the school even if they have limited English proficiency or limited access to technology.

For other youth at risk including students experiencing homelessness, foster youth, and students with complex social, emotional, or behavioral needs xMA's outreach emphasizes stability, belonging, and a restorative, trauma-informed culture. As we expand our recruitment infrastructure, we will collaborate with shelters, DHR offices, mental health organizations, and mentoring programs to ensure vulnerable students are aware of their immediate enrollment rights and the support available at xMA. Enrollment messaging emphasizes that every student deserves a fresh start and that behavior is understood as communication, not a barrier to belonging.

Throughout the enrollment cycle, xMA will maintain consistent communication through low-data social media campaigns, text-message reminders, community events, and neighborhood gatherings to ensure families remain informed and supported. After enrollment, the school will offer welcome

calls, transition meetings, and a mid-year onboarding process to support highly mobile students or those who join after the school year begins.

Through this combination of current engagement efforts and strategic expansion, xMA ensures that families in poverty, academically struggling students, students with disabilities, English Learners, and other at-risk youth are not only informed about our free public charter school option but also welcomed into a supportive, inclusive, and equitable educational community designed around their long-term success.

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

12. Student Discipline Policy and Plan

Reviewer Instructions

Please rate this section using the provided rubric.

Status: Completed

Form Result

Describe the policies and procedures for handling students' behavior problems, including measures to afford a student's right to due process.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Compelling evidence of an approach to student discipline that will directly and consistently address compliance with applicable laws and school district and the school culture.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

a) Describe the practices the school will use to promote good discipline, including both penalties for infractions and incentives for positive behavior.

Student Discipline Policy

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA), our student discipline practices are an extension of our mission: to create a safe, inclusive, and empowering learning environment where all students, especially those with diverse learning profiles can thrive. Our discipline framework is intentionally aligned with our school culture, rooted in the P.O.W.E.R.S. core values (Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, and Safety First), and grounded in research-based systems of support.

xMA implements a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) that integrates Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), and trauma-informed, developmentally responsive strategies. Rather than relying on punitive approaches, we use proactive practices to teach, reinforce, and restore behavior expectations. PBIS serves as our foundational behavior framework, offering a structured, tiered approach to fostering a strong schoolwide culture while addressing individual student needs with increasing levels of support.

We recognize that all behavior is a form of communication and that students particularly those with disabilities, trauma histories, or language barriers benefit from empathetic, structured, and restorative responses. Our schoolwide discipline approach emphasizes strong relationships, consistent expectations, and reflective routines that promote student ownership and self-regulation (Bear, 2010; Steinbrenner et al., 2020).

This work is led by our Dean of Culture & Instruction, in collaboration with classroom teachers, co-teachers, counselors, and our student support team. Together, they implement clear systems for modeling expectations, celebrating positive behaviors, and supporting students through both preventive and restorative strategies. Our discipline model is driven by three core practices: Shared Culture, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and Family Partnership, each designed to uphold the dignity of all learners and foster a school community built on respect, accountability, and growth.

Practice 1: Shared Culture

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA), our shared culture is intentionally cultivated through a commitment to inclusivity, predictability, and the reinforcement of our core P.O.W.E.R.S. We recognize that when all students feel seen, valued, and supported, they are more likely to engage deeply in their learning, develop resilience, and contribute positively to our community.

Inclusive and Supportive Learning Environment

At the heart of our school culture is a belief that every student regardless of background, identity, or support needs to belong and thrive. We create this environment through the following practices:

- **Neurodiverse-Inclusive Approach:** We embrace the diverse learning profiles, communication styles, and behavioral needs of our students as strengths. By offering both universal support (e.g., SEL instruction, behavior expectations, and community-building) and targeted support (e.g., speech and occupational therapy, counseling, behavior supports), we ensure all students have what they need to succeed.
- **Collaborative Teaching Structures:** Our co-teacher model includes an Academic Teacher and Life Skills Teacher who work alongside a team of educators, special education case managers, therapists, and support staff. These teams engage in regular co-planning, co-teaching, and shared problem-solving, ensuring that instruction and support are aligned across classrooms and students are seen as whole learners.
- **Embedded SEL and Life Skills:** We explicitly teach social-emotional and life skills through dedicated instructional blocks, as well as through daily routines and teacher modeling. Students practice communication, empathy, self-regulation, collaboration, and self-advocacy, which are reinforced across academic and non-academic settings.

Predictable Learning Environment

Predictability builds the trust and safety students need to take academic risks and grow. We design our environments with clear structures, routines, and visual cues so that all students, especially those with executive functioning or regulation needs can anticipate, participate, and build independence.

- **Visual Supports and Progress tracker:** Each student is guided by a progress tracker, which outlines their daily expectations and serves as the foundation for their visual schedule. These trackers help students know what they've accomplished, what's next, and how to prepare for transitions throughout the day. Classrooms incorporate color-coded learning stations, illustrated expectations, and accessible communication tools to promote autonomy and reduce anxiety around transitions.
- **Structured Classroom Environments:** Instruction follows a station-based small group model, where students rotate through clearly labeled stations with consistent expectations. At the start of each day, students review their progress tracker and schedule, establishing a predictable rhythm for their learning. This structured approach, rooted in Universal Design for Learning (UDL), supports clarity, independence, and routine for all learners.
- **Calm-Down Spaces and Flexible Learning Environments:** Every classroom includes a calm-down space that students can access when they need to self-regulate and reset. Classrooms are also designed with flexibility in mind featuring a variety of seating options, sensory tools, and adaptable workspaces allowing students to engage in learning in ways that

suit their unique needs and preferences.

- **Student Onboarding:** Whether joining at the beginning of the year or mid-year, students participate in guided onboarding sessions to learn classroom routines, schoolwide expectations, and community values. These sessions help students build confidence, understand expectations, and feel welcomed as valued members of our learning community.

Reinforcement of Positive Behaviors and P.O.W.E.R.S. Values

Our P.O.W.E.R.S. values Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, and Safety First are embedded into every aspect of school life. These values are:

- **Explicitly Taught:** At the start of the year and throughout the year during refreshers, staff model and teach behavior expectations using the Hero Code, role-playing, and class discussions.
- **Celebrated Consistently:** Our school wide PBIS system rewards students for demonstrating P.O.W.E.R.S. values through Hero Bucks, shout-outs, and recognition rituals at the classroom, grade, and school level.
- **Reflected Upon Daily:** Morning meetings, SEL lessons, and Closing Circles provide students with space to set personal behavior goals, reflect on their actions, and celebrate personal and peer growth.

By embedding inclusivity into instructional practices, reinforcing predictable routines, and celebrating positive behavior, xMA builds a culture that is supportive, student-centered, and grounded in high expectations. This shared culture empowers students to take ownership of their choices, grow in their social-emotional skills, and thrive as learners and leaders.

Practice 2: Behavior Supports

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)

Our MTSS framework provides a layered approach to behavioral and academic support, addressing the needs of all students. Research shows that MTSS, by incorporating data-informed and tiered supports, can significantly improve both academic and social outcomes for neurodiverse and typical students alike (Sugai & Horner, 2009). This approach is structured as follows:

- **Tier 1:** Universal, school-wide strategies that support a positive climate and set behavior expectations for all students. This includes teaching social-emotional skills, establishing routines, and recognizing positive behavior.
- **Tier 2:** Targeted interventions for students who need additional behavioral support. Small group interventions, staff check-ins, and skill-building groups help students strengthen social-emotional competencies and self-management skills (Walker et al., 1996).
- **Tier 3:** Intensive, individualized support for students with significant behavioral or social-emotional needs, including the creation of personalized Behavioral Support Plans (BSPs), one-on-one counseling, and collaboration with behavioral specialists.

Our use of MTSS ensures that each student receives appropriate support based on their unique needs, allowing early intervention to reduce behavioral disruptions and improve outcomes (Eber et al., 2009).

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is the foundation of our school culture, creating a positive, inclusive, and empowering environment for all students. Grounded in our superhero-themed P.O.W.E.R.S. values Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, and Safety First our PBIS framework proactively teaches, models, and reinforces behavioral expectations in every classroom and shared space. Rather than relying on punitive consequences, our system emphasizes recognition, consistency, and relationship-building to help students understand, reflect on, and take ownership of their actions. This evidence-based framework fosters a safe and respectful climate where students feel seen, supported, and motivated to make positive choices. Through regular feedback, intentional reinforcement systems, and collaborative goal-setting, PBIS helps build a culture where both academic and

social-emotional growth are celebrated. Teachers, students, and families work together to strengthen the community and ensure all students have the tools and support they need to succeed.

Figure (35): PBIS Framework: Tiered Supports for Student Behavior

Tier	Systems	Practices
Tier 1 (Universal for All Students)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Schoolwide commitment to P.O.W.E.R.S. values. - Behavior data monitored weekly by the PBIS/MTSS team. - Professional development on classroom culture, SEL, and culturally responsive behavior strategies. - Daily integration of SEL and P.O.W.E.R.S. lessons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explicit teaching of expectations using Hero Codes and behavior modeling. - Visual schedules, classroom norms, and clear procedures. - Daily student goal-setting and reflection in Hero Boards (K–5) and Power Banks (6–8). - Positive reinforcement through Hero Bucks/Power Credits. - Regular family communication through folders, newsletters, and progress trackers. - Weekly recognition in Power House Celebrations.
Tier 2 (Targeted Support)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Systematic identification using teacher referral and student data. - Weekly MTSS check-ins to review Tier 2 student progress. - Coordinated small-group interventions. - Additional teacher coaching and strategy support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Targeted social-emotional or behavior skill groups (e.g., friendship, regulation, coping skills). - Increased adult check-ins and reinforcement of expectations. - Home-school communication logs and goal-tracking tools. - Behavior checklists and tiered incentives. - SEL-based mentor sessions with school staff. - Goal-setting support with visual tracking. - MTSS Tier 2 referral form submitted and reviewed.
Tier 3 (Individualized Intensive Support)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Multidisciplinary team reviews student needs and progress weekly. - Ongoing data collection to track intervention fidelity. - Individualized plans co-created with students and family. - Wraparound services from mental health or external partners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Functional behavior assessments (if needed). - Individual behavior intervention plans. - 1:1 check-ins, counseling, or restorative circles. - Customized reinforcement systems. - Frequent parent meetings and communication. - Adjusted classroom supports and accommodations. - MTSS Tier 3 referral form and team action plan.

Our approach to fostering a positive school culture and providing behavioral support for all students is centered on a proactive, values-driven framework rooted in Positive Behavioral Interventions

and Supports (PBIS). This system helps create a supportive, predictable, and inclusive learning environment where expectations are clearly taught, modeled, and reinforced across all settings. At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy, consistent communication and common language are key. We use Hero Codes and a schoolwide Behavior Matrix to define and teach behavioral expectations aligned with our P.O.W.E.R.S. values Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, and Safety First.

Students engage daily with behavior tools such as Hero Boards (K–5) or Power Credits (6–8), earning recognition for demonstrating our core values in their actions and choices. These systems promote student voice, ownership, and accountability through daily goal-setting, reflection, and meaningful reinforcement. Morning Meetings, Afternoon Circles, and Advisory time provide structured moments for students to review their progress, celebrate their growth, and reset intentions for the next day. Visual tools throughout the school including communication boards, Hero Codes, and daily checklists further support clarity and consistency, ensuring that all students have access to the expectations, supports, and encouragement they need to thrive.

School Rewards and Incentives

Daily Incentives

Central to the rewards structure at xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy is the token economy system, known as our “Hero Boards, Hero Bucks, Power Credit” system. This program encourages positive behavior through a tangible reward structure.

xMA K-5-Each student maintains a daily token behavior board (Hero Board) where they can earn “Hero Bucks (K-5) or for demonstrating behaviors aligned with the P.O.W.E.R.S. values, such as kindness, ownership, and safety. Tokens are awarded in real-time to provide immediate feedback and motivation. Each week, students can trade their tokens at the Hero Hub store for a variety of rewards, including sensory-friendly items and activity passes. Teachers also use Hero Boards to determine SuperHero of the Month and Year.

xMA 6-8- Students earn Power Credits by demonstrating behaviors aligned with our core values: Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, and Safety First. Credits are awarded for leading projects, mentoring peers, participating actively in class, achieving academic milestones, and showing leadership and initiative. Each student maintains a virtual Power Bank Account where their credits are tracked. This encourages them to practice real-world financial skills such as budgeting, saving, and planning for future rewards. During advisory, students will keep up with their balance, plan and set goals for the month. Students can use their credits to gain promotional rewards and privileges at the Monthly Power House Meeting.

Weekly Incentives: P.O.W.E.R.S. House Celebration

xMA K-5-To foster a consistent and positive school culture, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy holds Weekly (K-5) and Monthly (6-8) Power House Celebrations. These gatherings highlight and recognize students and staff who exemplify the P.O.W.E.R.S. values, reinforcing positive behavior through public acknowledgment. Every Friday for K-5, Last Friday of the month for 6-8, students demonstrating these core values are honored in front of their peers, creating a school culture where positive behavior is valued and celebrated. Students calculate their Hero Bucks earned so that they can shop at our Hero Hub to earn prizes. Daily, Weekly and Monthly behavior charts are communicated with parents. Special accommodations are made for students with disabilities to ensure they are recognized in ways that align with their individual communication needs, such as visual announcements or customized certificates.

xMA 6-8- Weekly students check their virtual Power Bank account to see how many credits they have earned for the week/month and if they align with their goals for the month. Students make adjustments to goals based on their data.

Figure (36): Daily/Weekly Hero Bucks/ Power Credits Board:

Day	Positive Attitude (P)	Ownership Now (O)	Work Hard (W)	Encourage Others (E)	Respect All (R)	Safety First (S)	Total & Daily Reflection
Monday	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	

Tuesday	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	
Wed.	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	
Thurs.	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	
Friday	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	

Monthly & Yearly Incentives- P.O.W.E.R.S. House Celebration

xMA K-5-At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy, students are consistently recognized and rewarded for demonstrating exemplary behavior, academic achievement, and positive contributions to the school community. At the K-5 Prep school, Teachers nominate a SuperHero of the Month each month and a SuperHero of the Year annually. Our annual end-of-year awards ceremony celebrates students and their families for outstanding accomplishments, including perfect attendance, honor roll distinctions, and awards that reflect our core P.O.W.E.R.S. values: Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, and Safety First.

xMA 6-8-Monthly at our Power House Meetings, students earn promotional rewards and are recognized. Accumulating P.O.W.E.R. Credits allows students to achieve Power Promotions, which grant exclusive privileges. These can include access to special school events, recognition as the P.O.W.E.R. Player of the Month or Year, and other student-led incentives. Promotions reinforce the importance of goal-setting and reward long-term commitment to positive behaviors. Students earning Power Promotions are highlighted as school leaders, enhancing their resumes and preparing them for future career success. Recognition can also involve leadership roles in student-led activities and priority participation in school-wide initiatives. The Power Credits system at xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy not only promotes positive behavior but also prepares students for real-world responsibilities, fostering a sense of achievement and readiness for life beyond school.

xMA K-5 Tiered Behavior Matrix

Our K-5 teachers enforce classroom expectations using our Positive Behavior Supports xMA Tiered Behavior Matrix (Figure 24) that aligns with our PBIS Tier 1-3 system. xMA parents receive daily behavior reports to sign and return to school in their student’s daily folders. In addition, Hero Bucks are awarded based on the color students land by the end of the day.

Figure (37): Hero Board and Interventions Grades K-5 Weekly PBIS Tiered System for Rewards and Interventions

Tier	Weekly Balance of Hero Bucks	Rewards and Interventions
1	25-30 or more Hero Bucks	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Positive phone call 2. Recognition during morning meeting 3. Automatic recipient of xMASuperHero of the Week Award during POWER House Meetings. 4. Opportunity to shop for prizes in the Hero Hub shop.

1	20-25 or more column of Power Board filled with Hero Bucks	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Positive phone call 2. Recognition during morning meeting 3. Eligible for the xMA-SuperHero of the Week Award during POWER House Meetings. 4. Opportunity to shop for prizes in the Hero Hub shop.
2	11-19 or less column of Power Board filled with Hero Bucks	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Goal-setting support for the upcoming week 2. Parent/Guardian contact via text
3	6-10 or less column of Power Board filled with Hero Bucks	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conference with a counselor 2. Parent/Guardian contact via phone 3. Teacher completes MTSS Tier 2 referral
	0-5 or less column of Power Board filled with Hero Bucks	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conference with a counselor 2. Parent/Guardian re-entry meeting is required before the student returns to the classroom 3. Teacher completes MTSS Tier 3 referral

xMA 6-8 Tiered Behavior Matrix

For grades 6-8, we'll transition from morning and afternoon meetings, Hero Bucks, and weekly House Meetings to a more structured daily Advisory class and monthly house meetings. Students earn Power Credits by demonstrating behaviors aligned with our core values: Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, and Safety First. Credits are awarded for leading projects, mentoring peers, participating actively in class, achieving academic milestones, and showing leadership and initiative. Each student maintains a virtual Power Bank Account where their credits are tracked. This encourages them to practice real-world financial skills such as budgeting, saving, and planning for future rewards. During advisory, students will keep up with their balance, plan and set goals for the month. Students can use their credits to gain promotional rewards and privileges at the Monthly Power House Meeting.

Weekly students check their virtual Power Bank account to see how many credits they have earned for the week/month and if they align with their goals for the month. Students make adjustments to goals based on their data. Monthly at our Power House Meetings, students earn promotional rewards and are recognized. Accumulating P.O.W.E.R. Credits allows students to achieve Power Promotions, which grant exclusive privileges. These can include access to special school events, recognition as the P.O.W.E.R. Player of the Month or Year, and other student-led incentives. Promotions reinforce the importance of goal-setting and reward long-term commitment to positive behaviors. Students earning Power Promotions are highlighted as school leaders, enhancing their resumes and preparing them for future career success. Recognition can also involve leadership roles in student-led activities and priority participation in school-wide initiatives. The Power Credits system at xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds

Academy not only promotes positive behavior but also prepares students for real-world responsibilities, fostering a sense of achievement and readiness for life beyond school.

Students will have students unable to meet established norms and expectations expect logical consequences for their behavior. xMA students, teachers, and parents monitor student behavior to determine areas of strength and growth. To track minor student missteps over time, xMA uses a monthly tiered system for interventions and rewards for 6-8 outlined in Figure (25).

Figure (38): Power Credits and Interventions Grades 6-8 Monthly PBIS Tiered System for Rewards and Interventions

Tier	Monthly Balance of Power Credits	Rewards and Interventions
Tier 1	Balance of 30 or more Power Credits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive phone call • Recognition during advisory • Automatic recipient of the Power Promotion Rewards at Power House Meetings, eligible for Power Player of the Month and Year award • Opportunity to earn power credits to in exchange for other student lead incentives
Tier 1	Balance of 20-29 or more Power Credits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition during advisory • Eligibility for Power Promotion Rewards at Power House Meetings, • Opportunity to earn power credits to in exchange for other student lead incentives
Tier 2	Balance of 10-19 or more Power Credits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal-setting support for the upcoming week • Parent/Guardian contact via text
Tier 2	Balance of 1-9 or more Power Credits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent/Guardian contact via phone • Structured Lunch Check-In with reflections and/or Teacher • Teacher completes MTSS Tier 2 referral

Tier 3	Balance of less than 0 Power Credits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conference with a counselor • Parent/Guardian conference • Teacher completes MTSS Tier 3 referral
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Behavioral Support Plans (BSPs)

For students requiring additional support, individualized Behavioral Support Plans (BSPs) are developed in collaboration with families, teachers, and behavior specialists. BSPs include behavior goals, strategies for alternative behaviors, and progress monitoring methods, with regular reviews to ensure they are meeting students' evolving needs. Evidence supports the effectiveness of BSPs, particularly when they are data-driven, collaborative, and regularly updated, for improving outcomes for students with behavioral challenges (Gage et al., 2018). Behavior Support plans are led by our Special Education case managers. Our support plans embed ABA strategies such as tracking ABC data to understand and develop intervention plans.

Interventions for Crisis Situations

We prioritize proactive de-escalation techniques to prevent crisis situations. For students who may experience crises, individualized crisis response plans outline specific procedures, including sensory rooms and calm-down strategies. We adhere strictly to Alabama's Seclusion and Restraint Law, ensuring documentation and parental communication in cases where restraint or seclusion are necessary. Proactive approaches like these are shown to significantly reduce the frequency and intensity of crisis behaviors in school settings (Jones & Feder, 2010).

Suspension and Expulsion

Exclusionary discipline, such as suspension or expulsion, is considered only after all other interventions have been attempted and documented. For students with disabilities, a Manifestation Determination Review (MDR) is conducted to determine whether the behavior is a manifestation of the student's disability. This approach aligns with best practices for ensuring students' rights and providing equitable, inclusive education (Rausch & Skiba, 2004).

Practice #3: Family & Community Involvement

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy, we believe that students thrive when families, educators, and communities work together as partners. We recognize that family engagement is critical to sustaining a strong school culture, promoting positive behavior, and supporting the overall success of every child. Research affirms that schools with active parent collaboration experience higher academic achievement, improved behavior, and stronger student motivation (Epstein, 2001). That's why family involvement is embedded into the heart of our discipline approach and community-building efforts. Throughout the year, xMA hosts Parent emPOWERment Workshops interactive learning sessions led by our school leadership team, Student Support staff, and Principal and Dean of Culture & Instruction. These workshops provide families with practical tools and strategies aligned with our P.O.W.E.R.S. values and schoolwide behavior systems. Topics include home-based reinforcement systems, restorative practices, goal-setting with children, and creating structured routines. These sessions also provide space for families to ask questions, share perspectives, and build a shared understanding of the expectations and values that guide our school.

To further strengthen transparency and collaboration, xMA holds Parent POWER House Meetings quarterly. These sessions serve as open forums to review behavior data trends, clarify policies, gather parent feedback, and celebrate student growth. In doing so, families have a voice in shaping the culture of the school, and staff can respond directly to family needs and insights. These meetings help ensure alignment between school and home, fostering a consistent experience for students across settings.

We also create regular opportunities for families to be present and involved in the day-to-day life of our school. Parents are invited to volunteer in classrooms, assist during events, chaperone field trips, or serve on school culture and planning committees. This level of engagement allows families to witness the school's expectations in action, strengthens their confidence in our approach, and models for students that their success is a shared priority.

Recognizing the diverse needs of our families, we actively connect caregivers with community resources including mental health providers, mentoring organizations, and local service agencies through our student support team. This ensures that wraparound support is available when needed and that no family navigates challenges alone.

At xMA, we don't just invite families if we empower them as full partners in the educational journey. Through consistent communication, culturally responsive programming, and shared responsibility, we create a school community where families feel welcomed, valued, and equipped to support their children's success both at home and at school.

Addressing Student Missteps

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA), we believe that behavior is a form of communication and that every student deserves the opportunity to reflect, repair, and grow. Aligned with our mission to develop confident and self-directed learners, we approach discipline through a developmental and restorative lens that emphasizes accountability, relationship-building, and re-engagement. The goal is always to keep students in the learning environment while helping them take ownership of their actions.

Our behavior support model is embedded within a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), with preventive strategies at Tier 1, targeted interventions at Tier 2, and individualized behavior plans at Tier 3. When a student makes a misstep, staff use proactive reflection tools and structured conversations aligned to our P.O.W.E.R.S. values (Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, and Safety First). Co-teachers, counselors, and the Principal and Dean of Culture & Instruction support this process through daily advisory time and classroom-based interventions.

For ongoing or more intensive behavioral needs, the xMA behavior leadership team including the Executive Director, Principal, Director of Student Supports, Dean of Culture & Instruction, Counselor, and other specialists develops a student-centered support plan. These plans emphasize reflection, skill-building, and re-entry strategies to prevent recurrence and promote long-term growth. Restorative practices, including circle dialogues, peer mediation, and reparation projects, help students reestablish trust within the school community. Suspension is used only when necessary for safety and always as a last resort after all other supports and interventions have been documented.

Addressing Major Infractions

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy follows the Birmingham City Schools Code of Student Conduct to ensure alignment with Alabama state discipline policies and transparent, equitable procedures. Infractions are grouped into three classes: Minor (Class I), Intermediate (Class II), and Major (Class III). Class III offenses such as those involving weapons, drugs, or significant threats to safety may result in long-term suspension or expulsion after all other appropriate behavioral and restorative interventions have been exhausted.

xMA's discipline policy balances accountability with support. For all infractions, students participate in restorative reflection aligned with the P.O.W.E.R.S. values and, when appropriate, guided meditation or preparation activities. For serious behavior concerns, a Manifestation Determination Review (MDR) is conducted for students with disabilities to ensure legal protections and equitable treatment under IDEA. All responses to behavior are guided by a commitment to fairness, student dignity, and re-engagement in the learning process.

The xMA Student Code of Conduct outlines expectations for safe, respectful, and responsible behavior, reinforcing a culture of belonging and safety. A complete description of behaviors and consequences for each class of infraction, along with discretionary and mandatory disciplinary actions, is included in Attachment [xMA Discipline Policy & Code of Conduct] of the application. This ensures families, staff, and students all understand the process and support in place to uphold a safe, inclusive learning community.

[xMA Discipline Policy & Code of Conduct](#)

Interventions Based on the Violation Level

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy, behavior is addressed through a tiered, proactive approach grounded in MTSS, PBIS, SEL, and restorative practices. Our interventions prioritize re-teaching, reflection, relationship-building, and student support rather than punishment. More intensive levels

of intervention include individualized behavior supports, targeted SEL skill-building, and coordinated problem-solving with families and specialists.

Class I Violations –Classroom Based Interventions

Minor disruptions or low-level behaviors that do not pose a safety concern. Addressed by the observing staff member.

Class I Interventions

- Restorative: Teacher/student conferences, affective statements/questions, check-ins.
- Supports: Re-teaching expectations, visual cues, sensory breaks, de-escalation strategies, parent contact.

Class I Consequences

- Teacher or parent conference
- Temporary removal from class
- Detention
- Loss of privilege/social probation
- School work detail
- Restorative peer group

No suspension for Level I. If behaviors persist, support from the Director of Student Supports or Director of Student Supports may be requested.

Class II Violations – Targeted Interventions

Recurring Level I behaviors or moderate acts directed at others or property that do not threaten safety.

Class II Interventions

- Restorative: 1:1 counseling, reflective circles, restorative planning meetings.
- Targeted SEL: Small group instruction, check-in/check-out, parent collaboration.
- ABA Strategies: Behavioral tracking, ABC assessments, task boards, individualized reinforcement.

Class II Consequences

- Parent conference
- Temporary removal with reintegration
- In-school suspension
- Behavior Support Plan (BSP)
- Referral to mental health/SEL supports
- Loss of privilege/social probation

Out-of-school suspension is not used for Level II. Students participate in reflection and problem-solving.

Class III Violations: Administrative and Restorative Responses

Severe disruptions, threats, or acts endangering others, requiring administrative response and due process.

Class III Interventions

- Restorative: Restorative conferences, restitution, support team meetings.
- ABA Strategies: Behavior contracts, high-structure routines, crisis planning (with BCBA guidance as needed).

Class III Consequences

- In-school suspension
- Out-of-school suspension (not to exceed four days)
- Detention
- Loss of privileges
- Referral to outside agency
- Support team conference

All Class III responses are individualized, legally compliant, and focused on support and reintegration. Students are given the opportunity to reflect on the incident, voice their perspective, and participate in designing their re-entry or repair plan. Restorative practices, skill-building, and family involvement are prioritized over exclusion.

At xMA, we believe student growth stems from support, not punishment. Discipline is integrated into our MTSS framework and SEL program to ensure that each student receives the appropriate level of intervention and restoration. Our approach emphasizes reflection, restoration, and realignment with our P.O.W.E.R.S. values to help students build the habits and mindsets needed for long-term success.

Citations

1. Nicholas A. Gage et al., [Study on Data-Driven Behavioral Support Plans and Student Outcomes], 2018.
2. David E. Jones and Janet Feder, [Article on Proactive Crisis Prevention and Reduction of Seclusion and Restraint in Schools], 2010.
3. M. Karega Rausch and Russell J. Skiba, [Study on Suspension, Expulsion, and Equity in School Discipline], 2004.

b) Give a list and definitions of the offenses for which students in the school must (where non-discretionary) and may (where discretionary) be suspended or expelled, respectively.

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy Code of Conduct

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA), our Code of Conduct is designed to uphold a positive, inclusive, and safe learning environment where every student is empowered to grow academically, socially, and emotionally. The Code outlines clear behavioral expectations aligned with our P.O.W.E.R.S. values Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, and Safety First and applies to all students, staff, and community members.

Our discipline practices are grounded in restorative approaches, culturally responsive strategies, and the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework. These practices are designed to proactively teach expectations, foster accountability, repair harm, and restore community when missteps occur. In alignment with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), students with disabilities receive appropriate behavioral support and accommodations, and their rights are protected in all disciplinary procedures.

To ensure clarity and consistency, student infractions are categorized into three levels:

- Class I – Minor Violations: Disruptions or behaviors that interfere with classroom routines or school norms.
- Class II – Intermediate Violations: Repeated or more disruptive behaviors that may impact others but do not present an immediate safety threat.
- Class III – Major Violations: Serious incidents involving threats to safety, significant property damage, or potential criminal behavior.

For Class III infractions, students may be subject to long-term suspension or expulsion only after a full review process, including restorative interventions and due process protocols. All disciplinary actions whether discretionary or non-discretionary will be administered fairly and transparently, with an emphasis on reflection, repair, and reintegration.

A full list of offense definitions, aligned with Birmingham City Schools and Alabama state reporting requirements, as well as guidance on suspension and expulsion procedures, is included in the xMA Code of Conduct Attachment.

Class 1: Minor Violations

1.1 Excessive distraction of other students - Engaging in behaviors that interfere with the learning environment of others, such as talking out of turn, making unnecessary noises, or engaging in disruptive behavior.

1.2 Tardiness - Arriving late to class without a valid excuse, thereby disrupting the flow of instruction and learning.

1.3 Nonconformity to dress code - Failure to adhere to the school's dress code policy, which may include wearing inappropriate clothing, accessories, or footwear.

1.4 Inappropriate public display of affection - Engaging in physical displays of affection (e.g., hugging, kissing) in a manner that is not suitable for a school setting.

1.5 Unauthorized absence from class or school - Leaving class or school grounds without permission, which disrupts the educational process.

1.6 Repeated refusal to complete class assignments - Consistently refusing to participate in classwork or failing to bring necessary materials, undermining the learning experience.

1.7 Vehicular violations - Operating a vehicle in a manner that violates school parking or driving regulations, endangering the safety of others.

1.8 Out of the assigned area - Being in a location on school grounds that is not designated for student use during class time without permission.

1.9 Horseplay/shoving/running/minor disruption - Engaging in playful or rough behavior that disrupts the classroom or school environment.

1.10 Failure to serve school-based discipline assignments - Not completing assigned disciplinary actions, such as detention, which undermines the school's efforts to correct behavior.

1.11 Any other offense the principal may reasonably deem to fall within this category - This includes any additional behaviors that disrupt the learning environment and are deemed minor by the school administration.

Class 2: Intermediate Violations

2.1 Defiance of school board employee's authority - Any verbal or non-verbal refusal to comply with a lawful and reasonable direction or order of an X.S.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy employee.

2.2 Gambling - Participation in any form of gambling, including betting on games or events, which is not permissible on school property.

2.3 Use of profane, obscene, or racially offensive language - Use of language or gestures that are disrespectful, derogatory, or offensive to others within the school community.

2.4 Disruption on a school bus - Engaging in behaviors that disturb the safe and orderly operation of a school bus, affecting the driver's ability to transport students safely.

2.5 Possession of pornographic material - Having in one's possession any material that is sexually explicit or inappropriate for the school environment.

2.6 Misuse or abuse of any computer or computer program - Inappropriate or unauthorized use of school technology, including hacking, accessing inappropriate content, or using school resources for personal gain.

2.7 Leaving school premises without permission - Exiting school grounds during school hours without prior approval from school officials.

2.8 Trespassing - Entering school property without permission, particularly after hours or while suspended.

2.9 Academic dishonesty - Engaging in cheating, plagiarism, or any form of deceit in academic work, undermining the integrity of the educational process.

2.10 Intentionally providing false information - Deliberately lying or providing misleading information to school officials, which could affect school operations or student safety.

2.11 Illegal organizations: fraternities, sororities, gangs, and secret societies - Involvement in organizations that are not sanctioned by the school, which could promote illegal activities or disrupt the school environment.

2.12 Any other offense the principal may reasonably deem to fall within this category - Additional behaviors that do not align with school values and disrupt the educational experience.

Class 3: Major Violations

3.1 Possession and/or use of tobacco products, including lighters and matches - Having or using any tobacco products on school property or during school-sponsored events, which is strictly prohibited.

3.2 Battery upon students - Actual and intentional striking of another student against the will of the other student, causing bodily harm to the individual. This will result in an automatic suspension of up to three days from school. The severity and maturity of the participants may constitute a major offense.

3.3 Fighting - Physical conflict (e.g., fisticuffs) between two or more individuals. This will result in an automatic suspension of up to three days from school. Due to the inherent disruption of fighting, the suspension may take effect immediately.

3.4 Vandalism - Intentional and deliberate action resulting in injury or damages of less than \$200.00 to public property or the real estate or personal property of another. Restitution is required.

3.5 Stealing, larceny, theft - The intentional unlawful taking and/or carrying away of property valued at less than \$100.00 belonging to or in the lawful possession or custody of another. Restitution is required.

3.6 Possession of stolen property with knowledge that it is stolen - Having property that one knows to be stolen, which reflects intent to deprive the rightful owner of their property.

3.7 Threats; extortion - Making threats to harm another person or their property in order to obtain something of value or exert control.

3.8 Threats, harassment, or intimidation of a student - Any actions or statements intended to instill fear or discomfort in another student, affecting their ability to feel safe and secure in school.

3.9 Possession of fireworks or firecrackers - Having any type of explosive or incendiary device on school property, which poses a safety hazard.

3.10 Offensive touching of another person - Unwanted physical contact that is inappropriate and violates personal boundaries.

3.11 Sexual harassment - Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that creates a hostile environment.

3.12 Use of obscene manifestations (verbal, written, physical) toward another person - Engaging in acts or language that are vulgar or disrespectful, which undermine the values of the school community.

3.13 Directing obscene or profane language to an adult - Using inappropriate language towards a staff member or adult in the school setting, showing a lack of respect.

3.14 Violating Alabama's criminal statutes - Engaging in any activity that constitutes a violation of state laws, which may involve law enforcement intervention.

3.15 Physical contact with other students - Engaging in any unwanted physical interaction that disrupts the educational environment.

3.16 Unjustified activation of a fire alarm system - Activating a fire alarm without cause, causing unnecessary panic and disruption to the school community.

3.17 Hazing at school or school-sanctioned events - Engaging in initiation activities that are abusive or harmful to others, creating a hostile environment.

3.18 Technology infraction - Violating school policies regarding the use of technology, including accessing prohibited content or using devices inappropriately.

3.19 Any other offense the principal may reasonably deem to fall within this category - Any additional serious behaviors that compromise the safety and integrity of the school environment

[See Discipline and Code of Conduct Policy attachment.](#)

c) Provide an explanation of how the school will consider the rights of special education students and students with disabilities in disciplinary actions and proceedings.

Students with Disabilities Rights

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) is steadfast in its commitment to safeguarding the rights of all students, including those identified as having disabilities and those receiving special education services. To meet these obligations, xMA employs the Student Support Team team that includes teachers, staff, the Principal, Dean of Culture & Instruction, the Executive Director, and Special Education (SPED) professionals. This team collaborates to identify, document, and address behavioral needs and goals, ensuring that students receive individualized support designed to de-escalate behaviors and foster academic and social success.

In the event that a student receiving services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 commits a serious disciplinary infraction (classified as a Class III offense), xMA adheres to the Birmingham City Schools' Code of Student Conduct while complying with all pertinent state and federal regulations. This commitment ensures equitable treatment and access to educational resources for all students.

The discipline process is overseen by the Principal and Dean of Culture & Instruction who is responsible for communicating disciplinary measures to students and their families and facilitating discussions. The Executive Director reviews and provides final authorization for all disciplinary actions, ensuring procedural integrity. When an infraction involves a student with a 504 Plan or a special education designation, a review committee convenes to confirm adherence to legal standards and best practices.

Central to this process is the manifestation determination meeting conducted by the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team. The purpose of this meeting is to evaluate:

- Whether the student's behavior was a manifestation of their disability.
- Whether the student was appropriately placed and receiving the appropriate services at the time of the incident.
- Whether the behavior intervention strategies in place were consistent with the student's IEP or 504 Plan.

Should the IEP team conclude that the misconduct was not a manifestation of the student's disability, that appropriate placement and services were provided, the student may face consequences as outlined in xMA's discipline policy. Conversely, if the behavior is determined to be a direct result of the student's disability, the IEP team may conduct a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) and develop or revise a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP), with all modifications documented in the student's IEP. It is essential to note that only the IEP team has the authority to modify the placement of a student receiving special education services. Additionally, no such student shall be excluded from school for more than ten cumulative days without an IEP team review to evaluate the need for potential changes to their educational placement.

These protocols reflect xMA's dedication to ensuring compliance with educational law while maintaining the highest standards of student-centered support. This approach underscores the Academy's commitment to fostering a fair, inclusive, and supportive educational environment where all students have the opportunity to succeed.

d) Discuss the procedures for due process when a student is suspended or expelled as a result of a code of conduct violation, including a description of the appeal process that the school will employ

for students facing expulsion and a plan for providing services to students who are expelled or out of school for more than ten days.

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy Due Process for Suspensions, Expulsions, and Appeals

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) is committed to upholding the educational rights and safety of all students, with special attention given to those with disabilities, at-risk students, and English Language Learners. Any student facing disciplinary action at xMA is entitled to a fair and thorough due process, which encompasses several key rights. These include being informed of the specific reason for the proposed disciplinary measure, the opportunity to share their perspective, the right to present witnesses or relevant evidence, and communication with parents or guardians both verbally and in writing within 48 hours. The Academy ensures that all students are treated equitably, without discrimination based on race, sex, creed, color, religion, national origin, or disability.

Suspension Procedures

The discipline process at xMA is managed by the Principal and Dean of Culture & Instruction who oversees communication with students and parents and recommends disciplinary actions. However, the Executive Director is responsible for reviewing and formally approving any suspension decisions. When suspension is considered, due process is fully documented, and the student and their legal guardian receive a formal written notice detailing the reasons for suspension and any stipulations for reinstatement, such as attending a restorative conference or fulfilling restitution.

Within 5 to 10 school days from the issuance of the suspension notice, a hearing is conducted, where the following procedures are observed:

- The student attends the hearing with their legal guardian.
- The Principal who recommended the suspension, presents all relevant evidence related to the alleged infraction.
- The student is given the opportunity to admit or deny the allegations.
- The student is allowed to share their perspective and present any supporting evidence.
- The student may call witnesses to testify on their behalf.
- The Executive Director and Principal evaluates the evidence, determines whether the alleged offense occurred, and decides on an appropriate consequence.
- A written summary of the incident, evidence, and resulting intervention is prepared by the Executive Director.
- A written decision is provided to the student and their family within 48 hours of the hearing.

Appeal Process

Students and their families have the right to appeal the Executive Director's decision to the xMA Board of Directors. The appeal process involves a minimum of three Board members reviewing the case according to the following protocol:

- The Executive Director presents a written report to the Board, including evidence that due process was followed.
- The student is given the opportunity to present their account of the events.
- The family may advocate on behalf of the student during the appeal.
- The Board deliberates and issues a written decision to the family, student, and Executive Director within 48 hours. If the Board overturns the decision, the Executive Director will assign an alternative consequence.
- The decision made by the Board of Directors is final.

Continuation of Education and Re-Entry Planning

For students expelled or removed from school for more than ten days, xMA ensures continuity of education through a structured virtual learning environment. The student continues to have access to all necessary support, including special education and 504 services. The Director of Student Supports works with the student's teachers to create a remote, individualized learning plan that includes progress monitoring. Prior to the student's return to school, the team reconvenes to develop

a comprehensive re-entry plan, promoting a seamless and supportive transition back into the school environment.

Through these procedures, xMA demonstrates its commitment to maintaining a fair, equitable, and nurturing educational environment while fostering accountability and student growth.

e) Provide the school's proposed discipline policy. Discuss how students and parents will be informed of the school's policies.

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy, we collaborate with students and families to establish a shared vision for student behavior and our Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework. This vision and our behavioral expectations are communicated during the POWERHOUSE Kickoff, a dedicated week at the beginning of the school year focused on setting the tone for positive behavior and engagement.

Our expectations are also shared with parents during the first Parent emPOWERment Workshop and Open House, ensuring families are fully informed and equipped to support their child's behavioral development. Additionally, these guidelines are outlined in detail within the Family Handbook, which all families receive and must acknowledge in writing.

To further support understanding, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy hosts monthly Parent emPOWERment Workshops. These parent learning sessions are led by our Principal, Dean of Culture & Instruction and Leadership team and are designed to provide parents with valuable resources and strategies for effective discipline at home. The workshops also serve as a platform to communicate and reinforce expectations related to the school's discipline policies, ensuring families are equipped to support their child's behavioral growth and align with school practices.

School's Discipline Policy [Attachment](#)

School's Discipline Policy	File name:	xMA Discipline Policy & Code of Conduct (2).pdf
	Uploaded:	03/11/2026 11:07 PM
	Uploaded by:	Melissa Capehart

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

13. Family and Community Involvement

Reviewer Instructions

Please rate this section using the provided rubric.

Status: Completed

Form Result

Provide evidence of significant engagement efforts with the community in which the proposed school will reside.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Compelling evidence of how parents and community members will directly, consistently and appropriately be involved in the development of the proposed school.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

a) Describe and provide evidence of the role to date of any parents and community members involved in developing the proposed school. Evidence may include sign-in sheets, surveys, photos, and direct feedback by community members.

The design and development of xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) has been deeply rooted in community collaboration and family voice. From the beginning, the founding team made it a priority to engage parents, caregivers, and local stakeholders as co-creators of the school model. We have held over 75 individual meetings, over 125 community engagement survey responses and over 30 letters of support to date. This process has been informed and supported through coaching and design assistance from BES, New Schools for Alabama and NewSchools Venture Fund, who guided the team in building a prototype and testing the core assumptions behind the xMA educational approach. Over 75 individual meetings were conducted with families, educators, nonprofit leaders, faith-based organizations, business owners, and youth advocates across Birmingham and surrounding communities. These conversations helped shape core components of the model including the S.T.R.E.A.M. focus, personalized learning approach, and commitment to social-emotional development based on local needs and aspirations for a more inclusive, future-ready public school option. Under the guidance of BES and New Schools for Alabama, xMA created a prototype of its instructional and culture systems, tested key assumptions, and structured a comprehensive community engagement strategy.

The founding team facilitated multiple in-person and virtual meetings to share the draft mission, vision, and design of the school, inviting feedback, questions, and collaborative input from community members. A recurring theme echoed throughout these sessions: families want a school that addresses academic achievement and develops character, resilience, and future-ready skills. Parents expressed a desire for small class sizes, individualized supports, hands-on learning experiences, and a culture where their children feel seen, supported, and celebrated.

To deepen this understanding, the team conducted empathy interviews with families across Birmingham. Many shared stories of their children feeling unseen, disconnected, or unsupported in traditional classrooms. These stories shaped key components of xMA's instructional model, such as personalized learning portfolios, daily S.T.R.E.A.M. activities, and visual supports that promote independence, agency, and meaningful engagement for all learners.

Digital outreach also played a major role. Through accessible surveys shared across social media and community networks, xMA gathered input from 125 Birmingham-area families, producing clear and consistent patterns of support for the school's launch.

Community feedback directly influenced several key design decisions in the xMA school model. Families consistently emphasized the need for small class sizes, individualized academic support, hands-on learning experiences, and strong social-emotional supports. As a result, the founding team incorporated a personalized learning model that includes small-group instruction, mastery-based progression, and individualized learning plans. Parents also expressed strong interest in early exposure to STEM and creative disciplines, which reinforced the school's decision to adopt a fully integrated S.T.R.E.A.M. curriculum beginning in kindergarten. Additionally, community conversations highlighted the importance of safe, inclusive environments and strong communication between school and home, leading to the development of xMA's family engagement structures, parent workshops, and the Parent emPOWERment series. These insights demonstrate that the school's design was shaped not only by research and best practices but also by the priorities expressed by Birmingham families.

xMA has collected over 30 letters of support from parents, community members, advocates and businesses across the city of Birmingham. See letters of support attachment linked below.

[xMA Letters of Support-LINKED HERE](#)

Survey data revealed overwhelming alignment between community needs and the xMA design:

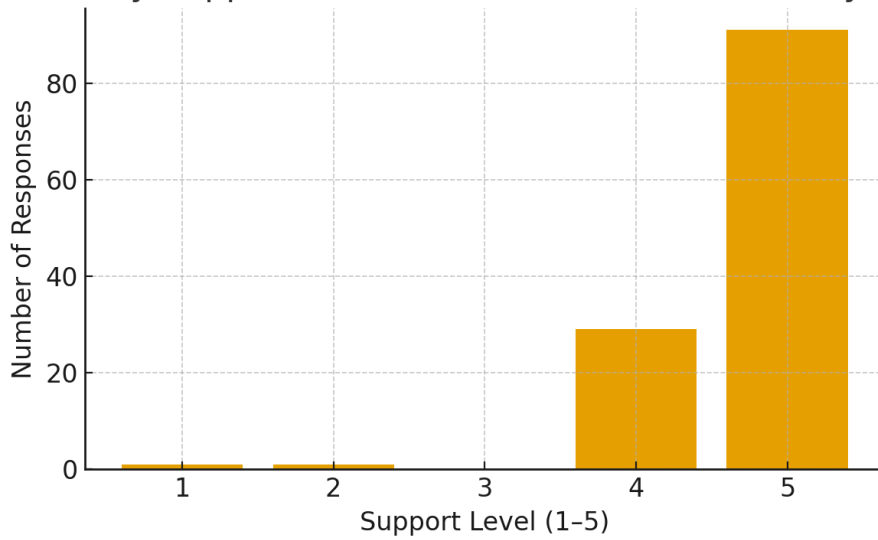
- Community Support:

When asked to rate their support for the opening of xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy, over 95% of respondents rated their support as a 4 or 5, with the large majority 91 families (72.8%)

selecting a “5 – Strong Support.”

Figure (39): Community Support for xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy

Community Support for xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (n=125)



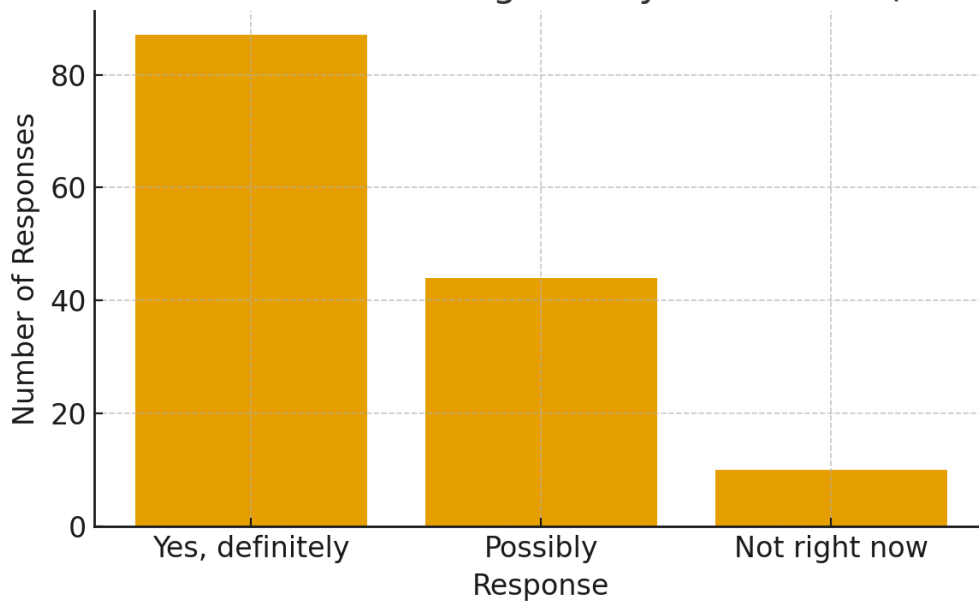
• Enrollment Intent:

Interest in attending xMA was similarly strong.

- 87 families (69.6%) stated they would “definitely enroll” their child.
- 44 families (34.8%) expressed high interest and wanted to learn more.
- Only 10 families (7.6%) indicated they were not currently planning to enroll.

Figure (40) - Enrollment Intent Among Surveyed Families

Enrollment Intent Among Surveyed Families (n=125)

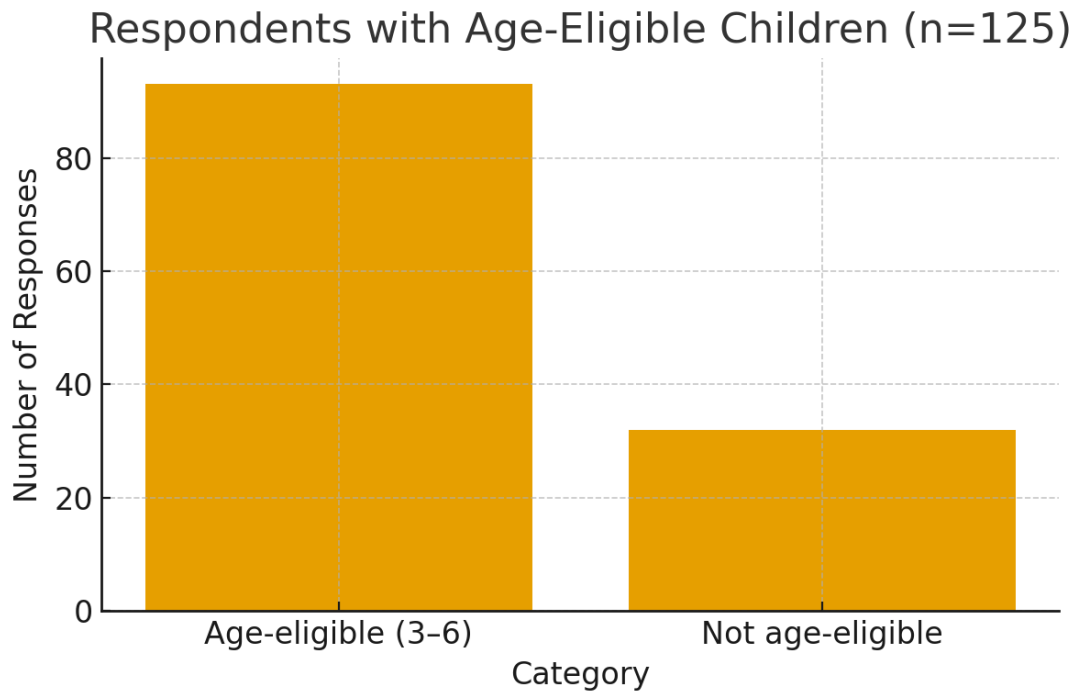


Families frequently cited hands-on S.T.R.E.A.M. learning, personalized instruction, small class sizes, and strong SEL supports as the primary reasons they would choose xMA.

- Age-Eligible Demand:

Importantly, 74.45% of respondents (93 families) currently have age-eligible children (ages 3–6) who would qualify for xMA’s proposed K–2 opening year. The remaining 25.3% (32 families) did not yet have school-aged children but expressed strong interest in future enrollment. This indicates a strong early-enrollment pipeline aligned with the school’s slow-growth model.

Figure (41):Age-Eligible Respondents



Families also used open-response survey questions to highlight priorities such as mental health supports, culturally responsive practices, early STEM exposure, special education inclusion, and opportunities for robotics, art, coding, and hands-on projects. These insights directly informed xMA’s curriculum plan, staffing model, culture systems, and parent engagement structures.

xMA’s development has also been strengthened by ongoing partnerships with youth programs, childcare providers, disability advocacy organizations, libraries, faith communities, and local small businesses many of whom have offered to support early family engagement events, STREAM Camps, enrichment programming, or community-based projects. These collaborations reflect xMA’s commitment to designing a school with the community, not just for the community.

Evidence of Community Involvement

File 1

File name: _xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy Community Feedback (Responses)- Application (3).xlsx
Uploaded: 03/11/2026 11:20 PM
Uploaded by: Melissa Capehart

File 2

File name: _xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy Family Feedback Survey (Responses)-Application (2).xlsx
Uploaded: 03/11/2026 11:20 PM
Uploaded by: Melissa Capehart

File 3

File name: xSTREAM MINDS ACADEMY SUPPORT LETTER 2025 (ALL)- revised state app.pdf
Uploaded: 03/11/2026 11:20 PM
Uploaded by: Melissa Capehart

File 4

File name: XMA events- application (1).pdf
Uploaded: 03/11/2026 11:20 PM
Uploaded by: Melissa Capehart

b) Describe and provide evidence of initiatives to assess and build parent and community demand for the school. Describe planned engagement efforts with parents and community members from the time that the school is approved through opening.

Understanding the Community xMA Will Serve: Enrollment Feasibility & East Birmingham Rationale
xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy's community engagement and recruitment strategy is grounded in a comprehensive understanding of the East Birmingham educational landscape, early childhood demographics, and the priorities expressed by families across the region. Before launching the school's formal multi-phase engagement cycle, the founding team conducted an extensive analysis of local academic performance, held structured interviews and focus groups with families, collected community-wide survey data, and visited high-performing schools nationwide through opportunities provided by BES and New Schools for Alabama. These insights confirmed both the need and the demand for a personalized, STREAM-focused, high-performing public school option in East Birmingham.

Enrollment Feasibility

Demographic and early-grade enrollment data in East Birmingham and the surrounding Jefferson County neighborhoods demonstrate a strong and sustainable pipeline for xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA). In 2024–25, Birmingham City Schools in the target region enrolled 159 Pre-K students, while nearby Jefferson County schools enrolled an additional 263 Pre-K students, totaling 422 Pre-K children within xMA's immediate recruitment area. Kindergarten enrollment patterns reinforce this depth of demand: the same East Birmingham schools enrolled 364 Kindergarten students, and the surrounding Jefferson County schools enrolled 732 Kindergarten students, reflecting consistently high early-grade participation across the region.

Taken together, these communities represent more than 1,500 children ages 3–6, concentrated within neighborhoods that mirror xMA's mission, student profile, and instructional approach. These enrollment patterns show both strong early-childhood density and stable year-over-year demand

for schools serving young learners. Even modest interest from 5–7% of families in this population would fully enroll xMA’s opening cohort of 140 students (grades K–2), confirming the feasibility and long-term sustainability of the school’s enrollment projections.

Figure (3): Enrollment Feasibility



Location

East Birmingham was intentionally selected as xMA’s primary focus area because persistent academic trends reveal both significant opportunity gaps and strong potential for transformative impact. Family interviews reinforce this reality, with parents sharing that their children “weren’t challenged enough,” needed “more small-group instruction,” or were searching for “a school that truly sees them.” Together, these patterns underscore a clear and urgent need for a personalized, inclusive, and STREAM-aligned learning model that meets the diverse needs of East Birmingham’s learners. Demographic, academic, and early-grade enrollment patterns across East Birmingham and the surrounding Jefferson County neighborhoods further strengthen the case for xMA.

The targeted East Birmingham schools Huffman Academy, Martha Gaskins Elementary, W.J. Christian, and Sun Valley Elementary serve communities with high concentrations of African American students (67%–96%) and economically disadvantaged families (65%–96%), alongside substantial populations of students with disabilities (4%–25%) and English Language Learners (25%–57%). These demographic patterns are reflected in persistent academic challenges: reading proficiency ranges from 37% to 47%, math from 13% to 17%, and science often falls below 15%, suggesting limited access to rigorous instruction and early exposure to hands-on STEM learning. Together, these schools illustrate both the tremendous potential of East Birmingham’s students and the deep inequities that xMA aims to address through a personalized, inclusive, and STREAM-centered educational model.

Figure (41): BCS Achievement Data

Birmingham City Schools Achievement Data					
School	Reading (24-25)	Math (24-25)	Science (24-25)	African American students (24-25)	Economically Disadvantage (24-25)
Huffman Academy Elementary (P-5)	37%	13%	10%	86%	85%
Students with Disabilities	4.00%	4%	6%		
ELL	25%	4%	4%		
Martha Gaskins Elementary (K-5)	41%	15%	11%	67%	84%
Students with Disabilities	9%	12%	0%		
ELL	31%	8%	20%		
W.J. Christian Elementary (PreK-8)	82%	45%	46%	89%	65%
Students with Disabilities	25%	18%	17%		
ELL	57%	13%	0%		
Sun Valley Elementary (P-5)	47%	17%	15%	96%	81%
Students with Disabilities	14%	4%	19%		
ELL	50%	33%	0%		

Academic performance trends further reinforce the need for a more rigorous, personalized instructional model that meets these diverse learning profiles. Across the targeted schools, students with disabilities (SWD) and English Language Learners (ELL) consistently perform far below their peers in every tested subject revealing some of the deepest opportunity gaps in the region. SWD proficiency drops as low as 4% in reading and math at Huffman Academy and 9–12% at Martha Gaskins, while even higher-performing schools like W.J. Christian report SWD results 20–30 points below overall averages. ELL students demonstrate similar disparities, with proficiency as low as 4% in math and science at Huffman, 8–20% at Martha Gaskins, 13% in math at W.J. Christian, and 0% in science at Sun Valley. These patterns underscore the need for a school intentionally designed to support diverse learners. xMA’s instructional model grounded in Universal Design for Learning (UDL), mastery-based progression, targeted small-group instruction, and STREAM-aligned experiential learning is built to close these gaps and ensure equitable access to high-quality learning for all students.

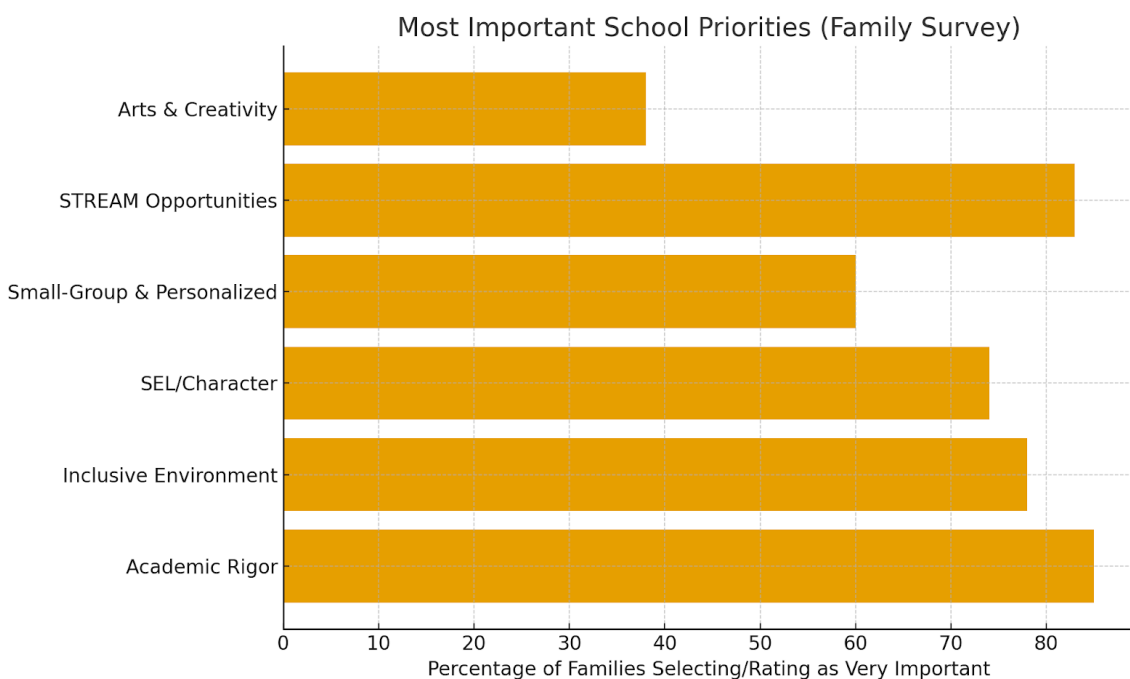
To develop a deep understanding of family needs and aspirations, the founding team conducted 25 parent focus groups and detailed interviews with surveys, along with 125 additional family and community engagement surveys across the East Birmingham corridor. This mixed-methods dataset revealed exceptionally strong alignment between community priorities and xMA’s instructional model:

- 85% prioritized academic rigor
- 78% prioritized an inclusive, supportive environment
- 74% emphasized social-emotional learning and character education
- 60% identified small-group and personalized instruction as top needs

- 83% rated STREAM as “very important”
- 88% rated personalized learning as “very important”
- 96% rated SEL as “very important”

Families also emphasized the need for hands-on learning, predictable routines, safe and affirming classrooms, clear communication, and staff with strong skills in supporting diverse academic and social-emotional profiles. Community voices consistently validated xMA’s focus on personalization, STREAM integration, mastery-based progression, and a school culture anchored in SEL and the P.O.W.E.R.S. values.

Figure (42): School Priorities



This community-informed landscape forms the foundation for the phased engagement approach described below.

Phase 1: Feedback & Insight Gathering (August–December 2024)

Phase 1 centered on listening deeply to families, educators, and community partners across Birmingham. Through more than 75 conversations with parents, early childhood providers, disability advocates, faith leaders, and neighborhood organizations, the founding team gathered rich insight into families’ aspirations and the barriers they face in accessing consistent, rigorous, and affirming public school options. Feedback collected across the city consistently pointed to East Birmingham as the area with the greatest need for a high-quality public charter school, guiding the intentional selection of this community as xMA’s primary focus area. Families expressed a desire for stronger small-group instruction, individualized support, culturally responsive environments, and a school that “truly sees” their children.

To deepen the design process, xMA leaders engaged in national school visits and targeted training supported by BES and New Schools for Alabama. Site visits included high-performing, mission-aligned schools such as Memphis Rise Academy, Brooklyn STEAM Academy, Valor, Nashville Classical, South Shore, Purpose Prep, Tapestry, Arizona Autism Charter, South Florida

Autism Charter, CAST STEM High School, Compass Rose Public Schools, and DREAM Charter Schools. Across these campuses, the team studied effective recruitment strategies, community-centered engagement practices, restorative culture systems, mastery-based instructional models, and STREAM-integrated learning environments that have demonstrated strong outcomes for historically underserved student populations.

Through training and support from BES and New Schools for Alabama, the xMA team strengthened its expertise in empathy interviewing, community asset mapping, authentic family engagement, and building feedback loops that ensure community voice directly informs school design. These insights reinforced xMA's commitment to a STREAM-integrated, personalized, mastery-based model anchored in social-emotional learning and strong relationships laying the groundwork for the more structured outreach and data collection that continued in Phase 2.

Phase 2: Community Awareness & Feedback (January 2025–July 2026)

During Phase 2, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy expanded its engagement across East Birmingham through deeper outreach, targeted events, and comprehensive data collection efforts. xMA conducted 25 parent focus groups and detailed interviews, along with 125 family and community engagement surveys, producing a robust dataset that captured families' priorities, needs, and experiences.

Survey findings revealed strong alignment with xMA's vision. A large majority of families selected academic rigor (85%), an inclusive and supportive environment (78%), and social-emotional development (74%) as core school priorities. Small-group and personalized instruction emerged as a top priority for 60% of families highlighting the need for instruction that adapts to individual learning needs.

STREAM learning also surfaced as a major area of enthusiasm. While families prioritized core academics and personalization first, their rating-scale responses revealed overwhelming support for hands-on STREAM experiences: 83% of all respondents rated STREAM as "very important." Many families described interest in robotics, coding, engineering design challenges, drones, and real-world, project-based learning aligned with future career pathways.

Personalized learning emerged as one of the strongest themes in the dataset: 88% of families rated it "very important." Families emphasized flexible pacing, small-group instruction, Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs), mastery-based progression, blended learning, and teacher-student goal-setting conferences all of which directly align with xMA's instructional model.

Social-emotional learning (SEL) was the highest shared priority across all categories: 96% rated it "very important." Families highlighted the need for positive culture, mental health supports, restorative practices, and intentional conflict-resolution skills. Several families expressed frustration with current school environments being "too large," "too restrictive," or "not equipped to support students with diverse needs," reinforcing the necessity of a smaller, relationally grounded, predictable learning environment.

Figure (43):xMA Survey Feedback- STREAM

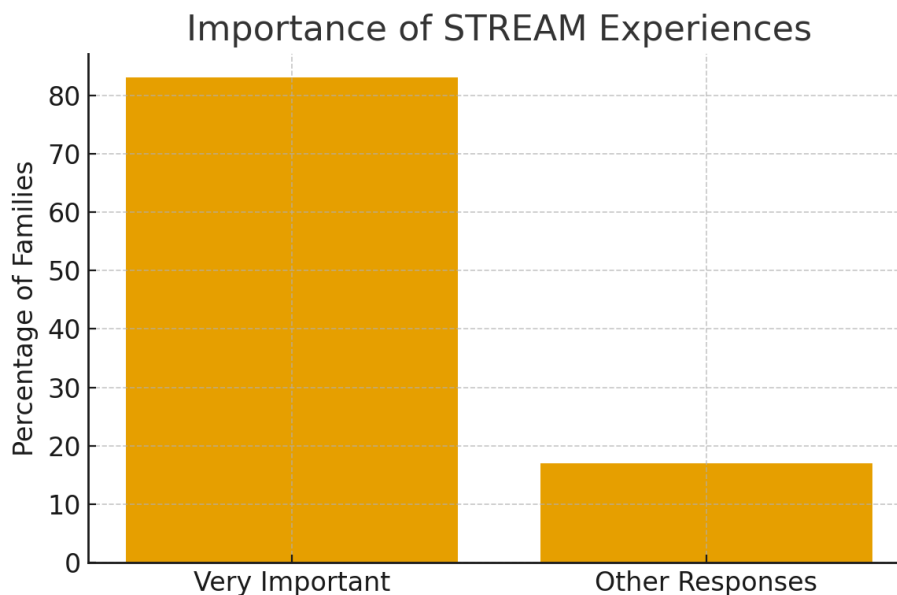
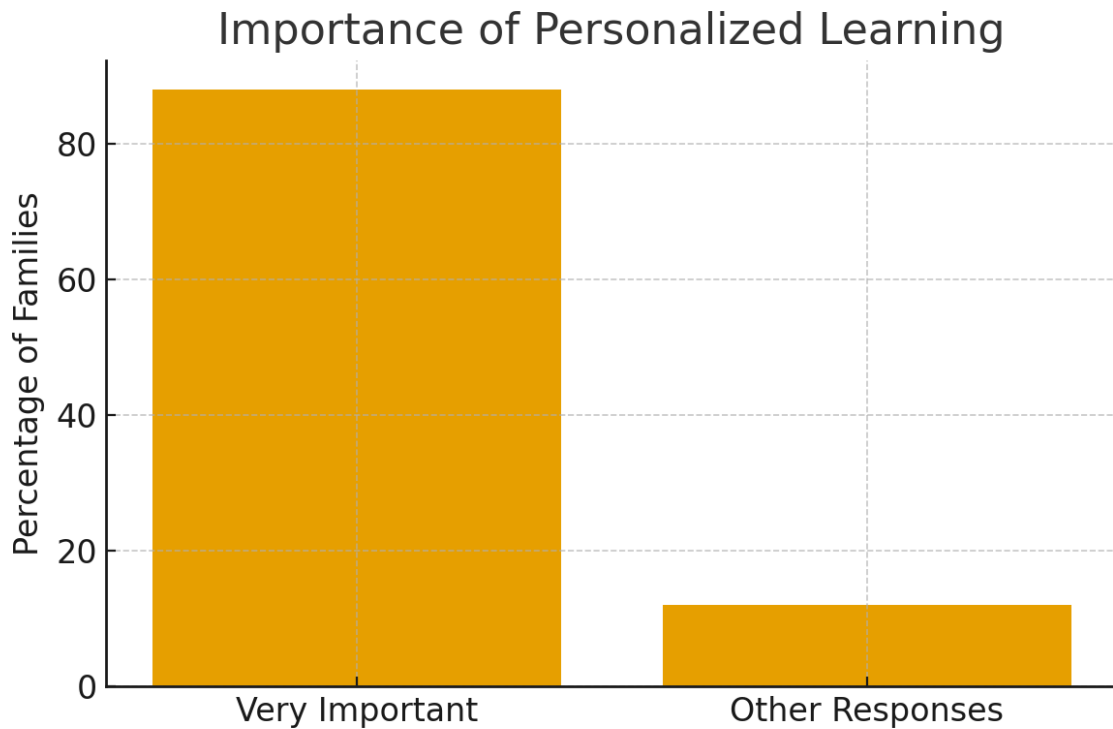


Figure (44):xMA Survey Feedback-Personalized Learning



Phase 2 also included extensive community engagement and recruiting events. Below are a few examples of events hosted throughout East Birmingham with the founding team:

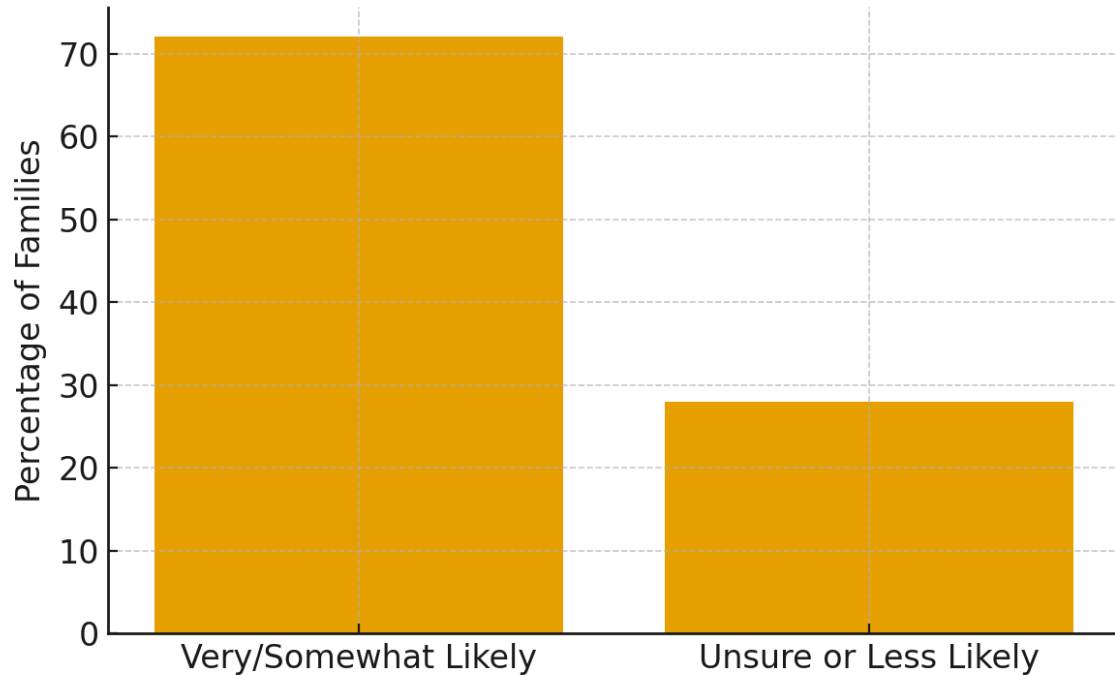
- Coffee Chats at Rochelle's Coffee Shop
- Virtual and In-Person Community Meetings
- Lunch & Learn at Zatie's Kitchen
- A major Trunk-or-Treat event at Center Point Church of Christ
- Diapers to Diplomas with local daycares
- Neighborhood canvassing across Roebuck, Sun Valley, Center Point, and surrounding communities

These in-person engagements were paired with robust virtual outreach, including virtual meetings, engagements designed for accessibility.

Families also expressed strong interest in enrolling: 72% reported being “very likely” or “somewhat likely” to enroll their child at xMA. Combined with population data showing more than 500 Pre-K and K students in East Birmingham feeder communities alone, Phase 2 provided strong evidence of demand and feasibility for xMA’s launch. This phase was essential in ensuring that xMA’s school model remains deeply rooted in authentic family voice, local context, and the expressed needs of the community it will serve.

Figure (45):xMA Survey Feedback-Enrollment

Likelihood of Enrolling in xMA

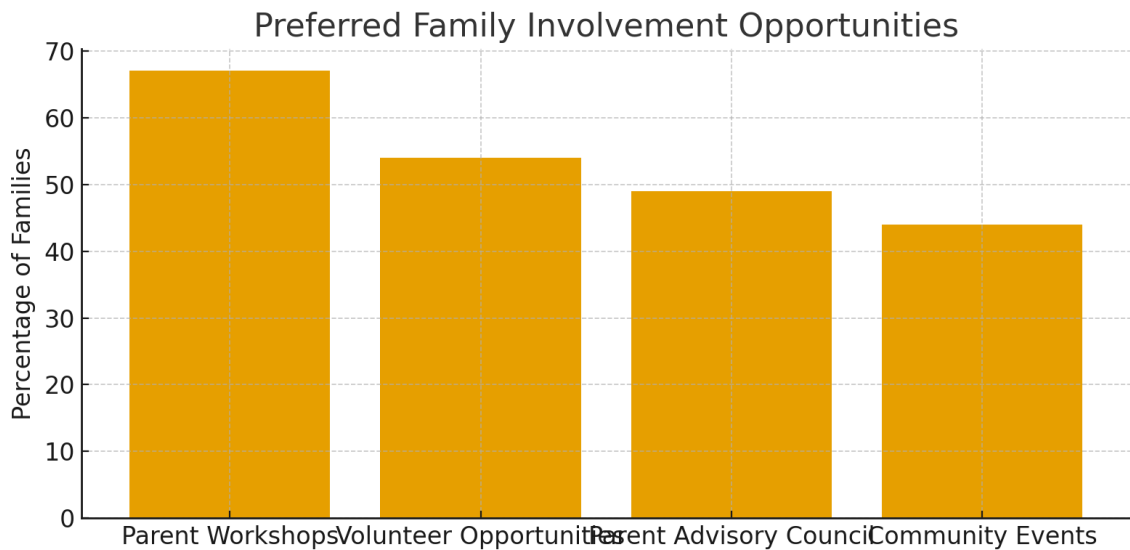


Phase 3: Recruitment & Enrollment (Planned: June 2026–July 2027)

Beginning in Summer 2025, xMA will launch its formal outreach and enrollment campaign grounded in the priorities, preferences, and feedback shared by families during Phases 1 and 2. Enrollment interest forms will open in Summer 2025, with the official application window beginning in Fall 2026. The founding team will conduct extensive canvassing visiting over 200 homes while distributing flyers through local businesses, childcare centers, and community hubs. At least 10 community-based information sessions will be hosted in partnership with trusted local organizations to ensure families have direct access to the founding team and clear, transparent information. Digital engagement will expand through social media, Facebook Live Q&As, captioned videos, and accessible website content to reach families of all backgrounds. Seasonal family-friendly events such as Trunk or Treat, Jingle & Jolly, and Kindness & Cupcakes will continue to offer relaxed, inclusive spaces for families to connect with xMA's vision and culture.

A key driver of Phase 3 is xMA's commitment to incorporating family voice directly into engagement and onboarding systems. Survey data revealed strong family interest in Parent Workshops (67%), Volunteer Opportunities (54%), Parent Advisory Councils (49%), and Community Events (43%) and these preferences will directly shape both outreach and school-launch activities.

Figure (46): xMA Survey Feedback-Preferred Family Involvement Opportunities



These parent-identified priorities will guide the types of events and support xMA offers during recruitment and onboarding. Parent workshops will be embedded into the school year, volunteer opportunities will be clearly communicated and accessible, and a Parent Advisory Council will allow families to actively inform school decisions. Community events will continue to serve as a cornerstone of visibility and trust-building in East Birmingham.

From school approval through opening, xMA will launch a comprehensive onboarding system modeled after the practices observed during national site visits and aligned to best practices from high-performing, community-centered charter schools. These systems will include:

- Open Houses, where families learn about xMA’s mission, meet the founding team, and sign “Intent to Enroll” forms, followed by personalized outreach to answer questions.
- Parent Orientation, led by the Executive Director and Principal offering an in-depth look at the personalized learning model, mastery-based progression, STREAM integration, and P.O.W.E.R.S. values.
- Enrollment Support Sessions, where staff assist families with registration, required documents, and school logistics in welcoming, bilingual environments.
- Back-to-School Bash, a celebratory event where students and families meet teachers, explore classrooms, and begin building community prior to the first day.
- xMA Parent emPOWERment Sessions, a recurring workshop series introducing families to STREAM education, personalized learning, blended instruction, goal-setting, SEL practices at home, digital literacy, and mastery-based grading.

Throughout Phase 3, Frequent and Accessible Communication will remain a core value. Families will receive regular updates through newsletters, emails, printed flyers, text messages, and social media provided in English, Spanish, and additional languages as needed. All materials will be screen-reader-friendly, with closed captions for video content to ensure full accessibility.

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy views families not only as supporters but as active partners in student success. From the moment a child enrolls, their family becomes an essential part of the xMA community. Every engagement strategy from coffee chats at daycare centers to neighborhood celebrations is rooted in connection, trust, and transparency. This intentional, community-driven approach ensures that family voice, cultural responsiveness, and local collaboration remain central to xMA’s launch and long-term success.

c) Describe planned efforts to engage and provide opportunities for parents in the life of the school beyond the role of a parent advocate on the governing board. Explain the plan for building family-school partnerships that strengthen support for learning and encourage parental involvement. Describe any commitments or volunteer activities the school will seek from, offer to, or require of parents.

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA), we believe that family partnership is not a supplement to the school model, it is essential to its success. We are committed to building an inclusive, dynamic school community where families are informed, empowered, and actively involved in every facet of school life. Our approach to sustained family engagement is guided by principles of trust, transparency, collaboration, and mutual accountability. These family engagement structures directly strengthen student learning outcomes by aligning home and school expectations, reinforcing academic goals, increasing student motivation, and ensuring families are equipped to support their child's personalized learning journey.

Board Membership In alignment with Alabama Act 2015-3 and charter school governance best practices, xMA will actively recruit and support parents or guardians of enrolled students to serve on the Board of Directors and advisory committees. These board members will have full voting rights and influence over school governance and strategic priorities. Parent leadership will also be sought on school advisory groups, such as our Continuous Improvement Team and Family Engagement Council, to provide input on policy, programming, and school culture.

Parent Volunteers xMA will maintain a robust Family Engagement Council coordinated by the Student Supports Team. Families will be encouraged to volunteer as reading buddies, classroom helpers, event assistants, or guest speakers to share their professional or cultural expertise. A monthly "Family Engagement Digest" will include a calendar of volunteer opportunities and community events. All opportunities will be optional and designed with flexibility and accessibility in mind, allowing families to contribute in ways that align with their interests, availability, and comfort levels. xMA does not require mandatory volunteer hours, ensuring equitable access for all families regardless of work schedules, transportation, or other barriers. However, families will be encouraged to participate in volunteer opportunities such as classroom support, family events, student showcases, and community engagement activities. Volunteer participation strengthens school culture, reinforces student motivation, and deepens family-school relationships. Flexible volunteer options, including virtual and at-home contributions, will be available to ensure accessibility for all families.

Home-School Connection and Academic Support

We are committed to transparent, two-way communication between families and staff. Families will receive weekly academic and behavioral updates tied to each student's Personalized Learning Plan (PLP), including progress toward mastery of grade-level standards and P.O.W.E.R.S. character goals. These reports will be available digitally and in print, with translation options to ensure accessibility for English Learners. As part of our blended learning model, families will also have access to our learning management system (LMS), allowing them to view assignments, student goals, teacher feedback, and progress in real-time.

Celebrating Student Learning and Growth

xMA will host quarterly POWER House Achievement Ceremonies to celebrate students who demonstrate growth, mastery of standards, and application of the P.O.W.E.R.S. values. These joyful, school-wide events will provide opportunities for families to honor student accomplishments and reinforce a culture of recognition and goal-setting. Families will also be invited to quarterly Student Showcase Celebrations, where they can explore S.T.R.E.A.M. projects, view digital portfolios, and see firsthand how students are progressing academically and personally.

Parent Education and Empowerment

To deepen family understanding of the xMA learning model and strengthen home-school alignment, we will host recurring xMA Parent emPOWERment Sessions throughout the year. These interactive workshops will equip families with tools and knowledge in areas such as S.T.R.E.A.M. education, personalized learning, blended instruction, mastery-based learning, standards-based grading, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), digital citizenship, student goal-setting, mindfulness,

and social-emotional learning at home. In addition to these learning sessions, families will be required to attend at least two of the four quarterly Parent emPOWERment Data Sessions held at the end of each nine-week period. During these sessions, parents will review their child's standards-based report card, PLP progress, and student portfolio alongside staff. These meetings ensure that families are actively engaged in their child's academic journey and contribute to personalized goal-setting and intervention planning.

Ongoing Communication and Feedback Mechanisms

In addition to regular classroom communication, xMA will provide school-wide updates through newsletters, social media, and family town halls. Twice a year, the Executive Director will share a "State of the xMA" update, outlining the school's overall health and progress toward its strategic goals. Aligned with the Alabama Open Meeting Act, Board of Directors' meeting minutes and financial statements will be published and maintained on the xMA website. To remain responsive to family needs, xMA will administer family feedback surveys twice annually at mid-year and at the end of the year to gather input on school culture, instruction, operations, and communication. These insights will directly inform continuous improvement efforts and provide families with a meaningful voice in shaping their school experience.

Open-Door Policy

xMA will maintain an open-door policy that welcomes families to observe instruction, engage with staff, and be part of the learning community. Clear visiting guidelines will be outlined in the Family Handbook to ensure safety and minimize disruption while maximizing access and trust.

Through these multi-layered strategies, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy will create a vibrant school village where families are not just engaged but empowered as full partners in our mission to nurture future-ready learners who thrive both in and beyond the classroom.

d) Please describe any expectations for parents that are part of the school's educational plan or model. Explain clearly how parents' expectations will support the educational plan. Reflect upon alternatives if parents are unwilling or unable to participate.

Parent Expectations and Family Partnership

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA), parent partnership is a foundational element of our personalized, mastery-based learning model. While we do not require mandatory volunteer hours, we do set clear expectations for family engagement that directly support our educational philosophy and student success. These expectations are intentionally designed to build strong home-school connections, promote shared accountability, and ensure families are equipped to support learning beyond the classroom.

One of the core expectations of our educational model is that families participate in at least two out of four quarterly Parent emPOWERment Data Sessions each school year. These sessions are held at the end of each nine-week grading period and are purposefully scheduled on dedicated e-learning days, where students complete independent virtual learning so that teachers can meet with families individually. During these data meetings, parents and caregivers review their child's Personalized Learning Plan (PLP), digital portfolio, and standards-based report card with their teacher.

These sessions are critical to helping families understand the student's current mastery levels, academic goals, and behavioral progress within our P.O.W.E.R.S. character framework. They also serve as opportunities to educate parents on key aspects of the xMA model including standards-based grading, mastery-based progression, blended learning, and student goal-setting while offering actionable strategies for supporting learning at home. Families may choose to attend these sessions in person or virtually, and alternate dates and times are available, including evenings and virtual options, to meet individual scheduling needs.

In addition to participation in these data meetings, families are expected to:

- Attend annual orientation sessions to learn about xMA's instructional model, personalized learning systems, and school culture.

-

Maintain open, ongoing communication with teachers and staff through email, phone, or school communication platforms.

- Review weekly academic and behavioral updates shared through our digital learning platforms.
- Engage with school-wide surveys administered at mid-year and end-of-year to provide feedback that informs continuous school improvement.

These expectations directly support xMA's educational model by ensuring families understand their child's individualized learning goals, progress toward mastery, and areas requiring additional support. Because xMA utilizes Personalized Learning Plans, mastery-based progression, and student portfolios, ongoing family engagement strengthens instructional alignment between school and home, reinforces student accountability, and improves student outcomes. Research consistently demonstrates that students whose families are actively engaged in their education demonstrate higher academic achievement, improved attendance, and stronger social-emotional outcomes.

Alternatives and Supports for Families Unable to Participate

xMA recognizes that families have varying schedules, responsibilities, and circumstances, and participation expectations are designed to be flexible, supportive, and accessible rather than punitive or exclusionary. A student's enrollment, participation in programming, and access to opportunities will never be conditioned on parent participation.

If families are unable to attend scheduled meetings or engage through traditional formats, xMA will provide multiple alternative engagement options, including:

- Flexible meeting times, including evenings and virtual conferences
- Phone conferences or recorded video summaries of student progress
- Written summaries of Personalized Learning Plans and progress reports
- Individual outreach by teachers, the Dean of Culture and Instruction, or school leadership
- Language interpretation services and translated materials for multilingual families
- Personalized family support from school staff to address barriers to participation

Additionally, the school will proactively identify families who may face barriers to participation and provide additional outreach and support to ensure they remain informed and connected. These efforts ensure equitable access to information and partnership regardless of family availability, work schedules, language, or other circumstances.

Partnership-Based Model, Not Compliance-Based Requirements

These expectations are not about compliance, but about building a strong, collaborative culture in which families are informed partners in their child's education. By ensuring families understand their child's data, learning path, and academic needs, xMA strengthens the entire educational ecosystem around the student. This partnership directly supports the school's model of personalized learning, mastery-based progression, and student agency, reinforcing key academic and social-emotional goals at both school and home.

Through these intentional expectations and flexible supports, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy fosters an inclusive environment where all families can engage in ways that work for them, ensuring every learner is seen, supported, and set up for long-term success

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

14. Partnership or Contractual Relationships

Reviewer Instructions

Please rate this section using the provided rubric.

Status: Completed

Form Result

Provide information on any anticipated partnerships or contractual relationships with local community organizations or other groups that will enhance the curricular or co-curricular aspects of the student experience. The next section covers partnerships with Education Service Providers (ESP), Charter Management Organizations (CMO), Education Management Organizations (EMO) and other such partnerships.

Preference: Preference is given to applications that pursue unique connections with community partners (e.g. facilities, fundraising) including those that enhance the student experience (e.g. mission specific programming, taking best-practices to scale.) Applicants are encouraged to engage such groups early in the process to allow a more meaningful and productive partnership.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Compelling evidence of high-quality partnerships and connections with community organizations, business, or other educational institutions that enhance or support the academic plan.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy is deeply committed to providing a whole-child education that integrates S.T.R.E.A.M. instruction with robust arts programming and hands-on, real-world learning. As part of this commitment, we are establishing key partnerships with organizations that will support the development and sustainability of our core programming across fine arts, S.T.R.E.A.M., after-school, and summer learning initiatives.

To support our K-5 Fine Arts Friday rotation, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy will partner with The Flourish, a local community arts organization that brings arts to local schools in Birmingham. They specialize in delivering high-quality instruction in dance, music, theater, and visual arts. The Flourish will collaborate with our leadership and teaching team to design and deliver a comprehensive fine arts program tailored to our students' interests and cultural context. These programs will rotate weekly, ensuring students are exposed to multiple disciplines within the arts and have the opportunity to explore and develop their creative talents. Beyond the regular school day, The Flourish will also serve as a community connector for our families, helping to link them with extracurricular fine arts programming throughout the Birmingham area. This includes workshops, summer camps, and arts-based enrichment programs that are culturally responsive and aligned with our values of inclusion and creativity. They will also support our after-school and summer learning programs, ensuring that students have continuous access to creative, engaging, and developmentally appropriate arts-based experiences.

Evidence of Community Resources

File name:	Letter of Support_Intent to Partner-The Flourish (3) (2).pdf
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b) Provide details of all curricular or co-curricular needs that the applicant seeks to fulfill with either an unidentified community partner or an identified partner that has yet to commit.

xMA Future Partnerships

To support and elevate our S.T.R.E.A.M. programming, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy will partner with WOZED, an education initiative founded by Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak. WOZED is a nationally recognized platform that provides career-connected STEM and CTE curricula designed to equip students with the knowledge and skills needed to thrive in the 21st-century tech economy. Through this partnership, students will engage in hands-on, project-based learning across areas such as robotics, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, drone technology, coding, and engineering. The curriculum is designed to be industry-aligned and future-focused, offering students pathways that prepare them for both college and career readiness. xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy will pursue designation as a WOZED STEM Pathways District School, an elite distinction reserved for schools and districts that demonstrate excellence in teaching and learning aligned to workforce and technology innovation. This designation will provide xMA with access to advanced educator training, technology-infused instructional materials, career-connected project kits, and national collaboration with other high-performing STEM-focused schools. As a WOZED Pathway School, xMA will be positioned to inspire students to explore their passions while developing future-ready skills that align with emerging industries and the demands of the technology economy.

In addition to WOZED, xMA will formally partner with Alabama Technology in Motion (ATiM), a statewide initiative housed within the Alabama State Department of Education's Alabama Regional Inservice Centers. ATiM provides high-quality professional development, coaching, and classroom-based support to equip teachers with the digital literacy, instructional technology, and computer science competencies required by Alabama's Digital Literacy & Computer Science (DLCS) standards. ATiM specialists are certified instructional technology experts who work directly with schools to strengthen technology integration, support device-enabled instruction, and improve teacher proficiency in coding, robotics, engineering design, virtual learning, and digital citizenship. xMA has established relationships with leadership at the Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative (AMSTI), a statewide program that provides instructional resources, professional development, and hands-on STEM, Math and Science materials to public schools. Upon authorization, xMA will have access to AMSTI's extensive instructional resources, teacher training, and equipment lending libraries, which will support the school's STREAM programming. AMSTI provides in-kind contributions through professional development, curriculum support, and access to high-quality STEM instructional materials, reducing the school's startup and instructional material costs while strengthening the rigor and quality of STREAM instruction.

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) has also established relationships with leadership at the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI), a statewide initiative established by the Alabama State Department of Education to support high-quality literacy instruction and ensure that all students develop the reading skills necessary to meet or exceed grade-level standards. Under the Alabama Literacy Act, authorized public charter schools receive access to ARI's comprehensive literacy supports, including professional development, literacy coaching, instructional resources, and training aligned to the science of reading. The Alabama Reading Initiative is designed to strengthen instructional capacity and improve reading outcomes, with the goal of achieving 100% literacy among Alabama public school students. Through ARI, xMA will receive in-kind contributions in the form of literacy-focused professional learning, instructional coaching, and access to state-approved literacy resources and training programs such as LETRS. These supports will strengthen xMA's literacy program, ensure alignment with the Alabama Literacy Act, and reduce the need for external literacy consulting services while enhancing the school's personalized learning and mastery-based instructional model. Together, these strategic partnerships provide students with daily access to both the arts and STEM, elevating our commitment to holistic development, creativity, innovation, and equity. Through these agreements, xMA ensures that students are not only mastering core content but also discovering passions, building career-aligned skills, and experiencing meaningful learning both during and beyond the school day.

To strengthen curriculum implementation and instructional quality, xMA is actively pursuing partnerships with organizations such as EdFarm, Apple Education, the Alabama STEM Council, Innovation Depot, AMP UP Arts, the Alabama Alliance for Arts Education, and TechBirmingham. These organizations provide professional development, instructional coaching, technology integration support, and access to curriculum-aligned tools that enhance teacher capacity and student learning experiences in coding, robotics, engineering, digital media, and creative technology.

At the local level, xMA is also seeking partnerships with highly respected Birmingham-based institutions including McWane Science Center, Create Birmingham, Innovation Depot, UAB STEM Outreach, Goodrich Foundation and Lawson State Community College. These partnerships would provide guest speakers, field-based learning experiences, student mentorship, arts integration support, entrepreneurship exposure, and early career pathway awareness aligned to our S.T.R.E.A.M. model. Through collaborations with these organizations, students would experience hands-on labs, industry-connected projects, and exposure to real-world problem solving that deepens classroom instruction.

Additionally, xMA will pursue grant-funded and nonprofit partnerships through initiatives such as Verizon Innovative Learning Schools, the Apple Community Education Initiative, regional workforce development organizations, and arts-based foundations operating within Jefferson County. These partnerships would expand access to devices, innovation lab equipment, professional learning for teachers, and student showcase opportunities.

While xMA's S.T.R.E.A.M. program is fully sustainable with existing budgeted staffing and curriculum resources, these partnerships will enhance program depth, increase instructional rigor, and expand co-curricular opportunities. Importantly, external support would allow xMA to leverage community expertise and resources while reallocating internal funds and staffing units toward intervention services, enrichment blocks, and expanded student support systems. This model ensures both sustainability and scalability, strengthening program quality while maintaining financial responsibility and long-term operational stability.

c) Identify any other partnerships or contractual relationships given above that are critical to the school's operations or mission, i.e. identify partnerships whose dissolution fundamentally changes the culture or nature of the proposed school.

xMA has strategic partnerships that bring an exceptional blend of national expertise, local relevance, and deep experience with inclusive and personalized learning. They are central to ensuring that xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy opens with excellence and continues to deliver on its mission of providing a high-quality S.T.R.E.A.M. education tailored to all learners.

Through NewSchools Venture Fund (NSVF), Dr. Capehart was selected for the prestigious Founders Fellowship, a national program that invests in visionary leaders designing innovative, equity-centered public schools. As a NewSchools Fellow, she has received strategic coaching, financial support, and thought partnership to refine xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy's instructional model, personalized learning systems, and community engagement strategy. The fellowship has provided access to national experts in school design, personalized learning, and DEI-centered leadership, as well as collaboration with a cohort of founders from across the country. NSVF continues to support xMA through ongoing design advising, strategic planning sessions, and capacity-building resources that strengthen the school's readiness for launch and long-term sustainability.

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy has partnered with BES (Build. Excel. Sustain.), a nationally recognized nonprofit that identifies and prepares excellent leaders to design, launch, and sustain high-performing, equity-driven charter schools. Our lead founder, Dr. Melissa Capehart, is a 2024–2026 BES Fellow, participating in a rigorous two-year fellowship and four-year leadership journey to design and found a transformative public charter school. Her training includes over 300 hours of professional development, site visits to more than 20 exemplar schools, and four regional residencies with thematic focuses on S.T.R.E.A.M. education, personalized learning, and special education. These residencies provided deep immersion in instructional and operational models aligned with our mission. BES will continue to provide Follow On Support through Year 2, which includes weekly

executive coaching, document reviews, school visits, video feedback, and access to the BES leadership network and resource hub to ensure strong implementation and long-term sustainability. Through a third partnership with New Schools for Alabama (NSFA), Dr. Capehart was selected for the competitive School Founders Fellowship, a program that trains and supports high-caliber leaders in launching innovative, high-quality charter schools in Alabama. Through this fellowship, she has received expert guidance in areas such as charter application development, facilities planning, compliance, and board governance. As part of the program, Dr. Capehart completed site visits to high-performing schools in Memphis, TN and Mobile, AL, and participated in the Teach Like a Champion leadership cohort. NSFA will continue to support xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy through board training, strategic startup guidance, budgeting support, and leadership development. Further strengthening our capacity to meet the needs of all learners, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy is a proud member of the second cohort of the National Accelerator of Autism Charter Schools (NAACS), a national initiative aimed at increasing access to high-quality education for students with disabilities. As part of this partnership, Dr. Capehart completed four week-long residencies at two nationally recognized schools Arizona Autism Charter School and South Florida Autism Charter School where she received rigorous, hands-on training in inclusive academic and behavioral practices, data-driven instruction, school operations, and special education leadership. In addition to these intensive learning experiences, she continues to receive monthly coaching and strategic support from NAACS, which will extend into the school's early years of operation. The knowledge gained through this partnership directly shaped the school's personalized learning model and its use of evidence-based academic and behavioral strategies for students with disabilities and diverse learning needs.

d) Disclose and explain any existing or potential conflicts of interest between the charter school board, the charter school administration, and the proposed service provider or any affiliated business entities.

Conflict of Interest Narrative

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) has no existing or anticipated conflicts of interest between the charter school board, school administration, or any proposed service providers or affiliated business entities. All board members and administrators are required to disclose any actual or potential conflicts in accordance with xMA's Conflict of Interest Policy, Alabama Ethics Law, and Alabama Charter School Law.

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

15. Educational Service Providers (ESP), Charter Management Organizations (CMO), Education Management Organizations (EMO) and Other Such Partnerships

Reviewer Instructions

Please rate this section using the provided rubric.

Status: Completed

Form Result

Provide details on the anticipated use of Education Service Providers (ESP), Charter Management Organizations (CMO), Education Management Organizations (EMO) or similar partnerships. This includes details on the selection process.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Compelling evidence of how any ESP, CMO, EMO, or other partnerships will be used and how these partnerships will directly and consistently enhance the school program. Evidence that the organization used proper procedures for a public school in entering into the agreement.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

a) Provide the details of the selection process, including evaluation criteria used to pick the provider and provide the Request for Proposal (RFP) used to solicit applicants.

This section does not apply to xMA.

b) Provide evidence of the provider's or organization's success in serving student populations that are similar to the targeted population, including demonstrated academic achievement as well as successful management of nonacademic school functions, if applicable. Attach a completed Portfolio Summary for the partner organization.

Evidence of Success Narrative

This section does not apply to xMA.

c) Provide a term sheet that includes:

i) Proposed duration of the service contract

ii) Roles and responsibilities of the governing board, school staff, and ESP

iii) Scope of services and resources to be provided by the ESP

iv) Performance evaluations measures and timelines

v) Compensations structure, including clear identification of all fees to be paid to the ESP

vi) Methods of contract oversight and enforcement

vii) Investment disclosure

viii) Conditions for renewal and termination of the contract

d) Disclose and explain any existing or potential conflicts of interest between the charter school board, the charter school administration, and the proposed service provider or any affiliated business entities.

This section does not apply to xMA.

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

16. Educational Program Capacity

Reviewer Instructions

Please rate this section using the provided rubric.

Status: Completed

Form Result

Name the people who have been identified for key positions in the proposed school, their collective capacity for operating the school, and disclose any potential conflicts of interest.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Compelling evidence of how the school will open and continue to operate a high-quality educational program with high capacity in the following areas: school leadership, administration, governance, curriculum, instruction, assessment, performance management, parent involvement, and community engagement.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

Educational Program Capacity

The leadership team of xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) includes both the proposed school-based leadership and the governing board members who will play a substantial and ongoing role in the development, governance, and educational success of the school. Together, this group brings deep expertise in school leadership, instruction, special education, finance, operations, real estate, legal oversight, strategic planning, community engagement, and governance. Their collective qualifications and personal ties to the Birmingham community uniquely position them to launch and sustain a high-performing charter school model tailored to the needs of local families.

Proposed School Leader

Dr. Melissa Capehart, Founding Executive Director

Dr. Melissa Capehart brings over 19 years of experience in education, nonprofit leadership, instructional coaching, and innovative school design. A Birmingham native and autism advocate, she blends professional expertise with lived experience as a parent of a child on the autism spectrum. Dr. Capehart holds multiple advanced degrees, including a Doctorate of Education in Educational Leadership, an Education Specialist degree, and a Master of Arts in Teaching, along with certification in Instructional Leadership.

Throughout her career, Dr. Capehart has successfully served in diverse instructional and leadership roles across K-12 education. As a District Technology Integration Specialist, she provided direct coaching and support to over 2,000 educators, helping schools achieve measurable academic growth across all student subpopulations, including students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and historically underserved groups. She has designed and delivered professional development aligned with Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Digital Literacy and Computer Science (DLCS) standards, ISTE standards, and STEM integration, supporting both academic achievement and equitable technology access. Her excellence in practice was recently recognized with the Teacher in the Trenches Award (2024) from Hoover City Schools, honoring her outstanding commitment to students, families, and community partnerships.

Earlier in her career, Dr. Capehart served as a secondary educator, Advanced Placement instructor, curriculum writer, and student organization sponsor, demonstrating her commitment to whole-child development, culturally responsive teaching, and strong school culture. She was honored with the Teacher of the Year Award (2017-2018) for her excellence in classroom instruction, mentorship, and leadership within her school community.

In addition to her leadership and instructional expertise, Dr. Capehart's research interests include the intersection of fine arts education and academic engagement for at-risk African American boys, an area that informs her commitment to culturally relevant, equity-centered practices that foster creativity, resilience, and achievement among historically marginalized students.

Capehart is also a nationally recognized charter leadership fellow, having completed highly competitive programs with New School Venture Fund, New Schools for Alabama (NSFA), Build. Excel Sustain (BES), and the National Accelerator for Autism Charter Schools (NAACS). Through these fellowships, she has engaged in intensive training on high-performing charter school leadership, strategic planning, academic and operational systems development, governance best practices, finance management, and special education compliance.

Her leadership philosophy is rooted in building inclusive, student-centered environments that integrate personalized learning, blended instruction, mastery-based learning, STREAM education, and robust social-emotional development frameworks. She has demonstrated a consistent ability to

drive results, close opportunity gaps, and build high-expectation, high-support school cultures that empower every learner to thrive.

As the Founding Executive Director of xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy, Dr. Capehart will oversee all academic, operational, and strategic aspects of the school's launch and growth, ensuring the fulfillment of its mission to provide rigorous, equitable, and innovative education for all students.

Governance and Board Leadership

xMA is governed by a committed, highly skilled, and diverse Board of Directors who bring extensive expertise across education, mental health, governance, nonprofit leadership, and public service.

Founding Board Members

- Krishula Edwards

A lifelong advocate for youth, equity, and public service, Krishula Edwards brings extensive leadership and board governance experience to xMA. She is a Contracting Specialist with the U.S. Air Force and founder of Edwards Essentials LLC, a consultancy focused on trauma-informed services and community wellness. She has served in numerous civic and leadership roles, including President of the Alabama Mental Health Counseling Association, PR Chair for the Junior League of Montgomery, President of the Florida A&M University Montgomery Alumni Chapter, and Board Chair of the Boys and Girls Club River Region. Her deep engagement across statewide and regional boards and her background in counseling, public administration, and nonprofit leadership make her an invaluable strategic leader for xMA.

- Kourtney Bilbo

A Licensed Professional Counselor, Registered Play Therapist™, and Senior Counselor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Kourtney Bilbo brings over a decade of experience in school-based mental health, trauma-informed care, and family engagement. She is a certified Mental Health First Aid instructor and national speaker on child and adolescent mental wellness. Her career has focused on creating safe, inclusive spaces for students and families especially those navigating trauma or mental health challenges and her insight into student support and community care will anchor xMA's social-emotional learning model.

- Dr. Amanda Giles

Dr. Giles is a Clinical Assistant Professor at the University of Alabama at Huntsville, where she prepares and mentors pre-service and in-service educators with a focus on English Learners, differentiated instruction, and curriculum development. A National Board Certified educator with a PhD in Curriculum and Instruction, Dr. Giles has published extensively on culturally sustaining pedagogy and has served as both a classroom teacher and instructional leader in Birmingham-area schools. Her leadership ensures xMA's academic model is rigorous, inclusive, and aligned to research-based practices.

- Beth Sanders - Beth Sanders is an education and innovation leader, Co-Founder and Vice President of Modiv EDU, and former Vice President of Learning at Ed Farm. With over a decade of experience spanning classroom teaching, instructional technology, and organizational leadership, she has designed and led programs that empower educators and students with future-ready skills. A recognized Apple Distinguished Educator and fellowship recipient, Beth is passionate about leveraging technology, partnerships, and innovative practices to create transformative learning experiences.

- Megan Skipper - Megan Skipper is Chief of Staff at A+ Education Partnership, where she supports efforts to enhance organizational strategy and impact. Megan originally joined the A+ team in December 2018 as the Director of Communications, then as Vice President of Communications and Strategic Initiatives. Megan began her career in Montgomery at the Montgomery Education Foundation in 2016 as a Communications and Research Coordinator. She briefly left the non-profit sector to work as a political strategist during the 2018 midterm election season, but her passion for education drew her back to education advocacy. At A+, she continues to advance education policy and communications initiatives. She holds a Bachelor's

degree in Human Development and Family Studies, with a focus on Public Policy, from Auburn University, and a Master's degree in Strategic Communication from Troy University. Originally from Daphne, AL, Megan now resides in Montgomery with her partner, Hunter, their dogs Jack and Rocky, and their cat Piper, surrounded by family and friends.

- Evan Cottrell- Evan Cottrell is a Birmingham-based project management and business operations professional with nearly a decade of experience driving organizational efficiency and strategic enablement for large-scale teams. As an operations manager, he leads initiatives that improve systems, align business goals, and enhance user experiences across global operations. Evan brings a passion for educational innovation and operational excellence to the founding board of xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy. Inspired by his personal experiences as a future xMA parent and advocate for diverse learning pathways, he is committed to helping the school create an inclusive, emotionally supportive environment where every child can thrive. Outside of his professional endeavors, Evan enjoys traveling with his wife and children and staying active in his local community.
- Courtney Winston- Courtney V. Winston is a seasoned operations and sales executive with more than 20 years of leadership experience at Bank of America, where she currently serves as a Director of Bank of America at Merrill Lynch. A FINRA Series 7, 66, 9, and 10 license holder, she has led large, complex teams across more than 180 financial centers serving over 1.3 million customers. Courtney is recognized for driving operational excellence, improving underperforming markets, and elevating team performance, including moving a bottom-ranked center into the top 11% in under a year. Her leadership has earned several company honors, including the Global Diversity & Inclusion Award, Valiant Award for Leadership Dexterity, and Deliver One Company recognition. She is also an active contributor to employee networks supporting women, Black professionals, Asian leadership, and caregivers. Courtney holds a Bachelor of Science in Finance & Financial Management Services from Tuskegee University.

Executive Board and Committees

- Board Chair leads the governing board of the school and is responsible for ensuring effective board operations and strategic leadership. The Chair sets meeting agendas, facilitates board meetings, oversees committee assignments, and serves as the primary liaison between the board and the Executive Director. The Chair also leads the evaluation of the Executive Director, ensures compliance with board bylaws, and supports board development and succession planning.
- Vice Chair supports the Board Chair in fulfilling their responsibilities and assumes leadership duties in their absence. The Vice Chair often oversees specific initiatives, supports committee coordination, and assists with Executive Director oversight and board training. This role ensures leadership continuity and helps maintain governance effectiveness across the organization.
- Secretary ensures accurate documentation of board activities and maintains official records of board meetings, votes, and policies. The Secretary is responsible for preparing and distributing meeting minutes, managing board documents and communications, and ensuring compliance with open meetings and public records laws, as applicable. The Secretary supports organizational transparency and accountability.
- Treasurer will bring expertise in nonprofit accounting, school finance, or public budgeting, and will chair the Finance & Operations Committee. This role is critical for ensuring transparency, accountability, and strong fiscal planning in alignment with all applicable laws, policies, and grants.
- Finance Oversight Committee: Provides oversight of budgeting, grant expenditures, procurement policies, financial reporting, and audit compliance. Supports the Director of Finance/Operations and ensures sustainability through multi-year planning.
- Academics Oversight Committee: Reviews curriculum, assessments, and student outcome data. Ensures fidelity to the instructional model, supports continuous improvement cycles, and monitors student subgroup performance.
-

Community Engagement & Partnerships Oversight Committee: Builds strategic partnerships with families, civic organizations, and local stakeholders. Reviews family engagement metrics and outreach efforts to ensure inclusivity, responsiveness, and transparency.

Team Capacity to Execute the Model

xMA's founding team includes educators, nonprofit leaders, mental health professionals, finance experts, operations specialists, and parents. They bring experience in finance (public budgeting, grants, audits), legal compliance (contracts, education law), real estate and facilities planning (capital projects, leasing), operations and HR (back-office systems, staff policies), and culturally responsive instruction. Team members have also led initiatives in trauma-informed care, special education, English learner supports, and personalized learning design. Beyond technical skills, the team includes Birmingham-based parents and community leaders with deep ties to the families xMA will serve. This blend of strategic execution, inclusive values, and local connection ensures that xMA is grounded, responsive, and prepared to thrive.

Transitional Leadership Team

The individuals described below collectively form the core transitional leadership team responsible for planning and launching xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy prior to opening. The leadership structure for xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy has been intentionally designed to ensure clear roles, strong instructional leadership, and effective school operations beginning in the planning year and continuing through the school's launch. The school will be led by the Executive Director, Dr. Melissa Capehart, who will oversee strategic leadership, organizational management, community partnerships, and overall implementation of the school's mission and vision. xMA plans to hire a full-time Principal for Year 1 who will serve as the instructional leader of the school and will be responsible for day-to-day campus operations, teacher coaching, curriculum implementation, discipline oversight, and academic performance. If philanthropic funding allows, the Principal will be hired during the Year 0 planning period to support staff recruitment, curriculum planning, and the development of instructional systems prior to opening. During the planning year, the Executive Director will also be supported by a part-time Dean of Culture & Instruction who will assist in developing key school systems, including curriculum implementation guides, assessment calendars, MTSS and SEL structures, teacher onboarding, and professional development aligned to the school's personalized learning and STREAM instructional model. In addition, xMA plans to hire a part-time Director of Finance & Operations (DFO) during the Year 0 planning period to support financial management, operational planning, budgeting, compliance, and the development of internal financial systems prior to the school's opening. Detailed job descriptions, qualifications, hiring timelines, and recruitment strategies for each leadership position are included in the application, and the founding board has established clearly defined executive officer roles and committee leadership to support strong governance and oversight as the school prepares to open.

[xMA Job Description-Executive Director- for app](#)

[xMA Job Description- Principal for App](#)

[xMA Job Description-DCI](#)

[xMA Job Description-DFO](#)

Resumes of Key Personnel

File 1

File name: MC Resume updated.pdf

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Uploaded by: Melissa Capehart

File 2

File name: xMA Board Resumes (3).pdf

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Uploaded by: Melissa Capehart

b) Describe the team's collective qualifications for implementing the school design successfully, including capacity in areas such as:

- i) School leadership, administration, and governance;
- ii) Curriculum, instruction, and assessment;
- iii) Financial management;
- iv) Performance management; and
- v) Parent and community engagement.

Collective Qualifications Narrative [object Object]

- c) Describe the group's ties to and/or knowledge of the target community.

Community Ties Narrative

Ties to and Knowledge of the Birmingham Community

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) is deeply rooted in Birmingham, and the school's founding leadership and Board of Directors bring lifelong personal, professional, and generational ties to the communities the school is designed to serve. These connections provide authentic insight into the strengths, challenges, and needs of Birmingham families and ensure that the school's design is grounded in lived experience, trust, and long-standing community relationships. Research and charter authorizing best practices consistently demonstrate that schools founded and led by individuals with deep ties to their communities are more likely to build trust, engage families successfully, and sustain long-term student success because their leadership reflects and understands the community they serve.

Founding Executive Director Dr. Melissa Capehart is a lifelong Birmingham native and proud graduate of Birmingham City Schools (BCS). She attended Hemphill Elementary School, Center Street Middle School, and graduated from Ramsay High School. Having been educated within BCS from elementary through high school, she brings firsthand knowledge of the district's instructional systems, culture, and student experience. Dr. Capehart grew up in West Birmingham and Ensley and spent significant time in Center Point and East Birmingham communities, providing her with deep familiarity with the neighborhoods that xMA will serve.

Her family's roots in Birmingham span generations and continue today. Her father has lived in East Birmingham for over 20 years and remains an active member of the community, while her mother continues to reside in West Birmingham. Her extended family owns and operates local restaurants and small businesses in East Birmingham, providing her with strong relationships among local business owners, families, and community stakeholders. These generational ties provide Dr. Capehart with a deeply embedded presence and trusted network throughout Birmingham.

In addition to her personal ties, Dr. Capehart has built extensive professional relationships throughout the community through her nearly two decades of work in Birmingham-area schools and education systems. She has worked directly with thousands of educators and students across the region and has established partnerships with community organizations, families, and local leaders. Her lived experience as both a Birmingham City Schools graduate and a parent further informs her commitment to creating a high-quality public school option that meets the needs of Birmingham families.

xMA's Board of Directors also reflects strong and meaningful ties to Birmingham and the targeted enrollment communities.

Board member Kourtney Bilbo is a Licensed Professional Counselor and Registered Play Therapist™ who grew up in the Birmingham area and has spent her professional career serving Birmingham families and students. Through her work as a mental health therapist and Senior Counselor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, she has provided direct mental health services and support to students and families across Birmingham, including Birmingham City Schools students.

Her work provides deep insight into the social, emotional, and academic needs of local youth and families.

Board member Evan Cottrell currently resides in East Birmingham, one of the school's targeted recruitment areas, and is raising his family in the community. As a parent, he has firsthand experience navigating school options in Birmingham and has chosen not to enroll his children in Birmingham City Schools due to unmet academic and instructional needs. His perspective reflects the experiences of many families seeking high-quality public school options and strengthens the school's understanding of parent priorities and expectations.

Board member Dr. Amanda Giles has lived and worked in the Birmingham metropolitan area and has extensive experience teaching and preparing educators who serve Birmingham-area students. Her experience working directly with local schools and educators provides valuable knowledge of instructional practices, student needs, and the broader educational landscape in the region.

Additional board members bring strong Birmingham ties through their work in education, nonprofit leadership, mental health services, community engagement, and public service. Collectively, the Board has served Birmingham families through schools, universities, nonprofit organizations, and civic leadership roles, building trusted relationships across the community.

Beyond individual relationships, xMA has built strong organizational ties within Birmingham through ongoing community engagement efforts, including hosting community information sessions, Fireside Chats, and recruitment events; partnering with local organizations such as Black Alabamians for Education; and engaging families through outreach at libraries, childcare centers, churches, and community events throughout East and West Birmingham.

These deep personal, professional, and community connections ensure that xMA is not an external organization entering the community, but rather a school founded by Birmingham natives and community leaders who are committed to serving their own neighborhoods. The leadership team's firsthand knowledge of Birmingham City Schools, strong generational ties, and extensive community relationships position xMA to build trust, respond to community needs, and create a school that reflects and serves the families of Birmingham. These authentic community connections also strengthen the school's long-term sustainability, as families, students, and stakeholders recognize xMA as a school created with the community, for the community, and rooted in a shared commitment to Birmingham's future.

d) Identify any organizations, agencies, or consultants that are partners in planning and establishing the school, along with a brief description of their current and planned role and any resources they have contributed or plan to contribute to the school's development.

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) is supported by a coalition of high-impact national, state, and local partners who provide critical funding, technical assistance, strategic planning support, governance training, and operational guidance to ensure a strong and sustainable school launch. These partners contribute financial resources, coaching, implementation support, and access to national best practices in school design and operations.

- NewSchools Venture Fund (NSVF)

NewSchools Venture Fund is one of the nation's leading education innovation organizations supporting entrepreneurs who are designing and launching transformative public schools. As a 2025 NewSchools Venture Fund Founders Fellow, Dr. Capehart receives secured grant funding, strategic coaching, and national-level thought partnership to support the planning and development of xMA. Currently, NSVF provides financial investment to support Year 0 planning, academic model development, and leadership capacity-building. NSVF also provides expert coaching focused on personalized learning design, instructional systems, leadership development, and school launch planning. In addition, Dr. Capehart participates in a national fellowship cohort, gaining access to research, tools, and peer collaboration that inform high-quality school design. NSVF will continue to support xMA through the pre-opening and early operational years by providing ongoing leadership coaching, strategic planning support, and access to national education networks and resources that strengthen implementation and long-term sustainability.

- New Schools for Alabama (NSFA)

New Schools for Alabama is Alabama's leading charter school support organization and plays a critical role in supporting the planning and establishment of new charter schools across the state. As a 2024 NSFA Fellow, Dr. Capehart receives grant funding, technical assistance, and ongoing coaching focused on governance development, financial planning, community engagement, and operational readiness. NSFA currently provides support with budget development, board governance training, enrollment planning, and compliance preparation aligned with Alabama charter school requirements. NSFA also plans to provide ongoing back-office support services after school launch, including financial management assistance, compliance monitoring, and operational guidance. These services will help ensure fiscal responsibility, regulatory compliance, and strong organizational infrastructure during the school's early years of operation.

- Build Excel Sustain (BES)

Build Excel Sustain is a nationally recognized nonprofit organization that supports charter school founders through its highly selective Fellowship program. As a BES Fellow, Dr. Capehart receives intensive training, coaching, and technical assistance in academic model development, instructional systems design, staffing models, real estate planning, financial sustainability, and school operations. BES currently supports the planning phase by providing strategic coaching, access to national school design experts, and structured development frameworks that guide the creation of academic systems, staffing plans, and operational infrastructure. BES will continue to provide leadership coaching, strategic guidance, and access to implementation resources that support xMA's successful launch and early implementation.

- National Accelerator for Autism Charter Schools (NAACS)

The National Accelerator for Autism Charter Schools is a national nonprofit incubator that supports charter school founders in developing inclusive, high-quality educational models designed to serve diverse learners. As a NAACS Fellow, Dr. Capehart receives coaching and technical assistance related to Universal Design for Learning (UDL), inclusive school design, special education systems, IDEA compliance, and family engagement structures. NAACS currently supports planning through technical guidance, access to national experts, and training related to designing effective systems for supporting students with diverse learning needs. NAACS will continue to provide guidance, coaching, and access to national partner networks to support implementation of inclusive instructional practices and student support systems.

e) Identify the principal/head of school candidate and explain why this individual is well-qualified to lead the proposed school in achieving its mission. Summarize the proposed leader's academic and organizational leadership record. Provide specific evidence that demonstrates capacity to design, launch, and manage a high-performing charter school. If the proposed leader has never run a school, describe any leadership training programs that (s)he has completed or is currently participating in. Also provide, as an attachment, the qualifications, resume, and professional biography for this individual. Discuss evidence of the leader's ability to effectively serve the anticipated population.

If no candidate has been identified, attach the job description or qualifications, and discuss the timeline, criteria, recruiting and selection process for hiring the school leader.

The proposed Executive Director for xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy is Dr. Melissa Capehart, who will serve as the founding Executive Director. A passionate and seasoned educator, Dr. Capehart brings over 19 years of experience working with children and families across both educational and nonprofit sectors. A proud Birmingham native, she holds a Doctorate in Educational Leadership, an Educational Specialist degree in Instructional Leadership, and a leadership certification from Samford University. She also earned a Master's in Secondary Education and a Bachelor's in History

with a minor in Psychology from the University of Alabama. Her deep academic training is matched by a lifelong commitment to inclusive, student-centered education.

Dr. Capehart is a dynamic instructional leader with a proven track record of school-based and district-level impact. She currently serves as a District Technology Integration Specialist for Hoover City Schools, where she has led the design and implementation of innovative, blended learning models and coached over 2,000 teachers and staff in effective instructional technology use. Her leadership directly contributed to academic growth across all student subgroups, including English Language Learners, students with disabilities, and African American and Hispanic students. She has also served as a mentor teacher, a member of the district's Cultural Leadership Team, and a cohort member of Hoover's Aspiring Administrators program. Her excellence has been consistently recognized, named the 2017 Teacher of the Year in Tuscaloosa City Schools and, most recently, the recipient of Hoover City Schools' 2024 "Teacher in the Trenches" award.

Beyond her professional accomplishments, Dr. Capehart brings a scholar-practitioner's lens to leadership. Her doctoral research explored how fine arts programming impacts academic outcomes for at-risk African American males, reflecting her passion for arts integration, equity, and culturally responsive practices. She is especially committed to ensuring that students with disabilities and those on the autism spectrum have access to high-quality STEM and Fine Arts experiences, an area of focus that aligns deeply with the mission of xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy.

Dr. Capehart is also a Distinguished Modern Classrooms Educator and Instructional Mentor, trained through the Modern Classrooms Project, a nationally recognized instructional model that promotes self-paced, mastery-based, and blended learning environments. Her certification demonstrates her capacity to lead a school grounded in personalized learning precisely the instructional vision that drives xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy. As a certified mentor teacher, she continues to coach educators in implementing these modern, inclusive practices across a range of classroom settings. In addition, Dr. Capehart is a 2024 and 2025 Fellow in four nationally recognized charter leadership pipelines: NewSchools Venture Fund Founders Fellowship (NSVF), New Schools for Alabama (NSFA), Build Excel Sustain (BES), and the National Accelerator for Autism Charter Schools (NAACS). Through these rigorous programs, she has received intensive training in charter governance, budgeting, compliance, data-driven instruction, special education law, and the design of inclusive, high-performing school models. Her capacity to launch and lead a charter school has been sharpened by this preparation and further enriched by her personal experience as a mother of a child on the autism spectrum. She approaches leadership with empathy, urgency, and a steadfast belief that every child, when given the right environment, can thrive.

Her resume, professional biography, and credentials are included in the attachments.

[MC Resume updated.pdf](#)

Supporting Documents	File name:	MC Resume updated.pdf
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	Uploaded by:	Melissa Capehart

f) Describe the responsibilities and qualifications of the school's leadership/management team beyond the principal/head of school. If known, identify the individuals who will fill these positions. Provide the qualifications, resumes, and professional biographies for these individuals if not so provided above. If these positions are not yet filled, explain the timeline, criteria, and process for recruitment and hiring.

xMA's leadership team will expand during the planning year and early operating years to include the following roles:

- Director of Finance and Operations (Part-Time Year 0, Full-Time Year 1+): Oversees financial management, compliance, facilities, procurement, and HR systems. This individual must have a background in nonprofit or school finance, operations, and vendor management.
- Director of Student Supports Student (Year 1+): Manages special education and English learner programs, ensures compliance, and coordinates student services. Must hold appropriate

SPED or EL certifications and experience with inclusive support systems.

- **Counselor (Year 1+):** Provides school-based mental health supports, SEL programming, and family resources. Must hold appropriate licensure.
- **Dean of Culture & Instruction (Part-Time Year 0, Full-Time Year 1+):** Oversees student culture, behavior systems, and restorative practices. Experience in school culture leadership, behavior management, and trauma-informed practices required. Leads curriculum alignment, assessment systems, instructional coaching, and personalized learning implementation. Qualifications include experience with mastery-based instruction, differentiated learning, and strong instructional leadership.
- **Co-Director (Principal) (Year 1+):** Manages day-to-day instruction and school operations as the school scales. This individual will work alongside the Executive Director and must demonstrate capacity to lead high-performing instructional teams.

Our Leadership Team Staffing Plan is shown in Figure () and more in depth in the xMA Leadership Roles and Responsibilities attachment.

[xMA Leadership Team Roles & Responsibilities Matrix](#)

Leadership Team Staffing Plan

Leadership Role	2026 (Y0)	2027 (Y1)	2028 (Y2)	2029 (Y3)	2030 (Y4)	2031 (Y5)
Executive Director	1	1	1	1	1	1
Co-Director (Principal)	0	1	0	1	1	1
Director of Finance/Operations	0.5	1	1	1	1	1
Dean of Culture and Instruction	0.5	1	1	1	1	1
Director of Student Supports	0	1	1	1	1	1
Counselor	0	1	1	1	1	1

Supporting Documents

File name: xMA Leadership Team Roles & Responsibilities Matrix (2).pdf
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Uploaded by: Melissa Capehart

g) Explain who will work on a full-time or nearly full-time basis on the development of the academic model during the pre-opening phase. This includes developing the curriculum, training materials, policies and procedures, on-boarding of teaching staff, etc. Include the plan to compensate these individuals.

During the planning year (Year 0), a dedicated leadership team will work full-time or near full-time to lead the development and implementation of xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy's academic model and organizational systems. Melissa Capehart, Founder and Executive Director, will work full-time throughout the planning year and will be fully responsible for overseeing all aspects of academic model development and school launch. In this role, she will lead the design and refinement of curriculum scope and sequence, instructional frameworks aligned to personalized learning and mastery-based progression, assessment systems, instructional technology integration, professional development systems, and schoolwide academic policies and procedures. She will also oversee the development of teacher training materials, onboarding systems, and instructional coaching structures to ensure fidelity of implementation prior to school opening.

She will be supported by a part-time Dean of Culture & Instruction, who will work near full-time during key phases of the planning year to support the development of instructional systems, curriculum implementation guides, assessment calendars, SEL integration, MTSS intervention systems, and teacher onboarding and professional development materials. The Dean of Culture & Instruction will play a critical role in ensuring alignment between academic programming, school culture, and student support systems.

The school plans to hire a Principal in Year 1 to serve as the instructional leader responsible for overseeing curriculum implementation, instructional quality, and student achievement. If philanthropic funding allows, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy intends to hire the Principal during the Year 0 planning period to support school design and launch. Early hiring would allow the Principal to participate in key planning work, including developing instructional systems, supporting staff recruitment and hiring, refining curriculum implementation plans, and helping design professional development structures to ensure strong instructional readiness for the school's opening year.

In addition, a part-time Director of Finance and Operations will support the planning and launch process by establishing operational systems that enable effective academic implementation, including staffing structures, scheduling systems, procurement of curriculum and instructional materials, and compliance with state and federal requirements. This role ensures that academic programming is fully supported by sound operational infrastructure.

As hiring timelines progress, additional instructional leadership staff including founding teachers and instructional leaders will participate in curriculum refinement, training development, and onboarding preparation during the pre-opening phase, ensuring that instructional staff are fully prepared to implement the academic model with fidelity beginning in the school's inaugural year.

Compensation Plan and Funding Sources

These leadership roles will be compensated through secured philanthropic and grant funding specifically designated for school development and pre-opening activities. Melissa Capehart's planning year salary and leadership development work will be supported through philanthropic funding from the NewSchools Venture Fund (NSVF), which has already been awarded and secured. Additional compensation for planning-year leadership staff, including the Dean of Culture & Instruction and Director of Finance and Operations, will be supported through a combination of philanthropic and grant funding, including anticipated funding from the secured BES StartUp Funding and anticipated Charter School Growth Fund (CSGF)(current semi-finalist) and the federal Charter Schools Program (CSP) grant. If additional funding permits, we will hire a Principal in Year 0.

These funding sources are specifically designed to support charter school founders and leadership teams during the pre-opening phase, including curriculum development, staff training, operational design, and organizational infrastructure. Utilizing these philanthropic and grant resources ensures that xMA can dedicate full-time and near full-time leadership capacity to academic model development while preserving operational sustainability and ensuring readiness for successful implementation at launch.

Together, this compensated leadership team will ensure that xMA's academic model, instructional systems, curriculum, professional development structures, and onboarding processes are fully developed, aligned, and ready for effective implementation prior to the school's opening in August 2027.

Conflict of Interest Narrative

Conflict of Interest Disclosure

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) does not currently have, nor does it anticipate, any conflicts of interest involving the individuals named in this section. All board members, staff, and affiliated individuals will comply with the Alabama Ethics Law (Ala. Code § 36-25-1 through § 36-25-30) and will disclose any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest promptly.

To ensure transparency and accountability, xMA will implement a formal Conflict of Interest Policy requiring annual disclosure statements from all board members and key personnel. Any individual with a potential conflict will recuse themselves from related discussions, decisions, or votes in accordance with state law and board policy. This process ensures that all decisions are made in the best interest of the school and its students, consistent with ethical and legal standards.



Element Review

Reviews is not provided

4. OPERATIONS PLAN AND CAPACITY

Effective management, including oversight by a governing board, is critical for long term and sustainable school success. This section outlines the organizational aspects necessary for effective management of a high-quality public charter school.

1. Organization Structure and Relationships

Reviewer Instructions

Please rate this section using the following rubric.

Status: Completed

Form Result

The organization charts should clearly delineate the roles and responsibilities of – and lines of authority and reporting among – the governing board, school leadership, any related bodies (such as advisory bodies or parent/teacher councils), and any external organizations that will play a role in managing the school. The organization charts should also document clear lines of authority and reporting within the school.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Evidence of organizational charts for governance, management and staffing.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

Organizational Chart

File 1

File name: xMA Organizational Chart Full & Final .pdf

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Uploaded by: Melissa Capehart

File 2

File name: xMA Leadership Team Roles & Responsibilities Matrix (2).pdf

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Uploaded by: Melissa Capehart

Responsibilities of Major Positions

File name: xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy Board Roles & Committee Descriptions.pdf

Uploaded: 03/11/2026 11:58 PM

Uploaded by: Melissa Capehart

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

2. Governing Board

Reviewer Instructions

Please rate this section using the provided rubric.

Status: Completed

Form Result

The governing board holds the charter contract and should be an active participant in overseeing the school in partnership with the school administration. The board is responsible for the success of the school and should be responsive to the various stakeholders. The board should periodically evaluate the leadership team and hold the team responsible for school performance.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Evidence of an effective and ethical governing philosophy and structure that directly and consistently guides the board toward educational and operation success and effective representation of key stakeholders, including parents.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

a) Explain the governance philosophy that will guide the board, including the nature and extent of involvement by key stakeholder groups. Include how the board will interact with the principal/head of school and any advisory bodies. Attach the governing bylaws for the proposed school.

Governance Philosophy

Governance Philosophy and Board Structure

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy's (xMA) Board of Directors consists of a diverse group of committed professionals who work to ensure equal access to high-quality education for the children and families of the greater Birmingham, Alabama community. Under the general supervision of the Alabama Public Charter School Commission and in compliance with the charter agreement and the Alabama School Choice and Student Opportunity Act, the Board of Directors serves as the governing body responsible for ensuring the academic success, financial health, and long-term sustainability of the school. The Board provides fiduciary oversight, sets strategic priorities, adopts policies, and hires, supports, and evaluates the Executive Director, who serves as the school's Head of School and is responsible for day-to-day operations and implementation of the school's educational program.

Governance Philosophy

The governance philosophy that guides xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy's Board is grounded in a policy governance model that clearly distinguishes between governance and management responsibilities. The Board focuses on strategic oversight, accountability, and long-term vision, while delegating operational leadership and implementation to the Executive Director. This model promotes organizational clarity, efficiency, and accountability, ensuring that leadership roles are clearly defined and aligned with the school's mission.

This philosophy provides a framework for how the Board operates and promotes a culture of continuous improvement by setting clear expectations for academic performance, financial management, and compliance with legal and regulatory requirements. Each Board member commits to:

- Overseeing the educational program to ensure alignment with the school's mission, vision, and charter goals
- Developing, adopting, and providing oversight of policies and procedures that govern school operations
- Hiring, supporting, and evaluating the Executive Director, including conducting an annual performance evaluation aligned with academic, operational, and organizational goals
-

Ensuring effective long-term strategic, financial, and organizational planning

- Providing fiduciary oversight, including approving budgets, monitoring financial performance, and ensuring responsible stewardship of public funds
- Supporting fundraising, partnership development, and resource acquisition to strengthen school sustainability
- Maintaining accountability to students, families, and the broader community the school serves

Board Interaction with the Executive Director (Head of School)

The Board governs through its relationship with the Executive Director, who serves as the school's chief executive and instructional leader. The Executive Director is responsible for implementing the Board's policies, managing daily school operations, supervising staff, overseeing academic programs, and ensuring compliance with state and federal requirements.

The Board interacts with the Executive Director through structured governance processes, including:

- Monthly Board meetings where the Executive Director provides updates on academic performance, enrollment, finance, operations, staffing, and school culture
- Committee meetings (Finance & Operations, Academics, Governance, and Community Engagement) where the Executive Director collaborates with Board members on strategic priorities
- Annual Executive Director evaluation aligned with performance goals, charter accountability measures, and organizational effectiveness
- Ongoing strategic planning and consultation to ensure alignment between Board priorities and school implementation

This governance structure ensures that the Board maintains strong oversight while empowering the Executive Director to effectively manage and lead the school.

Stakeholder Involvement and Advisory Structure

xMA's governance philosophy emphasizes meaningful stakeholder engagement while maintaining clear governance accountability. In accordance with Alabama law and the school's bylaws, at least 20% of the Board will consist of parent representatives, ensuring that families have a direct voice in school governance and strategic decision-making.

In addition to formal Board representation, xMA will establish a School Support & Advisory Board (SSAB) to ensure ongoing stakeholder engagement and structured feedback. The SSAB will serve in an advisory-only capacity and will not have formal governance authority. Instead, it will function as a consultative body that informs school decision-making in alignment with the school's mission, vision, and strategic priorities.

The SSAB will advise the Executive Director and Leadership Team on academic programming, school culture, student discipline, school safety, family engagement, and community partnerships. It will include representatives from across the school community, including:

- Parents (elected through the Family Engagement Council, including a Parent Safety Liaison)
- Teachers (elected instructional representatives)
- Support staff
- A member of the School Culture Team

- Community partners
- Student representatives

The SSAB will meet quarterly and report directly to the Executive Director. Summary reports and recommendations may be shared with the Governing Board through leadership updates to ensure alignment with strategic goals while preserving clear governance boundaries.

This structure ensures authentic stakeholder voice without compromising the Board’s legal authority or governance responsibilities.

Board Structure, Terms, and Transition to Governing Body

Founding Board members will transition to the formal governing body immediately upon charter authorization. Each Board member will operate under the term limits and governance policies outlined in the xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy Bylaws. Directors serve staggered terms to ensure leadership continuity, stability, and institutional knowledge over time.

Board members are selected based on their professional expertise, leadership experience, and commitment to the school’s mission. This structure ensures the Board maintains the collective skills necessary to provide strong governance oversight across academics, finance, operations, community engagement, and strategic planning.

Governing Bylaws

The xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy Bylaws establish the legal and governance framework for Board operations, including roles and responsibilities, officer duties, committee structures, conflict-of-interest policies, meeting procedures, and governance accountability. These bylaws ensure compliance with Alabama law, promote transparency, and establish clear governance processes that support effective and responsible oversight.

Board Bylaws	File name:	xMA BYLAWS (2).pdf
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	Uploaded by:	Melissa Capehart

b) Describe clearly the governance structure of the proposed school, including the primary roles of the governing board members. In this explanation, please include the following:

- i) Describe the size, current and desired composition, powers, and responsibilities of the governing board;
- ii) Identify key skills and areas of expertise desired among board members;
- iii) Identify key constituencies/stakeholders that will be represented on the governing board.
- iv) Include specifically which school employees report directly to the board and how the board will evaluate these employees.
- v) Describe how the board will hear from key stakeholders, including parents and community members.

Governance Structure

Governance Structure

The Board of Directors for xS.T.R.E.A.M. Mind Academy is composed of dedicated educators and professionals who are dedicated to the mission and vision of xS.T.R.E.A.M. Mind Academy and have the experience and expertise to govern a successful public charter school. The Board serves as the school’s independent governing body and is responsible for ensuring academic excellence, financial sustainability, and faithful implementation of the school’s mission.

The Bylaws are compatible with Robert’s Rule of Order and state that the board shall consist of a minimum of five (5) members and a maximum of fifteen (15) members. xMA’s current composition consists of seven (7) members. It complies with ACT 215-3 (10) GOVERNING BOARD, which states: “The governing board shall have at least 20 percent of its membership be parents of students who attend or have attended the public charter school for at least one academic year.” xMA board currently consists of two parents which meet the minimum and will before the first day of instruction each year, the 20 percent membership requirement will be satisfied by parents who intend to have their students attend the public charter school.

The xMA board currently includes two parents, meeting the minimum requirement. Before the first day of instruction each year, the school will satisfy the 20 percent parent membership requirement with parents who intend to enroll their students in the public charter school. This ensures that families are directly represented in governance and that the Board remains connected to the needs and experiences of students and parents.

xMA has a self-perpetuating board of directors that manages its membership subject to its regulations as identified in its ByLaws. The Bylaws indicate that the Board will include four elected officers to meet specific organizational needs. Each officer will serve a renewable two-year term for a maximum of three consecutive terms. Executive positions include a president, a vice president, a secretary, and a treasurer. Each remaining position will be an at-large voting position.

Board members have fiduciary duties to the organization, including care, loyalty, and obedience.

- The duty of care includes exercising prudent judgment in all decisions for the school and its stakeholders.
- The duty of loyalty requires board members to act in good faith and in the school's best interest.
- The duty of obedience dictates that board members adhere to all policies, laws, and regulations while governing the charter school.

Primary Role

Board members will be responsible for the school's governance, while the administration will be responsible for the school's day-to-day operations. The Board's primary responsibilities are communicating and measuring the school's success in reaching key objectives. These include the following:

- Ensuring the success and effectiveness of the school's academic program
- Ensuring that the school complies with all statutory and regulatory requirements while working within the bounds of its charter and taking regular strides in meeting its mission
- Continually ensuring that the school is financially healthy, is appropriately staffed, and regularly meets or exceeds goals set by the board

The Board also establishes school policies, provides strategic direction, approves budgets, monitors organizational performance, and ensures accountability to students, families, and the broader community.

Board Meetings

Board meetings will occur at least once per month, ten months each year, and will fully comply with the Alabama Open Meetings Act. Additional meetings may be called as necessary and will continue to abide by all Alabama Open Meetings Act provisions. These meetings include public comment opportunities to allow parents, staff, and community members to provide input directly to the Board. Committees will meet at designated times between the regular monthly board meetings to conduct a thorough analysis, discussion, and decisions to be recommended to the full board during the regular meetings to ensure that all aspects of the charter school continue to develop toward reaching the school's stated mission.

Employees Reporting Directly to the Board and Evaluation

The Executive Director is the only employee who reports directly to the Board of Directors. All other school staff report to the Executive Director or their designees, ensuring clear lines of accountability and operational efficiency.

The Board has identified a highly qualified school leader as Executive Director and will approve this position upon charter authorization. The Board will support the efforts of the Executive Director and the leadership team to bring the mission to fruition. Melissa Capehart, the proposed Executive Director, is a visionary and results-driven educator who is responsive to community needs and

experienced in developing strong academic outcomes, fostering positive relationships, and leading transformational change.

A strong relationship between the Board of Directors and the school leader is key to success. The working relationship between the Board and the Executive Director is one of transparency, mutual respect, and trust and is anchored in effective communication.

The Board will consistently collect data from the school leader in the following areas:

- Academic Achievement

- School Climate and Culture

- Financial health

After receiving feedback and guidance from the Board of Directors, the Executive Director will create a plan that responds to the successes and challenges indicated in the data. The evidence provided will be the basis for the Executive Director's annual evaluation.

This evaluation will occur formally every school year by the Governance Committee and will be aligned to clearly defined performance goals and charter accountability measures. It will be shared with the full board before discussing the findings and possible improvement plans with the Executive Director. The final evaluation will be saved in the personnel folder of the Executive Director.

Founding Board Member Selection and Representation

At the organization's inception, the organization consulted educational institutions in academic excellence, restorative practices, and whole-school reform. Founding board members of xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy was selected based on community input and a clearly defined set of criteria that prioritized relevant expertise, a commitment to educational excellence, strong governance and oversight capacity, and philosophical alignment with the school's mission and vision.

Board members bring diverse skills in areas such as academics, finance, operations, community engagement, nonprofit leadership, mental health, and public service, and were chosen for their demonstrated ability to work collaboratively, uphold high standards of accountability, and provide independent oversight to ensure the long-term success of the school.

The proposed board comprises members representing our community's demographics and diversity, including parents, community leaders, and professionals with deep ties to Birmingham. This will be our continual goal as members cycle on and off the board.

This group has reviewed, contributed to, and supported this charter application and the school design from conception. They bring a wealth of knowledge and demonstrate sustainability, fiscal responsibility, and organizational growth, as demonstrated by the success of their endeavors. They are actively involved in the Birmingham and state communities and are committed to seeing the mission and vision of xS.T.R.E.A.M. Mind Academy carried out.

Stakeholder Voice and Community Input

The Board ensures that key stakeholders including parents, families, and community members have meaningful opportunities to provide input and engage in school governance. In addition to public comment opportunities at Board meetings, stakeholder input is gathered through parent surveys, family engagement events, advisory structures, and reports provided by the Executive Director and Community Engagement & Partnerships Committee.

These structures ensure that the Board remains responsive to the needs of students, families, and the community and fulfills its responsibility to govern in alignment with stakeholder priorities and school mission.

Committees

Bylaws indicate that the Board of Directors will have standing committees. Additional Board committees or task forces may be added as needed by the resolution of the Board. Select committees will include our parents and business communities to involve key stakeholder groups further. They will be established to receive community feedback and provide input on various topics affecting the school.

Committees will include members of the Board, staff members, parents, and community members, as determined in the resolution. Each committee meets once per month and is composed of a minimum of 2 active Board of Directors, except for the Governance Committee, which comprises three active members. Committees will serve as a vetting process for community members interested in serving on the Board of Directors.

Governance Committee

The purpose of this committee is to ensure the Board has the necessary strength to govern xS.T.R.E.A.M. Mind Academy. In addition, the Governance Committee will create tools for evaluating the strength of the Board and provide development opportunities for members. The Governance Committee will also be responsible for new members' identification, recruitment, nomination, and training.

The committee will develop a succession plan in which each member is tasked with replacing not only him- or herself but also recruiting one or two additional board members. Potential candidates will be invited to serve on one of the committees as a trial period for both the board and the individual. If a board position becomes available, these committee members or new members may be elected to the board within three months of the vacancy, depending on the needs of the current board. Otherwise, they will be elected to the board at its annual meeting.

This Committee will receive input from community leaders and parents before submitting nominations to the Board for approval. This ensures all stakeholders have a voice and involvement in selecting Directors.

Finance Committee

The purpose of this committee is to closely oversee the school's financial management and work with the Executive Director, or appropriate designee, and back-office financial provider to ensure fiscal responsibility and sustainability.

The Finance Committee's tasks include reviewing monthly cash flow statements, preparing financial reports, presenting these reports to the Board, and taking the lead in hiring the school's auditor and interpreting the financial audit results for the Board as a body.

Academic Committee

This committee aims to work with the Executive Director to analyze students' academic progress and ensure that the school meets accountability goals outlined in the charter application and any additional internal measures of success that the board and school leadership may establish.

During the start-up phase of the school, this committee will also support the recruitment and enrollment efforts of the school.

Community Engagement & Partnerships Committee

This committee is responsible for supporting the Executive Director in building strong, authentic relationships with families, community organizations, local businesses, and civic partners to advance the school's mission and visibility.

The committee works to ensure that xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy is deeply connected to the communities it serves by advising on family engagement strategies, outreach efforts, and partnership development.

During the start-up phase of the school, this committee will play a critical role in supporting recruitment and enrollment by coordinating community events, strengthening outreach pipelines, identifying potential partnership opportunities, and promoting the school through trusted neighborhood networks.

Over time, the committee will also help cultivate long-term partnerships that enhance student learning, STREAM programming, enrichment opportunities, and family support services.

c) Explain how this governance structure and composition will help ensure that the school will be an educational, operational, and financial success.

Governance Narrative

Governance Structure and Capacity for Educational, Operational, and Financial Success

The governance structure of xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) is intentionally designed to ensure the school's long-term educational excellence, operational effectiveness, and financial sustainability. The Board of Directors provides independent oversight, strategic leadership, and accountability while

empowering school leadership to execute the school's mission and instructional model. This clear separation between governance and management ensures strong oversight while allowing school leaders to focus on implementation and student outcomes. The Board's diverse expertise across education, finance, governance, mental health, operations, nonprofit leadership, and community engagement ensures comprehensive oversight across all critical areas of school success.

Educational Success

The Board includes members with deep expertise in curriculum, instruction, educator preparation, instructional innovation, and student support, ensuring strong oversight of the academic program. Dr. Amanda Giles, a PhD-level curriculum and instruction expert, National Board Certified educator, and university professor who prepares and mentors educators, provides critical expertise in standards alignment, instructional design, English learner supports, and academic program quality. Beth Sanders, an education innovation leader, former Vice President of Learning at Ed Farm, and recognized leader in instructional technology and STREAM education, brings expertise in designing innovative learning programs, integrating technology into instruction, and building future-ready educational models aligned to workforce pathways.

In addition, Kourtney Bilbo, a Licensed Professional Counselor, Registered Play Therapist™, and school-based mental health provider, provides expertise in student mental health, trauma-informed practices, and social-emotional supports that are essential for ensuring student well-being and academic success. Krishula Edwards, a Contracting Specialist with the U.S. Air Force and founder of a community wellness consultancy, brings leadership experience in trauma-informed services, youth development, and community-centered program design, ensuring the school's academic and student support systems are responsive to the needs of Birmingham families.

Through its Academic Excellence Committee, the Board regularly reviews student achievement data, subgroup performance, assessment outcomes, and progress toward charter goals. These members provide critical oversight to ensure fidelity of implementation of xMA's personalized learning, mastery-based learning, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and STREAM instructional model. This ensures that academic decisions are grounded in research, data, and best practices, and aligned with the school's mission to provide rigorous, equitable educational opportunities for all learners.

Operational Success

The Board includes members with significant expertise in operations, organizational leadership, strategic planning, communications, and governance, ensuring strong operational infrastructure and effective school implementation. Evan Cottrell, an experienced operations and project management professional, brings expertise in operational systems development, organizational efficiency, and strategic implementation, supporting the school's operational readiness and infrastructure development.

Megan Skipper, Chief of Staff at A+ Education Partnership and former Vice President of Communications and Strategic Initiatives, brings expertise in education policy, organizational leadership, strategic communications, and stakeholder engagement. Her experience supporting statewide education initiatives strengthens the school's strategic planning, governance systems, and external communications.

Krishula Edwards brings extensive governance and nonprofit leadership experience through her leadership roles across multiple nonprofit boards, including serving as Board Chair of the Boys and Girls Club River Region and President of the Alabama Mental Health Counseling Association. Her governance experience strengthens the Board's ability to establish strong policies, accountability systems, and long-term strategic direction.

Through its Governance Committee, the Board ensures ongoing board development, recruitment, training, and succession planning. The Community Engagement & Partnerships Committee, supported by members such as Megan Skipper and Beth Sanders, ensures strong partnerships with community organizations, industry partners, and families, strengthening the school's ability to implement its STREAM program and expand opportunities for students.

These governance structures ensure that operational decisions are strategic, sustainable, and aligned with the school's mission.

Financial Success

The Board includes members with strong expertise in finance, banking, budgeting, and financial oversight, ensuring sound fiscal management and long-term sustainability. Courtney Winston, a senior executive at Bank of America with more than 20 years of experience managing financial operations across large-scale systems serving over one million customers, brings extensive expertise in financial management, budgeting, compliance, and organizational performance. Her leadership strengthens the Board's ability to ensure strong financial stewardship, accountability, and long-term sustainability.

Krishula Edwards, with her federal contracting and financial oversight experience, further strengthens the Board's ability to oversee financial compliance, procurement processes, and fiscal accountability.

Through its Finance Committee, the Board provides active oversight of budgeting, financial reporting, grant management, audit compliance, and financial sustainability. The committee reviews financial statements, monitors expenditures, ensures alignment with approved budgets, and works closely with school leadership and financial providers to ensure compliance with all federal, state, and charter financial requirements.

This financial oversight ensures that resources are used strategically to support student learning while protecting the long-term financial health of the school.

Governance Leadership and Strategic Oversight

The Board's governance expertise ensures strong leadership, accountability, and strategic direction. Board members bring experience in nonprofit governance, education leadership, public service, and organizational management, ensuring that the Board operates with integrity, transparency, and effectiveness.

Through its Governance Committee, the Board ensures strong governance practices, board training, policy development, and leadership accountability. The Board hires, supports, and evaluates the Executive Director, ensuring strong school leadership and alignment with the school's mission, academic goals, and strategic priorities.

This governance structure ensures effective leadership oversight while empowering school leaders to implement the school's vision.

Community Accountability and Family Partnership

The Board's composition reflects strong ties to the Birmingham community and includes parents, educators, and community leaders with deep roots in the neighborhoods the school will serve. Board members such as Krishula Edwards, Kourtney Bilbo, Megan Skipper, Beth Sanders, and Evan Cottrell bring extensive experience working directly with Birmingham students, families, and community organizations.

Through its Community Engagement & Partnerships Committee, public board meetings, and advisory structures, the Board ensures ongoing input from families, community members, and stakeholders. These structures ensure that governance decisions reflect community priorities and student needs. This strong community representation ensures that the school remains responsive, inclusive, and aligned with the needs of the families it serves.

Alignment with School Mission and Long-Term Success

Collectively, the governance structure and board composition of xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy provides the expertise, oversight, and strategic leadership necessary to ensure the school's success from its initial launch through long-term sustainability. The Board's combined expertise in curriculum and instruction (Dr. Amanda Giles, Beth Sanders), financial management and fiscal oversight (Courtney Winston, Krishula Edwards), operations and organizational leadership (Evan Cottrell), mental health and student support systems (Kourtney Bilbo), education policy and communications (Megan Skipper), and community-centered leadership ensures comprehensive oversight across all key domains required for school success. In addition, the Board has participated in ongoing governance training and capacity-building through national and state charter support organizations, including Build. Excel. Sustain. (BES), New Schools for Alabama (NSFA), and NewSchools Venture Fund (NSVF), which have provided training in charter governance, financial oversight, academic accountability, and strategic planning. Upon charter authorization, the Board will continue strengthening its governance capacity by participating in additional training and professional development through the Alabama Association of School Boards and other charter-specific governance training

providers to ensure continued readiness and alignment with state best practices. This governance structure provides strong accountability, sound financial stewardship, effective operational systems, and rigorous academic oversight. Additionally, the Board’s deep ties to the Birmingham community and commitment to the school’s mission ensure that xMA remains responsive to student and family needs. Together, this highly qualified, well-trained, and strategically structured governing board ensures that xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy is fully prepared to launch successfully, implement its mission and educational model with fidelity, and sustain strong academic, operational, and financial performance over time.

d) List all current and identified board members and their intended roles. Provide the qualifications, interest for serving on the board, full resume, and professional biographies for these individuals. If these positions are not yet filled, explain the timeline, criteria, and process for recruitment.

Board Members

Board Members, Roles, and Qualifications

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) is proud to introduce a founding Board of Directors composed of committed, highly qualified professionals who bring expertise in education, mental health, finance, project management, operations, nonprofit leadership, and public service. Each board member has been carefully selected for their alignment to xMA’s mission and their ability to provide strategic oversight as the school launches and grows. Upon charter authorization, these founding members will transition into their formal governance roles and lead the work of the Board through standing committees and officer responsibilities.

Figure (48):xMA Board Members, Roles, Expertise

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy – Board Members, Roles & Expertise		
Name	Board Role	Expertise
Dr. Amanda Giles	Board Chair, Academics & Finance Committee	Education
Megan Skipper	Vice Chair, Governance Committee Chair	Communications/Policy/Governance
Kourtney Bilbo (Parent)	Secretary, Community Engagement/Partnerships Committee	Mental Health
Courtney Winston	Finance Committee	Finance & Operations
Beth Sanders	Academics Committee Chair, Community Engagement/Partnerships Committee Chair	Ed Tech, Nonprofit
Krishula Edwards	Governance Committee	Mental Health, Governance
Evan Cottrell (Parent)	Finance Committee	Project Management, Finance, Real Estate

Dr. Amanda Giles (Chair)- Dr. Giles is a Clinical Assistant Professor at the University of Alabama at Huntsville, where she prepares and mentors pre-service and in-service educators with a focus on English Learners, differentiated instruction, and curriculum development. A National Board Certified educator with a PhD in Curriculum and Instruction, Dr. Giles has published extensively on culturally sustaining pedagogy and has served as both a classroom teacher and instructional leader and administrator in Birmingham-area schools. Her leadership ensures xMA’s academic model is rigorous, inclusive, and aligned to research-based practices.

Megan Skipper - (Vice Chair)-Megan Skipper is Chief of Staff at A+ Education Partnership, where she supports efforts to enhance organizational strategy and impact. Megan originally joined the A+ team in December 2018 as the Director of Communications, then as Vice President of Communications and Strategic Initiatives. Megan began her career in Montgomery at the Montgomery Education

Foundation in 2016 as a Communications and Research Coordinator. She briefly left the non-profit sector to work as a political strategist during the 2018 midterm election season, but her passion for education drew her back to education advocacy. At A+, she continues to advance education policy and communications initiatives. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Human Development and Family Studies, with a focus on Public Policy, from Auburn University, and a Master's degree in Strategic Communication from Troy University. Originally from Daphne, AL, Megan now resides in Montgomery with her partner, Hunter, their dogs Jack and Rocky, and their cat Piper, surrounded by family and friends.

Kourtney Bilbo - (Secretary) - A Licensed Professional Counselor, Registered Play Therapist™, and Senior Counselor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Kourtney Bilbo brings over a decade of experience in school-based mental health, trauma-informed care, and family engagement. She is a certified Mental Health First Aid instructor and national speaker on child and adolescent mental wellness. Her career has focused on creating safe, inclusive spaces for students and families especially those navigating trauma or mental health challenges and her insight into student support and community care will anchor xMA's social-emotional learning model.

Courtney Winston - Courtney V. Winston is a seasoned operations and sales executive with more than 20 years of leadership experience at Bank of America, where she currently serves as a Director of Bank of America at Merrill Lynch. A FINRA Series 7, 66, 9, and 10 license holder, she has led large, complex teams across more than 180 financial centers serving over 1.3 million customers. Courtney is recognized for driving operational excellence, improving underperforming markets, and elevating team performance, including moving a bottom-ranked center into the top 11% in under a year. Her leadership has earned several company honors, including the Global Diversity & Inclusion Award, Valiant Award for Leadership Dexterity, and Deliver One Company recognition. She is also an active contributor to employee networks supporting women, Black professionals, Asian leadership, and caregivers. Courtney holds a Bachelor of Science in Finance & Financial Management Services from Tuskegee University.

Beth Sanders - Beth Sanders is an education and innovation leader, Co-Founder and Vice President of Modiv EDU, and former Vice President of Learning at Ed Farm. With over a decade of experience spanning classroom teaching, instructional technology, and organizational leadership, she has designed and led programs that empower educators and students with future-ready skills. A recognized Apple Distinguished Educator and fellowship recipient, Beth is passionate about leveraging technology, partnerships, and innovative practices to create transformative learning experiences.

Krishula Edwards - A lifelong advocate for youth, equity, and public service, Krishula Edwards brings extensive leadership and board governance experience to xMA. She is a Contracting Specialist with the U.S. Air Force and founder of Edwards Essentials LLC, a consultancy focused on trauma-informed services and community wellness. She has served in numerous civic and leadership roles, including President of the Alabama Mental Health Counseling Association, PR Chair for the Junior League of Montgomery, President of the Florida A&M University Montgomery Alumni Chapter, and Board Chair of the Boys and Girls Club River Region. Her deep engagement across statewide and regional boards and her background in counseling, public administration, and nonprofit leadership make her an invaluable strategic leader for xMA.

Evan Cottrell-Evan Cottrell is a Birmingham-based project management and business operations professional with nearly a decade of experience driving organizational efficiency and strategic enablement for large-scale teams. As an operations manager, he leads initiatives that improve systems, align business goals, and enhance user experiences across global operations. Evan brings a passion for educational innovation and operational excellence to the founding board of xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy. Inspired by his personal experiences as a future xMA parent and advocate for diverse learning pathways, he is committed to helping the school create an inclusive, emotionally supportive environment where every child can thrive. Outside of his professional endeavors, Evan enjoys traveling with his wife and children and staying active in his local community.

The Board of Directors is responsible for setting policy, monitoring academic and operational performance, overseeing the budget and financial audits, hiring and evaluating the Executive Director, and ensuring fidelity to the school's charter and mission. As part of xMA's governance design,

board members also lead or participate in standing committees, including Governance, Academics, Finance, Community Engagement & Partnerships.

While these seven board members will anchor the initial governance structure, xMA intends to expand the board to include up to eleven total members prior to the school's first year of operation. The Governance Committee will lead recruitment efforts in collaboration with the Executive Director and BES/NSFA governance partners. The board seeks to add members with experience in legal affairs, real estate and facilities planning, parents, fundraising, school finance, and industry partnerships aligned to STREAM fields. A parent representative will also be added in accordance with state law. Recruitment will prioritize candidates who are committed to equity, bring diverse perspectives, and reflect the school's Birmingham community.

Prospective members will be identified through community outreach, personal referrals, and open calls for interest. Candidates will be vetted through a multi-step process that includes a mission-alignment screening, structured interviews, and board approval. New members will receive onboarding and training to ensure readiness for their governance role.

[Attachment -xMA Board Member Resume-LINKED HERE](#) will include the resumes of confirmed board members. Additional appointments and final officer elections will take place at the Board's organizational meeting following charter authorization.

Identified Board Members' Resumes

File 1

File name: xMA Board Resumes (3).pdf
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Uploaded by: Melissa Capehart

File 2

File name: xMA Board Members Info Sheet and Assurance-ALL (2).pdf
Uploaded: 03/12/2026 12:07 AM
Uploaded by: Melissa Capehart

e) Disclose any potential conflict of interest for identified board members and their association with the school. Consult the Alabama Ethics Law. Ala Code § 36-25-1 through 36-25-30 (1975) and Ala Code § 16-6F-4(16)b.

Conflict of Interest

Conflict of Interest Disclosure

At this time, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy has not identified any actual or potential conflicts of interest among its proposed Board of Directors or their association with the school. All board members have been selected based on their professional expertise, commitment to the school's mission, and ability to provide independent governance and oversight.

xMA is committed to full compliance with the Alabama Ethics Law (Ala. Code § 36-25-1 through § 36-25-30) and has adopted conflict of interest policies outlined in its Board Bylaws and Board Policy Manual. These policies require all board members to disclose any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest upon appointment and annually thereafter. Board members are also required to disclose any potential conflicts as they arise and to recuse themselves from discussions, decisions, or votes where a conflict may exist.

The Board will maintain signed Conflict of Interest Disclosure Forms for all members and will ensure that all decisions are made in the best interest of the school and in compliance with applicable state ethics laws. These procedures ensure transparency, accountability, and the integrity of the Board's governance.

f) If the current applicant team does not include the initial governing board, explain how and when the transition to the formal governing board will take place.

Transition Narrative

The current applicant team includes the initial governing board, which will also transition to the formal governing board once the charter application is approved.

g) If this application is being submitted by an existing nonprofit organization respond to the following:

i) Will the existing nonprofit board govern the new school, or has the school formed a new non-profit corporation governed by a separate board?

ii) If the nonprofit's current board will govern the charter school, what steps have been taken to transform its board membership, mission, and bylaws to assume its new duties? Describe the plan and timeline for completing the transition and orienting the board to its new duties.

iii) If a new board has been formed, describe what, if anything, its ongoing relationship to the existing nonprofit board will be.

iv) If a new board has been formed, does the new board have 501(c)3 status or has it applied for 501(c)3 status? Only organizations that have secured 501(c)3 status are eligible to hold a charter contract.

Formation of a new board

The current applicant team includes the initial governing board, which will also transition to the formal governing board once the charter application is approved.

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

3. Legal Status and Governing Documents

Reviewer Instructions

Please rate this section using the provided rubric.

Status: Completed

Form Result

Only organizations that have a 501(c)(3) nonprofit federal tax-exempt status may hold a charter school contact in the State of Alabama.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Evidence of nonprofit and federal tax-exempt status.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

Legal Status

Legal Status and Governing Documents

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy is established as a non-profit organization under Alabama law and has received its Certificate of Formation. The school has filed its Articles of Incorporation with the Alabama Secretary of State, and a copy of the filing is included in Attachment 15. Additionally, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy has submitted its application for 501(c)(3) non-profit status with the IRS. The school's federal tax exemption status is currently pending.

[Attachment \(\)](#) includes the completed and signed Statement of Assurances

Attachments Needed

- [Articles of Incorporation-Certificate of Formation - xSTREAM Minds Academy](#)
- [AL State Approved Articles.pdf](#)
- [501c3 status letter.pdf](#)
- [xMA BYLAWS](#)
- [xMA Conflict of Interest Policy xMA Code of Ethics](#)
- [xMA-SignedStatementofAssurance.pdf](#)

Articles of Incorporation	File name:	Articles of Incorporation-Certificate of Formation - xSTREAM Minds Academy (3).pdf
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Proof of non-profit status and tax exempt status (or copies of your filings for the preceding items)	File 1	
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	File name:	501c3 status letter (3).pdf
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File 2

	File name:	AL State Approved_Articles (2).pdf
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b) Attach, the completed and signed Statement of Assurances (template provided).

Completed and signed Statement of Assurances	File name:	xMA-SignedStatementofAssurance (3).pdf
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Element Review

Reviews is not provided

4. Performance Management & Mission Specific Goals

Reviewer Instructions

Please rate this section using the provided rubric.

Status: Completed

Form Result

Applicants may propose to supplement the authorizer's performance standards with school-specific academic or organizational goals.

Note: The authorizer will evaluate the performance of every charter school annually and for renewal purposes according to a set of academic, financial, and organizational performance standards that will be incorporated into the charter agreement. The academic performance standards will consider status, growth, and comparative performance based on federal, state, and school-specific measures. The financial performance standards will be based on standard accounting and industry standards for sound financial operation. The organizational performance standards will be based primarily on compliance with legal obligations, including fulfillment of the governing board's fiduciary obligations related to sound governance.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Compelling evidence of high quality and sustainable performance standards and evidence of direct and consistent performance monitoring over time, which considers status, growth, comparative performance, and fulfillment of legal standards.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

Performance Management

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA), we believe every learner is a hero in the making, each with unique powers waiting to be unlocked. But we don't leave their success to chance or inspiration alone. Our mission to cultivate future-ready innovators and problem-solvers through personalized, inclusive, S.T.R.E.A.M.-rich education comes to life through a performance system that is bold, mission-driven, and measurable.

Our educational model celebrates student agency, creativity, and mastery, but beneath this dynamic experience lies a foundation of SMART goals, strong organizational systems, and continuous improvement cycles. We know that dreaming big requires disciplined follow-through. For that reason, we have built a robust performance management framework that allows us to monitor not only student growth, but also the strength, fidelity, and effectiveness of our organizational systems that support student success.

xMA fully aligns with the Alabama Public Charter School Commission's academic, financial, and organizational performance standards, which consider governance effectiveness, operational compliance, stakeholder engagement, and organizational sustainability alongside academic outcomes. In addition to the Commission-established organizational indicators, xMA has identified mission-specific organizational performance goals that reflect the heart of our school culture, personalized learning model, S.T.R.E.A.M. programming, and family and community partnerships. These goals serve as key indicators of organizational health and school model fidelity and are designed to enhance the overall educational experience of students.

[xMA Academic Framework](#)

Mission-Specific Organizational Goals

Our goals aren't just numbers on a chart, they are the compass guiding our daily work as an organization. Each is Specific, Measurable, Action-oriented, Realistic, and Time-bound, and together they represent the organizational conditions necessary for students and staff to thrive.

S.T.R.E.A.M. Program Implementation Fidelity

To ensure the integrity and consistency of our innovation-focused model, xMA will implement a fully operational S.T.R.E.A.M. program across all grade levels, including robotics, coding, engineering, digital media, and AI exploration. Success will be measured by ensuring that 100% of students participate in scheduled S.T.R.E.A.M. instruction and projects, and that all STREAM classes are implemented in alignment with the school's instructional design, curriculum framework, and project-based learning model. This goal ensures that students consistently have access to enriching, hands-on learning experiences that support creativity, innovation, and engagement.

Culture and Core Values in Action

Our school culture is powered by our P.O.W.E.R.S. values: Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, and Safety First. We aim for 90% of students to demonstrate these values consistently, as captured through climate surveys, behavior data, and school culture metrics aligned with our PBIS system. This goal reflects the effectiveness of our schoolwide culture systems, student support structures, and safe, inclusive learning environment.

Family Engagement and Satisfaction

We believe families are essential partners in our school community. Our goal is for 90% of families to report feeling informed, welcomed, and engaged in their child's educational experience, as measured through annual surveys and participation in Personalized Learning Plan (PLP) conferences, family workshops, and school events. This goal reflects the strength of our communication systems, family partnership efforts, and overall organizational responsiveness.

Personalized Learning System Implementation

xMA is built on a personalized learning model designed to meet the individual needs of every student. We aim for 100% of students to have an active Personalized Learning Plan (PLP) and digital portfolio that is updated regularly and used to guide instruction, goal-setting, and reflection. This goal ensures that organizational systems for personalized learning are implemented with fidelity and that students have ownership of their learning journey.

Student Engagement and Attendance

Student engagement is a key indicator of a healthy school organization. xMA will maintain an average daily attendance rate of at least 95% and a chronic absenteeism rate below state and local averages. These metrics reflect the effectiveness of our school climate, student engagement strategies, and family partnership efforts.

Organizational Impact and Continuous Improvement

These mission-specific organizational goals complement the Commission's established organizational performance indicators and provide additional measures of success aligned to xMA's mission and model. School leadership and the Board of Directors will monitor progress toward these goals through regular review of organizational data, climate surveys, participation metrics, and implementation fidelity measures.

By establishing clear organizational performance goals aligned to our mission, culture, and educational model, xMA ensures that the systems, structures, and partnerships necessary for student success are implemented with fidelity, continuously strengthened, and sustained over time. These organizational goals ensure that xMA remains a high-functioning, mission-aligned school that provides students with a safe, engaging, innovative, and supportive learning environment.

b) How does the school measure success in meeting its organizational goals? Give specific, quantitative or qualitative, measures of success with benchmarks. Describe what success looks like for the school relating to the organizational aspects of the school's mission and vision.

Measure of Success Narrative

Academic and Organizational Goals

Our goals aren't just numbers on a chart, they are the compass guiding our daily work with students. Each is Specific, Measurable, Action-oriented, Realistic, and Time-bound, and together they represent the pillars of our S.T.R.E.A.M.-centered, inclusive model.

1. Academic Growth in Core Subjects

xMA commits to ensuring that 90% of students demonstrate at least one year of academic growth in English Language Arts, Math, and Science. This growth will be measured using

i-Ready Diagnostics and the ACAP Summative Assessment. We believe that every student, regardless of starting point, deserves and is capable of measurable progress.

2. **Benchmark Proficiency in Core Subjects** To ensure strong on-grade-level performance, 80% of students will score 85% or higher on quarterly interim assessments in English Language Arts, Math, and Science. These benchmarks will assess student mastery of Alabama State Standards and guide instructional adjustments throughout the year.
3. **S.T.R.E.A.M. Pathway Proficiency**
In alignment with our innovation-focused curriculum, 90% of students will demonstrate proficiency in at least two S.T.R.E.A.M. pathways, such as robotics, coding, animation, or AI. Through hands-on projects, digital portfolios, and competency-based rubrics, students show what they know and how they apply it in real-world contexts
4. **Culture and Core Values in Action**
Our school culture is powered by our P.O.W.E.R.S. values: Positive Attitude, Ownership Now, Work Hard, Encourage Others, Respect All, and Safety First. We aim for 90% of students to demonstrate these values consistently, as captured through climate surveys, teacher observations, and behavior data aligned with our PBIS system.
5. **Family Engagement and Satisfaction**
We believe families are partners in learning. Our goal is for 90% of families to report feeling informed and engaged in their child’s education, measured through annual surveys and tracked participation in PLP conferences, family workshops, and school events.

Together, these goals form the framework of our accountability system and ensure that we are honoring our mission every day.

Comprehensive Assessment Plan

To measure what matters, we use a comprehensive, research-based assessment system that balances rigor and relevance. Assessments are scheduled at strategic intervals to provide timely, actionable insights supporting early interventions, curriculum adjustments, and personalized learning.

Our system includes screeners, diagnostics, curriculum-embedded checks for understanding, and benchmark assessments across content and grade bands. These tools are used not as isolated events but as ongoing checks on our shared progress.

Figure (54): xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy Comprehensive Assessment Plan

Content/Grade Bands	Assessment	Purpose	Frequency
Reading & Math; K–8	i-Ready Diagnostic	Determines personalized learning pathways for reading/math acceleration and Advisory planning	BOY, MOY, EOY
Reading & Math; K–8	i-Ready Growth Monitoring	Progress monitoring for Tier II and Tier III students for MTSS academics	Every two weeks
SEL Behavior; K–8	SAEBRS	Universal screener for MTSS behavior	BOY, MOY, EOY
SEL Behavior; K–8	DBR-SIS	Progress monitoring for Tier II and Tier III students with MTSS behavior	Every two weeks

ELLs; K–8	WIDA-ACCESS Placement Test	Determine and identify ELLs' placement and services	Prompted by status on Home Language Survey
ELLs; K–8	ACCESS 2.0	Monitor ELL's progress in acquiring academic English within school context	Once per year in January
ELA & Math; 2–8 Science; 4, 6, & 8	ACAP Summative	Measures student progress on the Alabama Course of Study standards	Once per year in spring
Reading & Math, Science; K–2, All content areas; 3–8	Mid-Unit & Unit Assessments	Administered during class periods to assess mastery of taught standards	As indicated in curriculum maps
Reading, Writing, & Math; K–2 All content areas; 3–8	Interim Assessments	Comprehensive exams to measure standard mastery throughout 1st and 3rd nine weeks	Twice a year, at end of 1st & 3rd nine weeks
Reading, Writing, & Math; K–2 All content areas; 3–8	Semester Benchmarks	Comprehensive exams to measure standard mastery throughout each semester	Twice a year in December and May

Evaluating Academic Progress

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy will evaluate academic progress through a multi-layered system of assessments, data tools, and personalized goal-setting practices to ensure students achieve mastery and demonstrate year-over-year growth. These systems are designed to monitor learning for individual students, student cohorts, and the school as a whole across the academic year and over the full charter term.

Student progress is measured through a combination of formative and summative assessments, including i-Ready diagnostics and growth monitoring, ACAP summative assessments, curriculum-based unit assessments, benchmark exams, and project-based evaluations. These assessments provide timely data that informs instructional planning and ensures students are progressing toward grade-level standards and personalized goals.

To centralize data access and enhance visibility, xMA will implement a one-stop digital dashboard that houses real-time data snapshots at the student, classroom, cohort, and school levels. This dashboard integrates formative and summative data, tracks intervention effectiveness, and supports tiered instruction. Staff, students, and families will receive training during orientation, Advisory sessions, and quarterly Data Days to ensure they can navigate the platform and use it meaningfully. The Executive Director, Principal and Dean of Culture & Instruction & Instruction will regularly review schoolwide performance data, identify trends across subgroups, and present reports to the Board of Directors and families following each assessment window. These reports reflect both current achievement and growth over time, and serve as critical benchmarks to evaluate progress toward xMA's charter goals.

The Principal, Dean of Culture & Instruction & Instruction, in collaboration with instructional coaches and content specialists, will manage academic data systems and lead professional development on data literacy and instructional alignment. Math and Literacy Coaches will support instructional staff in translating data into targeted lessons, small group planning, and intervention strategies. Teachers are trained to use this data to inform reteaching, regroup students, and adjust pacing.

Every Friday during early release, teachers participate in dedicated data analysis meetings and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). These weekly meetings focus on reviewing student

performance, exploring student work, analyzing assessment results, and making collaborative decisions about curriculum delivery and instructional next steps. The PLC structure follows the Data Wise and PLCs at Work frameworks to support collective inquiry and continuous instructional improvement.

Students are active participants in the academic progress process. Each student maintains a Personalized Learning Portfolio, which houses academic and S.T.R.E.A.M. goals, assessment reflections, project artifacts, and evidence of progress toward mastery. During weekly Advisory sessions, students review their portfolios, reflect on their progress, and revise their goals with support from their advisor. These portfolios serve as tools for ownership and self-advocacy, culminating in student-led conferences every nine weeks where students present their growth to their families. In addition to student portfolios, all students have a Personalized Learning Plan (PLP) that includes academic, S.T.R.E.A.M., and SEL goals. These plans are reviewed regularly by teachers, advisors, and families to ensure students are progressing toward personalized milestones and career-aligned competencies.

Families receive ongoing updates on academic performance through standards-based progress reports issued quarterly, as well as real-time access to assessment data through the dashboard. Quarterly Data Days, scheduled during daytime and evening hours, give families dedicated time to explore student progress, ask questions, and collaborate with teachers and advisors on next steps. These sessions are facilitated by the Dean of Culture & Instruction & Instruction and instructional leadership team.

For students requiring additional support, Rtl and MTSS data is reviewed bi-weekly by the Student Support Team, which includes academic leaders, teachers, and specialists. The PST monitors student movement through intervention tiers and ensures targeted supports are aligned to each learner's needs.

To mirror the student growth model, xMA educators maintain their own Professional Learning Portfolios and Professional Learning Plans. These tools guide individual teacher development across the school year. The plans outline personal goals aligned with school-wide initiatives (e.g., mastery-based instruction, UDL, personalized learning), while the portfolios include artifacts of growth such as student data reflections, unit plans, coaching feedback, and lesson samples. These are reviewed during coaching cycles and used during mid-year and end-of-year reflection meetings to ensure staff members are growing in alignment with xMA's instructional vision.

By deeply embedding data use, reflection, and goal-setting across all levels student, classroom, and staff xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy ensures that academic progress is intentional, transparent, and guided by both evidence and purpose.

Academic Corrective Action

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy, frequent assessment cycles and consistent progress monitoring through our internal data dashboard and Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs) allow us to predict and identify academic shortfalls early before they become long-term gaps.

When data indicates that individual students, classrooms, or grade levels are off track in meeting academic performance goals, the school will implement a tiered academic corrective action plan to provide immediate and targeted support. Strategies may include, but are not limited to:

- Adjusting allocated instructional time and student schedules to ensure access to intervention programming. This may include extending daily intervention blocks during personalized learning plan time in reading and math , or increasing small-group instruction within the school day for students needing additional support.
- Providing targeted professional development for instructional staff, focused on mastery-based instruction, data-driven lesson planning, UDL strategies, and the effective use of adaptive learning platforms to differentiate instruction based on student need.
- Modifying the master schedule or daily routines to increase instructional time in specific content areas where student or cohort data indicates academic gaps.

-

Temporarily placing Leadership Team members including the Principal, Dean of Culture & Instruction & Instruction, instructional coaches, or content specialists into classrooms to provide embedded support. This may include co-teaching, lesson modeling, targeted feedback cycles, and collaborative planning aligned to areas of concern.

- Hosting grade-level and schoolwide data retreats to conduct root cause analysis and set short-term, data-driven goals. These sessions allow instructional teams to reflect on student outcomes, revise instructional pacing, and identify next steps to accelerate progress.

Each corrective action is documented within xMA's Continuous Improvement Tracker and revisited during bi-weekly leadership reviews and coaching meetings. Our leadership team, in collaboration with teachers, ensures that adjustments are timely, responsive, and aligned to our mission of helping all students grow, achieve mastery, and succeed within a personalized, S.T.R.E.A.M.-driven learning environment.

Training and Support

To ensure every educator is empowered to use data and instructional tools effectively, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy provides ongoing, mission-aligned professional development embedded into the school's calendar and culture. Staff training is designed to build both technical skill and instructional expertise, aligned with our personalized and S.T.R.E.A.M.-based model.

- All staff will be trained on FERPA and xMA's internal Data Governance Policy, ensuring compliance and the protection of student information.
- Educators will engage in professional development on data analysis and instructional response, including how to interpret i-Ready and TeachTown reports, analyze interim and benchmark assessment data, and make instructional decisions based on student performance trends.
- Teachers will be trained to implement mastery-based grading and assessment practices, aligned with our personalized learning model. This includes how to design assessments that reflect depth of knowledge and performance-based mastery, as well as how to track and report progress toward individual learning goals.
- Staff will learn to effectively use adaptive learning platforms and blended learning strategies to support individualized instruction. This includes training on rotation models, station teaching, and the integration of technology tools that allow students to progress at their own pace.
- All educators will be trained in the use of xMA's internal progress tracking systems, including how to support students in monitoring their Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs), tracking SMART goals, and curating artifacts for their learning portfolios.
- Teachers will receive direct support in Universal Design for Learning (UDL)-based lesson planning, which equips them to proactively design lessons and interventions that meet the needs of diverse learners including students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and those requiring enrichment or scaffolds.
- Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) meet weekly to analyze student work, examine progress monitoring data, and collaborate on strategies to close learning gaps. These sessions follow the Data Wise Improvement Process and are facilitated by the Principal and Dean of Culture & Instruction

- Families and students are trained to understand and engage with performance data through student-led conferences, quarterly Data Days, and orientation sessions that build data literacy and promote shared accountability.

Sustained Accountability

Performance monitoring at xMA is not a one-time event; it is a sustained commitment across the life of the charter. In addition to annual progress reports and state accountability benchmarks, we will monitor longitudinal data across Years 1–5 to evaluate our impact, adjust strategy, and prepare for renewal. We compare our student outcomes to statewide averages and similar schools to ensure we are not just growing, but outperforming expectations. Annual reporting to the board and community ensures that our mission remains the North Star of all we do. At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy, we don't just teach students to dream, we teach them to grow, reflect, and reach measurable goals that prepare them for a purpose-filled future. Our performance management system ensures that their success is intentional, supported, and sustained every day, every year.

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

5. Staff Structure

Reviewer Instructions

Please rate this section using the provided rubric.

Status: Completed

Form Result

Provide a staffing chart that identifies all key personnel necessary to operate a high-quality public charter school.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Evidence of a staffing chart that identifies all personnel.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

- a) Attach a completed staffing chart for the school that includes:
- Year 1 positions, as well as positions to be added in future years;
 - Administrative, instructional, and non-instructional personnel;
 - The number of classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, and specialty teachers; and
 - Operational and support staff.

School Staffing Chart	File name:	xMA Staffing Plan (2).pdf
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	Uploaded by:	Melissa Capehart

- b) Identify key responsibilities within the staffing chart including, but not limited to:
- Child Nutrition;
 - Federal Programs;
 - Speical Education;
 - Health Services;

- v) Standardized Testing;
- vi) Transportation (if applicable); and
- iv) Financial Reporting.

Key Operational Responsibilities Within the Staffing Structure

xMA identifies key staff roles and responsibilities in the attachment [xMA Leadership Team Roles & Responsibilities Matrix](#). In addition to these instructional groupings, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) maintains strong overall staffing levels to maximize support, with approximately one adult for every three students in our initial year. Such extensive staffing ensures we can respond to varied learning profiles, implement individualized educational plans, and provide consistent social-emotional and behavioral support. We emphasize a collaborative culture where leadership works in tandem with teaching staff. The senior administrative team comprising the Executive Director, Director of Finance & Operations, Principal, Dean of Culture & Instruction, and Director of Student Supports shares decision-making responsibilities and guides school-wide improvement strategies.

As outlined in xMA's Leadership Roles and Responsibilities Framework, each leadership role has clearly defined operational ownership, ensuring strong accountability, regulatory compliance, and effective implementation of the school's academic and operational model.

Child Nutrition

The Director of Finance & Operations oversees all aspects of the Child Nutrition Program, including vendor management, compliance with the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), procurement, and financial reporting. This role ensures compliance with federal and state nutrition requirements, manages contracts with food service providers, and monitors program expenditures and reporting.

Federal Programs

The Executive Director maintains overall accountability for federal program implementation and compliance, while the Director of Finance & Operations oversees fiscal compliance, budgeting, grant management, and financial reporting. The Director of Student Supports oversees programmatic implementation of IDEA and other federally funded student support programs, including compliance monitoring, documentation, and service delivery.

Special Education

The Director of Student Supports, who serves as the school's LEA Representative and Section 504 Coordinator, leads all Special Education compliance and service delivery. Responsibilities include oversight of IEP development and implementation, Child Find processes, MTSS and behavioral intervention systems, compliance reporting, and coordination with related service providers.

Special education teachers implement instructional support and services, while the Director of Student Supports ensures regulatory compliance, staff training, and progress monitoring.

Health Services

xMA will receive a nurse unit from ALSDE and will hire a licensed school nurse or qualified health services provider to oversee student health services, including medication administration, immunization compliance, health plans, and emergency protocols. The Director of Student Supports ensures coordination between health services, IEPs, and student accommodations.

Standardized Testing

The Principal and Dean of Culture & Instruction oversees all schoolwide assessment systems, including state assessments, diagnostic assessments (such as i-Ready), and benchmark assessments. Responsibilities include coordinating testing administration, ensuring test security, managing accommodations for students with IEPs and 504 Plans, and supporting teachers in analyzing assessment data to drive instruction and intervention.

The Dean works collaboratively with Literacy and Math Specialists to support assessment analysis, intervention planning, and MTSS implementation across all tiers.

Transportation (if applicable)

If transportation services are provided, the Director of Finance & Operations will oversee transportation vendor contracts, routing logistics, compliance monitoring, and safety protocols. If transportation is not directly provided, the school will coordinate with families and community partners to ensure equitable access to enrollment and participation.

Financial Reporting

The Director of Finance & Operations serves as the school's primary financial officer, overseeing budgeting, accounting, procurement, financial reporting, audit coordination, and compliance with all federal, state, and charter financial requirements. This includes preparing monthly financial statements, managing accounts payable and receivable, overseeing grant expenditures, and presenting financial reports to the Executive Director and Board of Directors.

The Executive Director maintains overall accountability to the Board for financial performance, while the Board Finance Committee provides independent oversight and review.

Leadership Accountability and Organizational Alignment

The Executive Director reports directly to the Board of Directors and maintains overall accountability for academic performance, financial sustainability, operational effectiveness, and strategic leadership. The Principal, Dean of Culture & Instruction, Director of Finance & Operations, and Director of Student Supports report directly to the Executive Director and oversee their respective domains, including instructional quality, operational compliance, financial management, and student services. Literacy and Math Specialists, who report to the Dean of Culture & Instruction, support instructional coaching, intervention implementation, and curriculum fidelity, ensuring strong academic outcomes for all students.

Moreover, leadership conducts regular instructional walkthroughs and coaching cycles, offering timely, constructive feedback to teachers. This shared leadership approach creates a supportive environment that fosters continuous growth, reflective practice, and accountability. Our professional development focuses on mastery-based learning, personalized learning, and differentiated instructional strategies, ensuring that our staff are well-equipped to serve a diverse range of learners. Taken together, this clearly defined leadership structure and responsibility framework ensures that academic programming, compliance systems, financial reporting, and student services operate cohesively and effectively.

Student-Teacher Ratio

xMA maintains a structured yet adaptable classroom-based learning model that balances whole-group, small-group, and individualized instruction to meet the needs of all learners. Each grade level enrolls 60 students, divided into three classes of 20 students, maintaining a 1:20 teacher-student ratio. To enhance personalized learning and differentiation, class sizes adjust to a 1:10 ratio during math and literacy blocks, with teachers and teacher associates co-facilitating small-group instruction and targeted interventions. This structure ensures continuous progress monitoring, flexible regrouping, and mastery-based advancement, allowing students to move through structured, meaningful learning experiences at their own pace while reinforcing foundational skills.

c) Explain how the relationship between the school's senior administrative team and the rest of the staff will be managed. Note the teacher-student ratio, as well as the ratio of total adults to students for the school.

Relationship management narrative

Management of the Senior Administrative Team & Staff Relationships

In addition to these instructional groupings, we maintain strong overall staffing levels to maximize support, with approximately one adult for every three students in our initial year. Such extensive staffing ensures we can respond to varied learning profiles, implement individualized educational plans, and provide consistent social-emotional and behavioral support. We emphasize a collaborative culture where leadership works in tandem with teaching staff. The senior administrative team comprising the Executive Director, Principal, Director of Finance/Operations, Dean of Culture & Instruction, and the Director of Student Supports shares decision-making responsibilities and guides school-wide improvement strategies. Regular faculty meetings and professional learning communities facilitate open communication, encouraging teachers and paraprofessionals to share classroom observations and best practices.

Moreover, leadership conducts regular instructional walkthroughs and coaching cycles, offering timely, constructive feedback to teachers. This shared leadership approach creates a supportive environment that fosters continuous growth, reflective practice, and accountability. Our professional development focuses on mastery based learning, personalized learning, and differentiated instruc-

tional strategies ensures that our staff are well-equipped to serve a diverse range of learners. Taken together, our collaborative leadership model exemplifies how we remain steadfast in actualizing a true personalized learning and UDL model for every student in our care.

Student Teacher Ratio

xMA maintains a structured yet adaptable classroom-based learning model that balances whole-group, small-group, and individualized instruction to meet the needs of all learners. Each grade level enrolls 60 students, divided into three classes of 20 students, maintaining a 1:20 teacher-student ratio. To enhance personalized learning and differentiation, class sizes adjust to a 1:10 ratio during math and literacy blocks, with teachers and teacher associates co-facilitating small-group instruction and targeted interventions. This structure ensures continuous progress monitoring, flexible regrouping, and mastery-based advancement, allowing students to move through structured, meaningful learning experiences at their own pace while reinforcing foundational skills.

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

6. Staffing Plans, Hiring, Management, and Evaluation

Reviewer Instructions

Please rate this section using the provided rubric.

Status: Completed

Form Result

Provide details on the hiring and management of school staff that provides opportunities for meaningful staff contributions and gives staff rights suitable to their position.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Evidence of appropriate contractual relationships with staff.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

a) Explain the relationship that will exist between the proposed charter school and its employees, including whether the employees will be at-will and whether the school will use employment contracts. If the school uses contracts, explain the nature and purpose of the contracts. Attach any personnel policies or an employee manual, if developed.

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) will employ all staff under at-will employment agreements that clearly outline compensation, designated supervisor, position classification, and key roles and responsibilities. While these agreements are not contracts and do not guarantee employment for a specific term, they ensure mutual clarity regarding expectations, professional conduct, and alignment to the school's mission and values.

As an at-will employer, xMA retains the right to modify employment terms or terminate employment at any time, with or without cause or notice, consistent with applicable state and federal law. In turn, employees may resign at any time. Performance feedback and professional growth will be supported through formal evaluation cycles and goal-setting aligned to the school's instructional priorities and P.O.W.E.R.S. values.

At-will agreements will detail expectations related to student safety, instructional duties, and workplace conduct, ensuring that all team members contribute meaningfully to a culture of excellence, accountability, and continuous improvement.

xMA recognizes and will strictly adhere to the criminal background check requirements of the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) and will implement all necessary procedures to ensure the safety and well-being of our students and school community.

xMA has developed an initial draft of an Employee Handbook, in collaboration with national experts from the BES Fellowship, New Schools for Alabama (NSFA), and school policy consultants. This handbook will outline professional standards, expectations, and policies across academics, operations, and finance. Upon charter approval, the school leadership team will conduct a final review of the handbook in consultation with the Governing Board and HR experts. Once approved by the Board, the handbook will become an official school document.

All staff members will receive the handbook upon hiring, acknowledge receipt, and be trained on its contents during In-Service training. The Personnel Policies and Employee Manual is still in draft and will be finalized upon Charter and Board approval.

Personnel Policies or Employee Manual	File name:	xMA Handbook Policy Manual (1).pdf
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	Uploaded by:	Melissa Capehart

b) Outline the proposed school's salary ranges and employment benefits for all employees, as well as any incentives or reward structures that may be part of the compensation system. Explain the school's strategy for retaining high-performing teachers. If available, include a salary chart based on years of experience.

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) will employ all staff under at-will employment agreements that clearly outline compensation, designated supervisor, position classification, and key roles and responsibilities. While these agreements are not contracts and do not guarantee employment for a specific term, they ensure mutual clarity regarding expectations, professional conduct, and alignment to the school's mission and values.

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Salary Chart	File name:	xMA_Salary_Schedule_Updated-State App.docx (1).pdf
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	Uploaded by:	Melissa Capehart

c) Describe the school's strategy, plans, and timeline for recruiting and hiring the teaching staff, including the school's plan for hiring "Highly Qualified" staff in accordance with the state accountability plan. Explain other key selection criteria and any special considerations relevant to the school's design. Identify which school positions will be funded via federal funds and what certifications are required to allocate federal funds in this way.

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) has developed a strategic and mission-driven plan to recruit and hire a diverse, highly effective team of educators who are passionate about equity, personalized learning, and student-centered instruction. Our strategy focuses on hiring candidates who meet Alabama's definition of "Highly Qualified" and are well-equipped to implement our instructional model, which emphasizes mastery-based learning, blended instruction, and social-emotional development. Strategy and Selection Criteria

xMA will prioritize the recruitment of certified teachers who meet Alabama's "Highly Qualified" designation, including appropriate certification and subject-area expertise. Special emphasis will be placed on hiring special education teachers, as well as general education teachers with backgrounds in elementary education, culturally responsive instruction, and blended learning environments. While Alabama certification is required, our ideal candidate also demonstrates:

- A strong belief in the school's mission and core P.O.W.E.R.S. values
- Familiarity with or willingness to learn blended learning and mastery-based instructional models
- A demonstrated commitment to educational equity and meeting the diverse needs of learners
- Preference for at least three years of classroom teaching experience, with flexibility for high-potential early career educators

Candidates must be ready to work in a dynamic, innovative setting that prioritizes student voice, collaboration, and personalization.

xMA Educators Fellowship

In our planning year, xMA will launch the xMA Educators Fellowship to proactively identify and develop high-potential educators from the Birmingham community. The fellowship will engage six experienced local educators in monthly design sessions to co-create key elements of xMA's academic model and culture procedures, helping to build deep familiarity with the school's instructional vision and expectations. This initiative also serves as an early pipeline to leadership and instructional roles for those selected.

In subsequent years, the fellowship will expand to include aspiring educators pursuing certification through Teachers of Tomorrow and iTeach. xMA will cover certification costs in exchange for a three-year teaching commitment post-certification, supporting both workforce development and long-term retention.

Recruitment Plan

xMA's recruitment strategy is designed to attract educators who are both instructionally strong and culturally aligned. Led by the Executive Director in collaboration with the Board and external consultants, recruitment will include:

- Outreach through national and regional networks including BES, New Schools for Alabama, NewSchools Venture Fund, Teach for America, and Elevate Birmingham
- Recruitment from local colleges, universities, and HBCUs
- Targeted efforts to recruit teachers with experience in elementary education, special education, and culturally responsive practices

- Use of digital platforms such as LinkedIn, the school’s website, and social media
- Participation in local job fairs, info sessions, and community engagement events

xMA’s approach ensures a pool of diverse, mission-aligned educators who are ready to reimagine learning for all students.

Hiring Process and Timeline

xMA’s structured hiring process ensures consistency, equity, and alignment with the school’s instructional expectations:

Step	Description
1. Resume Screening	Executive Director, Principal and Dean of Culture & Instruction review resumes for professionalism, relevant experience, certification, and alignment with xMA’s mission.
2. Phone Interview	Candidates answer consistent questions assessing instructional mindset, equity beliefs, and readiness for personalized learning environments.
3. Instructional Video Review	Candidates submit a 10–15-minute classroom video. Evaluators assess classroom management, differentiation, student engagement, and instructional skill.
4. Reference Checks	Reference calls are conducted using a standardized protocol to verify past performance and cultural fit. Only candidates with strong references proceed.
5. Final Interview & Sample Teach	Candidates deliver a sample lesson and participate in a structured interview. The team evaluates communication, culture, and instructional strategies.
6. Offer	The Executive Director extends the offer verbally and follows up with a formal written offer letter outlining terms of employment.

Planned Hiring Timeline (Planning Year – 2026–2027)

- October 2026: Job descriptions posted; resume drop opens
- November 2026: Outreach, advertising, and referral campaign begins
- December 2026: Resume screening and phone interviews
- January 2027: Instructional video review and additional interviews
- February 2027: Reference checks, final interviews, and sample teaching
- March 2027: Final decisions made
- By April 1, 2027: Offer letters extended

Use of Federal Funds and Certification Requirements

Certain instructional positions at xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy may be partially supported through federal funding sources, including Title I, Title II, and IDEA funds, in accordance with federal and Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) guidelines. Title I funds may support instructional personnel who provide supplemental academic interventions for students who are not yet meeting grade-level expectations in reading or mathematics. Title II funds may support professional development and educator quality initiatives, including instructional coaching and teacher development aligned with the school’s personalized learning and STREAM model. IDEA Part B funds may support certified special education teachers and related instructional staff serving students with disabilities. To ensure compliance with federal funding requirements, all positions funded through these sources will meet the applicable certification and licensure requirements established by ALSDE. Teachers supported through Title I and Title II funding must hold appropriate Alabama educator certification and meet the state’s “Highly Qualified” designation for their subject or grade level. Special education teachers funded through IDEA must hold valid Alabama certification in special education and meet all state and federal requirements related to service delivery for students with disabilities. The school will maintain documentation of certifications, assignments, and funding allocations to ensure full compliance with federal and state accountability requirements.

All xMA employees will receive annual employment contracts that detail role expectations, salary, and reporting structure. Contracts are eligible for yearly renewal and reflect a shared commitment to student achievement and school culture. xMA complies fully with Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) regulations for criminal background checks to ensure a safe, nurturing school community.

d) Outline the school’s procedures for hiring and dismissing school personnel, including conducting criminal background checks.

Hiring and Dismissing Personnel

Teacher Hiring Process

A thorough selection process will occur for all potential teacher candidates. xMA will incorporate the following hiring process:

Figure (51):xMA Teacher Hiring Process

STEP	TIMEFRAME	EXPECTATIONS OF TASK
Application	Week 1	The first step in the hiring process is to apply. This can be done online through the designated platforms, the ALSDE website, or the school website. The application should include educational background, teaching experience, certification, a resume, and requested documents. xMA will advertise positions for a minimum of five business days.

Application Screening	Week 2-3	The Executive Director (ED), Principal and Dean of Culture & Instruction will review the application for certifications, experience, background checks, and educational background, including degrees earned and institutions attended. Candidates are contacted for a brief screening interview to verify resume information.
Phone Interview	Week 4	If the applicant's background check and certification are satisfactory, they will be invited to a phone interview. The ED, Principal or Dean of Culture & Instruction will ask pre-selected questions to help determine professionalism and effective communication. Interviews will also help determine mission alignment, personal beliefs, and academic expectations. Each candidate is asked the same questions and rated against the same rubric.
Instructional Video Screening	Week 5	If advancing to the next level, candidates are asked to complete a 15-minute Q&A video about instructional strategies and classroom management. The ED, Principal and Dean of Culture & Instruction will review and rate the candidate's responses using a standard rubric to determine strengths and growth areas. In addition, videos are screened for evidence of differentiated instruction, cultural competencies, and instructional strategies and practices. If candidates are advanced to the next level, they are contacted to schedule an in-person interview. Instructions for the in-person interview will include a performance task that the candidate will submit before the interview.

Final Interview	Week 6	The ED, Principal and Dean of Culture & Instruction observe the candidate's performance task, looking for evidence of differentiated instruction, culture, and instructional strategies and practices. Candidates will respond to pre-determined questions, discuss a lesson plan, and participate in a role-play scenario (all candidates are asked the same questions). Candidates advancing will grant permission for reference checks to be conducted.
Reference Checks	Week 7	The final process will require candidates to be screened for background (if still applicable) and reference checks per Alabama state law for educators. The ED will contact references with specific questions to determine consistency in candidates' education experiences.
Offer	Week 7	The ED contacts the candidate to offer the position contingent on Board approval.
Board Approval	Week 8	The ED submits a recommendation to Hire to the Board along with all pertinent candidate information. Upon Board approval, the ED follows up with an official welcome and written offer letter.

Acknowledging ALSDE Educator Certification

xMA shall comply with all applicable federal laws, rules, and regulations regarding the qualifications of teachers and other instructional staff. xMA acknowledges the school's understanding of the ALSDE's Educator Certification Section and criminal history background check process. If approved, xMA will comply with this process and adhere to the necessary steps to ensure compliance. Likewise, xMA will be subject to the same civil rights, health, and safety requirements, including, but not limited to, state and local public health and building codes, employee fingerprinting, and criminal background checks applicable to other public schools in the state except as otherwise specifically provided in Act 2015-3, Section 9 (d)(1).

Teacher Dismissal Process

xMA will implement a progressive discipline policy while attempting to educate the employee simultaneously. This policy, which will be incorporated into employment materials at a later date, will follow the following dismissal procedures:

1. Verbal Warning. A Verbal Warning will be used in situations involving minor infractions or early signs of poor work performance. Multiple Verbal Warnings may be used in situations where the conduct is of a minor nature. For major issues/infractions, Verbal Warnings may not be appropriate.

2. **Written Warning.** A Written Warning will be used in situations involving repeated minor infractions following the use of Verbal Warnings, or for more serious infractions. For major issues/infractions, Written Warnings may not be appropriate.
3. **Performance Improvement Plan / Final Warning.** A Performance Improvement Plan and/or Final Warning may be used in situations of repeated minor infractions or for more serious and major infractions. This step will incorporate the Executive Director and applicable supervisors in determining a course of action to improve the employee's work performance by a certain date. If proper improvement has not been made by date certain, termination may be recommended. A Performance Improvement Plan / Final Warning may not be appropriate for major issues/infractions.
4. **Suspension.** Suspension may be used for repeated minor infractions or for more serious and major infractions. Suspensions may be in length up to 14 days.
5. **Termination.** Termination may be used in situations of repeated minor infractions or for more serious and major infractions. The Executive Director will make the decision on termination of the employee after consulting with the employee, supervisors and other interested parties. An employee terminated will have the right to appeal to the xMA Board of Directors to have the termination overturned.

Teacher/Employee Manual

The Executive Director, in collaboration with the Director of Operations & Finance, will develop the staff/employee handbook based on research. The handbook will include professional standards, policies, and practices for academics, operations, and finances. Upon approval of the governing board, the handbook will become an official document of the school.

Staff members will acknowledge receipt of the handbook upon hiring and be trained on its components during summer institute.

- e) Explain how the school leader will be supported, developed, and evaluated each school year. Attach any leadership evaluation tool(s) that have been developed.

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) will utilize the Alabama Principal Leadership Development System (APLDS) as the formal evaluation system for school leaders. The APLDS framework, developed by the Alabama Department of Education, aligns with the Alabama Standards for School Leadership and provides a structured system for annual goal setting, leadership evidence review, and performance evaluation focused on continuous improvement.

At xMA, the Executive Director will serve as the Head of School during the planning year (Year 0) and the school's first operational year (Year 1) until the leadership team expands as enrollment grows. During this period, the Governing Board will formally evaluate the Executive Director using the APLDS leadership evaluation framework.

Specifically, the Board Chair and the Academic Excellence Committee will lead the evaluation process, which will include review of leadership goals, school performance data, and evidence aligned to the Alabama Standards for School Leadership. Once a Principal is hired, the Executive Director will evaluate the Principal annually using the same APLDS framework, ensuring alignment with Alabama's leadership evaluation system.

The APLDS evaluation cycle includes the following components:

- **Self-Assessment:** The school leader completes an annual self-assessment aligned to the Alabama Standards for School Leadership.
- **Professional Learning Plan (PLP):** The leader develops annual growth goals connected to student achievement, instructional leadership, school climate, and professional learning.
- **Evidence of Leadership Practice:** Throughout the year, the leader collects artifacts demonstrating progress toward leadership goals and effective implementation of leadership responsibilities.
- **Annual Evaluation Conference:** The evaluator reviews evidence, discusses progress toward goals, and provides performance feedback aligned to state leadership standards.

Executive Director Support & Development

In alignment with best practices for school leader development, xMA ensures that the Executive Director receives ongoing, high-quality support through a combination of board oversight, coaching, and professional learning.

Board Chair & Academic Excellence Committee Support

The Board Chair and the Academic Excellence Committee support the Executive Director through regular check-ins, review of academic and operational data, and an annual leadership goal-setting process aligned to the school's performance framework.

External Coaching & Mentorship

The Executive Director will participate in leadership coaching and development through organizations such as NewSchools Venture Fund (NSVF), BES (Build. Excel. Sustain.), and New Schools for Alabama (NSFA). These organizations provide coaching, leadership development programming, and strategic guidance on instructional systems, governance, and organizational leadership.

Professional Learning Communities for School Leaders

The Executive Director and Principal will participate in regional and national leadership networks that support continuous improvement in areas such as personalized learning, STREAM integration, and effective charter school leadership.

360° Feedback and Continuous Improvement

xMA will utilize climate surveys and stakeholder feedback from staff, families, and students to inform leadership reflection and goal setting. These data sources will be incorporated into leadership coaching conversations and annual performance reviews.

Corrective Action and Leadership Accountability

If the Executive Director's performance is determined to be developing or unsatisfactory through the annual evaluation process, the Governing Board will implement a formal Leadership Improvement Plan (LIP). The plan will be developed collaboratively by the Board Chair, the Academic Excellence Committee, and the Executive Director and will include:

- clearly defined performance expectations aligned to the Alabama Standards for School Leadership
- specific improvement goals and measurable benchmarks
- targeted professional development or coaching supports
- a defined timeline for progress monitoring and follow-up evaluation

The Board will review progress toward the improvement plan at regularly scheduled intervals.

Continued failure to demonstrate adequate improvement may result in additional personnel action, consistent with board policies and applicable employment agreements.

Through the combination of state-aligned evaluation, board oversight, executive coaching, professional learning networks, and structured accountability measures, xMA ensures that school leaders receive meaningful support, continuous professional development, and rigorous accountability for school performance and student outcomes.

Leadership Evaluation Tool(s)

File 1

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File 2

File name: Alabama Standards for School Leadership.pdf
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f) Explain how teachers will be supported, developed, and evaluated each school year. Attach any teacher evaluation tool(s) that already exist for the school.

xMA Teacher Support, Development, and Evaluation System

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) is committed to developing highly effective educators who can deliver rigorous, personalized, and inclusive instruction aligned with the school's mission and instructional model. To ensure alignment with state expectations, xMA will implement the Alabama Teacher Growth Program (ATGP) as the formal framework for teacher evaluation and professional development. xMA's teacher development model emphasizes continuous improvement through observation, coaching, collaborative planning, and data-driven reflection.

As required by the Alabama Department of Education, teachers at xMA will receive evaluations using the Alabama Teacher Observation Tool (ATOT). The ATOT is a statewide observation instrument used to assess instructional practice and provide structured feedback aligned with Alabama's teaching standards. The ATGP framework includes teacher self-reflection, observation and feedback cycles, and individualized Professional Learning Plans (PLPs) designed to support continuous improvement in teaching practice.

Through this system, teachers receive ongoing feedback on key areas of instructional effectiveness, including instructional planning, classroom environment, student engagement, differentiation, and assessment practices. The ATOT observation process provides structured feedback to help teachers refine instructional strategies and improve student learning outcomes.

Professional Growth and Development

In addition to the formal ATGP evaluation process, xMA provides a comprehensive system of coaching and professional development to support teacher growth throughout the school year. Professional growth is measured through progress toward individualized Professional Learning Plan (PLP) goals. These goals are developed collaboratively between teachers and school leadership and reflect schoolwide priorities, instructional coaching feedback, and individual professional development needs.

Teachers also receive regular support through instructional coaching, collaborative planning, and data-driven reflection focused on improving student outcomes and strengthening instructional practices aligned with xMA's personalized learning and STREAM instructional model.

Student Achievement

Student achievement is measured through evidence of student progress toward academic goals, including growth on diagnostic assessments, mastery of standards-based objectives, and progress toward personalized learning goals. Student achievement data are used to inform coaching conversations, professional development priorities, and instructional adjustments throughout the year.

xMA Staff Development Cycle

The process by which the teacher support and evaluation system is implemented is outlined in the staff development cycle below. This process supports, but does not replace, the school's ongoing coaching model, which includes informal feedback, data conversations, lesson planning meetings, and weekly instructional check-ins.

Stage	Description
Self-Assessment	Staff begin the year by reflecting on their instructional practice to identify strengths and growth areas, which inform their Professional Learning Plan (PLP).
Goal-Setting & Growth Planning	A pre-evaluation conference is held where teachers establish SMART goals aligned with school priorities, student needs, and professional development objectives.
Formative Assessment Process	Teachers receive six instructional touchpoints annually: four walkthroughs (10–15 minutes) and two full observations (30+ minutes). Feedback is used for coaching and progress monitoring.

2x2 Mid-Year Conversation	Mid-year, teachers and school leaders engage in a structured reflection conversation to discuss strengths, growth areas, and progress toward PLP goals. Student learning data are reviewed and additional supports are implemented as needed.
Summative Evaluation	The Executive Director or designee conducts the annual summative evaluation using evidence from ATOT observations, coaching feedback, PLP progress, and student achievement data.
Annual Performance Review	At the end of the school year, teachers participate in a performance review to reflect on growth, celebrate accomplishments, and identify goals for the following year. Results inform contract renewal decisions and leadership development opportunities.

Through the combination of state-aligned evaluation, instructional coaching, professional learning plans, and data-informed reflection, xMA ensures that teachers receive meaningful support, continuous professional development, and clear expectations for instructional excellence.

Teacher Evaluation Tool(s)

File 1

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File 2

File name: ALSDE-DIMENSION-QUICK-GUIDE.pdf
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Dismissal Narrative

Personnel Dismissal Procedures and Performance Correction

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) is committed to maintaining a high-performing, mission-aligned team while providing all personnel with clear expectations, meaningful feedback, and structured opportunities for growth and improvement. The school implements comprehensive performance management systems for instructional staff and leadership that emphasize continuous improvement, professional support, and fair, transparent dismissal procedures when necessary.

Performance Expectations and Ongoing Evaluation

All personnel at xMA are evaluated regularly using clearly defined performance standards aligned to their role and responsibilities. Teacher evaluation and professional development are guided by the Alabama Teacher Growth Program (ATGP), which includes the Alabama Teacher Observation Tool (ATOT) as the statewide observation framework for assessing instructional practice and providing structured feedback to teachers.

School leadership, including the Principal and Executive Director when serving as Head of School, are evaluated using the Alabama Principal Leadership Development System (APLDS), which aligns with the Alabama Standards for School Leadership and provides a structured framework for goal setting, leadership evidence review, and annual performance evaluation.

These evaluation systems ensure that performance concerns are identified early and addressed through structured coaching, professional development, and clearly defined improvement expectations prior to dismissal consideration.

Teachers receive ongoing feedback through classroom observations, instructional coaching, data review meetings, and Professional Learning Plan (PLP) goal monitoring. School leaders receive feedback through leadership goal setting, evidence review, school performance monitoring, and annual evaluation conferences aligned to the APLDS framework.

Performance Correction and Professional Improvement

xMA prioritizes supporting personnel in improving performance through targeted intervention before dismissal is considered. When performance concerns arise, corrective actions may include:

- targeted instructional coaching and feedback
- increased observation and feedback cycles
- professional development aligned to identified needs
- mentorship and leadership support
- clearly defined performance expectations and timelines for improvement

When necessary, xMA implements a formal progressive discipline process designed to provide employees with notice, support, and an opportunity to improve performance.

Progressive Discipline and Dismissal Procedures

The progressive discipline process includes the following steps, although steps may be accelerated or bypassed depending on the severity of the conduct or performance concern.

1. Verbal Warning

A verbal warning may be issued for minor performance concerns or early signs of underperformance. Supervisors provide clear feedback, expectations for improvement, and documentation of the conversation.

2. Written Warning

A written warning is issued when performance concerns persist or when more significant concerns arise. The written warning outlines specific deficiencies, required corrective actions, and timelines for improvement.

3. Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)

If performance concerns continue, the employee may be placed on a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP). The PIP includes:

- clearly defined performance expectations
- specific improvement goals
- measurable success criteria
- a defined timeline for improvement
- scheduled progress monitoring meetings

Failure to demonstrate sufficient improvement during the PIP period may result in further disciplinary action, including termination.

4. Suspension (if applicable)

Suspension may be implemented for serious misconduct or repeated performance concerns. Suspension may be paid or unpaid and may last up to fourteen (14) days depending on the severity of the situation.

5. Termination

Termination may occur when:

- performance remains ineffective despite coaching, support, and formal intervention; or
- serious misconduct, policy violations, or failure to fulfill professional responsibilities occurs.

The Executive Director is responsible for termination decisions for school personnel, following consultation with appropriate supervisors and review of relevant documentation. All disciplinary actions and corrective measures are documented and maintained in the employee's official personnel file. Employees who are terminated may appeal the decision to the xMA Board of Directors in accordance with established grievance and appeal procedures.

All employment at xMA is at-will unless otherwise specified by written contract or required by applicable law.

Immediate Dismissal for Serious Misconduct

While xMA prioritizes progressive discipline and professional support, certain behaviors may warrant immediate dismissal without prior warning due to the severity of the conduct. These may include, but are not limited to:

- violations of student safety or safeguarding policies
- abuse, neglect, or endangerment of a student
- criminal conduct or illegal activity on school grounds
- serious ethical violations or breaches of professional conduct
- falsification of records or documents
- possession or use of illegal substances on campus
- actions that significantly compromise the safety, integrity, or operations of the school

In such cases, the Executive Director may take immediate personnel action consistent with school policies and applicable law. The Board of Directors retains authority over any disciplinary actions involving the Executive Director.

Executive Director Accountability and Dismissal Procedures

The Executive Director is accountable directly to the Governing Board of Directors and is evaluated annually using the Alabama Principal Leadership Development System (APLDS).

If the Executive Director's performance is determined to be developing or unsatisfactory, the Board will implement corrective actions, which may include:

- formal written performance feedback
- clearly defined improvement expectations
- leadership coaching and professional development support
- a structured Leadership Improvement Plan with measurable goals
- increased monitoring and progress reviews

If performance does not improve within the defined improvement period, the Board of Directors may take further action, including contract non-renewal or termination, consistent with the Executive Director's employment agreement and applicable law.

Commitment to Fairness, Support, and Accountability

xMA's personnel dismissal procedures ensure:

- clear performance expectations aligned to state evaluation systems
- ongoing feedback, coaching, and professional development
- structured opportunities for performance improvement
- fair, transparent, and documented disciplinary processes
- accountability for delivering high-quality instruction and advancing student success

All personnel actions are conducted in compliance with applicable Alabama law, federal employment regulations, and charter school statutory requirements. This balanced approach ensures that all

personnel are supported in achieving excellence while maintaining high standards of professional performance and organizational accountability.

Educator Performance and Staff Turnover

The students at xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) deserves a high-quality education to prepare them to be successful in college and careers. This challenging work requires the collective efforts and commitment of all educators, including the principal, teachers and operations staff members, families and community members. Educators are driven by the conviction that all students can succeed and understand the tremendous responsibility to dramatically improve student outcomes. xMA will act in the best interests of the students and understands that, unfortunately, there will be occasions where there is unsatisfactory instructional leadership/administrator or educator performance. In such situations where there is unsatisfactory performance, a performance improvement plan will be created. The Executive Director, Principal and Dean of Culture & Instruction will be responsible for implementing a corrective plan. The plan will be based on the data driven approaches and proven best practices. Plans could include school-wide plans, grade level corrective plans, and subject area and/or individual teacher corrective plans. Each plan will be prescriptive based on the needs.

Corrective actions could include:

- Termination
- Placement on a School Improvement Plan
- Mentor teacher provided for additional support
- On-going professional development

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) understands there will also be changes and turnover with educators and administrators. To address this obvious concern, xMA will look to build leaders and administrators from within its educator ranks. xMA will work to ensure decision making is shared throughout the educator ranks with the use of a Instructional Leadership Team. Additionally, xMA will focus on hiring from within and creating additional leadership roles, when possible, to reward deserving and promising educators. Promising educators will be given multiple opportunities to observe, participate and lead activities to better prepare them for administrative positions. xMA will also constantly work with its educators in professional development and career building exercises to address the educator's goals and needs in an effort to provide the educator self-fulfillment and growth. Through this multi-faceted approach, the xMA hopes to address the concerns with unsatisfactory instructional leadership/administrator or educator performance, as well as instructional leadership, administrator, and/or educator changes and turnover.

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

7. Facilities

Reviewer Instructions

Please rate this section using the provided rubric.

Status: Completed

Form Result

Provide evidence towards securing a safe, up to code, facility to house the school.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: High quality facilities plan that provides for the procurement of a suitable independent facility.

Note: Alabama charter schools may be able to utilize existing public school buildings for charter schools if they are located on the unused facility list.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

a) Describe the process used to identify and secure a facility including any brokers or consultants employed to navigate the real estate market, plan for renovations, timelines, financing, etc.

The xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy team has worked with several partners and advisors to identify and secure a suitable facility for the school. This process included guidance and technical assistance from New Schools for Alabama, consultation with experienced charter school leaders, and engagement with real estate and facilities professionals to navigate the Birmingham commercial real estate market.

To identify potential sites, the school partnered with Tessa Commercial Real Estate, a Birmingham-based commercial real estate firm, to evaluate properties that met the school's location, size, and accessibility needs. Through this process, the team identified a facility owned by Rebirth Christian Fellowship at 200 Roebuck Drive, Birmingham, Alabama, formerly operated as Integrity Christian Academy. The school has secured a signed Letter of Intent (LOI) demonstrating the intent to lease the facility upon charter approval.

To support facility planning and renovation, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy is working with TCU Consulting Services, LLC, a construction consulting firm that provides facilities planning, owner's representation, and development consulting services for education projects. TCU has conducted an initial site walkthrough and will support renovation planning, project coordination, and facility readiness.

Following charter approval, the school will finalize lease negotiations, complete any necessary renovations and upgrades, and obtain required permits and inspections in preparation for the school's planned August 2027 opening.

For facility financing and development support, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy will partner with New Schools for Alabama, which provides charter schools with access to credit enhancement and predevelopment loan programs to support facility planning and development. These resources will assist the school in securing financing for renovation and facility readiness prior to opening.

b) If a facility has been purchased or an MOU or other proof of intent to secure a specific facility, please provide proof of the commitment as an attachment. Briefly describe the facility including location, size, and amenities. Provide, as an attachment, supporting documents providing details about the facility. Charter school facilities must comply with applicable state, local and authorizer health and safety requirements. In addition, charter school applicants must be prepared to follow applicable city planning review procedures.

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy intends to locate its school at 200 Roebuck Drive, Birmingham, Alabama 35215, on the campus currently owned by Rebirth Christian Fellowship, which previously operated as Integrity Christian Academy. The property includes an existing school facility with classroom spaces, administrative offices, a gymnasium, and adjoining outdoor recreation and parking areas suitable for school operations.

The school identified this facility in partnership with Tessa Commercial Real Estate, a Birmingham-based commercial real estate firm that assists organizations in identifying and negotiating appropriate facilities. Through this process, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy secured a signed Letter of Intent (LOI) with Rebirth Christian Fellowship outlining the intent to lease the facility upon charter approval. The LOI provides xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy with initial access to a portion of the facility with the ability to expand occupancy as the school grows. The agreement also allows for negotiation of lease terms and any necessary improvements prior to occupancy. Documentation of this commitment is included as an attachment.

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy is working with TCU Consulting Services, LLC, a construction consulting firm that provides facilities planning, owner’s representation, and development consulting services for education and public sector projects. TCU Consulting conducted a preliminary site walkthrough and facility assessment of the building to evaluate its feasibility for school use. Their review found that the building is generally in good condition with no apparent structural concerns and that the facility can be adapted for school operations with typical interior upgrades and modernization, including accessibility improvements and other updates necessary to meet current building and safety requirements. A preliminary facility assessment supporting the viability of the building is included as an attachment.

Upon charter approval, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy will finalize lease negotiations with Rebirth Christian Fellowship and complete any required planning, renovation, and inspection processes. All improvements and occupancy will comply with Alabama Building Code, Alabama Fire Protection Code, and all applicable local, state, and authorizer health and safety requirements. The school will also follow all City of Birmingham planning, permitting, and inspection procedures prior to opening. Because the facility is currently vacant and was previously used as a school, it provides a strong starting point for renovation and preparation in advance of the school’s planned opening in August 2027.

Proof of Commitment

File 1

File name: Updated_LOI-dougaylor_rebirthchristian.org.pdf
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File 2

File name: School upper floor (4) (1).pdf
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Uploaded by: Melissa Capehart

Supporting Documents

File name: XSTREAM FAC ASS 20260226.pdf
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Uploaded by: Melissa Capehart

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

8. Advisory Bodies

Reviewer Instructions

Please rate this section using the provided rubric.

Status: Completed

Form Result

Advisory bodies, including professional organizations, can provide valuable insight to enhance the effectiveness of the governing board and school administration. Applicants are encouraged to consult with these outside bodies, and secure their participation, to strengthen the application. New advisory bodies tied to the school become stakeholders in the success of the institution and should be included in the decision-making process.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Compelling evidence of the use of advisory bodies to directly and consistently enhance the successful operation of the school.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

a) List any existing professional organization or body that will be joined or consulted by the governing board to inform their work.

The xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy Governing Board will intentionally engage with established professional organizations and charter support bodies to ensure strong governance, financial oversight, and academic accountability.

The Board has already benefited from and will continue to engage with:

- Building Excellent Schools (BES) – Through board governance training, mock capacity interviews, and leadership development, BES has supported the founding board in developing strong governance systems, academic oversight structures, and performance accountability practices. The Board will continue to participate in BES training opportunities as available.
- NewSchools Venture Fund (NSVF) – As part of the NewSchools Founder Fellowship, xMA has received funding and strategic advisory support. This partnership provides access to national experts in charter governance, financial sustainability, growth planning, and board development.
- New Schools for Alabama (NSFA) – NSFA serves as a key in-state partner providing technical assistance in governance, finance, operations, compliance, and state-specific charter requirements. NSFA has supported the board through fellowship programming, policy review, and state-level preparation and will continue to provide ongoing guidance post-authorization.

Upon approval, the Board will also engage with:

- Alabama Association of School Boards (AASB) – The governing board plans to join and consult with AASB to strengthen board governance practices, participate in ongoing board training, access legal and policy guidance, and ensure alignment with Alabama-specific governance standards.

In addition, the Board will consult:

- The Alabama Public Charter School Commission (as authorizer) for accountability alignment
- Charter-specific legal counsel for governance and compliance matters
- Financial auditors and school finance professionals for fiscal oversight and internal control monitoring

Through these partnerships, the xMA Governing Board will remain connected to national best practices and state-level expectations, ensuring continuous improvement in governance, compliance, and strategic oversight.

Advisory Bodies Formed

School Support & Advisory Board

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) will establish a School Support & Advisory Board (SSAB) to ensure ongoing stakeholder engagement and provide meaningful feedback to school leadership on key areas of school operations and culture. The SSAB will serve in an advisory-only capacity and will not have formal governance authority. Instead, it will function as a consultative body that helps inform school decision-making in alignment with the school's mission, vision, and strategic priorities.

Roles and Duties

The SSAB will advise the Executive Director and Leadership Team on critical aspects of the school program, including academic programming, school culture, student discipline, school safety, family engagement, and community partnerships. The board will offer feedback on school initiatives, emerging issues, and areas for improvement, supporting a culture of continuous growth and collaboration. Recommendations from the SSAB will be reviewed by the Leadership Team and may be shared with the school's Governing Board as part of regular reporting on stakeholder engagement and school performance.

Planned Composition and Selection Strategy

The SSAB will include representatives from across the school community, selected to ensure broad, diverse, and inclusive participation:

- **Parents:** Elected representatives from the Parent Association (xMA Parent Collaborative), with a specific seat reserved for a Parent Safety Liaison
- **Teachers:** Elected representatives from the instructional staff
- **Support Staff:** Elected representatives from the non-instructional/support staff
- **Culture Team:** One appointed member from the xMA School Culture Team
- **Community Partners:** Selected members from the broader community by the Leadership Team
- **Students:** Appointed student representatives selected collaboratively by teachers, peers, and the Leadership Team

Each group will bring a unique perspective: parents will offer insight into family engagement and safety; teachers will contribute instructional knowledge and classroom-level needs; support staff will reflect student well-being and school operations; community members will strengthen external partnerships; and student representatives will elevate the student voice in school culture and decision-making.

Reporting Structure

The SSAB will meet on a quarterly basis and report directly to the Executive Director. Summary reports of advisory discussions and recommendations will be documented and shared with the xMA Leadership Team. Where relevant, feedback may be included in leadership updates to the Governing Board to ensure alignment with the school's strategic direction and continuous improvement goals. To ensure strong stakeholder representation and meaningful community voice, the School Support & Advisory Board (SSAB) will consist of approximately 5–15 members representing key stakeholders within the xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy community. Membership will include a balanced mix of parents or guardians, teachers or school staff, community leaders, and local partners with expertise in areas such as education, youth development, workforce development, and STREAM-related fields. As the school expands into upper grades, student representatives may also be invited to participate in an advisory capacity to ensure student voice is incorporated into school improvement discussions. Members of the SSAB will be selected through a transparent process that may include nominations, community interest forms, and targeted invitations based on demonstrated commitment to the school's mission and the needs of the surrounding Birmingham community. School leadership, in collaboration with the governing board, will review and appoint members to ensure diverse representation, relevant expertise, and strong connections to the communities served by the school. The SSAB will serve strictly in an advisory capacity and will not hold governing authority; instead, it

will provide feedback, community perspective, and recommendations to the governing board and school leadership on topics such as student supports, school culture, family engagement, and community partnerships, helping ensure that school decisions remain informed by the voices and needs of the broader community.

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

9. Grievance / Complaint Process

Reviewer Instructions

Please rate this section using the provided rubric.

Status: Completed

Form Result

Provide documentation for a grievance policy that gives students and parents due process rights.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Evidence of a useful grievance process for use by parents and students.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

- a) Explain the process the school will follow should a parent or student have an objection to a governing board policy or decision, administrative procedure, or practice at the school. Attach any adopted policies or procedures.

We welcome families as collaborative partners in ensuring the academic success of every xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy student and commit to an open-door policy and fair and honest treatment, free of discrimination or harassment. If a parent or student objects to a governing board policy or decision, administrative procedure, or practice at the school that remains unresolved through traditional interventions, we utilize a defined grievance procedure to resolve complaints based upon guidance from the National School Boards Association (NSBA).

All grievance processes will follow the identified steps below:

Figure (49):xMA Grievance Policy Process

Type/Level of Objection:	Informal Discussion With:	Formal Complaint Sent To:	Appeal Sent To:	Final Appeal (if applicable)
Teacher or Classroom Level Objection	Classroom Teacher or School Employee	School Administrator	Board of Director	AL Public Charter School Commission
School Administrator or Administrative Practice or Procedure	School Administrator	School Administrator	Board of Director	AL Public Charter School Commission

Governing Board Policy	School Administrator	Board of Directors	AL Public Charter School Commission	Not Applicable, The Commission is the Authorizing Body and has the final decision
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Step 1: Informal Discussion: The first step is for parents or students to have an informal discussion with the relevant school staff member or other appropriate person who can address the concern. This discussion aims to clarify the issue and seek a resolution at the lowest level possible.

Step 2. Formal Complaint: If the informal discussion does not resolve the issue satisfactorily, the parent or student may file a formal complaint by completing a digital complaint form on the website or writing a letter detailing the objection and submitting it to the Executive Director. The complaint should clearly state the policy, decision, procedure, or practice being objected to and provide any supporting evidence or documentation.

Step 3. Review by School Administration: Once the formal complaint is received, the school administration or authorizing body will examine the complaint and begin an investigation within 5 business days. This could involve interviewing relevant parties, reviewing relevant documents, and examining other evidence related to the issue. The investigation aims to ensure that all perspectives are considered and that a fair and informed decision can be made.

Step 4. Decision and Resolution: Based on the information gathered during the review and investigation process, a decision will be made by the school administration or authorizing body within 30 days. The school administration will communicate the decision to the parent or student in writing, clearly explaining the rationale behind the decision.

Step 5. Appeal Process: If the parent or student is unsatisfied with the decision, they may submit a written appeal to a higher-level authority, such as the Executive Director or the Board of Directors. If the complaint involves the Executive Director, a formal letter of complaint is sent to the Board of Directors. A written appeal is sent to the Charter Authorizer if the complaint involves the Board of Directors.

Step 6. Review by Higher-Level Authority: Once an appeal is submitted, it will be reviewed by the higher-level authority (see Table above) designated in the appeal process. This authority will examine the complaint, review any relevant documentation, and consider any additional information provided by both parties involved. They may also conduct their investigation if necessary.

Step 7. Final Decision: After reviewing the appeal, the higher-level authority will decide on the objection raised within 30 days. This decision is written to the parent and student and clearly explains its rationale. In some cases, this decision may be considered final and binding, while in others, further avenues for appeal may be available by the board. Families may appeal to the Alabama Public Charter School Commission if the grievance remains unresolved and involves an alleged state or federal policy violation.

Adopted Gievance Policies and Procedures **File name:** xMA Grievance Policy.pdf
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Element Review

Reviews is not provided

10. Professional Development

Reviewer Instructions

Please rate this section using the provided rubric.

Status: Completed

Staff then participate in a three-week Summer Institute structured around three themes:

- Week 1: Ignite the Mission: Focus on xMA's vision, Portrait of a Graduate competencies, SEL systems, and P.O.W.E.R.S. values. Staff are introduced to the school's superhero culture, PBIS-aligned behavior model, operational systems, and data on the founding community. Embedding SEL and school culture training in onboarding helps foster emotionally safe, identity-affirming learning environments (Jones et al., 2018).
- Week 2: EMP.O.W.E.R. Every Learner: Educators internalize core curriculum (EL, i-Ready, StemScopes, MyPath), engage in instructional modeling, and practice lesson planning using the xMA Instructional Playbook and Toolkit. They receive hands-on training in blended learning strategies, PLPs, student portfolios, and mastery-based instruction. Research strongly supports active-learning PD approaches such as modeling, rehearsal, and job-embedded practice (Desimone & Garet, 2015).
- Week 3: Own the Mission: Staff apply learning through simulated practice, finalize Unit 0 plans, rehearse routines, test playlists and station rotations, and collaborate across teams to ensure Day 1 readiness. Collaborative rehearsal improves implementation fidelity and reduces first-day stress for teachers and students alike (Grossman et al., 2009).

2. Weekly Embedded PD (2 Hours/Week) – Sustaining Growth

Every Friday, staff participate in two hours of structured professional development:

- First Friday of Each Month: Whole-staff development sessions aligned to schoolwide priorities such as Mastery-Based Learning, Universal Design for Learning, Small Group Instruction, Blended Learning, and SEL integration. High-impact PD must be ongoing, content-focused, and aligned to instructional goals (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).
- Subsequent 2nd–5th Fridays: Remaining Fridays are dedicated to targeted, job-embedded Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) within content-area and grade-level teams. During these sessions, educators internalize upcoming curriculum units, co-plan lessons, analyze student work, and design reteach plans informed by mastery check data. Teachers also receive personalized support through Lesson Planning PLC and Culture PLC. Research shows that PLCs increase instructional alignment and improve student learning through collaborative inquiry and shared problem-solving (DuFour et al., 2008; Vescio et al., 2008).

3. Coaching and Personalized Learning – Personalized Growth

- Coaching Cycles – All teachers at xMA engage in bi-weekly coaching cycles led by the Dean of Culture & Instruction, Principal and the Executive Director. Research shows that high-quality instructional coaching with evidence-based feedback protocols such as See It – Name It – Do It leads to significant improvements in instructional practice and student achievement (Kraft, Blazar, & Hogan, 2018).

Each coaching cycle includes a 30-minute classroom observation followed by a 45–60-minute debrief using the See It – Name It – Do It framework. During debriefs, leaders and teachers co-identify one clear, actionable next step connected to instructional priorities, student outcomes, and the teacher's Personalized Professional Learning Plan (PPLP). Instructional Walkthrough Tool – To support consistent schoolwide implementation, leaders use xMA's Instructional Walkthrough & Growth Tool, aligned to the school's four instructional pillars (UDL, Blended Learning, Mastery-Based Learning, and Small-Group Instruction). This tool helps identify patterns across classrooms, celebrate strengths, and target precise areas for growth as teachers move from "emerging" to "developing," "implementing," and "innovating."

- xMA Professional Learning Hub – In place of external platforms, teachers have access to the xMA Professional Learning Hub, a curated online library of micro-modules, video examples, planning templates, and mini-courses aligned to xMA's instructional systems. Asynchronous microlearning allows educators to access just-in-time PD when planning lessons, preparing stations, building assessments, or analyzing student data. Research shows that flexible, self-paced learning increases teacher autonomy, transfer of practice, and sustained implementation (Trust & Whalen, 2020). These modules will be curated by the instructional team in year 0 and overtime from model teachers, classrooms and instructional support staff.

- Personalized Professional Learning Plans (PPLPs) – Based on coaching conversations, classroom observations, and student data, each teacher co-creates a Personalized Professional Learning Plan. These plans outline 2–3 individualized growth goals aligned to schoolwide priorities and the teacher’s professional trajectory. Research indicates that individualized PD plans increase teacher efficacy, professional satisfaction, and retention (Collins & Liang, 2015).

4. Data Team and Mastery Huddles – Collaborative Planning and Data-Driven Practices

xMA embeds data team meetings and daily Mastery Check Huddles into the weekly rhythm. These structures ensure that instruction is responsive, precise, and aligned to student needs in real time:

- Data Team (1x/week) – Teachers analyze student progress data, identify misconceptions, and co-plan targeted reteach lessons. Data-driven instruction improves student performance when embedded in collaborative team structures (Hamilton et al., 2009; Marsh et al., 2010).
- Mastery Check Huddles (Daily, 15 min) – Teachers review formative assessment results and adjust instruction. Real-time data use promotes instructional responsiveness and learning acceleration (Faria et al., 2012).

5. Special Education and Inclusion PD – Equipping All Educators

xMA is committed to building inclusive classrooms that effectively support students with disabilities. Special education teachers and paraprofessionals engage in training focused on co-teaching models, behavior support, data collection, and assistive technology. Studies show that ongoing PD in inclusive strategies increases teachers’ capacity to serve diverse learners and improves IEP implementation (Sindelar et al., 2010; McLeskey & Waldron, 2011).

Classrooms serving students with moderate-to-severe disabilities are staffed with certified teachers and RBT-trained paraprofessionals. Training in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) has been shown to improve learning outcomes for students with autism and developmental disabilities (Wong et al., 2015). xMA’s partnership with the National Accelerator for Autism Charter Schools (NAACS) ensures staff receive research-based coaching in life skills, communication supports, and structured teaching.

Professional Development Delivery

xMA embodies Personalized Learning and its core instructional methods Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Small Group Instruction, Blended Learning, and Mastery-Based Learning as the foundation for all Professional Development. Internal delivery by the Dean of Culture & Instruction, Principal and Executive Director, and instructional leaders ensures coherence, alignment, and high-quality implementation (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). External partnerships extend capacity and provide specialized expertise:

- National Accelerator of Autism Charter Schools – Provides training in special education best practices and inclusive support for neurodiverse learners.
- Conference Attendance – Teachers attend targeted conferences (i-Ready, AMSTI, NCTM, STEM/STREAM summits) aligned to their Personalized Professional Learning Plans (PPLPs). Role-specific PD expands expertise, strengthens teacher networks, and improves instructional quality (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014).

xMA’s Professional Development model is both uniform and individualized. All staff participate in shared training on schoolwide systems, curriculum, culture routines, and instructional expectations. Ongoing PD sessions follow a structured format inspired by xMA’s classroom routines Must Do, Should Do, Aspire to Do and include modeling, instructional videos, rehearsal, and mastery checks. These formative checks guide coaching cycles and follow-up support, ensuring PD is targeted, actionable, and directly connected to improved student outcomes (Killion & Hirsh, 2012).

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 - 11- U.S. Department of Education, *Enhancing Instruction Through Real-Time Data Use* (2012).
 - 12- Paul T. Sindelar et al., "Addressing Special Education Teacher Shortages: A Policy Brief," University of Florida Center on Disability Studies, 2010.
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 - 14- Connie Kasari et al., "Evidence-Based Practices for Children With Autism," *Pediatrics* 130, no. 5 (2015): S138–S150.
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 - 17- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, *Teachers Know Best: Professional Learning* (2014).
 - 18- Joellen Killion and Stephanie Hirsh, "The Elements of Effective Professional Development," *Journal of Staff Development* 33, no. 4 (2012): 10–18.
 - 19- Richard M. Ingersoll and Michael Strong, "The Impact of Induction and Mentoring Programs for Beginning Teachers," *Review of Educational Research* 81, no. 2 (2011): 201–233; Linda Darling-Hammond et al., "Effective Teacher Professional Development," *Learning Policy Institute*, 2017.

c) Provide a schedule and explanation of professional development that will take place prior to school opening. Explain what will be covered during this induction period and how teachers will be prepared to deliver any unique or particularly challenging aspects of the curriculum and instructional methods.

xMA Summer Institute

xMA's pre-service professional development occurs during the Summer Institute, a mandatory three-week, 105-hour induction program that prepares staff to launch the academic year with full alignment to the school's instructional model, culture systems, and STREAM mission. Research shows that high-quality induction programs significantly improve teacher retention, instructional quality, and student achievement, particularly when they are comprehensive, collaborative, and connected to a school's mission (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Pre-Work Requirement: Prior to Summer Institute, all instructional staff complete asynchronous pre-work focused on mastery-based learning, blended instructional strategies, and personalized

learning design. This pre-work ensures that teachers arrive with shared foundational knowledge and aligns with research showing that flexible, content-rich professional learning improves instructional practice and supports long-term implementation (Patrick, Worthen, Frost, & Truong, 2013). The structure of this pre-work mirrors the essential features of effective professional development: content focus, active learning, coherence with schoolwide instructional priorities, and opportunities for reflection (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

All staff then participate in a comprehensive three-week Summer Institute, organized around three core themes that build collective efficacy, instructional readiness, and deep alignment to xMA's culture and academic vision.

Week 1: Who We Are & xMA Culture – IGNITE THE MISSION

During Week 1, educators are immersed in the heart of xMA: its mission, vision, values, and model. Staff deepen their understanding of our Portrait of a Graduate and the five learner competencies we aspire to cultivate: Creative Thinkers, Problem-Solvers, Resilient Individuals, Empathetic Citizens, and Self-Reliant Learners. Research shows that aligning teacher practice with a clear vision of graduate outcomes fosters coherence, engagement, and shared ownership (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Through powerful storytelling, local data dives, and community context, teachers connect the “why” of xMA to their personal purpose. This week also launches our superhero-themed culture, where students and staff identify and grow their unique “superpowers.” Identity-affirming school culture initiatives rooted in storytelling and strengths-based language support student engagement, teacher motivation, and belonging (Gay, 2018; Hammond, 2015). Teachers internalize our six core P.O.W.E.R.S. values and rehearse the daily routines that bring them to life: Morning Meetings, Hero Boards, Weekly Powerhouse Celebrations, and goal-setting reflections. Ritualized routines linked to SEL competencies help create emotionally safe, predictable environments and boost student well-being (CASEL, 2020). Educators explore Unit 0 and plan superhero identity lessons that introduce students to xMA's culture and learning expectations from Day 1. Explicit culture instruction especially at the start of the year improves behavior outcomes and builds a consistent learning environment (Simonsen et al., 2008). Professional learning centers on culturally relevant pedagogy, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), and best practices for engaging neurodiverse learners. Culturally responsive teaching and SEL integration are strongly correlated with improved student academic outcomes, engagement, and inclusive environments (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Jones, Bailey, Brush, & Kahn, 2018).

Teachers also explore Alabama's workforce trends and xMA's STREAM pathways that prepare students for the future. Workforce-connected education ensures instruction remains relevant and engaging while supporting student aspirations and future readiness (Carnevale et al., 2014). Additional sessions support staff onboarding, operational systems, behavior management through PBIS, and schoolwide goal alignment. PBIS-aligned training helps educators proactively build positive behavior systems, reduce discipline incidents, and improve school climate (Sugai & Horner, 2002). The week closes with team-building, classroom showcases, Unit 0 rehearsals, and vision-boarding that unites each educator's purpose with the mission of xMA. Collaborative vision-building increases staff cohesion, morale, and commitment to organizational goals (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

Week 2: How We Teach – EMP.O.W.E.R. EVERY LEARNER

In Week 2, educators shift from culture to instruction, immersing themselves in the xMA classroom model and the core systems that drive personalized, rigorous teaching. This week equips teachers with the tools, strategies, and mindsets needed to personalize learning for every student through xMA's four instructional anchors: Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Small Group Instruction, Blended Learning, and Mastery-Based Learning. These components are grounded in extensive research and aligned with the science of learning, accessibility, and differentiated instruction (CAST, 2018; Tomlinson, 2014; Bloom, 1984). Teachers engage in deep internalization of core curriculum materials including i-Ready, StemScopes, and MyPath and learn how to adapt content using xMA's personalized learning tools such as Unit Challenge Boards, daily Choice Boards, and schoolwide Mastery Checks. Flexible curriculum structures that include adaptive content and ongoing formative assessment have been shown to increase engagement, equity, and student mastery (Black & William, 1998; Faria et al., 2012). Throughout the week, educators build fluency in blended learning routines, data-informed planning, and flexible grouping as they co-plan lessons that reflect student interests,

readiness levels, and academic goals. Research demonstrates that personalized environments which honor learner agency and provide opportunities for pacing and choice increase student motivation, persistence, and academic outcomes (Pane et al., 2015; Walkington, 2013). Educators are trained to manage Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs), Portfolios, and Learning Pods, using these tools to support ongoing goal setting, reflection, and one-on-one coaching. Goal-setting and self-reflection practices are strongly linked to increased student ownership, metacognition, and achievement (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001). Through curriculum clinics, hands-on modeling, and feedback-rich practice sessions, teachers rehearse routines, student-facing tools, and lesson delivery with structured peer support. Practice-based professional learning, especially when it includes rehearsal, modeling, and immediate feedback is among the most effective forms of PD for sustained instructional improvement (Grossman et al., 2009; Kraft & Papay, 2014). Throughout the week, educators hone strategies for promoting student agency, using real-time data to assign and adjust learning tasks, and building learning systems that empower every learner to grow, lead, and succeed. Real-time formative assessment and instructional adaptation remain essential features of xMA's mastery-based learning environment (Heritage, 2007).

Week 3: Ready to Launch – OWN THE MISSION

In the final week before school begins, educators step fully into their roles as xMA superheroes ready to lead instruction, culture, and community with purpose and precision. Week 3 is all about execution. Research shows that rehearsal weeks before school launch improve teacher confidence, reduce implementation errors, and create schoolwide consistency (Knight, 2012). Staff put their learning into action through targeted lesson rehearsals, procedural walk-throughs, and real-time practice clinics that bring xMA's instructional and culture systems to life. Rehearsals and role-play practices significantly enhance the transfer of professional learning into classroom practice (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Teachers finalize their Day One plans, rehearse embedded SEL routines and P.O.W.E.R.S. values, and prepare to launch classrooms where every learner can thrive. Early-year planning that incorporates SEL rituals improves student adjustment and reduces behavior challenges (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Educators collaborate in planning pods and co-teaching teams to solidify flexible grouping plans, blended learning routines, and personalized learning tasks. Collaborative planning has been shown to enhance teacher efficacy, instructional alignment, and responsiveness to student needs (Goddard et al., 2007). Throughout the week, teachers align instructional roles to xMA's personalized learning systems including PLPs, Challenge Boards, and schoolwide Mastery Checks ensuring clarity of expectations and a seamless student experience. Clear structures and routines that empower student autonomy are strongly associated with higher achievement and deeper learning (Marzano et al., 2003). Exceptional education planning is woven throughout the week, equipping all staff to support diverse learners through intentional scaffolds, accommodations, and inclusive instructional strategies. Inclusive planning during onboarding significantly increases IEP implementation fidelity and reduces access barriers (McLeskey & Waldron, 2011). Cross-functional coordination with culture, operations, and student-support teams ensures every detail is addressed from classroom visuals and tech setup to schoolwide procedures such as arrival, transitions, lunch, and safety routines. High operational clarity reduces cognitive load for staff and supports strong teaching during the critical first days of school (Leithwood et al., 2004). By week's end, staff have internalized safety plans, refined lesson pacing, and calibrated for a unified, high-quality launch. As the week concludes with celebration and team reflection, educators stand confident, connected, and fully prepared to own the mission on Day One and beyond. Reflection and celebration increase teacher motivation, solidify professional learning, and strengthen team culture (Lindqvist et al., 2017)

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Attach schedule example, if available

File name: xMA SummerPDSchedule (3).pdf
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Uploaded by: Melissa Capehart

d) Describe the expected number of days/hours for professional development throughout the school year, and explain how the school's calendar, daily schedule, and staffing structure accommodate this plan. Include time scheduled for common planning or collaboration and how such time will typically be used.

At xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA), professional development is intentionally embedded into the school's calendar, daily schedule, and staffing model to ensure that educators receive consistent, job-embedded, and personalized learning throughout the year. On average, each teacher engages in over 300 hours of formal professional development annually, distributed across a range of structures including summer pre-service training, weekly PD blocks, coaching cycles, daily data huddles, PLCs, and embedded planning clinics. Additional growth opportunities are provided through asynchronous micro-courses tailored to each teacher's Personalized Professional Learning Plan (PPLP), enabling deeper learning in blended, mastery-based, and small-group instruction.

xMA Professional Development Hours:

Figure (53):xMA Professional Development Hours

PD	Hours	Description
Summer Institute	105 hours	Mandatory 3-week pre-service program to prepare teachers in xMA's instructional model, classroom culture, and systems.
Weekly Friday PD	72 hours (2 hrs/week × 36 weeks)	Structured weekly PD including whole-staff sessions, grade/content team planning, lesson clinics, and culture clinics.
Instructional Coaching Cycles	~54 hours/year	Weekly coaching with the Dean of Culture & Instruction or instructional leads; includes observations, feedback, and planning.
Daily Mastery Check Huddles	45 hours (15 mins/day × 180 days)	Daily huddles to review student mastery data, identify misconceptions, and plan instructional next steps.
PLCs and Data Team Meetings	36 hours (1 hr/week × 36 weeks)	Weekly grade-level/content-area collaboration focused on student data, flexible grouping, and personalized instruction.
Lesson Planning & Culture Clinics	Variable (within Friday PD blocks)	Held as needed to support internalization of curriculum, lesson differentiation, and implementation of classroom culture systems.
Personalized PD (MCP University)	Ongoing/asynchronous	Micro-courses aligned to each teacher's Personalized Professional Learning Plan (PPLP), focused on core MCP-

Calendar and Schedule Design to Support PD:

To accommodate this comprehensive professional development plan, xMA's academic calendar and master schedule are intentionally designed around educator growth:

- A three-week Summer Institute is scheduled prior to the first day of school, allowing all teachers to build fluency in xMA's instructional model, curriculum systems, and cultural expectations.
-

Each Friday is designated as an early release day, providing two hours of uninterrupted time for PD, PLCs, or internalization clinics.

- The daily master schedule includes common planning blocks for each teaching team. These blocks are used for co-planning, analyzing student work, reviewing mastery tracker data, and planning differentiated supports.
- xMA’s staffing model includes grade-level and content-aligned co-teachers and instructional leads, enabling real-time collaboration, peer modeling, and shared lesson design.

This layered approach ensures that professional development is sustained, consistent, and flexible, while also being responsive to individual teacher needs and aligned to student learning outcomes. Teachers are never left to “figure it out alone” ; they are continuously supported through structured coaching, team collaboration, and access to tools that reinforce effective implementation of the xMA model.

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

11. Start-Up and Ongoing Operations

Reviewer Instructions

Please rate this section using the provided rubric.

Status: Completed

Form Result

Provide a timeline of the major tasks needed to open the school with an identification of the responsible individuals.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Compelling evidence of an effective, high-quality start-up plan that specifies detailed tasks, timelines, and responsible individuals.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

Start-up Plan	File name:	xMA -Year0StartUpPlan (1).xlsx
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b) If the school will provide transportation, describe the transportation arrangements for prospective students. In addition to daily transportation needs, describe how the school plans to meet transportation needs for field trips and athletic events.

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy will create a transportation system that is not a barrier to access within a reasonable distance of the school, as provided in Alabama Charter School Legislation. In the case that transportation is needed, and if the parent advises xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy staff that he/she is unable to secure transportation, xMA will provide transportation within a defined

reasonable distance. In such cases, xMA will be responsible for transporting all students who reside within a reasonable distance of the school, as well as any student with disabilities whose IEP requires transportation and are entitled to transportation by law, to and from the school in a non-discriminatory manner. In these situations, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy will provide transportation by contracting with an independent private transportation provider.

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy will consider options for student transportation, including engaging outside sources to provide those services. At the time a student enrolls in xMA, a transportation needs assessment will be conducted in order to determine the need and geographic concentration of families requiring transportation assistance. Detailed transportation plans, bus routes, etc. will be developed as a result of the needs assessment.

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy, at its discretion, may provide transportation for extracurricular activities including, but not limited to, transporting participants to and from extracurricular events via school bus. xMA will utilize charter and contract busing services for field trips and extracurricular activities. Students who are provided transportation with school district transportation vehicles for extracurricular events, shall ride both to and from the event in the school vehicle, unless arrangements have been made with the school director or designee, requesting to transport the student home from a school-sponsored event to which the student traveled in a school vehicle.

c) Provide the school plan for safety and security for students, the facility, and property. Explain the types of security personnel, technology, equipment, and policies that the school will employ.

School Safety

School safety is the number one priority for xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is often cited in education to illustrate the point that if students' basic needs are met, they cannot reach higher levels of learning such as achievement, problem-solving, and creativity. From this lens the operational aspects of a school that assist with providing these core physiological and safety needs illustrate a need for significant time and resources to be spent in operations.

The safety and security of students, staff, families, and visitors are always a priority at xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy. School safety encompasses a wide range of topics, such as emergency preparedness, climate and culture, student behavior, safety infrastructure, training, and safety capacity to name a few. At the beginning of each year, mandatory safety training and a review of all safety policies will be conducted. Staff will also complete all necessary OSHA and safety compliance training. During the beginning of Year Inservice, and periodically throughout the year, all xMA staff will continue to participate in mandatory safety training. This training will also include crisis and emergency management, fire and inclement weather safety, and active shooter procedures.

Alabama has a well outlined school safety system and individual school safety plans that will be utilized in the draft of the xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy safety plan. xMA will use a fully executed crisis and an emergency plan to handle situations that may arise. In partnership with local emergency responders, crisis and emergency plans and procedures are revised periodically. xMA will establish partnerships with the local police and fire departments to develop a plan for an active shooter, conduct campus walkthroughs, and participate in drills. Monthly fire and weather safety drills will be performed. A map of the school and evacuation routes for the drills will be posted in all classrooms. Student safety begins immediately; our first act is knowing our students' location. As required by Alabama law, teachers will have an electronic attendance count that must be submitted with each class and revised throughout the day. Morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up procedures will be developed and implemented by the Director of Operations & Finance with consultation from local law enforcement and the Executive Director to ensure all traffic and other safety protocols are adhered to.

As students prepare to receive technology devices, they will participate in Safe Surfer, a safety procedure for technology use. Teachers will also receive training in safety procedures for technology use. The issue of cyberbullying and social media platforms will be addressed as it pertains to technology etiquette and policy. Bullying forms will be posted on our website, the counselor's office, and the main office for any student needing it. xMA is a bully free school; teachers will be trained to

identify key characteristics, and parents will be trained to identify signs and report even the slightest concern.

School Safety Plan Development

Under AL Code 16-1-44 (2013) a comprehensive school safety plan will be developed. In the absence of a school safety committee before full staff is hired, a draft will be formulated with the current team. xMA will also work with the local emergency responders to regularly develop and revise crisis and emergency plans and procedures throughout the school year. Additionally, xMA will work closely with the fire chief and build relations with the nearest fire station to schedule walk-throughs of the school, and participate in fire and weather-related drills. Drills and emergency plans will be kept up to date for emergency responders to access. In addition to the crisis and emergency plan, monthly fire and weather safety drills will be performed. After the completion of each drill, a review of the time and procedures will be conducted. Teachers will be familiar with the attendance procedure during drills and be responsible for daily attendance within 30 minutes of the instructional day.

The next step of the school safety plan development process will be to assess all hazards related to the school facility and site. A floor plan with a map of potential hazards and the location of utilities, emergency equipment, and supplies will be developed. This will be utilized as the foundation for creating evacuation routes, assembly areas, and procedures for emergency response activities. The surrounding area of the facility will be assessed for potential hazards. These could include pockets of criminal activity, gas and water storage facilities, facilities containing toxic or radioactive materials, or other infrastructure related issues that could impact the secured site.

As the school continues to evolve, the School Safety Committee will conduct an annual review of the plan and update it with any new information, requirements, or best practices. Once xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy is in operation, the School Safety Committee will include the Executive Director, Director of Finance and Operations, Dean of Instruction and Culture, a lead teacher representative from each grade band, the school counselor, and a parent representative. This diverse committee ensures that multiple perspectives inform ongoing safety improvements and that the plan remains responsive to the needs of the school community. Prior safety plans will be archived in the central office. An annual hazard analysis will be conducted for the purposes of updating and redistributing plans. Each year, school staff will be trained on the school safety plan and procedures.

To ensure clear accountability and timely implementation, responsibility for safety planning and execution will be shared among designated members of the school leadership team. During the Year 0 planning phase, the Executive Director and the Director of Finance & Operations will lead the development of the comprehensive school safety plan in consultation with local law enforcement, fire departments, and emergency management personnel. Prior to the school's opening, this team will finalize emergency response procedures, establish drill protocols, conduct the facility safety assessment, and ensure that required safety technology systems such as visitor management, camera monitoring, and controlled access points are installed and operational. Once the school opens, the Director of Finance & Operations will oversee day-to-day facility safety operations, while the Executive Director and Dean of Culture & Instruction will support staff training, drill implementation, and student safety procedures. The School Safety Committee will conduct an annual review of the safety plan and update procedures as needed to ensure continued compliance with Alabama law and evolving safety best practices.

TRAINING

Training and professional development is critical in safety preparedness. An efficient system for these training modules is essential in order to deploy the large amount of content. Some of the content can be done in an asynchronous manner, while other elements are best suited for in person instruction. Simulation is also a powerful learning tool as educators can physically walk through various scenarios that they may encounter.

The following trainings will be conducted with staff annually:

1. Annalyn's Law
2. Jamari Terrell Williams Act
3. Erin's Law
4. Suicide Prevention

In addition to this training, staff will receive in person training on safety procedures and the full safety plan specific to each school site. In addition to formal training, staff and students will engage in simulation experiences that are the most powerful way to prepare for an emergency. xMA will conduct drills in cooperation with local emergency responders. Maps of the school evacuation routes and drill procedures will be posted in every classroom.

The following drills will be conducted on a regular cadence:

1. Fire Drills (1 per month)
2. Severe Weather (September, October, or November), and (January, February, or March)
3. Lockdown/Intruder Drills (1st 6 weeks of the 1st semester) and (1st 6 weeks of 2nd semester)

The school safety program also encompasses the medical needs of students, faculty, and staff. The school nurse will take the lead on training for first response protocols for a number of situations related to health. Training modules to support health and wellness safety include:

- Bloodborne pathogens
- Asthma Awareness
- Diabetes Awareness
- Life threatening allergies
- Seizures
- Child abuse: Mandatory reporting
- De-escalation strategies
- FERPA

SAFETY FACILITY and TECHNOLOGY CONSIDERATIONS

xMA will ensure that all safety measures and personnel are in place to create the safest environment available for our students and staff. The facility space occupied by xMA will include controlled-access entrances and cameras to monitor classrooms, hallways, and the facility perimeter. Cameras will be strategically placed throughout the school for maximum visibility, as well as on the outside in areas where students will be. School officials will have direct access to the camera system and will utilize this as needed.

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy will utilize the RAPTOR Visitor Management system for all non-students and non-staff members, including visitors who enter the school. This System screens all visitors, organizes volunteers, and communicates with xMA staff during emergencies. This system provides a rapid screening upon entry to ensure the safety of all xMA students and staff. Guests will receive a visitor pass when they enter, and return the visitor pass when they exit. All doors will remain locked from the outside, and all visitors will enter through the main door of the school.

In addition to physical safety, emotional and mental safety is also of paramount importance. The xMA technology plan will encompass creating a safe technological environment as well as teaching them to be responsible digital citizens. This technology safety plan will be developed in conjunction with Technology Lab, who will ensure all safety and security features are installed on xMA issued computers.

d) Provide, as an attachment, a list of the types of insurance coverage the school will secure, including a description of the levels of coverage. Types of insurance should include workers' compensation, general liability, commercial property, indemnity, directors and officers, commercial auto (if the school has buses), umbrella liability, and possibly others.

Insurance Coverage	File name:	Will Serve Xtreme Minds Academy-signed (2).pdf
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e) Provide, as attachment, the meal delivery plan including a wellness plan.

Meal Delivery Plan	File name: Meal Delivery Plan_xSTREAM Minds Academy.docx (3).pdf
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Wellness Plan	File name: Wellness Plan_xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy.docx (2).pdf
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	Uploaded by: Melissa Capehart
Other Operational or Ancillary Services	File name: Other Operational and Ancillary Services_xSTREAM Minds Academy.docx.pdf
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	Uploaded by: Melissa Capehart



Element Review

Reviews is not provided

12. Operations Capacity

Reviewer Instructions

Please rate this section using the provided rubric.

Status: Completed

Form Result

Provide details on the implementation team and their expertise to successfully complete the tasks needed to open a high-quality charter school.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Compelling evidence of an effective capacity to implement the school's operations plan in a quality and effective manner.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

a) Describe the applicant team's individual and collective qualifications for implementing the Operations Plan successfully, including capacity in areas such as the following:

- i) Staffing;
- ii) Fund-raising;
- iii) Financial;
- iv) Marketing and Recruitment;
- v) General operations; and
- vi) Facilities management.

General Operations

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy's applicant team includes a blend of local leaders dedicated to providing an additional education option in the Birmingham area. The combination of a strong founding leader, a diverse board of directors, and key outsource support from NSFA and its partners

gives xMA the depth and breadth required to successfully ensure strong operations capacity. A majority of the board of the school is already in place and is described in the governance section. It includes members with backgrounds in K-12 school experience, marketing, fundraising, philanthropy, real-estate, property management, and community building. The Executive Director and Community Engagement Committee will oversee marketing and student recruitment strategies, including community partnerships, outreach events, and targeted enrollment campaigns designed to ensure equitable access for families across Birmingham. Together, the founding Executive Director, governing board, operational leadership team, and external partners form the implementation team responsible for executing the operational plan and preparing the school for a successful launch.

Implementation Team Capacity Overview

The implementation team for xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy combines experienced leadership, a skilled governing board, and specialized external partners to ensure the successful launch and operation of the school. The table below summarizes the team's operational capacity across key areas required to implement the Operations Plan.

Operational Area	Responsible Leadership / Partners	Relevant Expertise
Staffing & Human Capital	Executive Director, Principal, Director of Finance & Operations, Board Governance Committee	Leadership hiring, teacher development, HR systems, compliance with certification and background requirements
Fundraising & Development	Executive Director, Board of Directors, national charter partners (NSFA, BES, NewSchools Venture Fund)	Grant development, philanthropic partnerships, startup funding strategy
Financial Management	Director of Finance & Operations, NSFA back-office accounting team, Board Finance Committee	Budgeting, payroll, procurement, federal program compliance, audit preparation
Marketing & Student Recruitment	Executive Director, Community Engagement Committee, community partners	Community outreach, family engagement, enrollment marketing, partnerships
General Operations	Executive Director, Director of Finance & Operations, TJ3 Consulting	School operations planning, compliance systems, operational coaching, district operations expertise
Facilities Acquisition & Management	Director of Finance & Operations, Board Facilities Committee, Tessa Realty Group, TCU Consulting	Real estate brokerage, facilities planning, renovation oversight, code compliance

Together, these leaders and partners provide the operational expertise required to successfully implement the school's operational plan and ensure a smooth and sustainable school launch. Additionally, Troy Williams with TJ3 Consulting, LLC. is a member of the applicant team. Troy is the former Chief Operations Officer with Birmingham City Schools, where he oversaw all district operations, including facilities, maintenance, food services, transportation, safety and security, technology and athletics. Troy is able to provide valuable support from his extensive operations experience with urban school districts, but also from his district and charter school startup work during his time as Senior Director of Operations and Chief Operations Officer with the Tennessee Achievement School district. Part of Troy's role with the Tennessee Achievement School District not only included overseeing day-to-day school operations with the direct-run schools, but also as coordinator and collaborator for Operations compliance and support services with the charter

organizations that were authorized to operate the neighborhood schools. Troy has also provided hiring, consulting and coaching services to other Alabama charter school's Directors of Operations.

Finance
The Executive Director and Board of Directors also lead philanthropic fundraising and grant development efforts, supported by relationships with national charter support organizations including NewSchools Venture Fund, BES, and New Schools for Alabama.. In addition to these leaders, xMA will partner with New Schools for Alabama for additional operations capacity. NSFA provides COO-level technical assistance and arranges other providers for essential services. xMA will be utilizing the New Schools for Alabama back-office services program that currently services ten existing charter schools in Alabama. NSFA's skilled staff is well respected by the ALSDE. It brings 50+ years of experience managing accounting, financial compliance, food service federal programs, and budgeting and planning for both districts and charter schools. The accounting team includes a CSFO with experience leading Tuscaloosa, Cullman City, and Pike Road school districts, a full-time senior accountant, and a payroll/benefits accountant. The shared cost model from NSFA also ensures that our Operations leader will receive professional development and coaching from this skilled team and others at NSFA. Additionally, xMA intends to use NSFA's carefully selected and recommended food service and facilities providers to ensure capable startup and operations functions occur in critical areas.

NSFA's CFO/COO support provides senior leadership and advisory support that small schools are rarely able to access on their own and works with the board and leadership on annual budgeting, startup and operations, facilities financing, and strategic planning. NSFA also has access to New Schools Facility Partners, a nonprofit service provider and fund that provides guidance and support to charter schools who are developing or renovating facilities, and supports schools with essential facilities related technical assistance such as architectural design, building codes, general contractor bidding processes, and owner's rep services, among others.

Facilities Management

xMA demonstrates strong capacity to manage its facility needs both in the short term (co-location during startup) and long term (dedicated campus). The school has engaged Tessa Realty Group, an experienced Birmingham-based broker, to identify and negotiate a suitable facility aligned with enrollment projections and programmatic needs.

The Director of Finance and Operations will lead all facilities coordination, including vendor contracts for maintenance, janitorial services, safety inspections, and compliance with ADA and fire codes. The DFO will also oversee facility readiness, ensuring spaces meet all health, safety, and educational standards prior to occupancy.

The Board's Facilities Ad Hoc Committee, supported by the Finance Committee, will monitor the leasing process, budget for renovations, and maintain compliance with authorizer and municipal requirements. The school will prioritize cost-effective co-location in the first 1–3 years, expanding into a larger, permanent site by Year 4–5 as enrollment grows.

This proactive approach combining expert real estate guidance, board oversight, and operational leadership ensures that facilities are safe, efficient, and scalable to support future growth.

Staffing Capacity

The xMA leadership team is composed of professionals with expertise in instructional leadership, operations, and student support, guided by a strong commitment to equity and innovation in public education. The founding Executive Director, Dr. Melissa Capehart, is an accomplished educator and school leader with a proven record of leading instructional improvement, building culture systems, and developing personalized learning and STREAM-integrated practices. She will provide overall leadership for the school's academic and operational strategy, ensuring that financial, instructional, and cultural systems align with the school's mission and vision. Capehart will be supported by a Director of Finance & Operations (DFO), who will serve as the school's chief business and operations officer and oversee finance, compliance, facilities, and operational systems with support from external partners such as New Schools for Alabama, BES and New.

We will prioritize hiring a DFO with expertise in financial management, human resources, vendor contracting, compliance, food service, and facilities operations, ensuring all systems are aligned with state and federal requirements. The leadership team will also include a Principal, Dean of Culture

and Instruction and Director of Student Supports, both of whom will collaborate with the DFO to ensure that school-wide operations directly support instructional excellence and student well-being. Recruitment and staffing are guided by xMA's mission, P.O.W.E.R.S. values, and a commitment to building a team that reflects the diversity of the Birmingham community. Hiring decisions will be data-driven, equity-centered, and aligned to state certification and background clearance standards.

Professional Development

Operational excellence at xMA is reinforced by a comprehensive professional development (PD) system designed to strengthen staff capacity, consistency, and culture. All staff academic, operational, and support will receive extensive onboarding prior to the start of the year to ensure alignment with school systems, procedures, and expectations.

The DFO, Executive Director, and leadership team will lead regular training sessions on operational compliance, financial protocols, and safety procedures, including procurement practices, risk management, and facilities maintenance standards. Staff will also engage in monthly professional learning sessions focused on SEL integration, crisis response, family communication, and operational systems improvement.

xMA's PD model draws on best practices from BES, NewSchools for Alabama, and the NewSchools Venture Fund Fellowship, all of which provide ongoing coaching and capacity-building support to the leadership and board. This partnership ensures xMA's leaders are equipped to implement high-quality operational systems that grow with the school.

Performance Management

The xMA team uses a data-driven performance management system to ensure accountability and continuous improvement across both instructional and operational functions. The Executive Director conducts regular performance reviews with the DFO and other leadership team members based on measurable goals, key performance indicators (KPIs), and adherence to compliance standards. Operational staff performance will be assessed through clear metrics tied to efficiency, compliance, and customer service, such as timely processing of purchase orders, accurate payroll execution, facility upkeep, and adherence to budgetary controls.

The Board of Directors, through its Governance and Finance Committees, provides additional oversight by reviewing monthly operational reports, financial dashboards, and annual audits. The DFO presents key data trends to ensure transparency and to inform board-level decisions about staffing, budgeting, and resource allocation.

This layered accountability structure spanning the leadership team, board committees, and back-office provider ensures rigorous performance management and operational excellence.

The collective qualifications of xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy's leadership team, Board of Directors, and external partners provide compelling evidence of operational excellence. Through experienced leadership, robust systems, and strong partnerships, xMA is fully equipped to implement its Operations Plan with integrity, efficiency, and alignment to its mission. From staffing and professional development to performance management, day-to-day operations, and facilities management, xMA's structures and expertise ensure a smooth and sustainable launch that will grow alongside the school's innovative STREAM model. The Executive Director, Director of Finance & Operations, Principal, and Dean of Culture & Instruction form the core operational leadership team responsible for implementing the school's operational plan.

b) Describe the organization's capacity and experience in facilities acquisition and management, including managing build-out and/or renovations, as applicable.

To support any needed facility renovations and/or improvements, xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) will utilize the partnership New Schools for Alabama (NSFA) maintains with TCU Consulting, a school facilities planning and development firm that specializes in supporting schools across the Southeast with facility planning, financing, development, and project management. TCU Consulting has extensive experience working with schools to evaluate facility options, develop sustainable financing plans, and guide schools through the facility acquisition and renovation process for both leased and purchased facilities.

Through the partnership with NSFA, TCU Consulting will provide facilities planning, development guidance, and feasibility analysis to ensure that the selected facility can support xMA's educational model and long-term enrollment growth. TCU Consulting provides comprehensive charter school real estate development services, including developing project strategies, conducting feasibility analyses of potential sites, supporting site acquisition or lease negotiations, assisting with financing strategies, and guiding project design and renovation planning. Their team also supports charter schools with essential facilities-related technical assistance such as architectural coordination, building code compliance, contractor selection processes, and owner's representation during construction and renovation projects.

In addition, New Schools for Alabama (NSFA) provides technical assistance and strategic support to charter schools during the facilities planning process, including assistance with financial planning, lender evaluation, and long-term facilities sustainability planning.

The xMA Executive Director, Director of Finance & Operations, and Board of Directors, along with support from Tessa Realty Group and TCU Consulting, demonstrate the school's strong capacity to successfully navigate facility acquisition, planning, and development, as well as to manage the build-out and/or renovation process required to prepare the facility for school opening.

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

5. FINANCIAL PLAN AND CAPACITY

Founding a high-quality public charter school in the State of Alabama is complicated by the fact that state and federal funding sources are not available until after the school is open with students attending. Even at this point, certain funding sources require specific conditions to be met for access, meaning a potential delay in funding and/or not being eligible for funding through part of the opening year. This section evaluates the financial resources available to the applicant for successfully navigating the pre-opening period and launching a public charter school. By law, a draft budget for the first five years of operations is required. Act. Ala. Code § 16-6F-7(a)(8)bb (2023).

1. Pre-opening Phase Funding Sources

Status: Completed

Form Result

Provide evidence of revenue streams during the pre-opening period.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Compelling evidence of revenue sources sufficient to carry the organization through the pre-opening phase until school opening when state and federal funding sources become available

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

a) Describe the fundraising goals and timeline for the pre-opening phase. Include funding raised for specific purposes (ongoing costs, facility, etc.)

Fundraising Goals and Timeline Narrative

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) has established a comprehensive and strategic fundraising plan to fully support the school's pre-opening phase and ensure strong financial readiness prior to opening in August 2027. xMA has set a total pre-opening fundraising goal of \$3,000,000, which will provide sufficient capital to support Year 0 staffing, working capital for future years, and resources to ensure facility readiness, curriculum and technology acquisition, enrollment and community outreach, professional development, and operational infrastructure.

To date, xMA has secured confirmed philanthropic investment from nationally recognized charter school incubators, venture philanthropies, and education support organizations. These funds provide critical financial stability and allow the school to begin hiring Year 0 leadership staff, conduct facility planning and preparation, implement operational systems, and complete comprehensive pre-opening activities. In total over \$578,500 has already been raised from New Schools for Alabama, Building Excellent Schools, New Schools Venture Fund and the National Autism Accelerator (see confirmation letters in attachments). Additional startup funds from New Schools Venture Fund of up to \$645,000 are also confirmed upon approval of the charter application, bringing expected startup funds at this early stage to over \$1.1 million, before considering support from CSP grants. See the attachment for additional detail on fundraising goals and targeted donors.

These funds are specifically designated to support pre-opening operational costs, including hiring Year 0 leadership staff, facility preparation and readiness, curriculum and instructional materials, technology infrastructure, professional development, enrollment and recruitment efforts, and startup operational systems. This diversified funding strategy ensures that xMA will have sufficient capital prior to opening and expects to be well positioned for long-term financial sustainability

Secured Funds Narrative

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) has secured substantial philanthropic grant funding to support ongoing costs during the pre-opening phase. These funds provide critical financial stability and allow the school to begin hiring Year 0 staff, support planning and operational development, and ensure readiness for launch. To date, xMA has secured over \$578,500 in direct Year 0 grant funding, along

with an additional \$645,000 in committed multi-year startup funding, upon charter approval, from NewSchools Venture Fund (\$215,000 annually for up to three years), for a total of up to \$1,143,500 in secured and committed funding. New Newschools for Alabama has contributed start up funding of \$225,000 of which \$105,000 is liquid assets and the rest covering prior expenses.

See attached grant commitment letters and the fundraising detail noted in the budget model.

Funds are available for use to pay salaries, other start-up costs, facilities expenses, travel, and training. In addition, the school has a commitment letter from NSFA evidencing up to \$200,000 in predevelopment lending, and \$1,000,000 in credit enhancement to support low cost early stage borrowing from CDFI lenders.

Secured Pre-Opening Funding (see grant letters in attachments)

- NewSchools Venture Fund (NSVF) – Secured: \$250,000 + Multi-Year Funding Commitment of up to \$645,000.
- Build. Excel. Sustain. (BES) Fellowship – Secured: \$103,500 + \$25,000 Startup Grant
- New Schools for Alabama (NSFA) Startup Grant – Secured: \$225,000
- New Schools for Alabama (NSFA) Predevelopment Loan – Contingent upon charter approval – \$200,000
- National Accelerator for Autism Charter Schools (NAACS) Scholarship Grant – Secured: \$20,000.

Funds are available for use to pay salaries, other start-up costs, facilities expenses, travel, and training. In addition, the school has a commitment letter from NSFA evidencing up to \$1,000,000 in credit enhancement to support low cost early stage borrowing from CDFI lenders.

Evidence of Liquid Assets	File name:	xMA Fellowship Grant Award Letters-revised state app (1) (1) (1).pdf
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	Uploaded by:	Melissa Capehart

c) Describe all grants/loans the school will apply for to fund ongoing costs during the pre-opening phase. Attach supporting documentation if available.

Funding Leads Narrative

xMA has developed a comprehensive and strategic grant funding plan to support ongoing costs during the pre-opening phase. In addition to the substantial grant funding already secured, xMA will pursue multiple federal, national, state, and local grant opportunities specifically designed to support startup charter schools, facility readiness, and pre-opening operational costs. These grant funds will support hiring Year 0 staff, planning-year salaries and benefits, facility preparation, curriculum development, student recruitment, technology infrastructure, and operational startup expenses.

Federal and National Charter School Startup Grants

Charter Schools Program (CSP) Grant – Anticipated Application: Up to \$2,000,000

xMA will apply for the federal Charter Schools Program (CSP) Startup Grant, which provides funding specifically for the planning, program design, and initial implementation of high-quality charter schools. CSP grants may provide up to \$2,000,000 in startup and multi-year implementation funding, which can be used for Year 0 staffing, curriculum, instructional materials, technology, facility preparation, and operational startup costs. This grant represents one of the most significant federal funding opportunities available to startup charter schools and will be a primary component of xMA's pre-opening funding strategy.

Timeline: Application submission anticipated Spring–Summer 2026 following charter authorization; award decisions typically announced Fall–Winter 2026; funding available immediately upon approval.

Charter School Growth Fund (CSGF) – Semi-Finalist: \$250,000 Potential Award + Multi-Year Funding

In December 2025, xMA was selected as a semi-finalist for the Charter School Growth Fund startup grant, with a potential award of \$250,000 in startup funding and eligibility for additional multi-year funding support. Charter School Growth Fund provides philanthropic investment to high-potential charter schools and supports startup staffing, leadership development, facility readiness, and

operational launch costs.

Timeline: Finalist interviews anticipated Spring 2026; award decisions expected Summer–Fall 2026.

National Charter School and Education Innovation Grants

Goodrich Foundation Grant – Estimated Request: \$50,000–\$250,000

The Goodrich Foundation supports innovative education initiatives, including charter school startup, student programming, and capital needs. xMA will apply for startup and facility-related funding to support STREAM lab development, instructional materials, and planning-year staffing.

Timeline: Applications accepted on a rolling basis; xMA anticipates submission in Spring 2026.

Camelback Ventures Fellowship and Startup Grant – Estimated Award: \$50,000

Camelback Ventures provides capital, coaching, and startup funding to education entrepreneurs building innovative and equity-focused schools. The program includes direct grant funding and intensive leadership support to assist founders during the pre-opening phase. Funds may be used to support leadership staffing, program design, and startup operational expenses.

Timeline: Fellowship applications typically open annually in Spring; xMA anticipates applying in Spring–Summer 2026.

Walton Family Foundation Startup Grant – Estimated Award: \$250,000–\$500,000

The Walton Family Foundation is one of the nation's largest charter school funders, supporting school startup, facility development, and implementation costs. Funding may be used for planning-year staffing, facility improvements, instructional materials, and operational readiness.

Timeline: Applications accepted on a rolling basis; submission anticipated Spring–Summer 2026 following authorization.

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Education Grants – Estimated Award: \$100,000–\$500,000

The Gates Foundation supports innovative school models focused on improving student outcomes through personalized learning and instructional innovation. Startup charter schools aligned with innovative instructional models may qualify for grant support to fund startup programming and operational implementation.

Timeline: Invitation-based and rolling opportunities; outreach and proposal submission anticipated 2026–2027.

Chan Zuckerberg Initiative Education Grants – Estimated Award: \$100,000–\$500,000

The Chan Zuckerberg Initiative supports innovative schools focused on personalized learning and student-centered instructional models. Grant funds may support startup program implementation, technology infrastructure, and planning-year staffing.

Timeline: Rolling application and invitation-based funding cycles; outreach and application anticipated in 2026.

Overdeck Family Foundation – Estimated Award: \$100,000–\$300,000

The Overdeck Family Foundation supports innovative STEM-focused educational initiatives and startup school development. Funding may support STREAM programming, curriculum development, and planning-year implementation.

Timeline: Grant cycles typically open annually; anticipated application submission Fall 2026.

City Fund – Estimated Award: \$100,000–\$500,000

City Fund supports the development and launch of high-quality public charter schools through startup investment and implementation support. Funds may support leadership staffing, startup operations, and early program implementation.

Timeline: Rolling funding cycles; outreach and application anticipated 2026.

Vela Education Fund – Estimated Award: \$50,000–\$250,000

Vela Education Fund supports innovative and student-centered school models, including startup charter schools. Funds may support planning-year staffing, program design, and instructional innovation.

Timeline: Rolling application process; submission anticipated Spring–Fall 2026.

Arnold Ventures Education Grant – Estimated Award: \$100,000–\$300,000

Arnold Ventures funds innovative education initiatives focused on improving student outcomes and educational access. Startup charter schools implementing innovative instructional models may qualify for funding support.

Timeline: Rolling and invitation-based funding cycles; outreach and application anticipated 2026–2027.

State and Regional Grant Opportunities

Alabama Power Foundation Education Grant – Estimated Award: \$25,000–\$150,000

The Alabama Power Foundation supports education initiatives across Alabama, including startup and facility funding for innovative schools.

Timeline: Annual application cycle; anticipated submission March–June 2026.

Regions Foundation Education Grant – Estimated Award: \$25,000–\$100,000

The Regions Foundation provides grant funding to support education access and innovative school development, including startup charter schools.

Timeline: Quarterly grant cycles; anticipated submission Summer 2026.

Protective Life Foundation Education Grant – Estimated Award: \$25,000–\$100,000

Protective Life Foundation supports education initiatives in Birmingham and surrounding communities, including startup school funding and educational programming.

Timeline: Rolling application process; anticipated submission 2026.

Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham – Estimated Award: \$25,000–\$250,000

The Community Foundation supports education initiatives throughout the Birmingham region, including startup charter schools and facility improvements.

Timeline: Competitive grant cycles typically open annually; anticipated submission Spring–Fall 2026.

Daniel Foundation of Alabama – Estimated Award: \$50,000–\$250,000

The Daniel Foundation supports innovative education initiatives and startup programs that improve educational outcomes for students in Alabama.

Timeline: Grant cycles typically open twice annually; anticipated submission Spring or Fall 2026.

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama Foundation – Estimated Award: \$25,000–\$100,000

This foundation supports initiatives that improve student well-being, school readiness, and educational access. Funding may support startup programming and student services.

Timeline: Rolling application cycles; anticipated submission 2026.

PNC Foundation Education Grant – Estimated Award: \$25,000–\$100,000

The PNC Foundation supports early childhood and K–12 education initiatives, including startup school development and educational programming.

Timeline: Rolling application cycles; anticipated submission 2026.

Dollar General Literacy Foundation – Estimated Award: \$10,000–\$50,000

The Dollar General Literacy Foundation supports literacy programs and educational startup initiatives serving K–12 students.

Timeline: Annual grant cycles typically open Spring–Summer; anticipated submission 2026.

Use of Grant Funding for Pre-Opening Costs

All grant funds will be used to support ongoing pre-opening costs, including:

- Hiring Year 0 leadership and planning staff
- Planning-year salaries and benefits
- Facility preparation and readiness
- Curriculum and instructional materials
- Technology infrastructure and student devices
- Student recruitment and enrollment activities
- Professional development and staff training
- Operational systems and school launch infrastructure

d) Describe all grants/loans applied for and/or awarded to fund the construction and/or renovation of the school building(s). Please attach evidence of any funds secured.

Construction Funding Narrative

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) has secured startup grant funding and identified additional financing pathways to support facility-related pre-development, due diligence, and renovation costs during the planning and pre-opening phase. These funds will ensure that the school can complete

critical early facility activities, including site evaluation, architectural planning, permitting, and renovation preparation.

xMA has been awarded a \$250,000 startup grant from NewSchools Venture Fund (NSVF), which may be used to support eligible startup and facility-related pre-opening expenses. A portion of these funds will be allocated toward initial facility costs, including site feasibility assessments, architectural and engineering consultations, facility planning, renovation cost estimates, and other due diligence activities necessary to prepare the building for occupancy and renovation.

In addition, xMA has been awarded a \$25,000 startup grant from Build. Excel. Sustain. (BES), which will be released upon charter authorization. These funds may be used to support early facility-related expenses, including facility planning, legal and consulting fees related to lease or purchase agreements, and other startup costs associated with preparing the facility for renovation and school opening.

To supplement grant funding and ensure sufficient capital for facility renovation and construction if needed, xMA will also pursue facility financing options through NewSchools for Alabama, which provides charter schools with access to pre-development and facility loans designed to support early-stage facility planning and renovation. xMA intends to apply for a pre-\$200,000 development loan through NewSchools for Alabama to support architectural design, permitting, construction planning, and initial renovation costs. These loans are specifically structured to support charter schools during the pre-opening phase and provide flexible financing to ensure facilities are ready for student occupancy. In addition xMA is eligible for up to \$1 million in credit enhancement support to encourage third party borrowers to make loans for school renovations.

Together, these secured grants and potential facility financing options provide xMA with the financial resources necessary to support initial facility due diligence, renovation planning, and building preparation. The fundraising strategy noted above is expected to produce additional grant dollars usable for facility costs.

In addition, the school will be seeking loan financing to support predevelopment costs and the upcoming facility renovation once charter approval is secured. Upon approval, the school anticipates applying for both a \$200,000 predevelopment loan from NSFA and credit enhancement of up to \$1 million to support third party borrowing. The financial model supports borrowing capacity of more than \$4.5 million dollars.

Evidence of Construction Funding	File name:	NSFA Loan Fund letter - xSTREAM (1).pdf
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e) Describe the fund-raising capacity of the organization during the pre-opening phase. Include information on the personnel involved.

Fund-raising Personnel Narrative

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) has strong fundraising capacity during the pre-opening phase, led by the Executive Director and supported by a highly qualified Board of Directors with extensive experience in philanthropy, grant writing, nonprofit leadership, corporate partnerships, and community engagement. Together, the leadership team brings both direct fundraising experience and access to extensive professional and philanthropic networks that will support the school's pre-opening fundraising goal.

Executive Director Fundraising Leadership and Capacity

Dr. Melissa Capehart, Founder and Executive Director of xMA, serves as the primary fundraising lead and brings demonstrated success in securing startup funding, fellowships, and grant awards. To date, Dr. Capehart has successfully secured over \$578,500 in direct startup funding and up to \$1,143,500 in secured and committed multi-year funding from national charter school incubators and grant organizations, including NewSchools Venture Fund, Build. Excel. Sustain., NewSchools for Alabama, and the National Accelerator for Autism Charter Schools. She has also advanced to the semi-finalist stage with the Charter School Growth Fund and continues to actively pursue federal, national, and regional grant opportunities, including the Charter Schools Program (CSP) grant.

Dr. Capehart is responsible for developing and executing the overall fundraising strategy, including grant identification and submission, major donor cultivation, corporate partnership development, and capital campaign leadership. Her participation in nationally recognized charter school incubators and fellowships including NewSchools Venture Fund, BES, and NAACS provides access to national philanthropic networks, grant opportunities, and fundraising coaching that further strengthens the school's fundraising capacity.

Board of Directors Fundraising Capacity and Leadership

The xMA Board of Directors plays a critical role in supporting fundraising efforts through personal giving, donor introductions, grant identification, corporate partnership development, and direct fundraising activities. Board members bring diverse professional backgrounds and direct experience in fundraising, nonprofit development, and philanthropy.

- Beth Sanders brings fundraising and nonprofit development experience through her leadership work with Ed Farm, where she has supported fundraising efforts, partnership development, and philanthropic engagement. Her experience working with education-focused nonprofit organizations strengthens the school's ability to access education-focused philanthropic funding.
- Courtney Winston has extensive experience in fundraising and philanthropic engagement through her professional career and her leadership and membership in Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, which conducts large-scale philanthropic fundraising initiatives. She also participates in fundraising activities through her professional role and community leadership, bringing valuable donor engagement and corporate partnership connections.
- Megan Skipper has fundraising experience through her work with A+, where she has supported fundraising initiatives, donor engagement, and nonprofit development. Her experience strengthens the Board's ability to identify and cultivate donors and philanthropic partners.
- Evan Cottrell brings strong professional networks in real estate, business, and community development, which will support corporate partnership development, facility-related fundraising, and donor cultivation efforts.
- Amanda Giles brings expertise in grant-funded education programs, instructional leadership, and academic program development. Her experience supporting grant-funded initiatives and educational program implementation strengthens the school's grant readiness and ability to secure education-focused funding.
- Additional Board members bring expertise in finance, nonprofit leadership, education, and community engagement, and all Board members are expected to contribute to fundraising efforts through personal giving, donor introductions, event participation, and corporate and philanthropic outreach.

Organizational Fundraising Structure and Support

Fundraising efforts are coordinated by the Executive Director, with direct support from the Board of Directors and external partners, including NewSchools Venture Fund, NewSchools for Alabama, National Accelerator of Autism Charter Schools, and Build. Excel. Sustain., which provide fundraising coaching, grant access, and strategic support. The Board of Directors has also established a culture of shared fundraising responsibility, with each Board member committing to supporting fundraising efforts through personal contributions, donor engagement, and partnership development.

Together, the Executive Director and Board of Directors provide strong fundraising leadership, demonstrated success securing startup funding, and the organizational capacity necessary to successfully fund the school's pre-opening phase and long-term sustainability.

f) What relationships have been established with local entities who may be able to fund special needs or programs? Describe and provide evidence of any pledges made to the school by community members / businesses / organizations. Include in-kind contributions that may reduce costs.

Local Pledges Narrative

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) has begun establishing strong relationships with local organizations, nonprofit partners, and community stakeholders who support the school's mission and may provide programmatic funding, in-kind contributions, and partnership support during the pre-open-

ing phase and beyond. These partnerships strengthen the school's ability to deliver high-quality STREAM programming while reducing operational costs and expanding student opportunities.

The Flourish

xMA has established a confirmed partnership with The Flourish, a Birmingham-based arts organization, to support the development and implementation of the school's arts programming. The Flourish will serve as a strategic partner in delivering high-quality visual and performing arts experiences aligned with xMA's STREAM model, which integrates the arts as a core instructional component. Through this partnership, The Flourish will support arts programming through curriculum collaboration, guest instruction, and potential in-kind contributions such as access to teaching artists, program design support, and arts-related resources. This partnership enhances the school's ability to provide comprehensive arts education while reducing startup costs associated with program development and external arts services. [Letter of Support Intent to Partner-The Flourish \(3\).pdf](#)

NewSchools for Alabama

xMA has established a strong partnership with NewSchools for Alabama, a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting the development and success of high-quality public charter schools. NewSchools for Alabama has already provided startup grant funding and continues to provide ongoing technical assistance, training, and operational guidance throughout the pre-opening phase. This partnership provides access to startup funding, facility planning support, financial and operational training, and connections to additional funding opportunities and strategic partners. In addition to direct financial support, NewSchools for Alabama provides in-kind contributions through technical assistance, professional development, strategic planning support, and access to operational resources that reduce startup costs and strengthen the school's readiness for launch.

Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative (AMSTI)

xMA has established relationships with leadership at the Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative (AMSTI), a statewide program that provides instructional resources, professional development, and hands-on STEM, Math and Science materials to public schools. Upon authorization, xMA will have access to AMSTI's extensive instructional resources, teacher training, and equipment lending libraries, which will support the school's STREAM programming. AMSTI provides in-kind contributions through professional development, curriculum support, and access to high-quality STEM instructional materials, reducing the school's startup and instructional material costs while strengthening the rigor and quality of STREAM instruction.

Alabama Technology in Motion (ATIM)

xMA has also established relationships with leadership at Alabama Technology in Motion (ATIM), a statewide initiative that provides technology integration support and professional development to educators. Upon authorization, xMA will receive access to technology integration coaching, training, and instructional support through ATIM. ATIM provides in-kind contributions through professional development, instructional technology coaching, and support for integrating technology into classroom instruction, reducing the need for external technology consulting services and strengthening the school's STREAM and personalized learning model.

Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI)

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) has also established relationships with leadership at the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI), a statewide initiative established by the Alabama State Department of Education to support high-quality literacy instruction and ensure that all students develop the reading skills necessary to meet or exceed grade-level standards. Under the Alabama Literacy Act, authorized public charter schools receive access to ARI's comprehensive literacy supports, including professional development, literacy coaching, instructional resources, and training aligned to the science of reading. The Alabama Reading Initiative is designed to strengthen instructional capacity and improve reading outcomes, with the goal of achieving 100% literacy among Alabama public school students. Through ARI, xMA will receive in-kind contributions in the form of literacy-focused professional learning, instructional coaching, and access to state-approved literacy resources and training programs such as LETRS. These supports will strengthen xMA's literacy program, ensure alignment with the Alabama Literacy Act, and reduce the need for external literacy consulting services while enhancing the school's personalized learning and mastery-based instructional model.

Through these partnerships and relationships, xMA anticipates receiving in-kind support that may include professional expertise, curriculum development support, instructional programming assistance, professional development, and access to instructional and technology resources. These in-kind contributions will reduce startup and operational costs while enhancing program quality and student experiences. As xMA continues through the authorization and pre-opening phase, the school will expand these partnerships and formalize additional agreements with community organizations, higher education institutions, corporate partners, and nonprofit organizations to support specialized programming, including arts, STREAM education, student enrichment, and social-emotional learning.

State/National Organization Narrative

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) has established strong relationships with several state and national charter school support organizations and philanthropic partners that provide direct startup funding, access to additional grant opportunities, technical assistance, and operational support during the pre-opening phase. These partnerships significantly strengthen the school's financial capacity and readiness for launch.

NewSchools for Alabama (NSFA)

As a back-office client and supported partner of NewSchools for Alabama, xMA receives ongoing support with financial planning, startup operations, and facility planning, including access to construction management guidance and facility development expertise at nominal cost. NewSchools for Alabama has already awarded startup grant funding to xMA and provides ongoing access to additional grant opportunities and pre-development loan financing specifically designed to support charter school startup and facility readiness. In addition to direct financial support, NewSchools for Alabama provides significant in-kind contributions, including financial modeling, budget development, compliance guidance, operational coaching, and facility planning assistance. These services substantially reduce startup costs and ensure that the school's financial and operational systems are established in alignment with state requirements and best practices.

NewSchools Venture Fund (NSVF)

xMA has been awarded startup grant funding from NewSchools Venture Fund, one of the nation's leading nonprofit venture philanthropies supporting innovative public charter schools. In addition to direct startup funding, NSVF provides leadership coaching, fundraising support, and access to national philanthropic networks that support charter school development. Through this partnership, xMA receives ongoing support in fundraising strategy, financial planning, and grant access, significantly strengthening the school's ability to secure additional startup and implementation funding. NSVF also connects school founders to national funders and provides access to future grant opportunities and philanthropic partnerships.

Build. Excel. Sustain. (BES) Fellowship

xMA has been selected as a BES Fellow through Build. Excel. Sustain. (BES), a national charter school incubator that provides startup grant funding, leadership development, and technical assistance to charter school founders. BES has awarded startup grant funding to support pre-opening activities and provides intensive coaching in school design, staffing, budgeting, and operational readiness. This partnership provides both direct financial support and substantial in-kind support through leadership training, grant access, fundraising coaching, and operational planning. BES also connects founders to national charter school funding networks and philanthropic partners.

National Accelerator for Autism Charter Schools (NAACS)

xMA has been selected to participate in the National Accelerator for Autism Charter Schools (NAACS), a national fellowship program that supports charter school founders through grant funding, leadership development, and access to national philanthropic networks. Through this partnership, xMA has received 20k grant funding and ongoing support in school planning, operational readiness, and program development. In addition, NAACS provides specialized support to strengthen xMA's special education programming, including technical assistance, training, and access to national experts and resources focused on supporting students with disabilities and building high-quality, inclusive special education systems.

Together, these state and national partnerships provide direct startup funding, access to additional grant opportunities, operational support, and in-kind services that significantly reduce startup costs and strengthen the school's financial sustainability. These relationships also provide access to national philanthropic networks and future funding opportunities that will support the school's successful launch and long-term growth.

[xMA Fellowship Grant Award Letters-F.pdf](#)

Donation Narrative

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) has received a private individual donation in the amount of \$1,000 to support the school's pre-opening activities and startup efforts. This contribution reflects early philanthropic support for the successful launch and long-term sustainability of the school. Documentation of this donation, including a signed donation letter, is attached. xMA will continue to maintain documentation of all private donations and disclose all contributions in accordance with authorizer requirements

Evidence of Donations	File name:	Stream donation letter=MS.pdf
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Element Review

Reviews is not provided

2. Pre-opening Phase Cost Estimates

Status: Completed

Form Result

Give details of the anticipated costs during the pre-opening phase.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Compelling evidence of financial consideration of all major start-up expenses occurring during the pre-opening phase.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

a) Provide a cost estimate and supporting documentation for leasing/buying a facility to house the school. Attach any contingent agreement if available.

Facility Narrative

The school anticipates engaging TCU Consulting to lead the design and renovation of the chosen site. TCU is highly experienced in school design and construction having recently led the completion of Legacy Prep's middle school campus and has an extensive roster of more than twenty (20) successful district school projects across the state of Alabama. Examples include Auburn High School, Carver High School, Johnnie R. Carr Middle School, and Sonnie Hereford Elementary School, among others. See the attachment for the assessment of the suitability of the school. The school has previously served as a school and is therefore grandfathered under Alabama's storm shelter law.

In addition, the school has an LOI with Rebirth Christian Church to lease the former school space that is intended to be renovated into the xSTREAM Academy charter school. TCU has made a preliminary evaluation of the school and provided a letter evidencing suitability as a school. Preliminary renovation costs are estimated at approximately \$5.8 million, including soft costs, exterior work, and optional gym renovations. Annual debt service is expected to range from \$309k per year at targeted enrollment and \$403k per year at maximum enrollment.

Evidence of Facility Costs **File name:** XSTREAM FAC ASS 20260226 (1).pdf
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b) Estimate the cost to renovate the identified facility up to code to open a school. Provide evidence to support the analysis.

Renovation Estimate Narrative

TCU Consulting has provided a preliminary estimate of costs to renovate the school. This cost is expected to be approximately \$5.8 million, including soft costs, exterior work, and optional gym renovations. Annual debt service is expected to range from \$309k per year at targeted enrollment and \$403k per year at maximum enrollment. Minimum enrollment requires fewer classrooms and will be cheaper to renovate but the school anticipates a project at least as big as the target enrollment requires. These numbers will evolve but compare reasonably with other current charter school projects.

Rebirth Christian Campus for xSTREAM Academy
 Conceptual Budget- 2/20/2026

Area	SQFT	Cost Per SQFT	Total
First Floor	12,700	\$ 150.00	\$1,905,000.00
Gym	6,300	\$ 75.00	\$ 472,500.00
Second Floor	12,700	\$ 150.00	\$1,905,000.00
Sitework: ADA	3.88 Acres	N/A	\$ 242,500.00
Construction Sub-Total	31,700	N/A	\$4,282,500.00
Program Cost	35%	N/A	\$5,781,375.00

Evidence of Renovation Estimates

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c) Describe the staff positions and estimated salaries and benefits of personnel hired during the pre-opening phase to assist in opening the school.

Pre-opening Staff Narrative

Staff positions and salaries are noted in detail in the budget spreadsheet and include a full year salary and benefits for the executive director, 6 months of full time salary and benefits for a Dean of Culture and Instruction and a Dir. of Finance and Operations. Other salaries include two months of staff wages in August and September of Year 0, before the fiscal year begins on October 1. Additional positions may be hired sooner pending philanthropy. The school will be hiring a company to manage construction and serve as owner's rep for the project. New Schools For Alabama will provide back office support for accounting, benefits setup, and facilitating the financing for necessary lending to support the construction.

d) Estimate the start-up costs of the following

- i) Curriculum
- ii) Furnishings
- iii) Instructional Technology
- iv) Insurance
- v) Community Outreach Programs
- vi) Student Recruitment
- vii) School Safety Requirements (i.e. nSides, storm shelter, if applicable)
- viii) Student Information System (PowerSchool)
- ix) School Compliance Platforms (Cognia, Anvilar)
- x) Child Nutrition Requirements
- xi) Transportation, if applicable
- xii) All other applicable costs

Start-up Costs Narrative

Please see the budget spreadsheet for expense details. These are noted in the tab titled Expense Assumptions and are on a line item basis.

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

3. Pre-opening Financial Management

Status: Completed

Form Result

Provide guidance on how the revenue sources are sufficient to meet the anticipated costs including verification of timeliness and financial safeguards.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Compelling evidence that the revenue streams are sufficient to meet the necessary outlays during the pre-opening phase. Compelling evidence of financial systems and processes with strong internal controls used during the pre-opening phase.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

a) Given the funding streams and estimated costs described above, rectify and balance the funding streams and cost estimates to ensure that the school enters opening day with a positive balance sheet. Please attach supporting calculations.

Rectifying Income to Costs in Preopening Phase Narrative

The school has raised more than \$1 million toward a \$3 million philanthropic goal for startup and has developed extensive national partnerships that are providing significant funding streams for the school. In addition the school has budgeted only \$1 million in CSP funds though the maximum \$2 million available will be sought. All budget models are conservative and evidence adequate cashflow and annual surpluses leading to more than 30 days cash on hand. The school anticipates building significant cash balances in the first three years due to philanthropic startup support and will deploy excess reserves to reduce debt burden or hire additional staff as may be needed. The cash on hand calculations are noted in the budget templates and show cash surpluses each year.

Names

Authorized individuals who may enter into financial agreements, approve expenditures, and receive funds on behalf of xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy include Dr. Melissa Capehart, Founder and Executive Director, and Dr. Amanda Giles, Board President. Both individuals are authorized agents of the school and are permitted to execute contracts, approve expenditures, and receive funds in accordance with board-approved financial policies and internal controls.

The Executive Director, Dr. Melissa Capehart, will serve as the primary authorized agent responsible for executing contracts, managing grant funds, and approving expenditures within board-approved limits. The Board President, Dr. Amanda Giles, will have authority to execute financial agreements and provide fiduciary oversight to ensure financial decisions align with the school's approved budget, policies, and mission.

Additional board-designated officers, such as the Board Treasurer, may also be authorized by formal board action to execute financial agreements or oversee financial transactions as necessary. The Executive Director may also designate a qualified financial administrator, such as a Director of Finance and Operations, to support financial management and reporting functions under the authority and oversight of the Executive Director and Board of Directors.

All financial transactions and agreements will follow established internal control procedures, approval thresholds, and segregation of duties to ensure transparency, accountability, and responsible stewardship of public funds.

c) Describe the internal controls used to ensure no unauthorized use of funds. This may include surety bonds, two signature rule, etc.

Financial Controls Narrative

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) maintains a comprehensive system of internal controls designed to prevent unauthorized use of funds and ensure full financial accountability. These controls are grounded in strict segregation of duties, multi-level approval requirements, and independent oversight. No single individual has authority to initiate, approve, process, and reconcile the same financial transaction. All expenditures must be pre-approved and supported by documentation, and payments above \$10,000 require dual authorization from the Executive Director and Treasurer, with Board approval required for contracts and expenditures of \$25,000 or more. As the school grows the Board may adjust these levels in accordance with Alabama law.

The School's Back Office Provider prepares payments and maintains accounting records but cannot authorize expenditures, ensuring an additional layer of separation. Monthly bank and credit card reconciliations are completed by the Back Office Provider and independently reviewed by

the Executive Director and Treasurer, with financial statements reviewed monthly by the Finance Committee and full Board. Access to financial systems is restricted based on role, and all transactions require verifiable documentation and audit trails. The School also undergoes an annual independent financial audit and maintains fraud prevention protocols, including immediate investigation and Board notification of any irregularities. Together, these layered controls, including dual signature requirements, independent reconciliations, restricted system access, and Board-level oversight, ensure that all funds are used only for authorized School purposes and in compliance with federal, state, and authorizer requirements.

Financial Policies and Procedures	File name:	xMA Financial Policies and Procedures (1).docx.pdf
	Uploaded:	03/12/2026 11:06 AM
	Uploaded by:	Melissa Capehart

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

4. Pre-Opening Financial Capacity

Status: Completed

Form Result

Provide evidence that the individuals tasked with opening the school have the relevant financial expertise and no conflict of interest.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Compelling evidence of individual and collective qualifications and capacity for implementing all aspects of the financial plan successfully.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

a) Identify organizational members with expertise in financial management, fundraising and development, and/or accounting and internal controls and describe the level of knowledge.

Organization Members

Organizational Financial Management Expertise

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy's organizational leadership team and governing board bring extensive expertise in financial management, accounting, federal grant oversight, nonprofit budgeting, fundraising, financial reporting, procurement, and internal controls. This expertise spans executive-level financial services, federal grant and school budget management, nonprofit financial leadership, corporate financial systems, and federal contracting, ensuring strong financial governance and oversight at both the operational and board levels.

Executive Director

As Founder and proposed Executive Director, Dr. Melissa Capehart brings strong financial leadership grounded in grant management, nonprofit financial oversight, technology budgeting, and extensive charter school financial training. In her current role leading xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy's development, she oversees all financial planning and grant management in collaboration with the Board of Directors and Finance Committee. This includes developing and monitoring startup and multi-year financial projections, managing philanthropic grant funds, ensuring alignment between expenditures and strategic priorities, and supporting long-term financial sustainability planning.

Dr. Capehart has successfully secured and managed grant funding through national organizations such as NewSchools Venture Fund and oversees grant budgeting, reporting, and financial

planning in coordination with board leadership. In her previous role with Hoover City Schools, she also supported technology budgeting, coordinated grant-funded initiatives, and evaluated financial investments to ensure cost-effectiveness and alignment with district priorities.

In preparation for launching and leading a charter school, Dr. Capehart has completed extensive financial leadership training through nationally recognized charter school leadership programs, including Build, Excel, Sustain (BES), NewSchools Venture Fund, NewSchools for Alabama, and the National Accelerator for Autism Charter Schools. These programs provided comprehensive training in charter school financial planning, budgeting, cash flow management, internal controls, grant compliance, and long-term financial sustainability.

Governing Board

The xMA Board of Directors brings exceptional financial expertise across financial services, banking, federal grant management, nonprofit financial leadership, corporate financial systems, and federal contracting.

Courtney Winston, Director at Merrill Lynch and former Senior Vice President and Region Operations Manager at Bank of America, brings executive-level financial expertise, including profit and loss management, regulatory compliance, financial reporting, and oversight of large operational budgets. She holds FINRA Series 7, 66, 9, and 10 licenses and has overseen operations serving more than one million customers while ensuring financial compliance and operational accountability.

Dr. Amanda Giles, Clinical Assistant Professor at the University of Alabama in Huntsville and Federal Programs Coordinator, brings extensive expertise managing school budgets, federal Title I, II, III, and IV grant funding, and financial compliance. As a former school administrator, she managed school-level budgets, grant-funded programs, and operational expenditures. She also serves as Treasurer for the Alabama TESOL organization, where she oversees financial management and fiscal accountability.

Beth Sanders, Vice President and Co-Founder of Modiv EDU and former Vice President and Director of Learning at Ed Farm and Propel Education, brings extensive experience managing nonprofit budgets, overseeing grant-funded programs, supporting fundraising and partnership development, and ensuring financial sustainability for education organizations.

Megan Skipper, Chief of Staff at A+ Education Partnership, works directly with executive leadership and financial officers to support organizational budget development, financial planning, board governance, and fundraising strategy. She has supported budget development and operational planning for nonprofit and political organizations managing significant fundraising and operating budgets.

Evan Cottrell, Project Manager at SAP and former Personal Banker at Wells Fargo, brings expertise in corporate financial systems, compensation planning, operational budgeting, and financial services. His experience includes supporting financial operations and planning for large corporate teams and advising clients on financial services.

Krishula Edwards, Contracting Specialist with the U.S. Department of the Air Force and small business owner, brings expertise in federal procurement, contract negotiation, financial analysis, and compliance. She regularly analyzes financial proposals, oversees contract expenditures, and ensures regulatory compliance for federal contracts.

Kourtney Bilbo, Licensed Professional Counselor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, brings expertise in program oversight, regulatory compliance, and organizational accountability through her work in highly regulated healthcare systems requiring strict financial and operational compliance.

Organizational Financial Capacity and Internal Controls

Collectively, xMA's Executive Director and Board of Directors possess strong expertise in financial planning, budget development, federal grant management, nonprofit financial oversight, procurement, contract negotiation, financial reporting, and regulatory compliance. Organizational members have direct experience managing multimillion-dollar operational budgets, overseeing federally funded programs, implementing internal financial controls, monitoring expenditures, analyzing financial

performance, and ensuring compliance with complex regulatory and audit requirements. This combined expertise ensures the organization has the capacity to implement sound financial management practices, maintain accurate financial reporting, safeguard public funds, and provide strong fiduciary oversight.

In addition, NewSchools Venture Fund (NSVF), NewSchools for Alabama (NSFA), and Build, Excel, Sustain (BES) have provided extensive financial leadership training to the administrative team and governance and financial oversight training to the Board of Directors. These organizations have supported training in charter school budgeting, financial planning, grant compliance, internal controls, and fiduciary oversight and will continue to provide ongoing financial training and technical assistance throughout Year 0 and the school's opening years to ensure strong financial governance and long-term sustainability.

b) Disclose any relevant conflict of interest. Consult the Alabama Ethics Law. Ala Code § 36-25-1 through 36-25-30 (1975) and Ala Code § 16-6F-4(16)b.

Conflict of Interest Narrative

xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA) and its governing board are committed to full compliance with the Alabama Ethics Law (Ala. Code § 36-25-1 through § 36-25-30) and Alabama Charter School Law (Ala. Code § 16-6F-4(16)b). At this time, no board member, school leader, or employee has identified any financial, business, or personal interest that would constitute a conflict of interest or improperly influence school decision-making. xMA has already adopted a formal Conflict of Interest Policy (attached), which is actively being implemented to ensure transparency and compliance.

[xMA Conflict of Interest Policy](#)

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

5. Financial Management Upon Opening

Status: Completed

Form Result

The financial policies and procedures must adhere to those followed by traditional public schools once the school is receiving state and/or federal funds. Please provide evidence of the preparation for this known change in expectations.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Compelling evidence of effective, high-quality systems, policies and processes for financial planning, accounting, purchasing, and payroll, including establishment and maintenance of strong internal controls and competence for complying with all financial reporting requirements.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

Financial Management Narrative

Upon authorization, the XMA Board of Directors will approve financial policies that govern fiscal practices. The Executive Director and Director of Finance and Operations will manage the day-to-day administration of fiscal resources and work in collaboration with the Board, which provides oversight of fiscal stewardship and strong internal controls. xMA has selected NSFA's back-office program to ensure strong financial planning, accounting, purchasing, and payroll functions for the school. Outsourcing to a skilled provider ensures proper accounting procedures, state reporting, and compliance are in place, as well as appropriate levels of internal control and cloud-based

software and reporting functionality. Responsibility for accounts payable, payroll, benefits, taxes, purchasing, monthly financial statements, and bank reconciliations are provided by New Schools for Alabama's back office team. While xMA will outsource this role, the Executive Director and Board will maintain oversight and work collaboratively, as the school remains ultimately responsible for financial operations and compliance.

The Director of Finance & Operations, a key leadership role, will be hired during the planning year and be the primary financial liaison working directly with NSFA and ensuring strong site based procedures and internal controls. This role reports to the ED and is responsible for approvals of major expenses, working with NSFA and the board to create an annual budget, financial forecasts, and related analyses to support the accounting and finance function of the school. Critical systems (payroll, benefits, bank reconciliations, etc.) are outsourced to NSFA and include recurring financial and compliance reporting to the ALSDE. All financial-related items, such as the annual budget, executive compensation, and vendor contracts, are approved at regularly scheduled board meetings.

Adopted Financial Policies	File name:	xMA Financial Policies and Procedures (1).docx.pdf
	Uploaded:	03/12/2026 11:14 AM
	Uploaded by:	Melissa Capehart

Financial Oversight Roles Narrative

Once approved, xMA's Board of Directors will adopt policies in compliance with the Alabama Code and ensure effective procedures are implemented for vendor approval, purchasing, payables, cash management, bank authorizations, and other financial management systems. xMA's Board reviews interim financial statements and approves a budget annually. The ED and Director of Finance & Operations are responsible for working with NSFA in preparing and adhering to an annual budget approved by the Board. NSFA supports budget production by maintaining careful monthly financials, reporting and analytical support through budget development. Each year, the board will conduct at least two open meetings to review and eventually approve the annual budget.

The Board has the responsibility of ensuring strong financial administration. It does this by approving the annual budget, audit, and approving leadership and other compensation, and reviewing regularly prepared financial statements. The ED and Director of Finance & Operations through an outsource agreement with NSFA are responsible for reporting to the board and implementing the financial function timely and accurately, with appropriate transparency, as required by law. NSFA's support allows the school to ensure a strong financial function while reducing the cost of hiring, training, and retaining multiple staff members. This partnership is a major advantage to smaller charter schools and allows them to avoid turnover risk faced and to direct leadership capacity to teaching and learning.

Audit Narrative

Each year, the board will engage with an independent CPA firm to conduct an audit of the school's books. The board then approves the audit and provides it and the IRS 990 to the public. This audit is submitted to the ALSDE and posted on the school's website along with the annual financial reports, budgets, and other related ALSDE required documents.

Transparency Narrative

As a public school xMA will conduct board meetings that are open to the public. In accordance with Alabama law, the school will adopt an annual budget in a series of at least two public meetings. Copies of the approved budget and prior year audited financial statements will be made available on the school's website and submitted to the ALSDE, lenders, and donors as required

Financial Services Narrative

xMA's strategy is to direct its leadership time and expertise toward teaching and learning and supporting our staff. As such we will outsource key operational and financial functions and join the shared cost program provided by New Schools for Alabama. NSFA currently provides back office support for ten Alabama charters and has the most experienced back office team in the state.

Accounting, payroll, transportation, foodservice, clinical support, and custodial services will all be outsourced as it is the most cost effective strategy for a small organization. The Harris/NextGen accounting and payroll system in use by nearly all schools and districts in Alabama and is the system used by NSFA.

Back office services are anticipated to cost approximately \$100,000 growing to \$140,000 annually, including the accounting software, and will decrease on a per student basis over time. Such fees are a fraction of what it would cost to hire a CSFO, bookkeeper, a payroll accountant, and federal programs director. It also removes the risk of employee turnover and time and energy spent by the leader and board to recruit, hire, and train such individuals as well as the associated benefits costs of adding additional staff who are non-instructional. The back office fee also includes access to the foodservice consortium and application and approval to become a NSLP site. Annual audit fees for existing charter schools range from \$12,000 to \$20,000 and xMA expects to select a firm with charter school auditing experience. As a moderately sized school audit fees are not expected to grow significantly until later years.

The ED and the Director of Finance & Operations will collaborate with NSFA to evaluate bids, provider capacity, etc. and will submit recommendations to the board for approval at regularly scheduled meetings. As required by the ALSDE, certain contracts, construction, for example, are required to be reviewed by the Dept. of Construction Management and bid appropriately. The Board will comply with these standard processes and will ensure the necessary RFPs are issued in such instances.

Insurance Narrative

Upon approval, xMA will secure directors' and officers' insurance, employment practices liability insurance, and general liability insurance to protect the school, staff, and students per Alabama law. In addition, an umbrella policy increasing liability levels will be part of the insurance package. Coverages will be scaled appropriately during the planning year and expand as the facility becomes occupied. Specifics of the coverage will be aligned with the insurance requirements of public charter schools in Alabama.

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

6. Budgeting in Opening Year and Beyond

Status: Completed

Form Result

By law, a start-up and five-year budget plan with clearly stated assumptions is required. Act. Ala. Code § 16-6F-7(a)(8)bb (2023)

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Compelling evidence of balanced revenue streams and cost estimates during the first year of operation with projections into the first five years of operations

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

a) Submit the Comprehensive Five-Year Budget Summaries for minimum, target, and maximum enrollment levels included in the attached Budget Workbook. In developing the budget, please use the per-student revenue projections provided by ALSDE and include the anticipated carryover from

the pre-opening year. Applicants may substitute another budgeting spreadsheet in place of the one provided here as long as all information is included.

Budget Workbook	File name:	xSTREAM 5yr. Budget 2026.03.11 AS SUBMITTED.xlsx
	Uploaded:	03/12/2026 11:18 AM
	Uploaded by:	Melissa Capehart

b) As an attachment, present a clearly stated budget narrative of assumptions and revenue estimates. Include the basis for revenue projections, staffing levels, and costs. The narrative should specifically address the degree to which the school budget will rely on variable income (e.g., grants, donations, fundraising). The narrative should include, but is not limited to, the following sections:

- i) Anticipated Governmental Funding Sources: Use the figures provided by ALSDE in developing your assumptions for per-student revenue. Include any governmental grants. Include site-based/fixed governmental funds.
- ii) Anticipated Non-governmental Funding Sources: Indicate the amount and sources of funds, property or other resources expected upon opening to be available through banks, lending institutions, corporations, foundations, grants, etc. Note which are secured and which are anticipated, and include evidence of commitment for any funds on which the school's core operation depends.
- iii) Anticipated Major Expenses: Describe the expected major expenses, which should include facility costs and personnel, and how to limit these expenses if revenue does not meet projections.
- iv) Debt Service: If any loans are anticipated during the pre-opening phase or the first few years of operations, describe the plans for repaying this debt including a description of the payment schedule.
- v) Contingency Plan: Discuss the school's contingency plan to meet financial needs if anticipated revenues are not received or are lower than estimated.

Budget Narrative	File name:	xSTREAM Commission Budget Narrative 2026.05.11.docx.pdf
	Uploaded:	03/12/2026 11:18 AM
	Uploaded by:	Melissa Capehart

Cashflow Plan

The school's five year cash flow plan is to cover startup expenses through philanthropy and facilities costs via credit enhanced borrowing. The school has successfully raised significant startup capital and anticipates positive cash balances throughout the Year 0 period and expects to begin year 1 with almost \$200k in cash and that includes making a \$300k equity contribution toward facilities costs. See the facilities financing tab in the budget that evidences monthly amortizations and annual cashflow for debt service.

Additionally, the school has access to \$200k in low cost, interest only borrowing from New Schools For Alabama that is not modeled in the budget but will be available upon charter approval – providing an additional \$200k improvement in cash over what is shown. The school's budget evidences sufficient cashflow year over year that delays in federal reimbursements do not present a risk. The major risks to cashflow include fundraising below plan or delays in approval of the CSP grant, if awarded. Costs in the minimum enrollment model have been reduced to such a level that cashflow remains strong.

Contingency plans are built into each of the three different budget scenarios and are summarized below each of the summary budgets.

Key differences to manage contingencies include:

- Fewer staff positions
- No transportation
- Opt out of the state pension and healthcare

Other costs will be evaluated carefully, but even at minimum enrollment the model produces a cumulative surplus of over \$1 million by year three. This surplus provides protection against fundraising delays, enrollment below plan, or additional facility costs. The school's model is conservative

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

7. Financial Management Capacity Upon Opening

Status: Completed

Form Result

Provide evidence that the individuals, if known, tasked with handling the financial aspects of an open school have the relevant expertise.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Compelling evidence of individual and collective qualifications and capacity for implementing all aspects of the financial plan successfully.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

School Financial Leadership Capacity Narrative

Financial Leadership Capacity and Expertise

As the Founder and proposed Executive Director of xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy (xMA), I bring strong financial leadership grounded in grant management, technology budgeting, nonprofit financial oversight, and extensive charter school finance training through nationally recognized school leadership fellowships and technical assistance partners. While my career has been rooted primarily in education and leadership, I have developed meaningful and practical experience managing budgets, stewarding grant funds, and building sustainable financial systems to support organizational growth and compliance.

Through my role as Founder and Executive Director, I currently oversee all financial planning and grant management activities for xMA in collaboration with our Board of Directors and Finance Committee. This includes developing and monitoring startup and planning budgets, managing philanthropic grant funds, and ensuring alignment between expenditures and programmatic priorities. I have successfully secured and stewarded philanthropic grant funding through national organizations such as NewSchools Venture Fund, while working closely with board leadership to ensure responsible fiscal oversight, transparent reporting, and long-term sustainability planning.

In my previous role as District Technology Integration Specialist in Hoover City Schools, I also contributed to technology budgeting and grant-supported initiatives, including evaluating instructional technology investments, coordinating technology-related grant projects, and supporting district-wide STEM and instructional technology implementation. This work required balancing programmatic goals with budget constraints, evaluating cost-effectiveness, and ensuring alignment between financial investments and student outcomes.

In preparation for founding and leading a charter school, I have completed extensive training in charter school finance, budgeting, governance, and fiscal management through multiple nationally recognized fellowship and support organizations, including:

- Build, Excel, Sustain (BES) Fellowship, which provides rigorous training in charter school financial planning, budget development, cash flow management, and long-term financial sustainability.
-

NewSchools Venture Fund Founders Fellowship, which provides coaching and technical support in nonprofit financial management, grant budgeting, fundraising strategy, and organizational sustainability.

- NewSchools for Alabama, which provides intensive training in charter school budgeting, financial compliance, and operational planning specific to Alabama charter school requirements and funding structures.
- National Accelerator for Autism Charter Schools, which includes training in federal and state funding requirements, grant compliance, and resource allocation for specialized programming.

These programs have equipped me with a deep understanding of key financial leadership responsibilities, including developing multi-year budgets, aligning financial planning with enrollment projections, understanding state and federal funding streams, implementing financial controls, and partnering effectively with boards and finance professionals.

To ensure strong financial leadership and operational excellence, xMA is committed to recruiting and hiring a highly qualified Director of Finance and Operations (DFO) with demonstrated expertise in nonprofit and/or charter school financial management. This individual will serve as the school's primary financial leader, responsible for developing and managing the school's annual budget, overseeing financial reporting, ensuring compliance with all federal, state, and authorizer financial requirements, and implementing strong internal financial controls. We will prioritize candidates with experience in charter school finance, nonprofit accounting, public sector budgeting, and financial compliance, as well as demonstrated proficiency in Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP), audit preparation, grant management, and financial reporting to boards and governing bodies.

The Director of Finance and Operations will work closely with the Executive Director, Board Treasurer, and Finance Committee to provide clear, accurate, and transparent financial reporting, including monthly financial statements, cash flow analysis, and long-term financial forecasting. This individual will also oversee operational functions such as procurement, payroll coordination, vendor management, and facilities-related financial planning, ensuring that operational decisions are fiscally responsible and aligned with the school's mission and strategic plan. By hiring a highly skilled financial leader with deep expertise in school and nonprofit financial management, xMA will ensure strong financial stewardship, sustainability, and compliance from launch through long-term growth. To further strengthen xMA's financial capacity and ensure the highest level of financial integrity and compliance, xMA will contract with NewSchools for Alabama to provide comprehensive back-office financial services, including accounting, payroll, financial reporting, and compliance support. This partnership ensures that xMA will implement strong internal controls, accurate financial reporting, and compliance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP), state requirements, and federal grant regulations. In addition, this partnership will provide ongoing training and coaching to both school leadership and the Board of Directors to build long-term internal financial capacity.

As Executive Director, I will work closely with the Director of Finance and Operations, Board Treasurer, Finance Committee, and back-office provider to ensure sound financial planning, transparent reporting, and responsible stewardship of public funds. My leadership approach prioritizes collaboration with financial experts, strong governance oversight, and continuous learning to ensure that xMA operates with the highest standards of financial accountability and sustainability.

Together, this combination of hands-on grant management experience, formal financial training, board governance oversight, recruitment of an experienced financial leader, and partnership with experienced back-office providers ensures that xMA will maintain strong financial systems and steward public resources responsibly in service of students and families.

Board Financial Leadership Capacity Narrative

Board Fiscal Expertise

The founding Board of Directors of xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy brings extensive and highly relevant expertise in financial management, accounting, federal grant oversight, procurement, organizational budgeting, fundraising, financial reporting, operational leadership, and internal controls.

Board members collectively hold leadership roles in major financial institutions, higher education, federal government contracting, nonprofit organizations, and national education policy organizations. Through these roles, members have direct responsibility for managing multimillion-dollar budgets, overseeing federal funds, supporting organizational budgeting processes, analyzing financial performance, managing contracts and procurement, supporting facilities and operational planning, and ensuring compliance with regulatory and fiduciary requirements.

Courtney Winston – Financial Services and Banking Leadership

Courtney Winston brings the most extensive financial management and financial services expertise on the board through her senior leadership roles at Bank of America and Merrill Lynch, where she currently serves as Director within Merrill Lynch after previously serving as Senior Vice President, Region Operations Manager and Senior Vice President, Consumer Banking Market Leader. In these executive leadership roles, she has overseen operations across up to 180 financial centers serving over 1.3 million customers and has led teams of over 200 employees while ensuring achievement of financial performance targets, operational compliance, and regulatory adherence.

Courtney holds a Bachelor of Science in Finance and Financial Management Services from Tuskegee University and maintains FINRA Series 7, 66, 9, and 10 licenses, which qualify her to supervise securities sales, manage financial operations, and ensure compliance with federal financial regulations.

Her expertise includes:

- Profit and Loss (P&L) management and financial performance monitoring
- Financial analysis and strategic financial planning
- Operational risk management and regulatory compliance
- Oversight of financial center operations and financial controls
- Budget oversight, revenue performance monitoring, and financial reporting
- Risk mitigation, audit readiness, and operational compliance across regulated financial institutions

In her leadership roles, Courtney has been responsible for analyzing financial performance, monitoring operational risk, ensuring compliance with over 20,000 regulatory requirements, and providing financial and operational performance updates to executive leadership. She has also managed large operational budgets and implemented financial and operational systems to improve performance, accountability, and efficiency.

Her executive-level experience managing financial operations in one of the nation's largest financial institutions provides exceptional expertise in financial governance, internal controls, risk management, audit readiness, and fiduciary oversight. Her financial expertise ensures strong oversight of school budgets, financial reporting, compliance systems, and long-term financial sustainability planning.

Amanda Giles – Federal Grant Management, School Budget Oversight, and Financial Leadership

Dr. Amanda Giles serves as Clinical Assistant Professor at the University of Alabama in Huntsville and Federal Programs and Student Support Coordinator, where she directly reconciles federal Title I, II, III, and IV budgets and oversees financial planning and compliance with federal grant requirements. In this role, she works closely with school districts and leadership to ensure accurate financial reporting, proper allocation of funds, and compliance with federal funding regulations.

Her responsibilities include:

- Reconciling federally funded program budgets
- Monitoring expenditures and ensuring compliance with federal guidelines
- Coordinating financial planning and resource allocation
- Supporting grant-funded program implementation and reporting

In addition, Dr. Giles serves as Treasurer for the Alabama TESOL organization, where she is responsible for overseeing organizational finances, monitoring expenditures, and ensuring fiscal accountability.

In addition to her higher education and federal programs role, Dr. Giles has served as a school administrator, where she was responsible for managing school-level budgets, overseeing grant-funded

programs, coordinating operational programming, and ensuring appropriate allocation of financial resources to support academic programs and student services. In this capacity, she worked closely with district leadership to monitor expenditures, support financial planning, ensure compliance with federal and state funding requirements, and align financial resources with school improvement priorities.

Her combined experience managing federal education funds, serving in a financial leadership role within a professional organization, and working within higher education provides strong expertise in grant compliance, financial oversight, and responsible stewardship of public funds.

Beth Sanders – Nonprofit Leadership, Budget Management, and Organizational Finance

Beth Sanders serves as Vice President and Co-Founder of Modiv EDU and previously served as Vice President of Learning at Propel Education and Director of Learning at Ed Farm, where she was directly responsible for managing program budgets, overseeing operational planning, securing funding, and supporting organizational financial sustainability. Her leadership roles included overseeing program implementation, managing teams, and ensuring alignment between financial resources and organizational priorities.

Her responsibilities across these organizations included:

- Managing program budgets and organizational financial resources
- Overseeing staffing, logistics, and operational expenditures
- Supporting fundraising and partnership development
- Managing financial planning and ensuring program sustainability
- Leading implementation of grant-funded educational programs

As Co-Founder of Modiv EDU, Beth manages organizational finances, partnership development, and operational planning to ensure long-term sustainability and strategic growth. Her experience founding and leading an education organization provides critical expertise in nonprofit financial management, budgeting, financial sustainability, and fundraising.

Megan Skipper – Organizational Operations, Budget Development, and Governance Support

Megan Skipper serves as Chief of Staff at A+ Education Partnership, one of Alabama's leading education policy and advocacy organizations. In this role, she works directly with the President, Leadership Team, and CFO to create and manage the organizational budget, streamline operational processes, and support strategic planning and organizational alignment.

Her responsibilities include:

- Supporting development and implementation of the organizational budget
- Supporting Board of Directors management and governance operations
- Managing partnerships, fundraising strategy, and organizational communications
- Supporting strategic planning, operational alignment, and organizational efficiency

In previous roles, she also helped manage fundraising initiatives and supported campaign budget development, including managing financial planning for a congressional campaign that raised over \$500,000.

Her experience supporting organizational budgeting, board governance, and fundraising provides valuable expertise in financial planning, organizational operations, and board oversight.

Evan Cottrell – Corporate Operations, Financial Systems, and Project Management

Evan Cottrell serves as Project Manager for Go-To-Market Operations and Strategic Enablement at SAP, where he supports compensation planning, operational systems, and financial and operational processes for over 1,150 employees. His responsibilities include coordinating compensation models, managing operational workflows, and supporting financial and operational system implementation.

His experience includes:

- Supporting compensation planning and financial systems
- Managing operational projects and vendor coordination
- Supporting financial planning and operational implementation
- Working as a personal banker at Wells Fargo, where he provided financial services and customer financial advising

His experience in financial services, corporate operations, and project management provides important expertise in financial systems, operational planning, and vendor oversight.

Krishula Edwards – Federal Contracting and Procurement

Krishula Edwards serves as Contracting Specialist with the United States Department of the Air Force, where she negotiates contracts, analyzes financial proposals, evaluates contractor pricing, and ensures compliance with federal financial and procurement regulations. Her responsibilities include analyzing price proposals, reviewing financial reports, and ensuring cost efficiency and regulatory compliance.

She also serves as Owner of Edwards Essentials, LLC, where she manages business revenue, financial operations, and consulting engagements. Her experience managing federal contracts and organizational finances provides expertise in procurement, financial compliance, contract management, and financial oversight.

Kourtney Bilbo – Healthcare Compliance and Program Oversight

Kourtney Bilbo serves as Senior Counselor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and is a Licensed Professional Counselor, National Certified Counselor, and Board-Certified Telehealth Provider. Her work includes managing treatment planning, coordinating services, and ensuring compliance with healthcare regulations and operational standards.

Her professional work within healthcare systems requires adherence to strict regulatory, compliance, and documentation standards, providing strong expertise in compliance oversight, resource coordination, and organizational accountability.

Collective Board Financial Capacity and Fiduciary Oversight

Collectively, the xMA Board possesses extensive expertise in:

- Financial services, banking operations, and P&L management
- Organizational budget development and financial planning
- Federal grant management and compliance
- Contract negotiation, procurement, and financial analysis
- Nonprofit financial management and fundraising
- Compensation planning and financial systems oversight
- Organizational governance, internal controls, and audit readiness
- Operational planning and facilities-related financial oversight

Board members have direct experience managing organizational budgets, analyzing financial performance, overseeing federal funds, managing contracts, supporting fundraising, and ensuring compliance with financial regulations. This level of financial expertise ensures the Board is well-equipped to provide strong fiduciary oversight, monitor school financial performance, ensure compliance with applicable financial regulations, and safeguard public funds.

This deep financial expertise, combined with ongoing board training and support from NewSchools for Alabama, Build, Excel, Sustain (BES), and professional financial service providers, ensures that xS.T.R.E.A.M. Minds Academy will operate with strong financial governance, accountability, and long-term fiscal sustainability.

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

6. EXISTING OPERATORS

By law, additional expectations and evidence are required for those applicants who are existing operators, defined as representing a nonprofit organization which currently:

- Have one or more schools in operation nationwide which have been in operation for more than one full school year; or
- Intend to employ an educational service provider with one or more schools in operation for more than one full school year.

For applicants meeting this definition please provide the following supplementary information regarding the performance of the existing schools in the portfolio. Ala. Code § 16-6F-7(a)(10) and Ala. Code § 16-6F-7(a)(11).

All Charter Management Organizations (CMOs) and Educational Management Organizations (EMOs) are considered existing operators.

1. Growth Plans

Status: Completed

Form Result

Growth Plans Narrative

This does not apply to xMA.

Changes for Alabama Narrative

This does not apply to xMA.

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

2. Portfolio Summary

Status: Completed

Form Result

Provide details on the organization's portfolio of schools and history of proven success.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Compelling evidence of how the organization's past performance will translate to success in Alabama.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

a) Provide, as an attachment, evidence of a track record of success serving similar student populations through a summary of academic, financial and organizational success for the organization's portfolio of schools. Discuss portfolio performance on the whole, relative to performance on the relevant authorizer, district, or state accountability plan(s) and/or state assessments. Performance on State Test or ACT/SAT is also acceptable. Include all currently open and operating schools in the portfolio.

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

3. Revocation History

Status: Completed

Form Result

Provide details on the organization's history of which have closed.

Overarching Standard/Criteria: Compelling evidence of how the organization's past performance will translate to success in Alabama.

Evidence needed for addressing the overarching standard:

a) Disclose information on any of the organization's portfolio of schools that have been closed or non-renewed or have had charters that were revoked.

Text

This does not apply to xMA.

Element Review

Reviews is not provided