

English Language Arts

Vision & Core Beliefs

Grades K–8 | 2026–2027 | Staff Handbook

Our Vision: *ELA instruction at Endeavor Charter School is explicit, evidence-based, and student-centered — designed to develop skilled readers, writers, and thinkers who can decode, comprehend, analyze, communicate, and create meaning in the world through language.*

OUR PURPOSE

ELA instruction at ECS is intentionally designed to develop proficient, confident, and curious literacy learners across grades K–8. Our program is grounded in evidence-based practice and built around three interconnected goals: that every student learns to decode and read with fluency, that every student learns to comprehend and analyze complex texts, and that every student develops the writing and communication skills to share their thinking with the world.

Every instructional decision — from how we structure our daily lesson block to how we assess and group students — is made in service of this purpose. The beliefs and principles below describe what that looks like in practice.

CORE BELIEFS

We believe effective ELA instruction at ECS:

01 Teaches foundational literacy skills explicitly and systematically.

Every student can become a proficient reader — and that proficiency is not accidental. Skilled reading is built on a clear foundation: word recognition and language comprehension working together. Systematic, explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension is not optional; it is the bedrock of everything else we do. Our program is grounded in research and responsive to the needs of each learner. Progress monitoring tools including DIBELS, CBM, and IXL help us identify needs early and respond with precision.

We teach every student to read — then we teach every student to read to learn.

02 Immerses students in authentic texts and daily literacy experiences.

Students do not learn to read and write by hearing about it — they learn by doing it. Students must spend significant time actually doing literacy: reading, writing, and talking about texts every single day. Our classrooms are rich with differentiated texts — fiction and nonfiction — selected to meet students where they are while stretching them toward new possibilities. Independent

reading and self-selected genre exploration are protected parts of the school day. Outside reading is actively encouraged as a lifelong habit.

03 Bridges decoding and meaning-making intentionally.

Literacy instruction must bridge “learning to read” and “reading to learn.” In the early grades, decoding opens the door; in the upper grades, comprehension and analysis carry students through it. Both matter at every level. Foundational skills — phonics, fluency, morphology — are taught alongside deep comprehension strategies: text structure, inference, annotation, and evidence-based discussion. Fiction and nonfiction are paired purposefully. Historical thinking skills are embedded in ELA instruction so students learn to read like scholars.

04 Develops vocabulary, morphology, and language as engines of comprehension.

Language knowledge is essential for comprehension and academic success. Students who lack the words to name ideas cannot fully access, discuss, or retain content. Vocabulary instruction is not incidental — it is intentional, visible, and ongoing. Morphology is taught daily as a mini-lesson in grades 4–8. Both academic and content-specific vocabulary are explicitly taught, practiced, and posted for student reference. Oral language development is prioritized, and discipline-specific language is emphasized in upper grades to prepare students for secondary coursework.

When students understand how words are built, they can unlock any text.

05 Positions writing as a central tool for thinking and learning across subjects.

Writing is not an add-on — it is a central tool for thinking, learning, and communicating in every subject. When students write, they clarify what they know, discover what they don’t, and develop the academic voice they will need in every future classroom. The writing process is taught explicitly and revisited throughout the year. Students write across multiple genres: narrative, argument, informational, poetry, and research-based writing. Longer projects are approved and assessed with standards-aligned rubrics. Responsible research practices — credible sources and proper citation — are taught and expected.

Writing is thinking made visible.

06 Positions students as active speakers, thinkers, and meaning-makers.

Deep literacy learning happens when students actively reason, discuss, and construct meaning — not when they passively receive it. Students must spend the majority of class time doing the thinking and talking. Public speaking, collaborative discussion, structured debate, and Socratic seminar are not extras; they are core to what it means to be literate. Students at each grade level have defined public speaking expectations. Participation rubrics are developed, shared with students, and explicitly taught before discussion grades are assigned.

Students are working more than teachers are talking.

07 Integrates literacy and content as inseparable acts of learning.

Reading and writing are not isolated skills — they are the vehicles through which students access and communicate knowledge across every discipline. At Endeavor, ELA and Social Studies are intentionally integrated: texts mirror topics and themes across both subjects, and students learn to read like historians and write like scholars. Primary and secondary sources are used to develop analytical reading skills. Graphic organizers, visual representations, and concept maps support cross-curricular connections. Historical thinking skills — chronology, cause and effect, point-of-view, synthesis — are taught and assessed in both disciplines.

08 Uses assessment to guide instruction and serve every learner.

Instruction must be responsive to student needs, and assessment is only valuable insofar as it informs what happens next. Data is not a destination — it is a compass. IXL is used diagnostically at the start of the year to establish benchmarks; students work individual pathways and enter the arena monthly. Major grades (50%) reflect tests and projects; minor grades (30%) include quizzes, poetry, and discussion; daily grades (20%) capture ongoing practice. Students scoring below 60% on a test are given an opportunity to relearn. Study guides for all tests are provided at least one week in advance.

09 Is built on structure, consistency, and a clear K–8 progression.

Literacy growth is not the product of a single great lesson — it is the result of intentional, coherent instruction that builds year after year. A clear K–8 scope and sequence ensures complexity grows appropriately in texts, writing tasks, and analytical expectations. Consistent classroom routines — morphology mini-lessons, small group instruction, exit reflections — are aligned across grade levels. Google Classroom is maintained by all teachers in grades 4–8 as a consistent resource hub. Block time is structured intentionally to include whole-group instruction, small group time, writing practice, and reflection.

Structure is not the enemy of creativity — it is what makes deep learning possible.

10 Is strengthened by a culture of teacher collaboration and shared ownership.

A strong ELA program is not handed down from above — it is built together, lesson by lesson, conversation by conversation. Through weekly grade-level meetings, monthly IMPACT sessions with our Instructional Coach, and co-planning and co-teaching experiences, we continuously refine our craft together. We share data, analyze student work, and hold each other to high standards — because the quality of our collaboration directly shapes the quality of our students' learning. New teachers and those on action plans receive priority coaching support in Q1.

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN PRINCIPLES

These principles describe how our core beliefs translate into daily instructional practice.

Daily Lesson Structure

Every ELA lesson follows a consistent arc: a purposeful warm-up (morphology mini-lesson) → whole-group comprehension instruction using mentor texts or read-alouds → small group instruction and independent work time → an explicit writing skill mini-lesson → exit ticket and reflection. The majority of instructional time is spent in the middle phases, with students actively reading, discussing, and writing.

Vocabulary and Morphology Development

Teachers plan explicitly for daily morphology instruction, consistent vocabulary reinforcement, and oral language development. Academic and content-specific vocabulary are posted and student-facing in every classroom. Content-specific words are selected for high utility; academic vocabulary is tied to grade-level standards. In upper grades, discipline-specific language is emphasized to prepare students for increasingly complex texts and tasks.

Writing Across Genres and Content Areas

Writing is taught and practiced in ELA and Social Studies. The writing process — prewriting, drafting, revision, editing — is taught explicitly and revisited throughout the year. Students write across narrative, argument, informational, poetry, and research-based genres. At least one purposeful poetry task is assigned per quarter. Writing projects over 250 words are approved by the IC and assessed with standards-aligned rubrics. Responsible use of sources and citation practices are taught in upper grades.

Discourse, Public Speaking, and Student Voice

Teachers plan explicitly for Socratic seminars, structured debate, collaborative discussion, and formal public speaking. Students in grades 4–5 complete at least two formal public speaking assignments per year; grades 6–8 complete at least three. These assignments include skill instruction, preparation time, and rubric-based assessment. Participation rubrics are shared with and taught to students before discussion grades are assigned. Academic vocabulary is expected in all student discourse.

Differentiation and Small Group Instruction

Texts are differentiated by student need and interest. Small group instruction is used to pre-teach, reteach, address misconceptions, and extend learning for advanced readers and writers. IXL individual pathways provide data-informed independent practice. All differentiation occurs within Tier 1 instruction. Group placement is driven by formative data, not fixed ability.

Classroom Culture and Learning Environment

Teachers intentionally cultivate classrooms where students feel safe to take risks with texts and ideas. Outside reading is encouraged and celebrated. Classroom libraries are maintained with diverse, student-accessible books. Google Classroom is consistently maintained as a resource hub for students and families. Students develop confidence, curiosity, and a genuine love of language through routines that honor thinking over performance and process over perfection.

WHAT WE EXPECT STUDENTS TO BE ABLE TO DO

As a result of consistent, high-quality ELA instruction, ECS students will:

✓	Decode and read with fluency and accuracy across all grade-appropriate texts.
✓	Comprehend, analyze, and evaluate a wide range of literary and informational texts.
✓	Write clearly, purposefully, and with command across multiple genres.
✓	Communicate thinking through purposeful speaking, listening, and structured discussion.
✓	Apply vocabulary and morphological knowledge to unlock meaning in unfamiliar texts.
✓	Think historically — examining evidence, perspective, cause, and effect across disciplines.
✓	Approach literacy with confidence, curiosity, and a genuine love of reading and language.

These beliefs and principles are not aspirations for the future — they are our commitments today. They guide every lesson we plan, every group we pull, every question we ask, and every conversation we have about student learning.