

## **School Design Model: Expeditionary Learning**

Expeditionary Learning is a comprehensive school design for school improvement that challenges students to meet rigorous standards for academic and character growth. Through professional development, Expeditionary Learning School (ELS) staff collaborates with entire faculties to strengthen instruction and school culture, to engage students in interdisciplinary explorations and to assess and raise student achievement.

Expeditionary Learning extends the experience of Outward Bound, an adventure and service-based program founded by educator Kurt Hahn, into public school where students learn to take responsibility to achieve their personal best. In 1993, New American Schools, a nonprofit coalition of teachers, school administrators, community and business leaders, policy makers and experts from around the country, designated Expeditionary Learning a comprehensive model of school improvement. It is built around ten design principles (see next section) that grow out of the work of Hahn and other educational thinkers.

At the heart of the school design is learning expeditions. Expeditions in every tradition and culture are journeys conducted for a definite purpose by individuals employing a range of skills and talents. Learning expeditions are purposeful, intensive and extensive studies of a single topic such as insects, Idaho history, ancient civilizations or injustice. They involve challenging projects, fieldwork and service, and culminate in exhibits, performances and presentations to audiences that go beyond the classroom. Harnessing the power of adventure and discovery, expeditions are intellectual journeys that lead students to become more motivated in their academic work and develop perseverance and self-discipline. These investigations inspire and compel students to learn the skills and content necessary to produce high quality, original work and to do well on standardized tests by which student and school performance are regularly measured.

Currently (2008), Expeditionary Learning Schools is working with over one hundred schools in twenty-eight states and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Crew Leaders, students and school leadership in Expeditionary Learning schools build a culture of respect, continuous improvement and high expectations for all. Time, space, financial and human resources are examined and reallocated. Flexible grouping replaces tracking, and students stay with the same crew leader or team of Crew Leaders for at least two years (with the exception of Kindergarten at our school). Grade-level teaching teams meet regularly to design their own learning expeditions and align them with district, state and national standards. Crew Leaders across grade levels participate in peer critiques of each other's plans and discuss portfolios of student work. Parents and community members are included as visiting experts and as audiences for demonstrations of students' learning. Five core practices, benchmarks and an annual school review drive each school's overall improvement plan. [www.elschools.org](http://www.elschools.org)