

# Emerging Leader - Dai Ellis - Boston Business Journal

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Premium content from Boston Business Journal by By Keith Regan

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When Massachusetts raised the cap on charter schools in 2010, it cleared the way for growth in what had been viewed as a limited experiment.

Excel Academy Charter School in East Boston is among those actively pursuing expansion, hoping to build on success that includes a ranking in the top 5 percent of the state's middle schools on the 2010 MCAS test.

Steering growth is [Dai Ellis](#), who brings experience scaling AIDS relief in Africa and lessons learned on the ground in Rwanda to the problem of helping bring high-quality education to inner city students.

A Cambridge native and former management consultant, Ellis's work in the nonprofit world was capped by efforts through the Clinton Health Access Initiative to dramatically expand AIDS treatment to millions in Africa.

"The treatment was available, but the medicine was so expensive, there were so few doctors and nurses on the ground, the roads were broken down, there were military and political hurdles — there were a lot of reasons why you couldn't scale up treatment," Ellis said. Leadership by former President [Bill Clinton](#) helped demonstrate that expanding treatment would lower costs and in the course of a decade, the number of people being treated for



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HIV/AIDS in Africa grew 100-fold.

Ellis now sees the same issue of scale applying to charter schools.

“You’ve got a bunch of high-performing charters that have shown that even the poorest kids who have fallen the farthest behind can perform at the same levels as the kids from the wealthiest towns,” Ellis said.

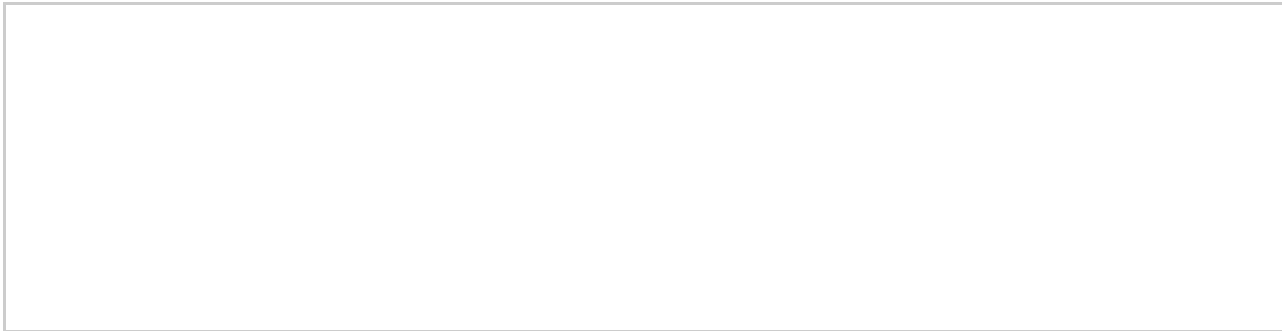
Excel just opened its second school in Chelsea and has approval in hand for two more.

“Our main job now is to show this isn’t a fluke, that as we start our second and third schools, they need to be every bit as good as the first, and maybe we can even use our growth to further improve the quality of education even more.”

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