

Exalt Academy High School Expansion Executive Summary

Exalt Academy is currently a Kindergarten through 8th grade public charter school serving 775 students in Southwest Little Rock. Currently, 96% of our students qualify for the federal free and reduced lunch program, and 70% of our students qualify for English Language Learner support. Despite these challenges, has a **long standing history of beating the state's growth score expectations**. Last school year, Exalt's state growth scores were in the **top 8%** of the state, providing an excellent education for our students.

Exalt's Mission:

The Exalt Academy of Southwest Little Rock (EASW) will prepare students from educationally under-served areas of Southwest Little Rock for competitive colleges and advanced careers from an early age by ensuring mastery of the core subjects and developing the key behaviors required for success, citizenship and leadership in their communities and beyond.

To better fulfill our mission and meet the requests of our families, **Exalt Academy requests to add high school grade levels and an enrollment cap lift to 1880 students**, providing an innovative high school education that meets the needs of our community.

1. Vision of Excellence: Success-Ready Pathways for Every Learner

The **Arkansas LEARNS Act** identifies a critical workforce gap:

60% of jobs in Arkansas require education or training beyond a high school diploma.

In response, Governor Sanders and DESE have called on schools to ensure that **every high school graduate has access to the additional credentials, skills, or certifications needed to succeed** in today's economy.

Exalt Academy's high school model is a direct answer to that clarion call.

We are committed to ensuring that each student graduates with both a diploma and a plan for success.

We will offer **three tiers of graduation**, each aligned with college, career, and workforce readiness:

- **High School Diploma**
- **Diploma with Merit**
- **Diploma with Distinction**

Regardless of tier, all Exalt Academy graduates will complete:

- ✓ A Success-Ready Pathway
- ✓ 75 documented hours of community service
- ✓ CPR certification
- ✓ A passing score on the Arkansas Civics Exam

Our graduation goal:

- 50–60% of students earning a **Diploma with Merit**
- 5–10% earning a **Diploma with Distinction**

Exalt Success-Ready Pathway Guide (provided with Executive Summary)

- 17 different pathways for students
 - Academic, Mental Health, and Basic Needs Supports
 - Extracurricular Activities.
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2. Driven by Community: Parent Demand and Pathway Priorities

A recent survey of Exalt Academy families revealed overwhelming support for our high school expansion: **89.8% of respondents** expressed interest in launching a high school.

When asked how many Exalt students their families would enroll in Fall 2025, parents projected a total of **250 students**—and we believe this is a **conservative estimate**, given that not every family responded. In addition to this current family base, we will start an enrollment campaign, opening enrollment to any high school student.

When asked which **Success-Ready Pathways** Exalt families wanted most for their students, these were the top five selected:

1. **Nursing** – 57.8%
2. **Engineering** – 57.1%
3. **Banking and Finance** – 47.6%
4. **Architecture / Construction** – 44.2%
5. **Computer Science – IT, Software Development, and Cybersecurity** – 36.7%

To honor this clear and direct feedback from our families, **Exalt Academy will include all five of these pathways** in our high school programming.

3. Laying the Foundations: Middle School Acceleration

A successful high school doesn't begin in 9th grade—it starts much earlier.

As we planned for high school expansion, **Exalt Academy intentionally began building early momentum in our middle grades.** Our current 8th graders can already earn **five high school credits**:

- English 9
- Algebra I
- Pre-AP World History and Geography
- Pre-AP Biology / Physical Science
- Pre-AP Art

Beginning next year, 7th and 8th grade students will have the opportunity to earn **additional high school credits**:

- Spanish 1 or Spanish Heritage 1

This means that some **Exalt students will enter high school a full year ahead of their peers** in traditional models.

That early acceleration is meaningful for two reasons:

1. It enables students to **graduate early or dual-enroll sooner**, accessing college-level coursework ahead of schedule.
 2. It also gives students the **flexibility to extend their senior year** at Exalt—earning **advanced credentials, certifications, or apprenticeship experience** before graduation.
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4. Trimester Model: More Instruction, More Flexibility

EASW's proposed schedule shifts to a 13-week trimester system:

- **More** instructional time
 - Fewer daily prep obligations for teachers
 - Easier **credit recovery**
 - Greater elective and work-based **learning opportunities** are available, especially for upperclassmen
 - **Math & ELA taught all year**; science includes a dedicated trimester for labs
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5. Our Continuing Commitment to Biliteracy

At Exalt Academy, we recognize that **over 75% of our students are bilingual**. Their ability to navigate multiple languages is an asset—not just culturally, but cognitively and academically.

But we believe our students deserve more than our recognition. They deserve the opportunity to **refine and elevate their language skills** in both English and Spanish.


That's why our high school model includes **Heritage Spanish courses** beginning in **7th and 8th grade**. These courses are distinct from traditional language instruction. They are designed for students who already speak Spanish at home and seek to develop advanced academic proficiency. In these classes, students will:

- Read Spanish and Latin American literature
- Analyze texts and media
- Write formal essays and compositions
- Explore grammar, vocabulary, and structure with academic depth
- Study their home language in a scholarly, rigorous context

Even though the students begin this course of study in 7th and 8th grade, they continue more advanced study in our high school program, where they can complete AP Spanish Language and AP Spanish Literature.

These experiences not only validate our students' linguistic identities, they also **prepare them to earn the Arkansas Seal of Biliteracy**, a nationally recognized credential signaling high proficiency in two languages.

Research shows that students who study in both English and their home language experience **accelerated growth in literacy and academic achievement across subjects**. This isn't just about honoring who they are—it's about unlocking their fullest academic potential.

 *French is also available through qualified staff, and additional languages may be added based on community need.*

6. Smart Staffing: Efficient, Scalable, and Cost-Conscious

We are committed to building a high-quality high school without overextending our budget. To achieve this, we are implementing a **strategic and sustainable staffing model** that maximizes resources while maintaining instructional excellence.

- **Pathway Stacking for Efficiency**

Many of our CTE pathways share foundational courses. For example, students in becoming a CNA and LPN both begin with *Introduction to Healthcare*. This allows us to “stack” pathways—**offering multiple credentials with fewer teaching staff**—and create **flexible cohorts** that can pivot between programs based on interest and demand.

- **Leveraging Diverse Staffing Options**

For specialized small courses, we will expand our team using **Virtual Arkansas, retired educators**, and **1099 industry professionals**. This allows us to:

- Offer niche courses with certified instructors

- Bring real-world industry experience into the classroom
- Remain adaptable as programs grow
- Reduce long-term staffing overhead

These approaches allow us to **scale strategically**, maintaining quality instruction while honoring our budget and staffing realities.

We have staffing models available for 200, 400, 600 and 800 students, and we can scale as needed.

7. Open-Enrollment = Opportunities for All

As an open-enrollment public charter school, Exalt Academy's high school will:

- Be **tuition-free**
 - Accept **any student in the region** through **Arkansas's School Choice Program**, not just Exalt K-8 Students.
 - Multiple tracks **diversifying** student body to maximize enrollment.
 - Remove barriers to advanced academics and industry-aligned CTE certifications
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8. Ready for Take-off

This proposal reflects an expansion grounded in:

- Community interest
- Existing success at the middle school level
- Strong student support services (mental health, academic tutoring, mentorship)
- Commitment to CTE and College Readiness.
- An innovative Success Ready Pathway Guide
- Financial Start-up Support
- History of strong financial management and clean audits.
- Visionary leadership and staffing aligned with Exalt Core values

