

Character Growth in EL Education – Ron Berger

In EL Education, Character Education Is Not a Separate Topic

EL Education does not provide a discrete character education program because we believe that character is not separate from scholarship: character education happens all day long. Explicit focus on character, reflection on character, and critique of character is present in every part of school, whether students are in hallways or in classes. School leaders and staff model positive character in all settings, in front of students and apart from students. Schools embrace the Structure of Crew and the Spirit of Crew: everyone thinking and working to help others in a team approach all day long.

When students or staff act in ways that do not represent good character, which is inevitable, those moments create the opportunity for character growth. If those moments are ignored, people get the message that it doesn't really matter what kind of person they are as long as they get their work done. If those moments—even in the middle of a busy day—are called out explicitly and processed well, they set the tone for a school that is “no excuses” for what matters most: respect, responsibility, courage, and kindness.

Character Is Supported in All Domains of School

- **Curriculum:** Students are given individual and group responsibility to take on challenging work together, to collaborate, to persevere, and to create work of quality to contribute to the world.
- **Instruction:** Teachers design and lead instruction that requires students to grapple with complex concepts and content, individually and collaboratively in groups. Lessons are challenging, engaging and empowering.
- **Assessment:** Assessment is student-engaged: students take responsibility for tracking their own growth toward clear targets, and gather and present evidence of their growth in scholarship and character.
- **School Culture:** School culture is founded on character values and habits of scholarship that are alive for students and faculty all day long. The school promotes a culture of respect, equity and inclusion, and of quality.
- **Leadership:** School leadership models and leads the school's character values across the school community—the most important role they serve.

Character Is Supported in School Structures in which Character is Explicitly Addressed

1. **Habits of Character Frameworks:** Character Codes for the school; Habits of Scholarship/Habits of Work for classrooms; norms for faculty and students; classroom constitutions
2. **Respectful Meetings:** Crew meetings; community meetings; morning meetings; closing meetings; restorative justice and disciplinary meetings; faculty meetings; team meetings; department meetings
3. **Presentations of Learning:** Student-led conferences; passage presentations; celebrations of learning; faculty presentations
4. **Environment:** Displays, galleries and documentation panels that celebrate learning, quality work and character growth throughout the school—in classrooms and common spaces
5. **Rituals and Appreciations:** Celebrations of good work and virtue in public and private settings for faculty, staff and students are built into school traditions—verbally, in writing, and symbolically
6. **Opportunities for Adventure, Challenge and Growth:** Students and faculty taking risks, going beyond comfort zones, and showing courage in academic, physical, artistic and social realms.
7. **Opportunities to Contribute to a Better World:** Students and faculty showing civic character by working to better their community and stand up for justice.