



The Educating All Learners Alliance
NASHVILLE SCHOOL STUDY TOURS
April 2024
BUNDLE



EALA School Study Tours

About EALA School Study Tours

EALA developed the EALA School Study Tours initiative to translate knowledge into practice and build more equitable learning environments and student experiences.

As a part of this initiative, in April 2024 , EALA alongside Diverse Learners Collaborative selected 4 schools to host tours that focused on centering promising practices for students with disabilities and learning differences.

10 Visiting School Teams toured schools, collaborated and learned with key school and community members, and witnessed implementation whether it be in a classroom or behind the scenes. After all tours, the group attended a Reflection Summit to put their thoughts and reflections into an action plan to bring home. The tour experience centered on reflection and opportunity to bring aspects or strategies back to attendees' home school or district.

About the Bundle

This Resource Bundle is a compilation of resources developed as a part of this initiative intended to support school teams both on, and outside of, these tours. When prompted (see the red arrows), click the images to access the full content items.

EALA PROMISING PRACTICES

INSTRUCTION

Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment

When there are evidence based practices in curriculum, instruction, and assessment that show promise for students with disabilities, then their use will contribute to improved outcomes for all.

Culturally & Linguistically Responsive Teaching

When learning incorporates culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices, all students find a sense of belonging and relevancy in classroom instruction.

FRAMEWORK

Learner Centered Models

When there are practices that schools can implement at both a schoolwide and individual level that can improve student engagement--especially attendance and discipline outcomes--for students with disabilities and learning differences, then their use will improve outcomes for all students.

COLLABORATION

Family Engagement

When all school staff can communicate and work with families through the special education process, then families feel more included and engaged, contributing to improved school experience and transition.

Community Engagement

When schools can lean on communities and organizations for support, more resources are made available and all students have further opportunities for local or community engagement and belonging.

Transition Planning

When there are practices in place that schools can implement to support transition plans to effectively prepare students with disabilities for post-secondary credential, then their use will improve transition for all students.

Data Use

When schools collect, analyze, and respond to data on student achievement, attendance, and discipline, they can use cycles of continuous improvement and can calibrate instruction to craft individualized learning experiences for each student, especially students with individual education plans (IEPs) or learning differences.

Scheduling

When students with individual education plans (IEPs) or learning differences are prioritized in the master schedule, then those students are paired with the right teachers and classes and there is proactive service planning for better collaboration between teacher and service provider.

Compliance Management

When there is effective compliance management, then teachers can dedicate more time to instruction and behavior/transition outcomes to benefit all students.

Leader Commitment

When leaders and teachers have mindsets of shared ownership and the belief that all students can achieve, then outcomes for students with disabilities and learning differences can improve. (For example, mindset impacts instructional choices and allows for better collaboration among adults.)

Innovative Structures of Support

When schools establish multiple means of staffing and innovative structures of support, students receive more personalized instruction and scaffolded support. When staff across specialties have space to collaborate, all students benefit.

Educator Development

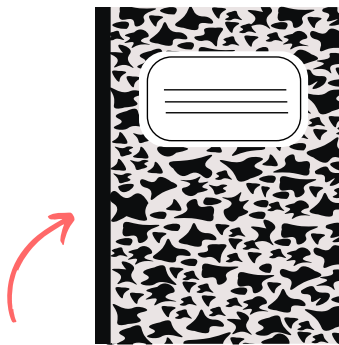
When teachers have access to effective pre-service and in-service development, then they are better able to support students with disabilities and learning differences.

School Study Tours: Collaborative Reflection



EALA Created the Reflection Guide to support visiting educators on the tours. This guide can be used in print or digital* versions.

- 1** DURING: Reflect during the tours....
 - Use the Reflection Pattern within the guide as a start (see guide below)
 - Capture thinking within the team highlights page (Post School Reflection Pages)
- 2** AFTER THE TOURS: Reflection Summit (see slides below)
 - Reflect in cross-collaborative groups and in school team groups
 - Create a plan of action with your school team
- 3** ONCE BACK IN YOUR OWN CLASSROOM: Use your reflections to implement Promising Practices in ways that work best for you and your students; use the Resources Page at the end of the guide for extended reading



Click the image to access the digital Nashville Reflection Guide



Click the image to access the digital Nashville Reflection Summit slides

CASE STUDY:

Nashville Newcomer Academy: Providing Support and Rigor for English Language Learners

In this case study, we discover how one Nashville middle school integrates culturally responsive teaching practices and community engagement to empower newcomer students.



Click the image to
access the case study



CASE STUDY:

Nashville Newcomer Academy: Providing Support and Rigor for English Language Learners

Establishing the Nashville Newcomer Academy

In 2015, under Karl Dean's mayoral leadership, Nashville expanded its educational programs to serve better the diverse student and family population in Metro Public Schools. This expansion included initiatives aimed at more robust support for English Language Learners (ELL).

Although the city had a Newcomer Academy that enrolled approximately 40 New Americans, STEM Prep Academy Middle School Founder Dr. Kristin McGraner saw a need for broader support for recently arrived language learners.

With Mayor Dean's support, STEM Prep integrated the city's Newcomer Academy into the middle school, expanding it to include new Americans in grade levels 5-8. This initiative, known as the Nashville Newcomer Academy (NNA), incorporates culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices to help all students find a sense of belonging and relevancy in classroom instruction and the school community.

Building Momentum

STEM Prep's NNA program opened its doors in 2016, enrolling 100 new Americans in its inaugural year. Securing enrollment for the 2016 school year was made possible through STEM Prep's partnership with the mayor's office and support from Metro Nashville Schools, which aided in identifying potential students for the NNA program. STEM Prep then recruited new American students through home visits and community-driven advocacy.

Adena Petsch, STEM Prep's Director of English Language Learners, highlighted several fundamental changes that contributed to the success of the program:

1. Vision: The middle school leadership team developed a vision for high-quality instruction for Newcomer students, incorporating ESL best practices with research-driven literature on supporting newcomer students' socio-emotional and academic needs.
2. Staffing and Planning: STEM Prep administration spent the year hiring certified ESL teachers for the program and a dedicated Academic Dean tasked with coaching and supporting teachers in the Newcomer Academy. The counseling team was also expanded to include multilingual school counselors who understood the needs of newcomer students and the Nashville immigration policy environment and legislation
3. Scheduling: The daily middle school schedule underwent significant restructuring to accommodate the NNA program's requirements, including allocating time for co-teaching planning sessions and NNA-specific teacher-team meetings.

CASE STUDY

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

Continued

In its inaugural year, NNA adopted a sheltered instruction classroom model, allowing new American students to attend electives and lunch with their grade-level peers. However, the instructional model has since evolved. NNA now occurs for a portion of a student's day, allowing enrollees to integrate into grade-level and Social Studies classes and electives. This shift has fostered stronger friendships between newcomer students and their grade-level peers, supporting socio-emotional development and integration in their first year.

In October of 2023, Petsch and STEM Prep Director of Exceptional Education Rachel Burley participated in [EALA's School Study Tours](#) in Chicago, IL, gaining valuable insights into effective educational practices for serving English Language Learners in diverse communities. During this school study tour, attendees participated in a principal-led meeting, where there was a discussion surrounding data and structures built to support New Americans at Willowbrook High School. They also observed an English Language Development (ELD) classroom at Addison Trail High School that included bilingual support for New Americans.

"My key takeaways for our NNA program revolved around the importance of supporting all teachers with professional development to incorporate strategies for newcomers," says Petsch. "It also made me reflect more on how we can incorporate bilingual education and translanguaging support for newcomer students on a systematic scale."

Petsch and the team took that learning back to STEM Prep in Nashville.

Stories of Success

Since establishing the NNA eight years ago, STEM Prep has seen many successes and remains dedicated to setting high-achieving goals for its learners. STEM Prep's goal for all new Americans is to grow two years in their language levels within a single academic year, as measured by the WIDA ACCESS assessment administered each Spring.

Ensuring that all NNA students have rigorous, grade-level work during their time in the Newcomer Academy allows these high-achieving goals to be met. All of STEM Prep's NNA students participate in state testing during April and transition into grade-level classrooms fully in the subsequent year. Last year, NNA students achieved an average of 1.5-2 years of growth on the ACCESS assessment. Despite being in the early stages of development at the high school level, the NNA has already witnessed significant successes, including exiting three newcomer students from ESL services within a year.

CASE STUDY

Continued

Community Impact

STEM Prep's partnership with the mayor's office has evolved over the years, and the Newcomer Academy now primarily enrolls New Americans through community advocacy. This collaborative effort has propelled STEM Prep to become Nashville's number-one school for New Americans. Petsch tracks the progress of NNA alumni and says she has seen firsthand the program's transformative effect on both students and the Southeast Nashville community. "Many of our former students excel in grade-level content classes and assume leadership roles within our schools, including mentoring our current NNA students," she says. She proudly notes that each NNA high school graduate has gone on to college, with many pursuing careers utilizing multilingual skills.

Looking ahead, Petsch and her team hope to incorporate more learnings from the EALA School Study Tours to create a bilingual model of instruction for newcomer students. "Our current challenge at STEM is that we serve New Americans who represent a diversity of languages," explains Petsch. "I think there is potential in recruiting our former NNA alumni to become teachers within our NNA program and pairing strong instruction with bilingual education standards and supports."

Petsch and her team also hope to build more socio-emotional support for newcomer students. Presently, NNA has a Social Emotional Learning (SEL) advisory group specifically designed for newcomers at the middle school. Petsch is developing a structured mentorship program between NNA high school alumni and current middle school NNA students. This initiative aims to foster a sense of continuity and support among NNA students across different grade levels, further enhancing the program's impact on student success and community engagement.

REFLECTIONS

What We Learned/Big Takewayay

Pestch addresses the foundation of support for developing a program such as NNA from the ground up, “It is critical when starting a program like this that you have a vision, solid school structures, and knowledgeable, mission-driven people to run the program” she says. “It is also essential to understand your community, their needs, and their cultures when designing a program like this one. This program is for them and built with them. It was done carefully, deliberately, and with much input from the community it was designed for.”

What We are Still Figuring Out

1. Start by identifying the need, finding external collaborators who understand that need, and building the vision with stakeholders. Create structures following this vision-setting, and remember to ask for feedback from those responsible for creating and running the program at all stages.
2. When drafting the vision, seek out resources, literature, and best practices for ESL. Develop ways to measure progress and success.
3. Hire the best teachers and leaders in ESL, ensuring that they are aligned with your mission and vision.
4. Harness the power of the community! Involve your leaders in community involvement and conversation so that your program reflects the needs and culture of the people who will participate in it.

What We Would Tell Others Trying This Out

“Our NNA program was originally designed as a middle-school-specific program. However, the number of new Americans at our high school doubled within the last year! Our support for Newcomer students at the high school is still in the early stages of development. We know we want all our high school students to graduate within four years and pursue the post-secondary options that they deserve. Working within the state guidelines for course credits and graduation is important to shape the trajectory of our high school NNA students. I look forward to developing even more robust support for them in the upcoming years!”

Resources

[EALA Promising Practices](#)

The EALA Promising Practices originate from research and insights by EALA partner organizations across the fields of disability advocacy, special education, civil rights, and K-2 nonprofits. We have compiled these key findings into one cohesive list: the EALA Promising Practices.

Adena Petsch is the Director of English Language Learners for the STEM Prep Academy. She has worked in the Southeast Nashville community for the past twelve years. Adena has served STEM Prep students and staff as a 5th grade reading teacher, literature intervention designer, literature intervention and RTI coach, Humanities and 5th/6th grade Academic Dean, before assuming her role as MS Academic Dean of English Language Learners for six years. She transitioned into her current role in 2023, and now provides coaching and oversight for all ELL students, teachers, and leaders across the STEM Prep network. Her life-long career goal is to create the most rigorous and effective multilingual program for students in the state of Tennessee.

About the Author



CASE STUDY:

Educate to Regulate: SEL in Nashville Schools

This Case Study dives into the “BeWell in School” program Fall-Hamilton Elementary School utilizes to support students with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Founder of “BeWell in School”, Riki Rattner explores how the BeWell in School program integrates mindful breath and movement into the classroom, fostering a supportive



Click the image to
access the case study

CASE STUDY

Continued

Elevating Wellness in Education

The COVID-19 pandemic brought youth mental health, emotional well-being, and overall wellness to the forefront of educational priorities.

This renewed focus on mental health has led educators and administrators to look for ways to integrate wellness practices into their daily classroom routines, making it an enduring component of the school's culture rather than a temporary response to crisis.

One such program that is on display in Nashville is [BeWell in School](#), a pioneering initiative aimed at integrating mindfulness, breath-based movement, and other wellness strategies into the educational environment. Founded in 2019 by Riki Rattner, BeWell incorporates regular training for educators on recognizing and addressing mental health issues, creating an ongoing dialogue about wellness, and integrating mental health education into the curriculum.

A Spark of Change

Rattner began her career as a fourth-grade teacher in North Nashville. Coming from a background in human and organizational development at Vanderbilt, her path to the classroom was unconventional. During her time interning at the juvenile justice center, Rattner witnessed firsthand the systemic issues affecting youth, sparking her interest in preventative and restorative approaches to education. In North Nashville, Rattner witnessed the challenges her students faced outside of school—generational trauma, over-policing, and other socio-economic stressors. These experiences highlighted the disparity between the wellness resources available to affluent communities and the lack thereof for her students.

"I would often step away from school to go to my yoga studio. I was confronted with how affluent and white my yoga peers were, which contrasted sharply with the diversity of my classroom," recalls Rattner. "This made me realize how readily available healing and therapy had always been to me, and how none of those tools were accessible to my students."

This realization ignited a fire in Rattner to bring those same healing and therapeutic tools into schools where students could benefit from them, leading to the birth of BeWell in School.

CASE STUDY

Continued

From Vision to Reality

BeWell officially launched at Warner Elementary in 2019-2020. Initially, Rattner volunteered her time, driven by a passion to make wellness accessible to all students. The program quickly gained traction, securing a state priority grant that allowed for broader implementation. Over five years, BeWell expanded to eight schools across North Nashville and Lexington, Kentucky.

One critical aspect of BeWell's implementation is its adaptability to the unique needs of each school. The program's success hinges on the support of school administrators and the willingness of educators to embrace new wellness practices. At Fall-Hamilton, for instance, the program started with after-school clubs and gradually integrated into the daily routine, demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness to the school community's needs.

Says Rattner, "What I've learned is that this work really begins with educators, and that's how we reach the kids."

Creating a Safe Place For All Students

Today, over 3,000 students participate in the BeWell program. According to Nashville Program Director & Coach Kara Kennard, student feedback consistently illustrates the program's necessity in empowering every student to access essential support and tools for emotional regulation.

"A lot of programs similar to BeWell end up looking like a place that just quote 'bad kids' go," says Kennard. "The beauty of BeWell is that all students feel like it's a place for them where they can get what they need, and it's something that they feel that their school needs and benefits from."

A tragic incident involving the loss of students highlighted the program's importance at one Lexington school. Thanks to BeWell, the school had established routines and a dedicated space for emotional support. This preparedness allowed the community to navigate the crisis with a sense of stability and support.

CASE STUDY

Continued

Empowering Educators & Creating a Culture of Wellness

Educators, too, have seen significant transformations thanks to BeWell. BeWell rooms often include dedicated “teacher corners” equipped with resources such as sound-canceling headphones, guided meditation books, and affirmations. These spaces provide educators with a much-needed respite, helping them manage their own stress and model self-care for their students.

At Rocketship Dream Community Prep, the PE teacher became a regular visitor to the BeWell room, utilizing the space during planning periods. The teacher’s positive experience extended beyond personal benefit; he began modeling wellness practices for his students, creating a ripple effect of mindfulness and regulation within the school.

Sustaining Social and Emotional Learning

Implementing a wellness program in schools comes with challenges, particularly in gaining buy-in from all stakeholders. BeWell’s approach emphasizes gradual exposure and building trust. Rattner and her team recognize the importance of meeting educators where they are, providing consistent support, and avoiding the imposition of rigid curricula.

“The real goal of impacting teachers through BeWell is giving them language and routine ideas that they can start to sprinkle moments of pause, moments of connection, moments to focus on regulation within their classroom, and do that in a way that they feel authentic and confident,” says Kennard. To that end, BeWell recently launched a digital content library called [BeWell Digital](#), which features student-focused mindfulness resources.

“Wellness content usually features a white woman doing yoga,” explains Rattner. “We want our kids to see themselves in these practices, so we created videos that show student actors demonstrating our foundational movement and wellness strategies.”

As BeWell continues to grow, it offers a compelling model for other schools seeking to integrate wellness practices into their daily routines, fostering an environment where everyone can thrive.

REFLECTIONS

What We Learned/Big Takeaway

Attending to students' emotional wellbeing and regulation is a prerequisite for learning. "If you're pushing academics and trying all these interventions but you're not prioritizing any regulation practices, then students might not actually physiologically be able to learn the information that you're teaching them," says Kennard.

What We are Still Figuring Out

Sustaining the momentum of a wellness program requires ongoing commitment and adaptability. BeWell emphasizes continuous professional development and encourages open dialogue about the benefits of mindfulness and wellness practices, as well as the importance of strong administrative support. "If you're going to do this schoolwide, the administrator has to be confident and ready to have difficult and honest conversations," says Rattner.

What We Would Tell Others Trying This Out

Rattner and her team are working to build out the BeWell Digital content library and make these resources available to more schools. "As of right now, we've only launched BeWell Digital in our partner schools. We're in the process of figuring out how we can offer that to more schools, whether you're partnered with BeWell or not."

Riki Rattner is the Founder and Executive Director of BeWell in School, a 501(c)(3) non-profit that partners with school communities to teach mindful breath and movement as proactive tools for self-regulation.

Before becoming a classroom teacher, BeWell founder Riki Rattner spent a brief time working within the criminal justice system. Her early career experience in these fields had a profound impact on her and the way she approaches student behavior. Riki saw both the criminal justice and education systems fail people in similar ways and found herself reflecting on how to interrupt the cycle.

At the same time, Riki was experiencing the stress that comes with being an educator and found tools to support her own emotional well-being. She reconnected with her yoga practice and fell in love with the calm she experienced in her mind and body after a class. Riki became determined to bring this type of experience to her students in an accessible, inclusive way.

Riki went on to get her yoga teacher certification and learned about the ways that movement, breathwork, and meditation can impact the central nervous system. She began incorporating mindfulness practices into her classroom management and one-on-one work with students. In short, the response she witnessed was profound. And it was in those moments, watching her students learn to self-soothe, attend to their emotional needs, and redirect their behaviors, that the small seed that would eventually become BeWell was planted. Riki served as the Founding BeWell Teacher in 2019-2021. Now she serves as Executive Director of the organization and continues to facilitate programming for youth and adults.

About the Author





A Deep Dive with Kemouy Bhalai: A School Study Tour Attendee's Perspective

In this episode, EALA sits down with Kemouy Bhalai, an educator, and attendee of the EALA School Study Tours in Nashville. Kemouy shares her unique experiences, lessons learned, and the SST's profound impact on her professional journey. Join us to discover the benefits of school study tours from an attendee's perspective and gain valuable insights for anyone considering implementing or participating in similar programs.

Click the image to
access the podcast



[View transcript here](#)



5 Minutes with A'Seret Dokubo: A School Study Tour Advisor's Perspective

EALA is joined by A'Seret Dokubo, the Managing Director of Fellowships for SELF and former School Study Tour advisor. Listen in to hear about her experience as a School Study Tour advisor, and how this experience has furthered her work in this field.



Click the image to
access the podcast

[View transcript here](#)

Blog

Translating Knowledge to Action: EALA Nashville School Tours 2024

In early April, the Educating All Learners Alliance (EALA) hosted its Spring 2024 School Study Tours in Nashville, Tennessee. Over three days, educators and administrators from across the country gathered to explore and learn from the innovative practices of schools that are making a difference for diverse learners.

Our time in Nashville was marked by deep engagement with schools that exemplify EALA Promising Practices—ranging from trauma-informed teaching to culturally and linguistically responsive instruction. These visits offered participants a chance to witness firsthand the ways in which these practices are transforming student outcomes and driving school success.

Day 1: A Focus on Holistic Development at Fall-Hamilton Elementary



Educators observe a yoga session in a bright classroom, part of the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) program.

The tour began at Fall-Hamilton Elementary School, a school known for its trauma-informed approach to education through frameworks like The Leader in Me and Be Well in Schools. The morning started with a warm welcome in the gym, followed by guided tours where educators explored various classrooms. The tours highlighted Innovative Structures of Support and Leader Commitment as participants observed a Be Well class focusing on yoga and Social Emotional Learning (SEL), co-teaching sessions with English Language Learners (ELL), and personalized learning time in a second-grade classroom.

One attendee shared, "The visit to Fall-Hamilton Elementary was eye-opening. Seeing trauma-informed education in practice reaffirmed the importance of SEL in creating a supportive learning environment." – Special Education Teacher, Attendee

The visit concluded with a Q&A session with former principal Mathew Portell, who shared insights into the school's ongoing efforts to support both academic and emotional development.

Blog

Translating Knowledge to Action: EALA Nashville School Tours 2024

Day 2: Strengthening Community Engagement at John B. Whitsitt Elementary

The second day of the tour took participants to John B. Whitsitt Elementary School, where the focus was on Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching and Community Engagement. The visit began with a welcome in the school library, followed by classroom observations that showcased Whitsitt's innovative scheduling and co-teaching models across grades K-5. Attendees observed a variety of practices, including a second-grade reading group and a co-planning session for math teachers that incorporated data-driven decision-making

The school's commitment to engaging families and the broader community was evident, as participants learned about how Whitsitt fosters strong partnerships with families to support student success. The visit ended with a debrief session, allowing attendees to reflect on the strategies observed and consider how they might apply similar approaches in their own schools.



Educators seated in a spacious library during a welcome session, with a school leader presenting.

Blog

Translating Knowledge to Action: EALA Nashville School Tours 2024

Day 3: Academic Excellence and SEL at LEAD Cameron Middle School

On the final day, the tour group visited LEAD Cameron Middle School and LEAD Academy High School, where they explored practices centered on Curriculum Instruction & Assessment and Culturally & Linguistically Responsive Teaching. LEAD Cameron, a zoned public charter school, showcased a unique program designed to support newcomer students, as well as a self-contained math and reading program for grades 5-8.



Educators taking part in a collaboration session, with teachers discussing instructional practices and a school banner displayed behind them.

One participant noted, "School Visit 3 at LEAD Cameron Middle School was incredibly inspiring. The CREW program and the support for newcomer students really stood out as innovative and impactful." – Administrator, Attendee

Another attendee reflected on the impact of the SEL learning observed, sharing, "STEM Prep Middle School provided a perfect example of how to integrate culturally responsive teaching with rigorous academics. This visit gave me actionable ideas to take back to my own school." – Special Education Coordinator, Attendee

The day concluded with a panel discussion with teachers, providing further insight into the school's instructional practices and the impact of strong leadership on student outcomes.

Final Reflections: A Collaborative Learning Experience

The Nashville School Study Tours provided a rich opportunity for educators to engage with promising practices across multiple schools. From trauma-informed education at Fall-Hamilton to community engagement at Whitsitt and innovative instructional models at LEAD Cameron, participants left with new ideas and strategies to bring back to their own districts.

We extend our gratitude to our partner organizations, Diverse Learners Cooperative and Getting Smart, for their support in making this event a success. To read more about our previous School Study Tours and their impact, check out our blog on the [2023 Chicago Tours here](#).