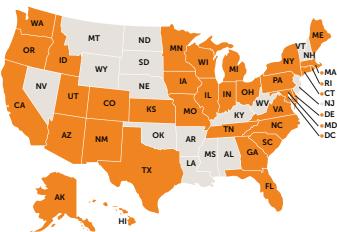


InFOCUS

Evaluation of Expeditionary Learning Middle Schools

Expeditionary Learning (EL) Schools



The EL model is in operation in more than 160 schools in 30 states.

Educators are seeking ways to help students develop the broad range of competencies covered by the new Common Core standards and assessments. The [Expeditionary Learning \(EL\) model](#), which operates in more than 160 schools in 30 states, provides an interdisciplinary curriculum for students and professional development services for teachers and school leaders. The model emphasizes five dimensions, which are implemented through a combination of curriculum resources, professional development institutes throughout the year, and on-site classroom coaching. The EL curriculum includes several elements that are closely aligned with Common Core standards for English language arts and literacy.

In the first rigorous study of the impacts of EL schools, Mathematica Policy Research found that EL middle school students perform better in reading and math than their counterparts in other public schools. The study team examined student performance on the existing state reading and math assessments up to three years after students enrolled in five EL middle schools (assessments were not yet based on the Common Core standards). We found that the schools had positive, statistically significant impacts on both reading and math. [Read the full report.](#)

KEY FINDINGS

Based on the impact estimates, the five EL schools increase reading and math significantly on average:

- In **reading**, EL students experience positive impacts that are approximately equal in magnitude to an extra five months of learning growth after two years (.11 standard deviations) or an extra seven months of learning growth after three years (.16 standard deviations).
- In **math**, EL students experience positive impacts equal to about an extra three months of learning growth after two years (.09 standard deviations) or 10 months of extra learning growth after three years (.29 standard deviations).

Positive impacts on EL students in Reading

after 2 years

+5 months
of learning growth

after 3 years

+7 months
of learning growth

Positive impacts on EL students in Math

after 2 years

+3 months
of learning growth

after 3 years

+10 months
of learning growth

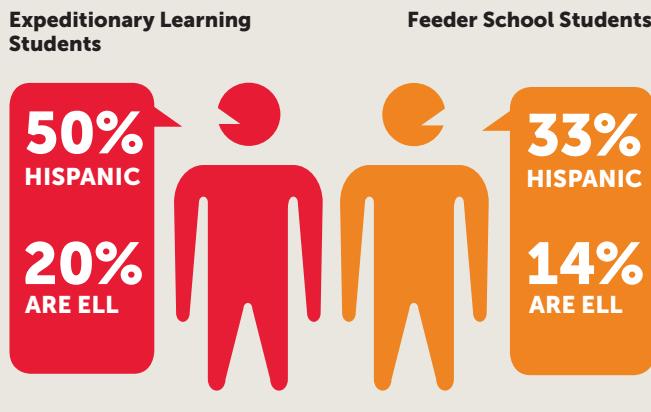
ABOUT THE STUDENTS

EL students and students at EL feeder schools have similar baseline test scores in reading and math.



EL students in the five study schools are more likely to be Hispanic and more likely to be English language learners (ELLs) compared with students who attended the same elementary feeder schools (the elementary schools previously attended by EL students).

Otherwise, EL students in the five sample schools are demographically similar to students in feeder schools.



ABOUT THE STUDY

A Rigorous Study Methodology:

COMPARISON GROUP WITH SIMILAR CHARACTERISTICS

- Demographics
- Baseline achievement



ADDRESS ADDITIONAL THREATS TO VALIDITY

- Student attrition
- Repeating grades

Mathematica was commissioned by Expeditionary Learning to conduct an independent evaluation of the program. Mathematica's team matched students from five urban middle schools founded in partnership with EL in Washington, DC, and New York City to a comparison group of students with similar demographic characteristics and baseline achievement in the two years before students entered EL schools. The team also used a variety of methods to mitigate potential threats to the study's validity, such as student attrition and repeating a grade. This rigorous approach helped to ensure that the estimated impacts on student performance were caused by the EL model and not variations in student characteristics or student achievement trends from prior years.

AREAS FOR FUTURE STUDY

Future studies would deepen the understanding of the EL program's effectiveness and build on the evidence base developed by this study.

- ▶ Studying a larger sample of schools within the national EL network would show whether the model could be scaled up and replicated at other schools, particularly in suburban and rural communities.

▶ Examining outcomes beyond reading and math would help policymakers understand the broad impacts of the EL model's interdisciplinary curriculum, which emphasizes project-based learning and includes several elements aligned with the Common Core curriculum. In addition, using new Common Core reading and math assessments will provide further insight into EL's impacts.

▶ Identifying which components of EL's multifaceted approach are strongly associated with impacts on student achievement would highlight potential best practices for school leaders.

