

Core Practice 23

Building a Spirit of Crew

In the EL Education model, the tradition of Crew is both a spirit and a structure. The term “crew” comes from the words of Kurt Hahn, whose work in education inspired the EL Education motto “We are crew, not passengers.” The spirit of crew impels all members of a school community to work together as a team, to pitch in, to help others. We are all getting up the mountain together—individual success is not enough. The structure of Crew—daily meetings to support everyone’s learning and growth—makes time for students to build meaningful relationships with peers and their Crew leader, to reflect on and monitor academic progress, and to focus on character development. Crew is also an engine for equity and inclusion, a place where all students feel they belong and can succeed. Crew leaders strategically plan Crew meetings to address and assess these multiple goals.

Other school structures can also help build crew spirit and make sure every student is well known and supported by peers and adults (community meetings; mentoring; peer counseling; restorative justice work; apprenticeships). The spirit of crew extends beyond the school walls to relationships with families and community members.

A. Building Relationships and Fostering Crew Spirit

1. Leaders and teachers ensure that every student is matched to an adult member of the school staff who gets to know that student well and serves as an advocate for the student’s academic and social progress.
2. Leaders and teachers use a variety of structures and strategies to get to know students well (e.g., Crew time, flexible grouping, regular check-ins). They foster crew spirit by supporting students to make friends, be heard, and interact as contributing members of the school community.
 - a. Leaders and teachers create structures for welcoming new students who arrive mid-year.
 - b. Leaders and teachers foster multi-year connections between students of different ages, and between students and adults in school and in the community. These connections may take the form of reading buddies, tutoring, mentoring, internships, apprenticeships, or other partnerships.
 - c. Leaders and teachers support students to feel valued, respected, safe, and included regardless of differences.
 - d. Leaders and teachers support all students to succeed and hold them accountable for high academic expectations.
3. Leaders and teachers celebrate the contributions of members of the learning community through community meetings, events, and other traditions.

B. Crew as a Structure in Primary and Elementary Classrooms

1. In primary and elementary classrooms, teachers generally serve as Crew leaders for their entire class. They typically

hold Crew meetings daily at the beginning of the day (sometimes referred to as “morning meeting”) and sometimes also at the end of the day.

2. Whenever possible, students in Crew sit or stand in a circle so they can see and hear each without the interference of furniture. A circle allows Crew members to be equally vulnerable, joyfully connected, and supportive of one another.
3. Teachers as Crew leaders plan and facilitate Crew experiences that support building relationships, Habits of Character, literacy, portfolio work, adventure, service learning, and to address schoolwide issues.
 - a. Crew leaders incorporate greetings, stories, appreciations, apologies and other activities that foster students’ sense of relationship, belonging, and self-efficacy.
 - b. Crew leaders engage students in collaboration and competition in a joyful, supportive environment (e.g., through the use of team building initiatives and cooperative problem-solving games). They debrief initiatives by helping students reflect on skills and mindsets that can be applied beyond the activity.
 - c. Crew leaders facilitate student reflection on their Habits of Character. Positive behavior is celebrated. Concerns about behavior (discourtesy, bullying, exclusion, or not following classroom norms) are often addressed in Crew, sometimes through restorative justice circles or other conflict mediation strategies.
 - d. Crew leaders facilitate student reflection on the relationship between their academic progress, Habits of Scholarship, and the quality of their work. Often, students work on portfolios or prepare for student-led conferences in Crew.

- e. Crew leaders help students understand foundational concepts of EL Education such as the concept of “crew not passengers,” the Design Principles, growth mindset, and Habits of Character.
4. Crew leaders form positive relationships with parents and other care providers, monitor academic progress, and lead interventions as needed so that every student knows that he/she can be a successful member of the Crew.

C. Crew in Secondary Classrooms

1. Leaders and teachers establish a schedule that allows for Crew to meet on a consistent basis for a significant amount of time (30-60 minutes) most days of the week, every day if possible. (Crew is structured similarly to what some schools call “advisory.”)
2. Leaders and teachers develop a schoolwide Crew curriculum with the following features:
 - a. Includes learning targets, common lessons, common procedures, and tools for progress monitoring.
 - b. Designates specific purposes for Crew on different days or for different grade levels (e.g., literacy on Tuesdays, college preparation for juniors).
 - c. Provides consistency in Crews across the school but also allows for individual Crew leaders to craft or customize lessons for Crew members.
 - d. Provides a pathway for college preparation (e.g., college visits, college research, applications, financial forms, interview preparation).
3. Leaders and teachers are careful to keep Crew sizes small (8-15 students), so that students can fully participate and develop meaningful relationships with their Crew members. Often staff beyond classroom teachers are trained and supported to be Crew leaders (e.g., athletic coaches, office staff, custodians, counselors).
4. Leaders and teachers determine how students’ are grouped for Crew in the way the school feels works best in its culture. Often Crews stay together over multiple years and Crew leaders stay with one Crew for multiple years (e.g., three years of middle school; four years of high school).
5. Leaders provide professional development for Crew leaders and support them with ongoing coaching, check-ins, and sometimes a facilitated “adult Crew” experience that mirrors student Crew. They ensure that Crew leaders are trained and prepared to be advocates for students in their Crew.
6. Crew is not homeroom. Crew leaders plan and prepare for meaningful lessons with learning targets. Students are active participants and leaders in Crew. In many schools Crew is a credit-bearing, graded course. High

school juniors and seniors use Crew to prepare for college admissions and post-secondary life.

7. Character, literacy, portfolio work, adventure, service learning, and to address schoolwide issues.
 - a. Crew leaders incorporate greetings, stories, appreciations, apologies and other activities that foster students’ sense of relationship, belonging, and self-efficacy.
 - b. Crew leaders engage students in collaboration and competition in a joyful, supportive environment (e.g., through the use of team building initiatives and cooperative problem-solving games). They debrief initiatives by helping students reflect on skills and mindsets that can be applied beyond the activity.
 - c. Crew leaders facilitate student reflection on their Habits of Character. Positive behavior is celebrated. Concerns about behavior (discourtesy, bullying, exclusion, or not following classroom norms) are often addressed in Crew, sometimes through restorative justice circles or other conflict mediation strategies.
 - d. Crew leaders facilitate student reflection on the relationship between their academic progress, Habits of Scholarship, and the quality of their work. Students often work on portfolios or prepare for student-led conferences in Crew.
 - e. Crew leaders help students understand foundational concepts of EL Education such as the concept of “crew not passengers,” the Design Principles, growth mindset, Habits of Character.
 - f. Crew leaders facilitate restorative justice circles in Crew or otherwise use the structure of Crew to mediate and resolve conflicts.
8. Crew leaders ensure that all their students know about and have access to demanding academic courses, extracurricular activities, academic and social supports, and the best sequence of classes for college placement or post-graduation pursuits.
9. Crew leaders form positive relationships with parents and other care providers, monitor academic progress, and facilitate conversations between students, care providers, and other staff members as needed so that every student knows that he/she can be a successful member of the Crew and is ready for graduation.