



Hayden Canyon Charter

Expeditionary Learning Family Guide

A parent and family reference for the EL Education model

The big idea

Students learn important content, practice habits of character, and create work that is meaningful, polished, and worth sharing.

What families may notice

You may hear students talk about crew, expeditions, critique, revision, fieldwork, experts, portfolios, and celebrations of learning.

How to use this

Use this guide to understand school language, ask students better questions, and see how family support connects to classroom learning.

What Makes EL Education Different

Term	What it means for families
EL Education	A school model that grew from Expeditionary Learning. It connects strong academics, character development, collaboration, and meaningful student work.
Mastery of Knowledge and Skills	Students are expected to understand important ideas deeply and use skills in reading, writing, math, science, social studies, arts, and problem solving.
Character	Students practice habits that help them learn and contribute, such as responsibility, perseverance, collaboration, courage, compassion, and integrity.
High-Quality Work	Students create work that shows care, accuracy, complexity, and craftsmanship. They often revise work several times before it is considered finished.
Crew	A small community where students build belonging, set goals, reflect, solve problems, and support one another. Crew is also a schoolwide idea: we are responsible for each other.
We Are Crew	A phrase that means no one is just a passenger. Students, families, and staff all help the community learn and thrive.
Learning Targets	Student-friendly learning goals, often written as "I can..." statements. They help students know what they are working toward and how to reflect on progress.
Student Ownership	Students are taught to track their learning, explain their growth, ask for help, use feedback, and take responsibility for next steps.



Learning Experiences Families May Hear About

Term	What it means for families
Learning Expedition	A deep study of a topic or problem that may connect multiple subjects. Students investigate, read, discuss, create, and often share a final product.
Module	A unit of study organized around texts, questions, skills, and assessments. A module may be part of a larger expedition or curriculum sequence.
Guiding Question	A big question that focuses student thinking. It is meant to invite curiosity and return throughout the unit as students learn more.
Case Study	A focused example students study closely, such as a local issue, historical event, ecosystem, person, community, or text set.
Fieldwork	Purposeful learning beyond the classroom. Students may observe, collect information, interview, sketch, measure, or investigate in a real-world setting.
Expert	A person with knowledge or lived experience who supports student learning. Experts may visit class, answer questions, review work, or serve as an audience.
Service Learning	Learning that leads to contribution. Students use academic skills to help, inform, improve, or support something beyond the classroom.
Authentic Audience	People beyond the teacher who see, use, learn from, or respond to student work. This can include families, community members, experts, younger students, or local partners.

Family question to ask

What are you investigating, why does it matter, and who will learn from or use your work?



Feedback, Revision, and Student Work

Term	What it means for families
Critique	Structured feedback that is kind, specific, and helpful. Students learn how to give feedback that improves work without discouraging the learner.
Revision	Improving work after feedback. In EL classrooms, revision is normal and expected because quality usually takes more than one draft.
Craftsmanship	Careful attention to detail, accuracy, beauty, clarity, and pride. It can show up in writing, math explanations, presentations, art, design, and public products.
Model or Exemplar	An example students study to understand what quality looks like. Students analyze models so they can name strong features and apply them to their own work.
Criteria for Success	A clear list of what strong work should include. Criteria help students check their work before turning it in.
Rubric	A tool that describes levels of quality. Rubrics help students, teachers, and families talk about strengths and next steps more clearly.
Product	A polished piece of work created for a real purpose or audience. Products may be books, exhibits, speeches, maps, podcasts, reports, performances, or presentations.
Celebration of Learning	A public event where students explain what they learned, show evidence, and reflect on growth. It is more than a display; students should be able to talk about their learning.

Instead of asking

"Is it done?"

Try asking

"What feedback did you use?"

Then ask

"What are you improving next?"



Assessment and Communication

Term	What it means for families
Formative Assessment	A check during learning that helps teachers and students decide what to do next. It may be quick, informal, and not always graded.
Benchmark	A checkpoint before final work is due. Benchmarks help students see progress early enough to revise.
Portfolio	A collection of work that shows progress, achievement, reflection, and goals. Portfolios help students tell the story of their learning over time.
Student-Led Conference	A conference where the student explains progress, strengths, challenges, and goals using evidence from their work.
Performance Task	An assessment where students apply learning in a meaningful way, such as writing, presenting, solving a problem, or creating a product.
Standards-Based Grading	A way of reporting progress on specific skills or standards. It is designed to show what a student has learned and what still needs attention.
Reflection	Students think about what they learned, how they learned it, and what they will do next. Reflection helps students build independence.
Goal Setting	Students identify a clear next step and track progress. Goals may focus on academics, habits of character, collaboration, or quality of work.

At conferences or exhibitions

Listen for students to explain evidence: what they learned, what changed from draft to draft, what was challenging, and what they are proud of.



How Families Can Support EL Learning

Term	How this helps your student
Ask about purpose	What is this work for? Who is the audience? Why does this topic matter?
Ask about process	What did you try first? What feedback did you get? What did you revise?
Ask about evidence	What part of your work shows your strongest thinking? What makes you say that?
Ask about character	How did you show perseverance, collaboration, responsibility, compassion, or courage today?
Support fieldwork	Help students prepare to observe carefully, ask respectful questions, and connect real-world experiences to classroom learning.
Attend public learning events	Celebrations of learning and student-led conferences matter because students practice explaining their growth to an audience.
Value revision	Treat multiple drafts as a sign of serious learning. Encourage students to use feedback and make work stronger.
Stay curious	If a term is unfamiliar, ask your student to explain it. Explaining school language helps students understand it more deeply too.

Quick Translation Guide

Term	What it means for families
Crew	Advisory, belonging, and shared responsibility.
Expedition	A deep investigation or unit of study.
Critique	Kind, specific, helpful feedback.
Revision	Improving work using feedback and criteria.
Fieldwork	Purposeful learning outside the classroom.
Celebration of Learning	A public student presentation of learning and growth.

Selected Sources

EL Education, The EL Education Model and public resources, <https://www.eleducation.org>

EL Education, Core Practices: A Vision for Improving Schools, EL Education, commonly used as a model implementation reference.

Berger, Ron, An Ethic of Excellence: Building a Culture of Craftsmanship with Students, Heinemann, 2003.

EL Education, Leaders of Their Own Learning: Transforming Schools Through Student-Engaged Assessment, Jossey-Bass, 2014.