

# Sierra Expeditionary Learning School

## 2022-2025 Strategic Plan

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**SIERRA**  
**EXPEDITIONARY**  
LEARNING SCHOOL

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# Overview

The purpose of the 2022-25 Sierra Expeditionary Learning School (SELS) strategic planning document is to create a collaboratively built roadmap that drives Board and Staff decision making while moving the school towards existing mission, vision, and goals.

## Development + Organization of the Plan

The SELS strategic plan structure and main categories were developed in 2014-2015 through a process of gathering parent and student feedback via focus groups, a school-wide survey and workshops, staff input meetings, and several Board of Directors planning sessions. The result is a plan that reflects the ideas and opinions of many key stakeholders.

The guiding principles that created and will continue to drive this plan include:

- Research driven
- Results focused
- Relevant to today's educational needs

The Plan is divided into strategic focus areas and within each is a set of goals and objectives. Each year a work plan will be created via parent, staff, and board input that updates the goals under each strategic focus area and adds specific tasks to accomplish within a school year. Following are the seven strategic focus areas of the Plan.

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## Strategic Focus Areas

**Program Excellence**

**Staff**

**School Culture and Diversity**

**Communications**

**Campus**

**COVID-19**

**Board Governance**

## About Sierra Expeditionary Learning School

Sierra Expeditionary Learning School opened in the fall of 2010 in Truckee, California as an independent public charter school of the Tahoe Truckee Unified School District (TTUSD), serving 64 K-5th grade students. Originating from the vision of an alternative education program in the Tahoe-Truckee region envisioned by fourteen founding families, SELS was granted its charter in March 2010 by TTUSD. Today, SELS serves 212 students in grades K-8 to meet the vision of providing an alternative education program. SELS offers a small school environment (class sizes from 22-25) dedicated to academic excellence, diversity, and the building of character and community.

## Educational Philosophy

Founding families decided upon the EL Education (formally Expeditionary Learning) framework to fill a need for a unique approach to education in the Tahoe-Truckee area. EL Education is a framework for engaged teaching and learning. It is comprised of a national network of schools and a model of curriculum that is transforming schools. EL Education is derived from Outward Bound. An EL Education is:

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- Active
  - Challenging
  - Meaningful
  - Public
  - Collaborative

Our EL Education-based model challenges students to think critically and take active roles in their classrooms and communities. We invest in the growth of our teachers and create stimulating and rigorous classroom environments, which results in higher achievement and greater engagement in school and in life.

We believe:

- Interdisciplinary learning expeditions, in-depth, project-based studies led by a teacher or teaching team that last for 6 weeks to a semester, are developed from state standards and promote learning through authentic experiences that encourage critical thinking and social responsibility.
- Small multi-grade and/or looping classes where students have the same teacher for grades in a row in elementary school cultivates a safe environment for individual learning and self-discovery.
- Small, self-contained classrooms in middle school establish a closer student-teacher connection and the ability to address student needs more effectively.
- High expectations for character development and behavior create a school culture exemplified by physical and emotional safety, accountability, compassion, integrity, and respect.
- Shared school traditions and celebrations support reflection, personal growth and a sense of belonging within the school community.
- Multiple means of assessment, including portfolios and student-led conferences, along with academic and character reports, hold students, teachers, and staff accountable for the highest quality of work.

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- Multicultural studies and a foreign language component instill tolerance and broad worldviews while fostering an appreciation for local and global diversity.
  - A diverse school population reflective of our community promotes intercultural understanding and respect for individual differences and similarities.
  - Physical fitness, outdoor activities, and visual and performing arts are an integral part of students' daily lives.

### **SIERRA Norms**

**S** - Strength

**I** - Integrity

**E** - Empathy

**R** - Respect

**R** - Responsibility

**A** - Adventure



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## Our Mission

Inspiring a diverse group of learners to achieve academic excellence and develop a strong sense of character and community.

## Our Vision

To provide experiential, project-based learning that challenges students to think critically while fostering their natural curiosity and love of learning.

## Our Commitment to Diversity

We strive to foster a culture rich in diversity and overflowing with inclusion. Our community includes students and families from different backgrounds with different experiences and current living conditions. Students (and families) are continually encouraged to connect with those who are different than themselves, and to respect and honor those differences as a normal part of any vibrant community.

## SELS Social Justice Statement

SELS's commitment to social justice promotes inclusion and equitable learning environments, facilitating fair and equal access to educational opportunities for all students. Our teaching fosters a heart for sensitivity, a head for critical thinking, and a hand in social action.

SELS educators teach tools for content mastery, critical thinking, awareness of multicultural group dynamics, social change, and reflection. Through this, students develop an understanding of inequity in power structures, empathy for others, and avenues for positive change.

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# Strategic Focus Area: Program Excellence

## The Importance of Program Excellence

Programming provides the means, framework, and tools to inspire and educate our students, and we see it as a process of continuous improvement. As a model EL Education school, programming at SELS includes all aspects related to academics, field work, character development, electives, events, and sports. To ensure our programming is current and inspiring, we want to provide an intriguing and engaging experience for our students, teachers, parents, and the community. We want to share the success of our unique program with the District and the wider world. We believe our school's achievements need to be measured to validate the success of our current programming, and to ensure an ever-rising standard of excellence in education.

### **Goal 1: Program Excellence**

- Support focus on whole child and character development
- Support enrichment programming
- Alignment of Staff and Board work plans
- Support programs for a variety of learners
- Support integration and balanced use of technology

### **Goal 2: Program Evaluation**

- Analyze academic and character data
- Comply with and integrate national EL Education requirements
- Survey SELS community for program feedback

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# Strategic Focus Area: Staff

## Importance of Supporting Staff

We understand the importance of implementing strategies to support the School Director as well as the Director's role in supporting SELS staff. We strongly believe that the staff at SELS are the number one asset of the school and their satisfaction and support is directly linked to the health and success of the school.

### **Goal 1: Attract and retain awesome staff**

- Secure quality salary and benefits packages for teachers
- Support methods of creating teacher fulfillment
- Provide resources (time and budget) for teachers to participate in high level professional development opportunities

### **Goal 2: Ensure teachers have the resources necessary to create a positive classroom and work environment**

- Provide adequate budget allowances for material support
- Provide adequate budget allowances for all support staff
- Professional Development when and as needed

### **Goal 3: Keep lines of communication between Board and Staff open and active**

- Ensure opportunities for ongoing board/staff collaboration



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# Strategic Focus Area: School Culture and Diversity

## The Importance of School Culture and Diversity

We believe that strong family involvement is key to the health of the school and positively impacts each student's growth and learning. We believe that an invested family correlates with an invested student. Additionally, we strive to create a school culture that is welcoming, diverse, and responsive to a wide range of students and families in our K-8 program.

### **Goal 1: Creating a culture around diversity and inclusion**

- Align school celebrations with school values
- Support targeted Free and Reduced Family recruitment efforts
- Assure a breadth of diversity in academic curriculum
- Develop opportunities for stronger connections between diverse groups within SELS community

### **Goal 2: Garner strong, consistent family involvement**

- Educate = build awareness among families regarding the value and benefits of volunteering and dedicated parental involvement
- Support the Parent Teacher Crew (PTC)

### **Goal 3: Support a strong middle school culture**

- Build middle school pride
- Retain middle school population
- Foster student maturity (self-actualization, empowerment....???)
- Prepare students to successfully transition to High School with a strong sense of self + character + community

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#### **Goal 4: Character Development Programming**

- Maintaining a central focus on character development

## Strategic Focus Area: Communications

### Importance of Communications + PR + Outreach

Communication is important to SELS in order to attract funding, keep enrollment strong and diverse, further integration into our district, and increase the recognition of our school in the National EL Education network. We recognize that our parents are our best marketing tools. Keeping them informed about our programming will keep families activated and enthusiastic about SELS, which in turn benefits student learning.

#### **Goal 1: Effective crew communication**

- Use best method communication with all families

#### **Goal 2: Effective school-wide communication**

- Communicate with parents about program and other results
- Communicate Successes within our SELS Community
- Be transparent with school policies and procedures / decision-making

#### **Goal 3: Effective external, community-wide communication**

- Maintain strong relationships and communication with TTUSD
- Communicate SELS' success to the Truckee/Tahoe community, EL Education, and national audiences
- Share SELS programs + philosophy with interested educators

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# Strategic Focus Area: Campus

## Importance of Campus Improvement

Updating the campus supports students' learning both in and outside of the classroom, builds community, and overall enhances the experiences of all involved with SELS.

- At this time, there are no plans for campus work

# Strategic Focus Area: COVID-19 Response and Mitigation

## Importance of Addressing Pandemic Crisis

### [Covid Goals](#)

#### **Goal 1: Rebuild Crew**

- Reintegrate the value of "Crew" as we come out of COVID for students, staff, and the larger SELS community

#### **Goal 2: Address learning loss and social-emotional setbacks**

- Provide additional support structures for both academics and social-emotional health

# Strategic Focus Area: Board Governance

## The importance of Governance + Board Systems

A strong Board supports the actions of SELS and long-term, inclusive planning helps sustain SELS into the future. History is important. As such, managing historical documents for the school is a key role of the Board. In addition, we believe supporting the parent leadership of PTC is key to our success as a school.

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### **Goal 1: Develop systems to support a highly functioning Board**

- Create long-term plans and organizational structure to strengthen the board and SELS
- Establish and maintain systems to function within the regulations for School Boards
- Continued communication with and support of the PTC via the PTC Liaison position on the board.

### **Goal 2: Develop structures for Board member relationships with the community**

- Develop pathways for the SELS community to meet/connect with the SELS board
- Provide opportunities for SELS board members to connect with TTUSD board members

### **Goal 3: Fiscal Responsibility**

- Establish and maintain systems for fiscal oversight and accountability
- Raise money as necessary, for example for special projects
- Maintain 25% savings reserve for unforeseen expenses

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# Acknowledgements

Thank you to the students, parents, board, and staff at SELS in 2021 who participated in the creation of this 2022-2025 Strategic Plan.

## Board of Directors (current)

John Killen, President

Veronica Derrick, Vice President

Jose Rivero, Treasurer

Aaron Rothschild, Secretary

Kelly Vickers, PTC representative

## **Previous board members who helped in the development of this plan:**

Dan Martin, President

Christopher Old, Vice President

Morgan Hargrave, Treasurer

Kat Newell, Secretary

Saira West, PTC Liaison

Chris DeLuna