

A Different Approach to Teaching and Learning

EL Education creates classrooms where ...

Learning is challenging.

Students are supported to do far more than they think they can. Teachers expect excellence and teach in ways that enable students to learn deeply, surpass standards, and produce high-quality work. Students and teachers model academic courage.

Learning is active.

Students are scientists, urban planners, historians, artists, and activists, exploring ideas and engaging in authentic work that allows them to contribute to their communities and promote equity and social justice.

Learning is meaningful.

Students build deep understanding of concepts and can apply their skills and knowledge to new contexts and real-world issues. They are learning with a purpose—getting smart to do good—and see that their education is in service of building a better world.

Learning is collaborative.

School leaders, teachers, students, and families work together to create a culture of respect, responsibility, and joy in learning. The school community is a place where all students and adults feel that they belong, support each other to succeed, and are inspired to be their best selves.

Learning is public.

Students produce high-quality work for presentation to audiences within and beyond the school. They reflect on what and how they learn with peers, teachers, and community members. Hallways and classrooms are filled with evidence of learning and beautiful student work.

EL Education Core Practices

Our Core Practices address five key domains of life in school.

Curriculum

EL Education’s approach to curriculum promotes both challenge and joy in learning. We encourage educators to use, adapt, or design curricula that allow all students to grapple with demanding, standards-based content and meaningful tasks and produce high-quality work. We believe curricula should elevate student collaboration, voice, thinking, and reflection; should reflect a commitment to developing character; and should empower students to contribute to a more just and equitable world.

Instruction

EL Education promotes instruction that is alive with discovery, inquiry, critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration. Teachers talk less. Students talk and think more. Lessons challenge, engage, and empower students with complex issues, text, and problems. They lift up big disciplinary ideas and give students practice with the tools and skills professionals use in the real world as they create high-quality work. Teachers differentiate instruction and empower all students to be self-directed, independent learners.

Culture and Character

The EL Education model fosters and celebrates students’ character development by building a culture in which students and staff work together to become effective learners and ethical people who contribute to a better world. Schools establish Habits of Character—qualities like respect, responsibility, courage, and kindness—and model and discuss them every day. The school is suffused by a spirit of crew: students and staff work together as a team to sustain a learning community where everyone belongs and can succeed.

Student-Engaged Assessment

EL Education believes that assessment practices should motivate students to become leaders of their own learning. Students track their progress toward standards-based learning targets, set goals, and reflect on growth and challenges. Students and teachers regularly analyze quantitative and qualitative data that include assessments, reflections, and student work and use those data to inform goals and instruction. Students regularly present evidence of their achievement and growth through student-led family conferences, passage presentations, and celebrations of learning.

Leadership

EL Education supports school leaders to build a cohesive school vision focused on EL Education’s Dimensions of Student Achievement, continuous improvement, and shared leadership. Leaders align resources and activities to the school’s vision and lead a professional culture with a growth mindset. Leaders shape school structures to provide equitable education to all students, celebrate joy in learning, and build a schoolwide learning community of trust and collaboration. Leaders work collaboratively with families, staff, and students to make evidence-based decisions that enable all students to achieve.

EL Education Design Principles

1. The Primacy of Self-Discovery

Learning happens best with emotion, challenge, and the requisite support. People discover their abilities, values, passions, and responsibilities in situations that offer adventure and the unexpected. In EL Education schools, students undertake tasks that require perseverance, fitness, craftsmanship, imagination, self-discipline, and significant achievement. A teacher's primary task is to help students overcome their fears and discover they can do more than they think they can.

2. The Having of Wonderful Ideas

Teaching in EL Education schools fosters curiosity about the world by creating learning situations that provide something important to think about, time to experiment, and time to make sense of what is observed.

3. The Responsibility for Learning

Learning is both a personal process of discovery and a social activity. Everyone learns both individually and as part of a group. Every aspect of an EL Education school encourages both children and adults to become increasingly responsible for directing their own personal and collective learning.

4. Empathy and Caring

Learning is fostered best in communities where students' and teachers' ideas are respected and where there is mutual trust. Learning groups are small in EL Education schools, with a caring adult looking after the progress and acting as an advocate for each child. Older students mentor younger ones, and students feel physically and emotionally safe.

5. Success and Failure

All students need to be successful if they are to build the confidence and capacity to take risks and meet increasingly difficult challenges. But it is also important for students to learn from their failures, to persevere when things are hard, and to learn to turn disabilities into opportunities.

6. Collaboration and Competition

Individual development and group development are integrated so that the value of friendship, trust, and group action is clear. Students are encouraged to compete, not against each other, but with their own personal best and with rigorous standards of excellence.

7. Diversity and Inclusion

Both diversity and inclusion increase the richness of ideas, creative power, problem-solving ability, and respect for others. In EL Education schools, students investigate and value their different histories and talents as well as those of other communities and cultures. Schools and learning groups are heterogeneous.

8. The Natural World

A direct and respectful relationship with the natural world refreshes the human spirit and teaches the important ideas of recurring cycles and cause and effect. Students learn to become stewards of the earth and of future generations.

9. Solitude and Reflection

Students and teachers need time alone to explore their own thoughts, make their own connections, and create their own ideas. They also need to exchange their reflections with other students and with adults.

10. Service and Compassion

We are crew, not passengers. Students and teachers are strengthened by acts of consequential service to others, and one of an EL Education school's primary functions is to prepare students with the attitudes and skills to learn from and be of service.

EL Education Dimensions of Student Achievement

Our definition of student achievement combines academic achievement, character, and high-quality work. We believe that academic success is built on strong character qualities of collaboration, perseverance, responsibility, and compassion, and that character is shaped through engaging and challenging academic work.

Dimension of Achievement	Students	Teachers and Leaders
Mastery of Knowledge and Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate proficiency and deeper understanding: show mastery in a body of knowledge and skills within each discipline • Apply their learning: transfer knowledge and skills to novel, meaningful tasks • Think critically: analyze, evaluate, and synthesize complex ideas and consider multiple perspectives • Communicate clearly: write, speak, and present ideas effectively in a variety of media within and across disciplines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that curriculum, instruction, and assessments are rigorous, meaningful, and aligned with standards • Use assessment practices that position students as leaders of their own learning • Use meaningful data for both teachers and students to track progress toward learning goals • Engage all students in daily lessons that require critical thinking about complex, worthy ideas, texts, and problems
Character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work to become effective learners: develop the mindsets and skills for success in college, career, and life (e.g., initiative, responsibility, perseverance, collaboration) • Work to become ethical people: treat others well and stand up for what is right (e.g., empathy, integrity, respect, compassion) • Contribute to a better world: put their learning to use to improve communities (e.g., citizenship, service) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elevate student voice and leadership in classrooms and across the school • Make Habits of Scholarship visible across the school and in daily instruction • Model a schoolwide culture of respect and compassion • Prioritize social and emotional learning, along with academic learning, across the school
High-Quality Student Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create complex work: demonstrate higher-order thinking, multiple perspectives, and transfer of understanding • Demonstrate craftsmanship: create work that is accurate and beautiful in conception and execution • Create authentic work: demonstrate original thinking and voice, connect to real-world issues and formats, and, when possible, create work that is meaningful to the community beyond the school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design tasks that ask students to apply, analyze, evaluate, and create as part of their work • Use models of excellence, critique, and multiple drafts to support all students to produce work of exceptional quality • Connect students to the world beyond school through meaningful fieldwork, expert collaborators, research, and service learning