

EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING

What is Expeditionary Learning?

Expeditionary Learning is a model for comprehensive school reform for elementary, middle, and high schools that emphasizes high achievement through active learning, character growth, and teamwork. Its extensive professional development program provides teachers with powerful instructional strategies and practices to teach the various academic subjects through a challenging set of connected, real-world projects called learning expeditions. The integration of literacy into learning expeditions is a special feature of this design.

How does Expeditionary Learning support school reform?

Expeditionary Learning fosters change in the culture, structures, and teaching and assessment practices of its partner schools. Over a multi-year period, school faculties and administrators are offered a coherent, demanding, and highly regarded program of professional development to implement the model and to realize significant improvement in student learning and character development. Expeditionary Learning maintains an active national network of schools and helps regional clusters of schools work together to continue to improve over time.

What are some characteristics of schools in the Expeditionary Learning network?

In Expeditionary Learning schools, students spend much of their time engaged in learning expeditions: in-depth studies of rich topics or themes such as water quality, the civil rights movement, or the industrial revolution. Teachers collaborate to design learning expeditions that align with district and state standards and to assess their own work and student work. Structures like block scheduling and common planning time for teacher teams make it possible for students to go into the community for fieldwork and service and for teachers to work together. To foster a culture of respect and high standards, schools mainstream students, provide for significant amounts of crew (advisory) time, and ask teachers to work with the same students for more than one year.

How many schools have adopted the design?

Begun in 1993, Expeditionary Learning is now being implemented in 130 urban, rural, and suburban schools in 29 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. It has been demonstrated to be effective at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

What are the roots of Expeditionary Learning?

Expeditionary Learning was developed as a program of Outward Bound. Outward Bound uses outdoor adventure and service to help participants learn teamwork, courage, craftsmanship, perseverance, and compassion. Transformative learning occurs because skills and understandings are immediately needed and applied, and participants discover that they can accomplish more than they thought possible. The Expeditionary Learning design uses these kinds of instructional practices in classrooms to create powerful learning experiences that foster academic rigor and character growth.

What Expeditionary Learning is not:

Expeditionary Learning is not a series of courses in the wilderness, though it makes such courses available to faculty and students from partner schools. It is an application of Outward Bound's educational principles and practices to classrooms and the subjects – reading, writing, literature, math, science, history, music, art, physical education – that comprise the daily reality of schools. Expeditionary Learning is not a curriculum. It is an approach to teaching and learning that seeks to change school culture by making the curriculum more active and by motivating students to go deeper, work harder, and do more than they thought they could.

What does Expeditionary Learning offer schools in the EL network?

Expeditionary Learning offers schools support to help students meet high academic standards and become more engaged in school. Learning expeditions capture students' interest through real-world projects, adventure, and service. As students become more invested in their work, the quality improves, their test scores rise, and disciplinary problems decrease. The design's professional development program models and teaches instructional practices teachers need to deepen student learning and provides opportunities for personal and professional rejuvenation. School leaders receive guidance in making structural changes, benchmarks to assess school progress, and assistance in identifying funds to support their work.

Expeditionary Learning (EL) Professional Development

Overview:

Expeditionary Learning provides schools over a multi-year period with an integrated set of on-site, regional, and national professional development and technical assistance services to facilitate full implementation of the design and a high level of student learning. During EL professional development, teachers experience as students the instructional practices they will use as teachers in their classrooms. The National Staff Development Council (NSCD) rated Expeditionary Learning's staff development as exemplary. In three separate studies of professional development at the elementary, middle, and high school levels in 1999 and 2002, NSCD found that EL professional development was of the highest quality at all three levels and at all three had a significant impact on student achievement.

On-Site Staff Development

On-site services average 25-30 days per year beginning with a retreat for school leaders and a planning institute for teachers during the summer and continuing throughout the school year. An EL professional developer, called a school designer, is assigned to each school. She or he carries out most of the on-site work in collaboration with the regional field director and other EL staff and consultants. Professional development for each school is planned jointly with the school's leadership team and is coordinated with state standards and district goals, curriculum requirements, and tests and assessments.

Regional Staff Development

EL is organized into eight regions: the Northeast, New York/New Jersey, the Mid-Atlantic, the Southeast, Puerto Rico, the Midwest, the Northwest, and the Southwest. Regional staff development is designed to strengthen local networks of EL schools and to provide an opportunity to build ongoing relationships with colleagues from other schools also engaged in using the design. It includes:

- Two-day workshops focused on particular content areas or practices such as math, science, portfolio assessment, and leadership development and on particular grade levels, e.g., primary literacy or high schools. Each school receives on average 12 slots for regional workshops each year.
- Site seminars, structured two-day visits to exemplary EL schools that showcase the implementation of the design. Each school has an unlimited number of site seminar slots.

National Staff Development

Offerings include:

- Summits, weeklong intensive learning expeditions for teachers. In 2003, these will include Writing Children's Books, in Boston; Physiology, Fitness, and Art, in Estes Park, Colorado; Deaf Culture, in Boston; Fading Footprints, an environmentally-focused expedition that builds skills in art and technology, in Portland, Maine; and Writing Biographies, in Phoenix, in which participants will create biographies in Spanish or English from intensive

interviews. Schools have on average six summit slots per year.

- Outward Bound educator courses, five-to-seven days, for EL teachers and administrators. In 2003, these will include hut-to-hut skiing in Washington State; whitewater rafting in Colorado; sea kayaking in Baja; and sailing off the coast of Maine. Schools have an average of four Outward Bound course slots, one of which is reserved for a principals' course.
- Institutes, four-to-five day intensive seminars in particular practices or content areas. In 2003, these will include literacy, math, the use of test data and other information on student performance to improve instruction, and leadership. Each school has approximately eight institute slots per year.
- The EL Leadership Conference, a one-day opportunity for each principal and another member of the school's leadership team to work with colleagues in the EL network to address leadership issues and practices.
- The EL National Conference, a two-day conference focused on a particular theme. In 2003, the National Conference will focus on instructional practices. EL teachers will offer master classes highlighting particular practices and will provide participants with the opportunity to practice what they have learned. The Conference is preceded by a day during which participants can visit Expeditionary Learning schools near the conference's location. Each school receives on average six Conference slots.

Planning and Teaching Learning Expeditions

Overview:

A learning expedition is a purposeful, in-depth investigation of a rich theme or topic, such as simple machines, the scientific revolution, or World War II. Expeditions must be designed to help students meet state standards and must fit within state or district curriculum frameworks. Teachers formulate guiding questions for expeditions that stimulate student inquiry and debate. Each learning expedition includes challenging projects, literature that relates to the theme or topic, fieldwork, adventure, and service. Learning expeditions culminate in exhibits, performances, publications, and other demanding products for audiences beyond the classroom.

Snapshots from Schools:

- In a high school science class in Denver, students explore scientific and cultural revolution through an in-depth study of Galileo. Students read Aristotle, Ptolemy, and Copernicus; study the scientific changes reflected in Renaissance culture and art; and analyze the scientific, religious, and political forces that led to Galileo's imprisonment for his ideas. Students become experts in the solar system and its mechanics and build original conceptual models for understanding the moon's phases. Their work culminates in the application of algebraic formulas to calculate focal lengths and magnification of lenses in telescopes; the students construct their own Galilean telescopes and present them to a local astronomy club.
- In a bilingual Boston urban middle school, students study the architectural and political issues surrounding land use policy and apply their knowledge to three parcels of land near the school. They survey local residents, analyze the survey data they have collected, research zoning ordinances, and meet with officials from City Hall to discuss options. They work with the Harvard Graduate School of Design to prepare architectural drawings and models, collaborate with landscape designers and an urban gardening association to design plantings, and prepare a variety of realistic architectural proposals and models. Students present the designs to city officials, including the mayor, and one of the parcels is developed into community gardens incorporating student ideas.

Snapshots from Professional Development:

- Twenty-five teachers from around the country spend a week in July on the Amherst College campus attending a geology summit – an intensive learning expedition for teachers – exploring and mapping caves, collecting and identifying rocks and minerals, and measuring and mapping streams. They create a variety of products: mineral charts, stream and cave maps, computer models of stream flood data, and jewelry made from polished river stones and crystals. They discuss plans for geology expeditions in their own schools. The following year, first and second graders in Atlanta, fourth graders in San Antonio, middle school students in Boston, and high school students in Memphis, all guided by teachers who attended this summit, are busy exploring caves, identifying minerals, and calculating the flow of streams.
- A Baltimore elementary school's staff gathers for five days in August to plan learning expeditions for the coming year. The EL school designer meets with the school's leadership team prior to the planning institute to target the institute to the school's particular needs. The week begins with seven teachers sharing their experiences from a variety of EL summer institutes, summits, and Outward Bound courses. The school designer leads the staff in looking at models of exemplary learning expeditions in other EL network schools and offers strategies and practices for strong expeditions. Over the course of the week, the school designer leads the faculty through guided reading, curriculum analysis, and expedition planning and critique. Teachers from another EL school visit and present their expedition plans. The faculty discusses the schedule for ongoing support from the EL school designer and for site seminar visits to other EL schools, fall and spring literacy institutes, and the EL National Conference.

Instructional Practices in Expeditionary Learning Classrooms

Overview:

In Expeditionary Learning schools, teachers use active pedagogy to help students become active and collaborative learners: to make connections, to find patterns, to see events from different perspectives, to experiment, to go beyond the information given, and to develop empathy and compassion for events, people, and subjects. Teachers model this pedagogy, confer with students, facilitate productive group work, and stimulate students to think. Among the practices used in EL schools are literature circles, cooperative learning groups, close observation strategies, and student- and teacher-developed rubrics for projects.

Snapshots from Schools:

- First grade students in Denver produce a camping manual for young children. To prepare themselves, they engage in writing activities geared toward their project and learn skills for setting up camp. They work in small groups to research a particular aspect of camping and produce rough drafts of their sections. With guidance, students then test out each other's sections for clarity and accuracy and make revisions. Next comes the real test: the class goes on an overnight camping trip and uses the manual in the field. Back in the classroom, each group revises its section to reflect the learning gained from that real life experience.
- Also in Denver, tenth grade students in an algebra class are required to develop an understanding of quadratic equations and factoring: they must use the math to design a fountain that they will build for the school. Combining active pedagogy, visiting experts, and fieldwork, the students learn about the mechanics of fountain construction. To calculate the speed, height, and trajectory of the arcs of water flow, they learn and use equations. Each student group produces a mathematically feasible proposal. The class as a whole builds a fountain that brings their learning to life.

Snapshots from Professional Development:

- A school principal works with Expeditionary Learning staff and math teachers from around the country to plan a regional math institute. New to the EL network, he is surprised and pleased to learn the same instructional practices used in the EL approach to literacy also apply to math. Comprehension strategies he learned in the Expeditionary Learning literacy institute are used to make sense of confusing math problems. Participants meet in small groups to discuss ideas gleaned from math readings. Math skills are learned through inquiry-based activities and projects, and the verbal discourse in a good math classroom is the core of good instruction and assessment.
- Having experienced an Outward Bound sailing course off the coast of Maine that was intimidating, thrilling, and transforming, a mid-career teacher takes the risk of being an "ambassador" the following year on a mountain course in Colorado for EL teachers. As ambassador, her job is to help other teachers on the trip recognize the powerful practices of Outward Bound that can be brought back from the wilderness into the classroom. Just as the adults on the course are supported to accomplish more than they thought possible by a program that uses strategies of group support, reflection, and artfully planned challenges, students in classrooms can be guided to go beyond their expectations. Around evening campfires, the ambassador leads discussions among the teachers about how to recreate in their schools the power of this experience and the sense of community it builds.

Literacy in Expeditionary Learning Schools

Overview:

Literacy is a major focus across the curriculum in Expeditionary Learning schools. Comprehension strategies are taught from kindergarten on to convey the idea that the point of reading is to make meaning out of what is read. In EL primary classrooms, students learn to decode fluently and are helped to solve problems and build sound theories of letter-sound relationships. EL teachers teach reading within learning expeditions so that meaning, context, and motivation drive the learning of critical literacy skills; in turn, the explicit teaching of reading skills helps students master expedition content. Reading is taught in all content areas because each requires different kinds of text, e.g., science articles, primary historical sources, math word problems.

Snapshots from Schools:

- In a fifth and sixth grade expedition on the Great Depression, students in a Seattle elementary school interview elders in their community and write biographical memoirs of their experiences in the 1930s. In preparation, they read biographies and memoirs in literature circles and work in writers' workshops to refine their narrative and descriptive language. During readers' workshops, the teacher models and the students practice strategies for making sense of text in a variety of contexts. Students do their historical research using history books, reference books, microfilmed newspaper articles, and the Internet. Students revise their memoirs through multiple drafts until they are of presentation quality, well written and mechanically perfect. A copy of each memoir is presented as a gift to the interviewed elder during a final celebration.
- In a large vocational high school in New York City focused on automotive trades, students in a shop class spend almost as much time reading and writing as they spend working on transmissions. They complete a series of written and computer presentations of automotive research, and they are evaluated by the quality of their writing as much as by their technical expertise. They are taught to do careful Internet research, to contact industry manufacturers for information through business letters, and to present their research in articulate, accurate, written presentation formats. Students complete a comparative analysis of two cars with technical reviews and consumer recommendations and analyze the financial implications of leasing these automobiles vs. buying them at current interest rates.
- In a primary-grade expedition on butterflies, students in Dubuque, Iowa produce an illustrated field guide of local butterflies for the Chamber of Commerce. The teacher uses think-alouds during reading comprehension workshops to teach how to build background knowledge, activate schema, and make connections to prepare each child for writing a page for the field guide. The teacher also teaches decoding skills such as segmenting, how to use context clues, and specific features of nonfiction text to help students master what they are reading.

Snapshots from Professional Development:

- A school district in Maryland struggling with weak reading scores on state tests has five schools that send seven teachers and two administrators to a four-day EL literacy institute. At the institute, participants review current research on comprehension strategies and learn how to teach the strategies explicitly through modeling them in their classrooms. They use literature circles, readers' and writers' workshops, and Socratic seminars and learn how comprehension strategies can be used across the disciplines to build literacy. Participants find the strategies to have immediate application, and all of the EL schools request slots for upcoming literacy institutes.
- A large elementary school, also in Maryland, has a reading program mandated by the district, but it has not proven effective and needs to be supplemented with new tools and strategies. The EL school designer holds three staff development sessions on literacy strategies and arranges a visit to another EL school, where teachers observe classrooms, interview teachers and students, and meet with the principal and the reading specialist to discuss scheduling, resources, flexible grouping, and interventions for weaker readers.

School Culture and Character in Expeditionary Learning Schools

Overview:

The culture of a school – its climate and shared values – has a major impact on learning. An Expeditionary Learning school's culture is characterized by a climate of physical and emotional safety, a sense of adventure, an ethic of service and responsibility, and a commitment to high quality work. Expeditionary Learning schools consciously shape such a culture by building shared beliefs, traditions, and rituals. This intentional culture promotes best effort, high expectations, respect for diversity, and teamwork. EL staff works with teachers and administrators to develop a strong culture among the adults that is a model for students and is evident in common spaces and classrooms alike.

Snapshots from Schools:

- In its first year with Expeditionary Learning, students from three advisory classes in Ronan, Montana's comprehensive high school refurbish the town's community center. In the second year, the senior class builds a house to be sold to a low-income family. Every senior is involved in a committee to plan a particular aspect of the work as well as in the actual construction of the house. In the third year, the seniors work with downtown merchants to renovate Main Street.
- Preparing for a move to a new facility, a renovated urban building, students in a K-8 school in Washington, D.C. work to contribute to their new school. Kindergartners study plants and research ideas for gardens and plantings around the building. Using experts from the community, they visit gardens nearby where they can both learn and contribute service by helping to maintain the gardens. First graders study and help to design playground options and play structures for the new school, which, as a result of space constraints, must be located on the roof. Older elementary students help younger students and work on blueprint proposals for the use of classroom space and common space. Middle school students partner with a local community group involved in building a new recreational center, helping to gather data to insure the center meets community needs.
- At a weeklong summer summit in Memphis, teachers and administrators work to make sense of the civil rights movement—its historical implications and its implications for educators and citizens. Using the National Civil Rights Museum as a resource, participants branch out into surrounding Memphis to interview community members about these issues and local history. Each participant explores his or her own history with race and diversity; this learning is forged into a common artistic product, a short dramatic play. The play is performed for the public at the museum, and participants end their week discussing how they can take their visions of justice back to their personal and professional lives. Teachers conclude that the best way to foster character is to choose rich expedition topics that focus on issues of social justice and to have students create products that require them to empathize, take multiple perspectives, and apply lessons learned to their own school lives.

Snapshots from Professional Development:

- At an Expeditionary Learning Leadership Conference in Dubuque, Iowa focused on school culture, more than 170 EL principals and teacher-leaders study, analyze, and experience strategies for building effective school cultures. Practices are shared and modeled by schools that have built strong, positive cultures, and challenges to building a positive culture are discussed and diagnosed in small groups. School teams work together to draft action plans for improving a significant aspect of the culture in their own schools.

School Structures and Expeditionary Learning

Overview:

Expeditionary Learning requires schedules, flexible student grouping, teacher teams, and access to resources that support high quality teaching and learning. Schedules in EL schools provide longer and more flexible blocks of time for project-based learning, fieldwork, service, and community-building activities. Teaching the same students for more than one year strengthens relationships in the classroom and improves the likelihood of academic success. Common planning and professional development time for teacher teams is a necessity. Shared leadership allows schools to structure practices and resources to support comprehensive school reform.

Snapshots from Schools:

- A new Boston middle school quickly builds an ethic of high quality work by requiring every student to maintain a portfolio with evidence of success in each discipline and evidence of character and responsibility. More than just grades and attendance, the portfolio must have specific, required work samples and contain a resume of accomplishments and goals. Students must present and defend their portfolios and growth at parent/teacher/student conferences and at mid-year and end-of-year public exhibitions. To graduate from eighth grade, students must present and defend their portfolios of required and optional assignments to a formal panel of educators. The school's structures are sufficiently flexible to facilitate such cross-discipline work.
- An elementary school in Prince George's County, Maryland reorganizes its week and its use of specialists to create new opportunities for common teacher planning time. Grade level teams are now able to meet twice a week; one meeting is dedicated to curriculum planning and expedition management, and the second meeting is dedicated to looking at and critiquing student work. In addition, a biweekly meeting is established for each teacher to meet with a special education teacher to discuss individual students. The entire faculty decides to change the structure of faculty meetings to address curriculum planning and professional development, moving logistical topics to short, biweekly business meetings.

Snapshots from Professional Development:

- A high school in New York City has initiated block scheduling, but the faculty does not feel equipped to use the longer blocks effectively. In addition, the schedule does not build in teamwork across disciplines or fieldwork outside the school. The EL school designer meets with the faculty and administration to help establish new cross-discipline team planning blocks and special days dedicated to fieldwork. Subsequently, the school sends a team of teachers and administrators to a site seminar at an EL high school that has a history of effective block scheduling to observe and discuss strategies for using long blocks effectively.
- A principal from a school in Maryland that has just joined the EL network is not familiar with many of the recommended school structures. She first attends a regional principals' institute and meets with other EL principals from Maryland, Delaware, and the District of Columbia to discuss the rationale for the structures and strategies for rearranging the school schedule. She finds that her faculty is not comfortable with some of the new structures, and some members are particularly resistant to change. Attending an EL Leadership Conference, she asks to be the subject of a consultancy protocol, where she explains her challenges to a group of school leaders and receives feedback and suggestions. She makes arrangements to have some of her faculty visit one of the schools of the principals in her small group.

Producing High Quality Work in Expeditionary Learning Classrooms

Overview:

Students in Expeditionary Learning schools are expected to produce high quality work, and they do. Projects, papers, presentations, and other products are not considered complete unless they have met explicit criteria developed by teachers and students. Students take their work through multiple drafts and critique and revision processes; they develop perseverance. They do more than they thought they could. Creating real work for audiences beyond the school motivates students to meet high standards and “get it right.”

Snapshots from Schools:

- In a yearlong kindergarten study of birds in Boise, Idaho, students learn to draw bird portraits that are remarkably accurate and beautiful. The final products take weeks to produce: students are given lessons in drawing and go through multiple drafts of their work, getting critique from peers, teachers and older students to make their portraits stronger. The final drafts are used to produce professional quality full-color note cards with bird portraits on the front and student-written descriptions on the back. The note cards are sold in stores and displayed nationally by the EL network, with all the proceeds sent to bird conservation organizations.
- Middle school students, in an expedition on the tidal zone of a bay near their school in Portland, Maine, produce a professional quality field guide to the sea life. Combining lessons in science, writing, and visual arts, each student researches a plant or animal and produces a page for the field guide, working through many drafts. To insure the authenticity of their work, the students go beyond book and computer research; they work with a research aquarium with live specimens and take trips to the bay where they put on wetsuits and snorkels to collect and photograph specimens in the water. The final product, entirely produced, written, edited, and illustrated by the students, can be purchased at the ranger station near the bay, with proceeds used for beach maintenance.

Snapshots from Professional Development:

- Two teachers in Dubuque, Iowa have just completed a successful and emotional expedition. Pairing their sixth graders with residents of a nursing home, they have helped the students produce beautifully written biographies of the elders. But their work is not done. Like EL students, these teachers take the next step of making their work public and agree to present their expedition at the EL National Conference. They realize that they must document the powerful student writing and illustrations in a manner that does justice to the quality of the work.
- Twenty-five EL teachers and administrators spend seven summer days and nights hunched over drafting tables in a design studio at Cooper Union Institute in New York City during an architecture summit. Though they have been learning about the city’s architectural styles and history, much of their time has been spent in the studio, drafting scale blueprints of houses using professional materials and meeting professional standards. Most of the participants bring their learning and new skills back to the classroom, and one administrator takes his blueprints home and actually makes the renovations to his house that he designed in class.

Evidence of Success

Overview:

Expeditionary Learning is a New American Schools-approved model for comprehensive school reform that achieves results: improved teacher practice, higher student achievement and engagement, and a positive and productive school culture. Many reports have evaluated EL's work favorably, and Expeditionary Learning itself commissions third-party studies to assess student achievement and teacher practice in individual schools and groups of schools. EL also collects data and stories from partner schools to create profiles of successful implementation of the design. For more information, please visit the website, www.elschools.org.

Third-Party Studies and Reports

Center for Research on the Education of Students at Risk (CRESPAR), 2002

In "Comprehensive School Reform and Student Achievement: a Meta-Analysis," researchers looked at 29 comprehensive school reform models including EL. The report characterized Expeditionary Learning's research base as showing "highly promising evidence of effectiveness." This was the highest rating given to any model that was created in the last ten years. Only three of the 29 other models assessed received higher ratings, and they had all been in the field for a decade longer than EL to build a larger research base.

National Staff Development Council (NSDC), 2002 and 1999

A series of NSDC reports entitled "What Works: Results-Based Staff Development" have featured Expeditionary Learning as a leading professional development organization. The 2002 NSDC report on elementary school professional development notes that "using both independent third-party evaluations and internal assessment, consistent improvement in student achievement has been demonstrated throughout the [design's] history." The 1999 middle school report concluded that EL was the only program of 26 studied to meet all 27 standards for high quality professional development. The 2002 report on high school professional development mentions EL's "heavy emphasis on teacher content development and the rigorous expectation of adult learning and collaboration for all teachers."

American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF), 2001

Finding common ground between service learning and comprehensive school reform was the theme of the AYPF survey of 28 leading school reform models. The report gave Expeditionary Learning a five-star rating for being "highly compatible" in linking community service to academics and building "an ethos ...of service to others."

Center for Research in Educational Policy, 2002

This study of the Rocky Mountain School of Expeditionary Learning (RMSEL) in Denver compared teacher practice and the school's student achievement data to those of the four Denver-area districts from which the student population is drawn. In comparison to a group of schools with similar demographics, teachers at RMSEL used significantly more coaching and project-based learning and significantly less direct instruction and independent seatwork. The study found that RMSEL students consistently outscored the weighted average of students from its four feeder districts across all grade levels for each year of the five-year study period on the Colorado State Assessment Program. RMSEL students scored on average 11.9 percentage points higher in reading than those of the comparison group.

Polly Ulichney, Ed.D., Brown University, 2000

This study analyzed data from two New England Expeditionary Learning schools. King Middle School in Portland, Maine serves 550 primarily low-income students, 22 percent of whom are English Language Learners. Before the EL design was implemented, King scored lower than its district and state on the Maine Educational Assessment. In 1998-1999, however, King students outscored the state average in 6 of 7 disciplines. Ulichney also studied the Rafael Hernandez School, a K-8 two-way bilingual school in Boston. In 1998, when Massachusetts introduced the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, Hernandez performed better than a district school with a demographically similar population. Ulichney concludes, "Expeditionary Learning implementation appears to be providing a strong academic curriculum that allows students from typically disadvantaged backgrounds to thrive."

American Institutes for Research (AIR), 1999

In "An Educators' Guide to School-wide Reform, AIR determined that Expeditionary Learning was one of only eight school-wide reforms with a research base showing positive effects on student achievement. The study noted that positive results had been found across subjects.

Academy for Educational Development (AED), 1995

AED found that after three years of implementing the Expeditionary Learning design, 9 of 10 original demonstration site EL schools showed significant improvement in the standardized tests mandated by their districts. Teachers reported that their classroom practices changed markedly including more collaboration with other teachers, a more systematic connection between content and skill learning in designing expeditions, and the development of clear criteria for assessing student work. The study found that students produced high quality work, often higher than they had ever achieved in the past. AED also found a strong level of student engagement.

Snapshots from Schools

Oakcrest Elementary School in Prince George's County, Maryland serves 630 students, 90 percent of whom are African American. Since 1999 when the school first began implementing Expeditionary Learning, second and fourth grade reading and math national percentile rank (MNPR) scores on the California Test of Basic Skills have risen each year. For grade two reading, the MNPR went from 24 percent in 1999 to 34 percent in 2002, and second grade math rose from 28 percent to 41 percent in the same period. The fourth grade scores for 2002 exceeded the district average for the first time in recent years. Disciplinary referrals have decreased by 52 percent since 1999, and teacher turnover has dropped from 52 percent in 1999 to just 5 percent in 2002.

Winnequah Middle School in Monona, Wisconsin began to work with Expeditionary Learning in 1999, and since then the percentage of students scoring at the proficient or advanced levels on the reading portion of the state assessment has increased annually. In 2001-2002, 88 percent of eighth graders were assessed as proficient or advanced in contrast to the statewide average of 74 percent. In addition, out-of-school suspensions decreased from 6.5 percent of the student population in 1998-1999 to 4.5 percent in 2001-2002, and teacher absenteeism fell from an average of 4.1 days in 1998-1999 to 3.06 days in 2000-2001, the most recent year for which data are available.

Buncombe Community School East (BCSE) in Swannanoa, North Carolina, is an alternative high school that serves many of Buncombe County's hardest-to-reach students. For the past three years, BCSE has been implementing Expeditionary Learning. In August 2002, the North Carolina Department of Instruction determined that the school had met expected targets for student achievement and had shown "high growth" according to state criteria. In 1995, none of the graduating students went on to college compared to the class of 2002 of which 62 percent were college bound.

Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound Design Principles

Overview:

Expeditionary Learning is built on ten design principles that reflect the educational values and beliefs of Outward Bound. These principles also reflect the design's connection to related thinking about teaching, learning, and the culture of schools.

1. The Primacy of Self-Discovery

Learning happens best with emotion, challenge and the requisite support. People discover their abilities, values, passions, and responsibilities in situations that offer adventure and the unexpected. In Expeditionary Learning schools, students undertake tasks that require perseverance, fitness, craftsmanship, imagination, self-discipline, and significant achievement. A teacher's primary task is to help students overcome their fears and discover they can do more than they think they can.

2. The Having of Wonderful Ideas

Teaching in Expeditionary Learning schools fosters curiosity about the world by creating learning situations that provide something important to think about, time to experiment, and time to make sense of what is observed.

3. The Responsibility for Learning

Learning is both a personal process of discovery and a social activity. Everyone learns both individually and as part of a group. Every aspect of an Expeditionary Learning school encourages both children and adults to become increasingly responsible for directing their own personal and collective learning.

4. Empathy and Caring

Learning is fostered best in communities where students' and teachers' ideas are respected and where there is mutual trust. Learning groups are small in Expeditionary Learning schools, with a caring adult looking after the progress and acting as an advocate for each child. Older students mentor younger ones, and students feel physically and emotionally safe.

5. Success and Failure

All students need to be successful if they are to build the confidence and capacity to take risks and meet increasingly difficult challenges. But it is also important for students to learn from their failures, to persevere when things are hard, and to learn to turn disabilities into opportunities.

6. Collaboration and Competition

Individual development and group development are integrated so that the value of friendship, trust, and group action is clear. Students are encouraged to compete not

against each other but with their own personal best and with rigorous standards of excellence.

7. Diversity and Inclusion

Both diversity and inclusion increase the richness of ideas, creative power, problem-solving ability, and respect for others. In Expeditionary Learning schools, students investigate and value their different histories and talents as well as those of other communities and cultures. Schools and learning groups are heterogeneous.

8. The Natural World

A direct and respectful relationship with the natural world refreshes the human spirit and teaches the important ideas of recurring cycles and cause and effect. Students learn to become stewards of the earth and of future generations.

9. Solitude and Reflection

Students and teachers need time alone to explore their own thoughts, make their own connections, and create their own ideas. They also need time to exchange their reflections with others.

10. Service and Compassion

We are crew, not passengers. Students and teachers are strengthened by acts of consequential service to others, and one of an Expeditionary Learning school's primary functions is to prepare students with the attitudes and skills to learn from and be of service to others.

Expeditionary Learning Meets the 11 Criteria for Comprehensive School Reform

Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, one of the frameworks for whole-school improvement supported by New American Schools, is a comprehensive design that transforms curriculum, instruction, assessment, and school culture and organization to enable all students to achieve at a high level. The model helps schools enhance their programs to meet the criteria of the federal Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program.

1. Employs proven methods and strategies based on scientifically based research.

Building on the educational principles of Outward Bound, Expeditionary Learning is based on the practice-oriented research on effective schooling carried out in the 1970s and 1980s. The National Research Council's publication, *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School* (1999), lends support to many of Expeditionary Learning's practices including project-based learning, cooperative learning, student-centered assessment, looping, and effective classroom and school communities.

2. Integrates a comprehensive design with aligned components.

The Expeditionary Learning design is comprised of five core practices that build on one another to support high expectations and achievement in every domain.

Learning expeditions: planning and teaching rigorous and purposeful learning expeditions – in-depth, sustained theme-based units aligned with standards and comprising a series of related projects – are the cornerstone of curriculum and instruction.

Reflection and critique: collaborative assessment, critique, and reflection by teachers on their own work and that of their students and by students on their own and each other's work drive continuous improvement in teaching and learning.

School culture: Expeditionary Learning schools promote a strong culture of best effort, high expectations, high quality work, community and collaboration, service, and the value of diversity.

School structures: Expeditionary Learning requires the reorganization of time, student grouping, and resources to support high quality learning expeditions. School schedules provide longer and more flexible blocks of time for project-based learning and fieldwork, common planning by teams of teachers, and community-building activities. Heterogeneous grouping allows all students to share in the richness that diversity brings to learning. Multi-year looping strengthens relationships in the classroom and

improves the likelihood of academic success by allowing students to stay with the same teacher or team of teachers for more than one year.

School review: Expeditionary Learning schools engage in an annual cycle of reflection, planning, and action to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Expeditionary Learning benchmarks provide a framework for the review.

3. Provides ongoing, high-quality professional development for teachers and staff.

Expeditionary Learning provides on average 25-30 days per year of on-site professional development for teachers and school leadership. Activities include: a two-day leadership institute; a five-day summer planning institute; and workshops, coaching, and modeling scheduled throughout the year. National professional development offerings include weeklong intensive learning expeditions for teachers focusing on academic content (summits), five-day institutes on literacy and leadership development, and Outward Bound educators' courses. Regional programming includes two-day regional institutes focusing on particular content areas and instructional strategies and site seminars at and visits to Expeditionary Learning schools implementing the design at a high level.

4. Includes measurable goals and benchmarks for student achievement.

Students are expected to meet the standards established by their school districts and states and to go beyond those standards. Program staff works with participating schools to help teachers align state and district standards with learning expeditions and teach to those standards. Through these efforts, teachers develop criteria, standards, and assessments of student work on both class-by-class and school-wide levels. Teachers help students organize portfolios of their work, and schools develop exhibitions and graduation requirements bearing on questions of character development as well as academic achievement.

5. Is supported within the school by teachers, administrators, and staff.

Evidence of faculty and leadership understanding of the program is required before implementation. A high degree of faculty and staff support – 80 percent of the faculty and all of the school’s leadership – is a pre-contract requirement.

6. Provides support for teachers, administrators, and staff.

Expeditionary Learning staff and national faculty provide an average of 25-30 days of on-site professional development and national and regional professional development offerings including summits, Outward Bound courses for educators, institutes, conferences, and site seminars at and visits to other Expeditionary Learning schools.

7. Provides for meaningful parent and community involvement in planning, implementing, and evaluating school improvement activities.

Expeditionary Learning schools involve parents and community members in providing expertise in learning expeditions. Each expedition is designed to meet real-world standards and culminates in an exhibition or performance for parents and community. Parents report significantly greater participation in their children’s learning in Expeditionary Learning schools. In addition, the design supports site-based decision-making by councils including administration, faculty, parents, and community members.

8. Uses high-quality external support from an external partner with experience and expertise in school-wide reform and improvement.

Expeditionary Learning was one of 11 designs chosen by New American Schools from among more than 800 proposals submitted as a promising approach to reforming public education in the United States. It was one of 25 designs specifically mentioned in the initial federal comprehensive school reform legislation as a well-qualified model to partner with schools in the transformation process. It is implemented in 130 schools in 29 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

9. Plans for the evaluation of strategies for the implementation of school reform and for student results, annually.

Expeditionary Learning benchmarks measure in detail the level of student achievement and the degree of implementation of each of the design’s core practices. Progress is assessed by each school annually, with an external review occurring every three to five years, and schools reaching full implementation of the design as

measured by these benchmarks are given exemplary status and are recruited to host site seminars and participate as leaders in the network of Expeditionary Learning schools. Expeditionary Learning schools also assess the degree of student engagement as measured by attendance, discipline, and school tone. A growing number of schools also assess students’ character development.

10. Identifies resources to support and sustain the school’s comprehensive reform effort.

In addition to CSR support, schools use Title I funding and special grants to cover implementation costs. Some schools reconfigure their staffing to free resources for professional development.

11. Has been found to significantly improve the academic achievement of students or demonstrates strong evidence that it will improve the academic achievement of students.

Expeditionary Learning has been the subject of a number of independent evaluations that have found the design to be effective in changing curriculum, instruction, assessment, school culture, and school structures to improve student achievement. These studies, which are referenced in Evidence of Success and on the Expeditionary Learning website, www.elschools.org, include:

Center for Research on the Education of Students at Risk (CRESPAR), 2002

National Staff Development Council (NSDC), three studies conducted in 2002 and 1999

American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF), 2001

Center for Research in Educational Policy, 2002

Polly Ulichney, Ed.D., Brown University, 2000

American Institutes for Research (AIR), 1999

Academy for Educational Development (AED), 1995

Patrick McQuillan, Ed.D., University of Colorado, 1994