Core Practice 23
Building the Culture and Structure of Crew

In the EL Education model, the tradition of Crew is both a culture and a structure. The term "crew" comes from educator Kurt Hahn, founder of Outward Bound. Hahn’s quote "We are crew, not passengers, strengthened by acts of consequential service to others" inspired the EL Education motto, "We are crew." The culture of crew impels all members of a school community to work together as a team, to pitch in, to help others. Staff and students help their colleagues and peers get 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 culture and ensure that every student is well known and supported by peers and adults (e.g., community meetings, mentoring, peer counseling, restorative justice work, apprenticeships). The culture of crew extends beyond the school walls to relationships with families and community members.

A. Fostering a Culture of Crew among Staff
1. Leaders and teachers establish a culture of crew among staff that supports and is a model for the culture of crew among students.
2. Leaders and teachers ensure that every staff member feels respected and valued as part of the culture of crew, as well as supported to grow personally and professionally. (See also Core Practice 34: Cultivating a Positive Professional Culture.)
3. Leaders and teachers create structures and strategies to cultivate a positive culture among staff (e.g., orientation, mentoring, communication norms, team-building activities, readings, staff events that build relationships, appreciation traditions).
4. Leaders and teachers create systems to overcome challenges to a positive culture of crew (e.g., conversation protocols for discussion of diversity and equity, including staff members’ own backgrounds and identities; equitable decision-making processes; protocols for conflict resolution among staff or in response to school crises).
5. Leaders and teachers plan staff Crew meetings to fit the school community (e.g., whole staff Crew meetings, grade/team or department Crew meetings, mixed small groups from across the building that meet regularly as staff Crews).
6. Staff Crew meetings (or the crew components of staff meetings) are focused not on the “business” of school, but on staff relationships, emotional health, growth, and sustainability.
7. Leaders and teachers sometimes use staff Crew as a structure to prepare staff to lead a student Crew effectively.

B. Fostering a Culture of Crew among Students
1. Leaders and teachers ensure that every student has a Crew leader 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, home visits, flexible grouping, regular check-ins). They foster a culture of crew by supporting students to make friends, be heard, and interact as contributing members of the school community.

Professional learning for Crew facilitation includes:

a. Providing a Crew curriculum framework
b. Providing sample Crew lessons or a Crew lesson format
c. Teaching greetings and debrief strategies
d. Modeling effective Crew facilitation (e.g., circling up, greetings, initiatives)
e. Teaching specific team-building activities
f. Teaching strategies for relationship-building, conflict resolution, and courageous conversations
g. Addressing questions and concerns about Crew

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e. Teaching specific team-building activities
f. Teaching strategies for relationship-building, conflict resolution, and courageous conversations
g. Addressing questions and concerns about Crew
c. Leaders and teachers support students to feel safe, valued, respected, and included regardless of background or identity.

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.

C. 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 other without the interference of furniture. A circle allows Crew members to be equally vulnerable, 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, and service learning.

   a. Crew leaders incorporate greetings, stories, appreciations, apologies, and other activities that foster students' sense of purpose, belonging, and agency.

   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 (e.g., discourtesy, bullying, exclusion, or not following classroom norms) are often addressed in Crew, sometimes through restorative circles or other conflict mediation strategies.

   d. Crew leaders facilitate student reflection on the relationship among their academic progress, Habits of Scholarship, and 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.

D. Crew as a Structure 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 to 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 Crews small (8 to 15 students), so that students can fully participate and develop meaningful relationships with their peers and Crew leaders. 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. 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. 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 postsecondary life.

6. Teachers as Crew leaders plan and facilitate Crew experiences that address healthy relationships, Habits of Character, literacy, portfolio work, adventure, and service learning.

   a. Crew leaders incorporate greetings, stories, appreciations, apologies, and other activities that foster students' sense of purpose, belonging, and agency.
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.

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d. Crew leaders facilitate student reflection on the relationship among their academic progress, Habits of Scholarship, and 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, and Habits of Character.

7. 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 postgraduation pursuits.

8. Crew leaders guide and support the college application process for students, including financial aid and scholarships, especially for first-generation college applicants. School counselors support Crew leaders in this work.

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.