

THE ODYSSEY SCHOOL

We Are Crew, Not Passengers

At Odyssey, learning is active, learning is challenging, learning is meaningful, learning is public, and learning is collaborative.

Amy Anderson, founder and parent

SCHOOL INFO:

Location: Denver, CO

Type: Charter

Focus: Applied- and Project-Based Learning

Network: Expeditionary Learning

Expeditionary Learning promotes high achievement in over 160 schools across the country by connecting student learning to the real world - using "learning expeditions" (extended projects) that join rigorous academics with citizenship and service to their community.

BY THE NUMBERS:

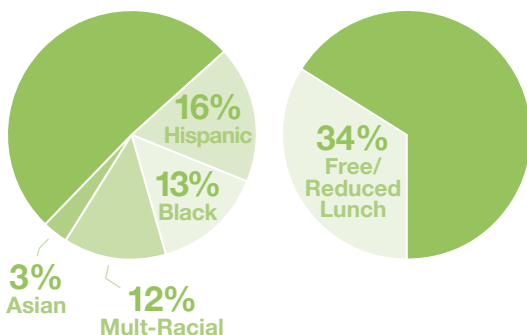
Date Opened: 1998

Grades Served: K-8

Enrollment: 234

Teachers: 16

Students Demographics:



What is Deeper Learning?

Deeper Learning teaches students to master core academic content, think critically, solve complex problems, work collaboratively, communicate effectively, direct their own learning, and develop an academic mindset.

Executive Director Marcia Fulton describes The Odyssey School as a dynamic Expeditionary Learning community dedicated to fostering each child's unique potential and spirit of adventure through exemplary standards of character, intellectual achievement, and social responsibility.

The school was founded on the philosophy that children learn best through personal, direct experiences designed to take advantage of their natural curiosity about the world. Fulton explained that Expeditionary Learning harnesses children's natural passion to learn and helps them develop the curiosity, knowledge, skills, and personal qualities they need for a successful adulthood.

Teachers at Odyssey frame all lessons with learning targets that students unpack to ensure that they understand the learning targets for the day, the project, and the unit. This means students are always clear about their learning targets and what they must do. Learning often takes place in groups to encourage collaboration, problem solving, working with multiple perspectives, and forming and articulating individual opinions.

These learning targets also align with student assessment. "We use student-engaged assessment practices to drive our approach because it builds student ownership of learning, focuses students on reaching standards-based learning targets, and drives achievement," said Fulton. Students continually assess and improve the quality of their work through the use of models, reflection, critique, rubrics and interaction with community-based experts.

Odyssey's Habits of a Learner:

Documented with a section in a passage portfolio using academic, art studio, physical education, and adventure work.

Revision:

I can use critical feedback to improve my work.

Responsibility:

I can begin to advocate for myself. I can maintain focus in class. I can complete quality work on time.

Inquiry:

I can use the practices, tools and skills of an academic discipline to investigate, evaluate, form and test theories. I use those skills to understand specific situations and make sense of big ideas in that discipline.

Perspective Taking:

I can consider multiple perspectives and their implications in terms of justice, freedom, and human rights.

Service and Stewardship:

I am crew. I can do things to care for my environment and my community. I make connections between my actions and the global community.

Collaboration and Leadership:

I can engage positively with others to learn things and create work that is larger and deeper than I could create on my own.

Student Spotlight:



Odyssey fourth grader Ariella Nadav is confident she will master math in fifth grade and beyond.

Fourth grader Ariella Nadav didn't see herself as a mathematician, or successful in math at all. In fact, she knew only four percent of the math targets for her grade.

Slowly, through the consistent use of an online math program, a lot of hard work, and the support of family, teachers, and peers, Ariella began filling in

the math concepts she had missed in third grade. This blend of immediate feedback loops, getting instruction just when she needed it, and practice made the difference. Ariella also decided to shift her mindset about what she believed she was able to achieve. Once that was accomplished, she was able to move into grade-level material. "It was fun when I found out that I could do what other kids could do in math. It made me feel good about myself."

By the end of the school year, Ariella had mastered over 70 percent of the fourth grade standards and no longer sees herself as a poor mathematician. "She is ready to enter fifth grade as a strong, capable math student," reports Principal Fulton.

"It didn't change my mind about math," said Ariella. "But it made me happier, and now I can understand more and not feel bad."

ENGAGING STUDENTS THROUGH STRATEGIC, PURPOSE DRIVEN, EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING

Amy Anderson, senior director at the [Donnell-Kay Foundation](#), and also one of Odyssey's founders, a former board member, and a current parent, said, "Odyssey's curriculum stresses hands-on learning, with students training in real-world situations, because when students learn with purpose and relevancy, they achieve on all levels."

Odyssey follows the thoughtful Expeditionary Learning school design principles:

- Primacy of self-discovery;
- Having of wonderful ideas;
- Responsibility for learning;
- Empathy and caring;
- Success and failure;
- Collaboration and competition;
- Diversity and inclusion;
- The natural world;
- Solitude and reflection; and
- Service and compassion.

Fulton said there has been a conscious shift to the use of technology and blended learning in strategic ways that serve to differentiate and personalize learning. Examining student work and analyzing disaggregated assessment data helps teachers identify and address gaps in achievement. It's working—Odyssey has been named a mentor school by the Expeditionary Learning network, a status that Fulton and Anderson cite with pride.

The expeditions that are central to Expeditionary Learning are developed using backward planning from guiding questions that require critical thinking. "We are careful to build knowledge so that students need to do something with that knowledge – apply, analyze, synthesize, create," said Fulton.

Expeditions go in depth on important subjects and topics. Students are required to complete significant research and writing. In order to complete their work, they must address multiple perspectives and form their own opinions regarding politically charged topics such as social progress, access for the disabled, pollution and waste disposal, and educational equity.

Odyssey students build math skills using adaptive software such as [ALEKS](#), and have access to instructional videos from [Khan Academy](#) for additional support in helping monitor their own progress against grade-level math targets. In addition to teacher support, Anderson said, "students use each other as resources. It is simply how kids approach all things – together."

"This is truly a special school," said Anderson. "My son graduated from Odyssey last year and my daughter is currently in the sixth grade. I visit a lot of schools, and I rarely see a school that has anything close to what Odyssey offers."



GettingSmart.com
Deeperlearning4all.org

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