



EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING

Purposes of Crew

An Expeditionary Learning school culture is planned for, developed, and sustained through practices that bring the community together, promote shared understandings, and encourage all community members to become crew, not passengers. Students in EL schools are known well and supported by adults. In Expeditionary Learning schools, each student is known well by at least one adult within the school. One structure for developing this relationship—and supporting students socially, emotionally, and academically—is crew.

The structure of crew allows for relationship building, academic progress monitoring, and character development. Crew allows students to build positive connections with their peers and with their crew leader. Crew leaders strategically plan crew to address and assess these multiple goals. Multi-year relationships are also forged in other school structures (e.g., multi-age classrooms, looping) to ensure that students' needs are met and individual strengths are discovered. Outside of school, mentoring, internships, and apprenticeships foster relationships between students and community members.

In some EL Schools, crew is a required, credit-based class. It meets for a minimum of 2.5 hours per week with opportunities to expand this time within the flexible block schedule as needs arise. Crews are either single grade or multi-grade groups, and many crew advisors stay with the same crew for two to four years. Ideally, crew size does not exceed 16 students. Crew sessions are generally scheduled for maximum attendance, avoiding the beginning and end of each school day. Generally, all faculty members are crew leaders, and sometimes school leaders also guide a crew.

Content and Purposes of Crew

1. Relationships
2. Literacy
3. Service
4. Academic Advisement Monitoring
5. Adventure and Fitness
6. Post-Secondary Preparation
7. School Administration

The following broad areas provide the focus of crew sessions in EL secondary schools:

Relationships

Crew provides each student a one-to-one relationship with an adult advisor (crew leader) at the school, as well as a consistent and ongoing small-scale peer community. Crew leaders monitor and support student progress, serve as the student's advocate in difficult academic and social situations, and act as the primary contact point between parents and the school. Crew meetings are frequently used for teambuilding exercises and for group discussions on topical issues. These exercises and discussions help establish crew identity and a positive school culture.

Sample strategies and practices to support relationships are:

- Establishing group norms
- Participating in group initiatives and debriefing them
- Circling up to celebrate student successes and address student issues
- Discussing and resolving social and school culture issues
- Understanding the Design Principles through readings and reflection
- Using daily readings to inspire thinking and encourage discussion
- Learning and applying the school's code of conduct and character traits
- Contacting parents on a regular basis
- Monitoring the academic progress and needs of each student through contact with other faculty members
- Discussing and practicing organizational and social skills

Literacy

Crew has a strong academic focus on the goal of developing life-long readers. This goal, while primarily addressed in academic classes, has a special home in crew. Crew time may be used each week for literature circles and structured discussions based on short text or high interest books. Crew leaders utilize readers' workshops and other practices that hone students' ability to apply reading comprehension strategies to progressively more challenging texts. Independent reading may also be monitored in crew, often through book chats that also enhance the relationship between crew leader and individual students. The crew portfolio outlines the minimum independent reading requirements for each term of the school year. Crew leaders confer with students as they read, encourage exploration of new genres, and monitor student progress in meeting the independent reading requirement.

Sample strategies and practices to support literacy are:

- Participating in Socratic Seminars and other text-based protocols centered on current topics
- Developing crew book clubs around a text of choice
- Using crew time to reflect on who we are as readers
- Modeling of specific reading strategies by the crew leader
- Monitoring students' outside independent reading, using reading logs, book chats, and personal conferences
- Learning how to "read" a test
- Providing time for reading

Service

Within their crews and with the guidance of their crew leaders, students identify needs in the school and in outside communities, and propose and develop projects to address those needs. Students document their involvement in service throughout their school experience, selecting examples of service for inclusion in passage portfolios and presentations.

Sample strategies and activities to support crew service are:

- Inviting guests from service organizations to share their stories
- Finding potential service sites for individual student service outside school
- Completing service as a crew on specially planned, longer crew days
- Recording and assessing individual service logs of crew members
- Serving as mentors for younger students
- Creating audio tapes of reading materials for younger students

Academic Advisement Monitoring

Students use regularly designated crew sessions to assemble and organize materials for the crew portfolio and to prepare for passage presentations and Student Led Conferences (SLCs). Crew leaders monitor portfolio progress and assess student readiness for presentation.

Sample strategies and practices to support portfolio development:

- Learning about school-wide portfolio requirements for Passages and SLCs
- Establishing crew portfolio work days to collect portfolio artifacts
- Creating resumes
- Writing and collecting personal letters of reference
- Using a peer review protocol for portfolio development
- Preparing for student led conferences
- Preparing for portfolio passages events

Adventure and Fitness

Crew offers opportunities for shared discovery and explorations into the unfamiliar, both inside and outside of the school building. These experiences are initially crafted and guided by the crew leader, and then gradually led by students. Fitness and nutrition plans can be developed and revisited by students during crew meetings.

Sample strategies and practices to support adventure and fitness in crew are:

- Participating in an Outward Bound course or similar adventure experience with the crew at the start of the freshman year
- Reflecting and following-up on lessons learned from adventure
- Connecting adventure and fitness learning to academic habits of work
- Participating in physical activities that engage the whole crew, such as active initiatives or daily walking
- Discussing and monitoring student adventure and fitness plans

Post-Secondary Preparation

Crew leaders support and coach students in their exploration of options for higher education, application processes, and college selection. They also assist in exploration of a variety of other post-secondary options. Exposure to information about higher education and other options can be built into crew as early as elementary or middle grades, increasing the focus and depth of preparation as students enter high school. All students have specific post-secondary plans upon graduation.

Strategies and practices to support college preparation are:

- Setting post secondary goals with crew members
- Inviting recruiters from post secondary institutions
- Discussing the nature of testing and practicing test-taking skills
- Hosting financial aid workshops for students and families
- Visiting a variety of campuses as early as freshman year
- Supporting the college application process

School Administration

Student administrative business is generally accomplished during crew meetings under the guidance of the crew leader.

Activities involving school administration can include:

- Completing required documentation for the school and the district
- Disseminating information to and collecting information from families regarding most school events
- Organizing participation in student government