

Structures: Designing Time for Student and Adult Learning

Overview

In Expeditionary Learning schools the schedule serves instructional and curricular priorities. While each schedule is unique to a school and its constraints, there are key features that all Expeditionary Learning school schedules have in common: blocks of class time, opportunities for integration of the disciplines, and common planning time for teachers. The schedule accommodates project work, fieldwork, service learning, and flexible groupings of students. Time is scheduled during the school year and summer for whole-school professional development and collaboration across grade levels and subject areas.

BENCHMARK 1:

DESIGNING TIME FOR STUDENT AND ADULT LEARNING

A. Designing the School Schedule

1. School leaders and staff identify the needs and goals of the school and build a schedule to address and meet them.
2. School leaders and staff approach scheduling comprehensively, taking into consideration before- and after-school programs as well as in-class time.
3. The schedule provides time for teachers and students to work collaboratively.
4. The schedule facilitates flexible groupings of students among classes as well as within classrooms and is not held hostage by tracked classes.
5. The schedule allows for fieldwork and service without disrupting other classes.

B. Making Best Use of the Schedule

1. Teachers create uninterrupted blocks of time that allow in-depth investigations.
2. Teachers make optimal use of block time through effective instructional practices (e.g., readers' and writers' workshops, science labs, and fieldwork), project work, product development, and service learning.
3. Tight lesson design and a focus on completing tasks and producing quality work result in a high level of student productivity and engagement throughout each class period.

C. Designing Time for Adult Learning

1. The school develops a calendar to guarantee time (e.g., early release days, days between terms) and meeting structures (e.g., whole staff, teaching teams, individual coaching) for on-site professional development.
2. The schedule provides uninterrupted time for individual teacher preparation and planning, team or grade-level planning, and meetings of the whole staff.
3. Teams of teachers who share students have common planning time each week.
4. Structures for productive use of common planning time include agendas, minutes, roles for facilitation and participation, and plans for follow-through.
5. Common planning time is used for designing expeditions and projects, improving instruction and assessment practices, and developing plans to meet the needs of individual students.
6. Resources are allocated to support a summer institute each year.

Structures: Creating Structures for Knowing Students Well

Overview

Students in Expeditionary Learning schools are known well and supported by adults. Each student's academic progress and character development are followed closely over time by at least one caring adult. School structures such as crews, multi-age classrooms, and/or looping ensure students' needs are met and individual strengths are discovered. Mentoring, internships, and apprenticeships foster relationships between secondary students and community members. Flexible, heterogeneous groupings replace tracking.

BENCHMARK 2:

CREATING STRUCTURES FOR KNOWING STUDENTS WELL

A. Building Relationships

1. Multi-year connections between students and adults are created through looping, multi-age classrooms, and/or mentoring or crew relationships that last more than one year.
2. A caring adult monitors the progress of each student.
3. When appropriate and feasible, older students are paired with younger students for orientation, tutoring, and mentoring.

B. Crews

1. Crew time is used well and has clear purposes, goals, and lesson plans.
2. All crew leaders adhere to schoolwide expectations for crew time.
3. Crew time is respected and proceeds without interruption.
4. Crew leaders ensure that all their students know about and have access to demanding academic courses, extracurricular activities, academic and social supports, and the best sequence of classes for college placement.
5. Crews allow students and teachers to forge productive relationships over time.
6. Crew leaders form relationships with parents, monitor academic progress, lead interventions, and ensure that all students graduate.
7. Crews provide a forum for character education, portfolio work, adventure, and literacy.

C. Mentoring, Internships, and Apprenticeships

1. Mentors provide additional support to secondary students.
2. Internships help high school students build relationships with adults in the community, accumulate work experience, and learn about job and career opportunities.
3. Apprenticeships create opportunities for students to master a craft or a discipline.

D. Heterogeneous Grouping

1. Tracking by ability is eliminated.
2. Students are taught in heterogeneous, flexible groups so that they know and learn with a diverse group of peers.