

Parent & Community Member Reflections

Both of our kids were unsure about their ability to meet the challenges of the Adventure Education program, thinking that other children would be better skilled or prepared somehow. However, they learned that with the support of the tightly knit EAS student and teacher community, they could accomplish far more than they set out to. In fact, they found they had much to offer the other kids as well. This kind of hands-on training in teamwork and leadership is very rare in a formal educational setting. -Arun and Rosie

Having been on five, week-long residential trips with EAS, and having seen the children in day to day life, too, you can see the benefits these trips make on influencing the minds of the children at EAS. The children achieve many personal goals at these events that affect their lives in a positive way and that they will remember for years to come.

Speaking about my daughter Charlotte, she is very happy in a totally academic environment, but in choosing EAS we wanted (along with Charlotte) to achieve a more rounded (and I don't mean from camp food) child. In the two years she was at EAS, before returning to the UK, Charlotte went on a spectacular change of character. She went on the March Expedition Hike in 03 and struggled though all the way carrying her 50lb backpack. I was glad that she took on that personal challenge, but when she asked to do it again, I was amazed especially as it meant flying back from the UK to the US to do it. Even though this was another struggle for her, she completed it and yet again wants to go next year. On the other side, from being very happy with a pen, pencil and ruler, Charlotte now works our garden and looks after any wildlife she finds, she is more aware of the environment and the long term impact it has on our lives, a task we would not have expected from her two years ago. She is now a confident speaker and confident at achieving her academic goals. Charlotte misses her experience with EAS (which she tells me daily)! -Richard

I have been amazed that each time my son comes home from an Adventure, he seems far more mature! Not only does he have a great time being in the outdoors, he leaves each week with a sense of accomplishment that he's finished a task (such as backpacking with a 30 pound pack) that was definitely out of his comfort zone. Having these experiences proves to him that determination and hard work do pay off. This is a lesson many teens don't get! -Kari

As the parents of a first-year student at the Environmental and Adventure School, we've watched our son grow in many ways which we directly attribute to this school's fabulous curriculum and caring professionals.

One of the most obvious areas of our son's growth has been the incredibly positive change in how he approaches new experiences. Until this year, our son approached ALL new experiences with a high degree of anxiety. With two working parents, he has necessarily been exposed to many different camps and outside activities, but has always been very anxious before they began. We spent countless hours role-playing first days with him and anticipating every contingency, but our efforts never seemed to alleviate his fears.

BUT throughout this school year, his anxiety has melted away. After each "Adventure trip" at EAS, he grew more confident and began eagerly anticipating the next adventure. I don't know how to express just how amazing this turnaround is for us. The most powerful way I can think to describe it is the look in his eyes. Before EAS, he would approach new experiences with an eye to what could go wrong; now, he has a look of excitement and confidence - like an explorer eagerly surveying new land. It really is amazing and we thank you for providing the structure that has allowed this growth to occur in our son - and our- lives. -Elizabeth & Mike

I have been able to work on Community Stewardship Projects, Wednesday Electives and in the classroom for the past two years. And every time I am with these kids I am always amazed of the level of respect they have towards each other, teachers and other parents. I know these are great kids, and most kids/teenagers are. However, I feel there is something about bringing them all together from different schools at such a critical age that creates a special bond among these kids that I do not see at our local Jr. High. The respect towards each other, adults and the environment, work ethics and responsible actions expected from these kids at EAS are truly creating wonderful adults for our future. I am so thankful that my daughter goes to EAS. Thank you, Laura

My daughter's participation in Community Stewardship Projects has grown her in many ways; she speaks to groups with more confidence, takes leadership responsibility in accomplishing projects, has learned a ton about plants and how they grow (which I discover when we are gardening at home together) and wrote in her end-of-year essay that she found that when she's tired and overwhelmed, "working outdoors clears her head." I was impressed with how well she and all EAS students related to and taught younger students, truly a great opportunity to discover their capabilities in a new way.

Outdoor education is interactive education, to which students must bring their own resources, imagination, problem -solving, perseverance. Applying their knowledge, and then teaching that knowledge to others, how much better they learn than if they were sitting in a classroom trying to absorb a lecture.

EAS students build lasting structures for the community, encouraging others to enjoy and learn, even when teachers are not physically present. Students gain a feeling of mastery

from learning to use tools, and a so-important feeling of belonging and contributing to the neighborhood.

The skills and experiences of EAS expeditions are valuable, the beauty of the campsites soul-enriching, but most of all, the expeditions nurture wonderful camaraderie among the students. It is amazing to me and every adult to witness the acceptance and fearlessness of campfire performances. I think the students will carry forward with them a trust in people, a willingness to accept people in their entirety, and to give everyone their due dignity.

I'm reading a nonfiction book now called "Random Family" by Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, about poor Bronx families. If only there were enough grants and teachers willing to fund a program like EAS for those children, the benefits individually and to wider society would be huge! We are very fortunate to have EAS to foster excitement about learning and teaching about the natural environment, and also trust and joy in working with other people.

Most of all, it's fun! If you can't take joy in doing something, you're not going to want to continue it. EAS encourages a joy in learning and being together. -Deb

My daughter has been a member of EAS for the past three years. As an incoming 6th grader she was shy, had never participated in teaming on projects, and had only been invited to one birthday party per year all the way thru elementary school. That has changed. Now she joins her friends from school in activities and social events. An interesting point is that at several of the birthday parties, her friends from EAS have asked for donations for an animal hospital, toys for tots, and clothing for the poor rather than presents for themselves. These are 13 and 14 year old girls! My daughter has established friendships across the grade levels and her conversations with her friends indicate a much broader awareness of the world.

I have observed a tremendous growth in my daughter's maturity just within the first several months of attending EAS. Her first week away from home attending a camp was with EAS. She came back more independent and competent just after one time and her self-confidence/esteem has steadily increased over time. Her awareness of the environment and the fact that she can make a difference is very clear to her. She feels an immense sense of pride that she has helped to re-build parks and trails. As we walk in the forest, she can point to the trees/plants and name them, explain the interdependency of the eco-system and the importance of taking responsibility for the world. She loves teaching at the elementary school and will come home talking about the students and what the lesson was for the day. She also has a greater appreciation for her teachers because of the challenge at times of getting the elementary students' attention.

Having worked at the junior high level I can tell that there is truly a qualitative difference between the education students obtain from EAS. My daughter wants to become a scientist, a dream that has been fostered and supported at EAS. I think a very telling point is according to research that across our nation, very little academic growth occurs in 8th grade. That was not the case with my daughter; her skills in all areas have grown significantly this year. She is also definitely more courageous, having had to brave all kinds of elements has made her more willing to push through when obstacles are placed in her path. The other day, her hand had accidentally bumped up against stinging nettles, she looked around for some horsetail, broke open the stalk and put some of the juice on her hand, which promptly stopped stinging. EAS teaches not only how to have adventure in the environment but also how to contend with the hazards of being in the great outdoors.

What I truly love about EAS is that they are training earth stewards. Individuals who will take personal responsibility for the earth. I think the school is very supportive of both genders, but I truly believe for many of the girls it has provided them the opportunity to truly break gender barriers. The school provides them the support and opportunity to be strong, bright, curious, creative, assertive and competent.

In a nutshell, EAS has given my child the opportunity to experience the world in great ways than she (or I) had ever imagined. As our world's future leaders, these EAS students will make a difference in our society. -Laurie H., Ph.D

My fourth grade students were taught by EAS students who were in the ***Backpack Naturalist*** Community Stewardship Projects program. The middle school students lead several activities to teach topics such as "The Journey of the Salmon," "The Water Cycle," "How People Negatively Impact the Environment," and "The Travel of a Rain Drop." Each of the stations were highly active and were taught in a way that engaged the fourth graders. The whole experience of having "older" students teach them impacted fourth graders so much that many stated they hoped they could go to this school when they're in middle school, so they could study this more! The recall of the information and the students application of the information has proven to be stronger through the model of the Middle School students being the "teachers" for the younger students. What was also very impressive to me as an educator was that after hearing about the importance of being "citizens who must take action" and contribute positively to our world, there were 15 students in my class who created "Clean-Up" projects in our local neighborhood and streams...on their own time (off the school clock) and reported back to the class what they did, what they learned, and how they were now stewards. The whole process is just what our world needs! -Kari