

Culture and Character: Developing a Professional Community

Overview

School leaders, teachers, and staff in Expeditionary Learning schools are members of a community of learners. Professionals work together to share expertise, improve the school's program, build background knowledge in their disciplines, and model collaborative learning for students. Staff culture is characterized by a respectful collegiality where teachers resist judgment and blame, and support each other in improving practice. Teachers and school leaders model a safe community that fosters high quality work. Professional development for individual teachers and for the staff as a whole is at the heart of the school.

BENCHMARK 5:

DEVELOPING A PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY

A. Building and Modeling an Expeditionary Learning School Culture

1. Adults at the school are themselves learners, willing to implement and master new practices and model learning for students.
2. Staff members live by and model the school's code of character.
3. Expeditionary Learning instructional practices are used at staff meetings and in other professional development.
4. The professional community uses and models rituals such as opening readings, circles, and team-building activities to build and sustain their own culture.
5. Staff members take responsibility for all students and not only their own; they reinforce schoolwide expectations, foster all students' learning, and work to ensure their physical and emotional safety.
6. Teachers new to teaching or to the school are mentored.
7. The faculty establishes and maintains structures (mentoring, teaming, peer supervision) that build trust and allow teachers to support and advise one another.
8. Adults in the school always discuss students and their families respectfully.

B. Practices and Protocols for Effective Collaboration

1. Adults establish norms for working together and adhere to those norms in all settings.
2. Teachers use established protocols and strategies to collectively examine and evaluate learning expedition plans, instructional practices, and assessment practices.
3. Teachers expand their repertoire of practices by drawing on the strengths of colleagues in other disciplines.
4. Collaborative time also is used to analyze and make sense of student work.

C. Focus on Growth Over Time

1. Teachers work to hone the craft of their teaching by increasing both their repertoire of instructional practices and the quality of their use.
2. Teachers are committed to increasing their own disciplinary knowledge and understanding.
3. Members of the professional community participate in Expeditionary Learning on-site and off-site professional development, communicate what they have learned to colleagues, and use what they have learned in their own teaching.
5. Teachers document their work (e.g., learning expedition plans, lesson and workshop design) to reflect, critique, and improve.