



# Santa Fe Public Schools

## Schools of Innovation Proposal Brief

### **PURPOSE**

This brief proposal allows school leaders to present an innovation concept for consideration for designation as a Santa Fe Public Schools School of Innovation. If approved by the Board of Education, the school will enter **Year 1: Planning and Training** for SY 26-27.

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### **SCHOOL INFORMATION**

**School Name:** Gonzales Community School

**Principal:** Christopher Lopez

**Grade Levels Served:** K-8

**Current Enrollment:** 297

**Proposed Innovation Focus Area:** Expeditionary Learning

**Requested Planning Year:** 2026-2027

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### **INNOVATION OVERVIEW**

Provide a brief description of the proposed innovation. Clearly describe what will look different for students and teachers in daily classroom practice.

Include:

- What the innovation is



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- How instruction or programming will differ from current practice
- What students will experience differently

*(Approximately 1–2 paragraphs)*

**Response:**

Gonzales Community School would like to transition to an Expeditionary Learning (EL) school. This is contemplated at a three year integration cycle with the first year being a staff development year. Expeditionary Learning is methodology of teaching and learning that builds student proficiency through tapping into the students’ innate curiosity. The structure of EL is to formulate a series of “Expeditions” throughout the school year that are typically student generated ideas, thoughts, or themes that are to be explored by the “crew.” The crew is the moniker given to the ethos of EL. It is the Expeditionary Learners’ way of being, its essence. Crew members are composed of all learners on campus, staff and students, and its general foundation is that the members are all contributing to the betterment of their larger community. This community is often contemplated as the school, at its nascency, but later becomes the world writ large.

This foundation is in contrast to current practice in two main ways. First, teaching will be primarily project or thematic at its base. The chosen unifying concept will be the lens through which all the standards are taught (though, there may be some outlying standards based concepts that may have to be taught in stand alone lessons). The students will be asked to make progress toward accomplishing the goal of that unifying concept to ultimately present their proficiency during a culminating activity. This can take many forms, but is often a showcase where the student becomes a teacher around their expedition. Second, the structure of EL is student-centered. Its engagement strategies are built in and not reliant on lecturing or didactic instruction. The Crew is responsible to themselves and the other crew members, which forces students to see learning as something to be pursued and not given to them. They are the drivers of their own edification and the crew ethos pushes this to the forefront. Learners are going to school for a purpose beyond doing something that they feel they are just “supposed to do.” Crew members start to see the bigger picture of the meaning of education and learning from their first days as an EL student.

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## **Problem of Practice / Rationale**

Explain the need for this innovation. Consider including:



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- Student achievement trends
- Engagement or attendance data
- Program gaps or unmet student needs
- Community demand

*(1 paragraph)*

**Response:**

Gonzales’s data shows that the school trends towards the middle of the New Mexico Vistas metric for school scoring since Vistas’s inception in the 22-23 school year. This tracks with anecdotal historical feelings around the school and its placement within the various metrics used by the state during different Federal Department of Education frameworks and dictates. What also seems apparent in these metrics, and in the raw data, is that Gonzales is often on the cusp of pushing into the upper tier of these ratings scales. The missing piece is, at least anecdotally and what is presented by district level data, is student engagement. The district tool that is used for administration led instructional walk-throughs note that the levels of engagement are highly rote and compliance based. This has been an area of both school and district priority for two school years and we have not seen much movement toward more student centered lesson delivery. EL would help push this methodology to the forefront and be a built-in foundation for achieving full engagement. The hypothesis is that this will push our overall achievement scores up as well. Our community has shown an interest in exploring all avenues for pushing us through the glass ceiling of the mid-tier as we know that our unlocked potential can take us to heights we know we can achieve.

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## **Expected Impact**

Identify **2–3 outcomes** the school expects the innovation to improve and how success will be measured. Examples may include:

- Increased academic achievement
- Improved attendance
- Increased student engagement
- Expanded access to advanced coursework
- Development of career pathways

**Response:**



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EL provides an avenue and opportunity for us to, first and foremost, increase student engagement. It forces our teachers and students to contemplate a different and more forward thinking version of education than the current model employs. Through this engagement we are hoping to see increased academic achievement, but beyond that, we are hoping to create citizens that actively engage in their own learning for the sake of their own personal growth and advancement, but ultimately the growth and advancement of their communities up to the global level as they realize that their voice is valuable to this development. Along with this goal would be improved attendance and more rigorous accessing of academic content.

The measurement for these outcomes would likely evolve over time in the EL structure, but we would begin by using the district’s walkthrough tool that measures engagement using the framework developed by the [Schlechty Center on Engagement](#). Improved attendance would be measured against our previous year’s attendance data. Lastly, through our data on engagement, we’d use our High Quality Instructional Materials and other supplemental materials vetted by district and building leadership specific to an expedition to engage more deeply in the content. We would then use existing assessment data measured against our scores prior to transitioning to the EL framework to assess our efficacy.

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## Initial Planning Approach

Briefly describe how the school will use Year 1 (Planning and Training) to prepare for implementation. This may include professional learning, curriculum design, staff collaboration, and any anticipated external partners supporting implementation.

*(1-2 paragraphs)*

### **Response:**

The EL planning year is set and mostly determined by the national EL consortium. They describe this year’s goal “to bring the EL Education Full Model vision to life through the support of building systems and structures that facilitate a culture of belonging and deep learning. We begin to work toward the 3 Dimensional Goals identified in the planning year. EL Education continues to support strategic planning and professional learning. Additionally, coaches begin the work of coaching toward impact and the workplan goals. Coaching includes supporting individual teachers or teams, building their instructional capacity within the model and supporting staff’s fluency and comfort with examining data.” Each prong of these goals is described in detail in a matrix that was given to Gonzales. The basic throughline is that every



step will be focused on building capacity for each staff member and providing the building and instructional leaders the tools to leverage this capacity to its fullest potential.

An additional focus for Year 1 implementation would be to foster a deep understanding of what this transition would mean for our existing Gonzales families. We would start this process by inviting our families into our initial planning after we have received the imprimatur of the Board to be a School of Innovation for Expeditionary Learning. We would first introduce the concept to our School Advisory Council and then hold a meeting with our entire community. The aims of these meetings would be to introduce the ideas and rationale behind the movement to EL. During the planning year, we would continue these meetings and include all that we are learning about EL and how it will apply to the following year's classes. The reasoning behind this would be twofold in that 1) it would garner excitement for the year to come and the great opportunities it would present to our stakeholders; but also 2) it would allow our families to make informed choices if they are nervous about EL as it applies to their student(s). And while, I don't anticipate much of a negative reception from our families, this would allow them the ability to voice their concerns for amelioration. Furthermore, these meetings and conversations would also present an opportunity for the Santa Fe community to hear what we are doing and for families that don't live in the GCS district to also make an informed choice if they would like a chance to join an EL school.

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## Preliminary Cost Considerations

Briefly describe any known or estimated costs associated with this innovation, including training, materials, external partnerships, and any anticipated funding sources (if applicable).

### **Response:**

The implementation of the EL curriculum will be phased in over three years. This will be done in partnership with the EL Education national group and the Thornburg Foundation respectively.

The EL Education group will provide the training and education for the staff throughout the 3 year implementation. [They have provided us with a scope of their services and the costs associated with each step.](#)

### **Year 1 – Planning Year**

The first year will be a “Planning Year” which will be necessary to foster a strong foundation for the EL model. It will be focused on bringing the EL vision to life at GCS through engaging all staff members in building understanding of the model and the rationale behind the EL model,



first at the macro level, but in its application to the Gonzales Community, as well. The ultimate goal will be to create a fertile ground for the next year’s implementation of the EL model across the Gonzales K-8 landscape.

**Cost:** \$30,450

**Year 2 – Implementation**

The design of the second year will be focused on “bring(ing) the EL Education Full Model vision to life through the support of building systems and structures that facilitate a culture of belonging and deep learning.” This phase of the plan will incorporate many days of training for school leaders as well as days for the full staff to plan and implement their Expeditions at their root levels so that each step of the journey is meticulously curated to achieve the best results possible for this stage of the transition. Networking and connecting with the EL community on the national scale are also contemplated in this phase. This is key in creating foundational support for the school as it begins to operate independently from the close proximity of the EL Education group.

**Cost:** \$59,500

**Year 3 – Ongoing Support**

The next year’s cost will be dependent on the level of need for the school as it begins its work without the direct support of the national EL entity. There are opportunities to purchase a la carte services based on these needs.

**Estimated Cost:** \$10,000–\$15,000

The meetings with the liaison for the Thornburg Foundation created optimism that the Foundation will be able to aid with the associated costs for transition to an EL School of Innovation for Gonzales. The liaison said that his board is looking for innovations that help foster a systemic change in schooling that focuses on a model of education that helps foster student facility through challenging and engaging conceptual frameworks. EL provides this in spades and is at its very core. The liaison stated that his board would be measuring the success of the initiatives through traditional measures, but also stated that we could incorporate data that could be delivered by those fostered within the EL model itself. Overall, the impression is favorable that the partnership between Thornburg and SFPS, through Gonzales’s journey to becoming an EL school would be strong and mutually beneficial.

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## Staff Awareness

Indicate the level of staff awareness or support.



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- Initial idea being explored
- Discussed with leadership team
- Discussed with staff

(Optional comment)

**Response:**

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## Principal Statement

I believe this innovation has the potential to improve student outcomes and align with the strategic priorities of Santa Fe Public Schools.

**Principal Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** 3/19/2026