

Culture and Character: Building School Culture and Fostering Character

Overview

An Expeditionary Learning school culture is developed and sustained through practices that bring the community together, promote shared understandings, and encourage all community members to become crew, not passengers.

Teaching practices and schoolwide structures ensure that all students are well known by adults and peers. The faculty articulates and promotes a set of character traits that are emphasized throughout the school. Teachers foster student character through challenging academic work, service, and the expectation that students are courteous, respectful, and compassionate.

Public and classroom spaces reflect the values of the Expeditionary Learning Design Principles, showcase the work of students, and facilitate collaboration.

BENCHMARK 1:

BUILDING SCHOOL CULTURE AND FOSTERING CHARACTER

A. Rituals and Traditions

1. A common set of Expeditionary Learning rituals and traditions (e.g., community meetings, readings, team building) are used in schoolwide gatherings and in classrooms.
2. In addition, the school develops its own unique rituals and traditions that express its identity and vision.

B. Knowing Students Well

1. The school ensures that every student is known well by at least one adult who serves as an advocate for the student's academic and social progress.
2. Morning meetings, flexible groupings, crews, and regular check-ins or conferences with individual students enable teachers to know students well.
3. Mentorships and internships foster relationships between students and community members.

C. Character Traits

1. School leaders and faculty articulate a set of character traits and a code of conduct consonant with the Expeditionary Learning Design Principles.
2. The character traits express the school's vision for a productive and courteous community.
3. The character traits are clearly stated in school documents (e.g., handbooks, newsletters, visual representations) and in the school's code of conduct.
4. Teachers foster the character traits through learning expeditions and instructional practices as well as through activities specifically focused on community building.
5. Character traits are reinforced within classrooms, in common areas throughout the building, and in all school-related activities.

D. Service and Service Learning

1. Teachers integrate service with academics through learning expeditions and other project-based work.
2. Students have many opportunities to practice service within the school and in the surrounding community.

E. Physical Environment and School Tone

1. Classrooms and common space are attractive, clean, orderly, and in good repair.
2. High quality student work, rather than commercial materials, is displayed.
3. Students play an active role in the life of the school (e.g., morning announcements, maintaining the building, mentoring younger children, leading meetings, greeting visitors).
4. Classrooms are arranged to accommodate class meetings and to encourage various configurations for instruction.