

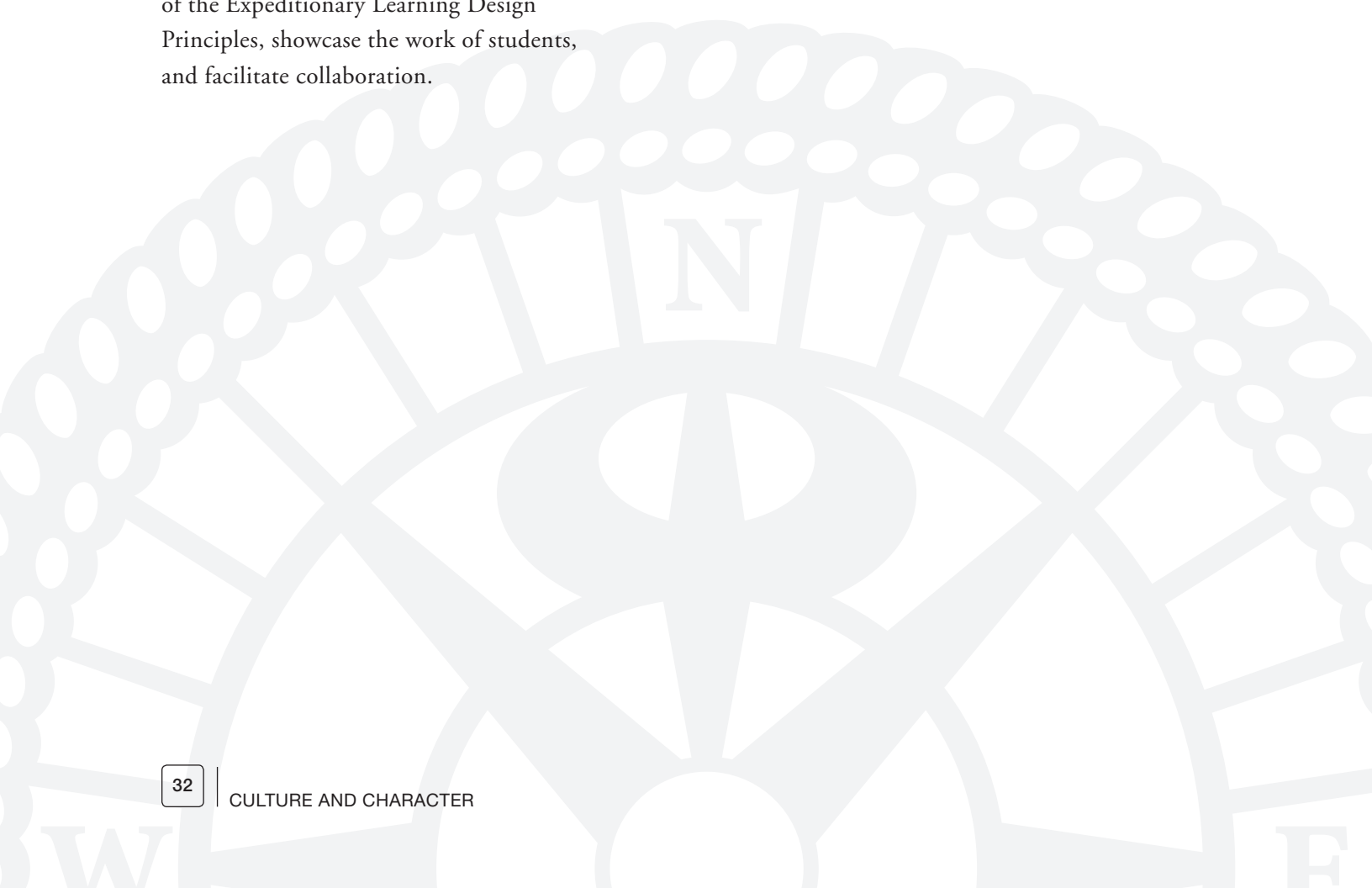
Culture and Character: Building School Culture and Fostering Character

Overview

An Expeditionary Learning school culture is developed and sustained through practices that bring the community together, promote shared understandings, and encourage all community members to become crew, not passengers.

Teaching practices and schoolwide structures ensure that all students are well known by adults and peers. The faculty articulates and promotes a set of character traits that are emphasized throughout the school. Teachers foster student character through challenging academic work, service, and the expectation that students are courteous, respectful, and compassionate.

Public and classroom spaces reflect the values of the Expeditionary Learning Design Principles, showcase the work of students, and facilitate collaboration.



BENCHMARK 1:

BUILDING SCHOOL CULTURE AND FOSTERING CHARACTER

A. Rituals and Traditions

1. A common set of Expeditionary Learning rituals and traditions (e.g., community meetings, readings, team building) are used in schoolwide gatherings and in classrooms.
2. In addition, the school develops its own unique rituals and traditions that express its identity and vision.

B. Knowing Students Well

1. The school ensures that every student is known well by at least one adult who serves as an advocate for the student's academic and social progress.
2. Morning meetings, flexible groupings, crews, and regular check-ins or conferences with individual students enable teachers to know students well.
3. Mentorships and internships foster relationships between students and community members.

C. Character Traits

1. School leaders and faculty articulate a set of character traits and a code of conduct consonant with the Expeditionary Learning Design Principles.
2. The character traits express the school's vision for a productive and courteous community.
3. The character traits are clearly stated in school documents (e.g., handbooks, newsletters, visual representations) and in the school's code of conduct.
4. Teachers foster the character traits through learning expeditions and instructional practices as well as through activities specifically focused on community building.
5. Character traits are reinforced within classrooms, in common areas throughout the building, and in all school-related activities.

D. Service and Service Learning

1. Teachers integrate service with academics through learning expeditions and other project-based work.
2. Students have many opportunities to practice service within the school and in the surrounding community.

E. Physical Environment and School Tone

1. Classrooms and common space are attractive, clean, orderly, and in good repair.
2. High quality student work, rather than commercial materials, is displayed.
3. Students play an active role in the life of the school (e.g., morning announcements, maintaining the building, mentoring younger children, leading meetings, greeting visitors).
4. Classrooms are arranged to accommodate class meetings and to encourage various configurations for instruction.

Culture and Character: Ensuring Equity and High Expectations

Overview

Expeditionary Learning teachers and school leaders hold high expectations for all students. Teachers work to understand the home cultures of their students. School leaders create and adapt structures to ensure that all students have access to a comprehensive and challenging curriculum. Teachers differentiate instruction so that all students produce high quality work and meet standards.



BENCHMARK 2:

ENSURING EQUITY AND HIGH EXPECTATIONS

A. Equity

1. Teachers learn about the home, cultural, and community backgrounds of their students.
2. Teachers appreciate how cultural differences influence curriculum and instruction and they build on student interests and backgrounds.
3. School communications welcome families and accommodate linguistic and cultural differences.
4. The school establishes forums that guarantee respectful communication and the opportunity for diverse perspectives to be heard.
5. Teachers and school leaders offer all students access to cultural and social institutions (e.g., libraries, museums, and universities).
6. Teaching materials are selected so that all students read high quality literature, assume multiple perspectives, and develop compassion and empathy.
7. Teachers use instructional practices that promote equity such as differentiating instruction and providing multiple pathways for achievement.
8. Exhibitions and performances present the work of all students.

B. High Expectations

1. All learning expeditions are rigorous and compelling, and require high-quality products.
2. Teachers ensure that all students acquire the background knowledge needed to succeed.
3. Teachers use instructional practices to ensure that all students are thinking and participating.
4. Teachers examine their own classroom equity practices using protocols (e.g., equitable response analysis).
5. Special education students are taught in regular classrooms to the greatest extent possible.
6. Teachers help all students develop and exemplify the school's character traits.

C. Passages and Graduation

1. Passages and graduations are based on students meeting competency standards and not only on seat time.
2. The school takes on the mission of providing students with the knowledge of colleges, universities, and careers, and it provides structured help to all students in accessing these opportunities.
3. In high schools, graduation content and skills standards are aligned with college entrance requirements.

D. Structures That Support Equity

1. Ability grouping (tracking) is replaced with flexible heterogeneous grouping informed by ongoing assessment.
2. The school has systems to support students who fall behind (e.g. summer school, tutorials, reading programs, etc.).

Culture and Character: Fostering a Safe, Respectful, and Orderly Community

Overview

The climate in an Expeditionary Learning school is characterized by physical and emotional safety, respect and courtesy, and a disciplined environment. Teachers and school leaders communicate clear expectations for students' conduct. Policies and practices encourage students to take responsibility for their actions, their learning, and their shared space.



BENCHMARK 3:

FOSTERING A SAFE, RESPECTFUL, AND ORDERLY COMMUNITY

A. Clear Expectations Schoolwide

1. Schoolwide expectations for student character and conduct are founded in courtesy, respect for others, and a commitment to learning.
2. These expectations are embodied in a formal, written statement or code of conduct.
3. The school establishes policies and procedures that support the code of conduct.
4. Adults model the character traits and code of conduct.
5. All students have the opportunity to share leadership roles and school responsibilities.
6. The code of conduct is evident in the lunchroom, in the halls, during recess, before and after school, and when students represent the school in the community.

B. Teaching the Code of Conduct and the Character Traits

1. A common language communicates the school's follow-through and commitment to the code of conduct and the character traits.
2. Staff explicitly teach students the code of conduct and the character traits.
3. Student behavior is addressed with an emphasis on education rather than punishment.
4. Consequences for misbehavior are logical and consistent.
5. Classroom norms reflect and reinforce the school's code of conduct and the character traits.
6. Teachers include students when establishing classroom norms.
7. Teachers set up and maintain systems that support productive and orderly classrooms.
8. Teachers foster independent behavior management skills.

C. Welcoming the Community

1. Students actively welcome visitors to the school, using established practices and norms.
2. All students are trained to be ambassadors for the school within and outside of the building.
3. School leaders, teachers, and students have traditions for recognizing the contributions of outside experts and volunteers.
4. Students share their work with visitors.

Culture and Character: Promoting Adventure and Fitness

Overview

Expeditionary Learning promotes a spirit of adventure. Academic and physical challenges push students to pursue excellence and assume responsibility for their own learning. The physical education program places a strong emphasis on personal fitness and nutrition, enhances the school's Expeditionary Learning culture, and promotes character development. Physical education teachers rely on coaching, framing, and debriefing to help students be successful. Teachers help students understand the connections between physical challenge and academic challenge. Students accomplish more than they think is possible.



BENCHMARK 4:

PROMOTING ADVENTURE AND FITNESS

A. Adventure

1. School leaders and teachers experience physical and intellectual adventure through Outward Bound courses, summits, and school-organized wilderness experiences.
2. Many learning expeditions incorporate physical adventure and challenging fieldwork.
3. Physical adventure and challenge (e.g., ropes courses, adventure curricula, camping trips, etc.) are explicitly connected to academic challenge.
4. Learning expeditions engage students in intellectual adventure; they motivate students to take different perspectives, defend positions, and pursue their own interests.
5. Teachers provide students with opportunities to experience success and failure through adventure, and to learn from both.

B. Physical Education and Fitness

1. Physical education instruction builds character; it engages all students in perseverance, personal fitness, challenge, collaboration, and adventure.
2. Outdoor education programs, ropes courses, and team and individual sports are explicitly connected to and reinforce the school's character traits.
3. Physical education teachers focus on students' strengths and help each student experience success.
4. When possible, teachers link fitness and physical challenge to academics through projects, expedition content, and reflection.

C. Safety

1. The school has policies and protocols to ensure that physical education classes, adventure programming, and fieldwork are physically and emotionally safe.

Culture and Character: Developing a Professional Community

Overview

School leaders, teachers, and staff in Expeditionary Learning schools are members of a community of learners. Professionals work together to share expertise, improve the school's program, build background knowledge in their disciplines, and model collaborative learning for students. Staff culture is characterized by a respectful collegiality where teachers resist judgment and blame, and support each other in improving practice. Teachers and school leaders model a safe community that fosters high quality work. Professional development for individual teachers and for the staff as a whole is at the heart of the school.

BENCHMARK 5:

DEVELOPING A PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY

A. Building and Modeling an Expeditionary Learning School Culture

1. Adults at the school are themselves learners, willing to implement and master new practices and model learning for students.
2. Staff members live by and model the school's code of character.
3. Expeditionary Learning instructional practices are used at staff meetings and in other professional development.
4. The professional community uses and models rituals such as opening readings, circles, and team-building activities to build and sustain their own culture.
5. Staff members take responsibility for all students and not only their own; they reinforce schoolwide expectations, foster all students' learning, and work to ensure their physical and emotional safety.
6. Teachers new to teaching or to the school are mentored.
7. The faculty establishes and maintains structures (mentoring, teaming, peer supervision) that build trust and allow teachers to support and advise one another.
8. Adults in the school always discuss students and their families respectfully.

B. Practices and Protocols for Effective Collaboration

1. Adults establish norms for working together and adhere to those norms in all settings.
2. Teachers use established protocols and strategies to collectively examine and evaluate learning expedition plans, instructional practices, and assessment practices.
3. Teachers expand their repertoire of practices by drawing on the strengths of colleagues in other disciplines.
4. Collaborative time also is used to analyze and make sense of student work.

C. Focus on Growth Over Time

1. Teachers work to hone the craft of their teaching by increasing both their repertoire of instructional practices and the quality of their use.
2. Teachers are committed to increasing their own disciplinary knowledge and understanding.
3. Members of the professional community participate in Expeditionary Learning on-site and off-site professional development, communicate what they have learned to colleagues, and use what they have learned in their own teaching.
5. Teachers document their work (e.g., learning expedition plans, lesson and workshop design) to reflect, critique, and improve.

Culture and Character: Engaging Families in the Life of the School

Overview

Families are partners in the education of their children. Students and staff in Expeditionary Learning schools make families welcome, know them well, and engage them actively in the life of the school. Regular communication and multiple opportunities for participation encourage families to be strong partners in their children's learning.

BENCHMARK 6:

ENGAGING FAMILIES IN THE LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

A. Welcoming Families and Building Relationships

1. The school has in place practices and norms to welcome families and community members (e.g., established greetings, norms for guiding visitors, etc.).
2. Efforts are made to encourage all families' participation (e.g. scheduling events, assisting with transportation, providing translators, etc.).
3. School leaders collect data on family participation, and work with teachers and the community to increase family involvement.
4. School leaders and teachers learn about and respect the cultures, backgrounds, and values of their students' families.

B. Communication

1. The faculty begins the school year by establishing a pattern of positive, regular communication with families.
2. School leaders and teachers create an annual calendar of events that involve families in a variety of ways.
3. A range of publications and formats is used to assure that all families understand the school's policies, curriculum, approaches to instruction, and assessment system.
4. Teachers communicate regularly with families about their children's accomplishments.
5. School leaders and teachers develop strategies, such as enrollment interviews, surveys, or portfolio conferences, to learn about families and involve them in their children's learning.

C. Participation in the School

1. The school has a variety of ways for families to participate (e.g., governance, tutoring, classroom experts, portfolio panelists).
2. Interactive family education nights are held throughout the year (e.g., an open house to explain the year's expeditions, workshops to show how students are learning in the various disciplines, etc.).
3. Teachers and school leaders organize regular exhibitions and presentations of student work so that students share their project work and portfolios with family and community members.