

I.1 Learning Expeditions: Implementing Learning Expeditions Across the School

Overview

In Expeditionary Learning schools learning expeditions are the primary way of organizing curriculum. The subject matter of a learning expedition is a compelling topic derived from content standards. Learning expeditions feature linked projects that require students to construct deep understandings and skills and to create products for real audiences. Learning expeditions support critical literacy, promote character development, create a sense of adventure, spark curiosity, and foster an ethic of service. They address central academic standards of content, skills, and presentation, and include goals related to character and community. They allow for and encourage the authentic integration of disciplines.

Teachers work together to ensure that learning expeditions align with local standards. A coherent sequence of learning expeditions is mapped vertically through the grade levels to ensure that expedition topics are not repeated and that students learn essential skills and knowledge.

While learning expeditions are the primary curricular structure in an Expeditionary Learning school, other curricular structures, programs, materials, projects, and lessons are also used when appropriate or required (e.g., commercial math programs). As much as possible, however, these other curricular structures incorporate essential elements of learning expeditions such as products, literacy, and service.

The elements of a learning expedition are addressed in different places throughout the Core Practice Benchmarks. These elements include: standards, compelling topics, guiding questions, character, literacy, student products, service, adventure, and assessment.

BENCHMARK 1:

IMPLEMENTING LEARNING EXPEDITIONS ACROSS THE SCHOOL

A. Scope of Expeditions

1. Most curriculum is taught in learning expeditions or through projects that have elements of expeditions.
2. All learning expeditions integrate skills such as reading, writing, listening, speaking, and research.
3. Expeditions integrate content areas when the integrity and standards of the disciplines can be preserved.
4. The schoolwide plan for learning expeditions includes expeditions that address diversity, equity, social justice, and multicultural issues.

B. Standards, Alignment, and Mapping

1. The school maps content and process standards across the grade levels and aligns those standards with learning expeditions and other curriculum structures.
2. Learning expeditions and standards are checked across grade levels to assure that expedition content is not repeated.
3. Local, state, and national standards are addressed through the content, the projects, the products, and the guiding questions.

C. Quality Control

1. The school has structures in place to review the quality of learning expeditions.
2. The school uses protocols for colleagues to critique each other's learning expeditions.

D. Documentation

1. The school has a system to document learning expedition plans, assessment tools, and student work across the grade levels.
2. All teachers document their work in planning and teaching learning expeditions (e.g., expedition plans, daily lessons, assessment tools, and student work).