



Innovative Schools Learning Excursion to Tucson, Arizona
featuring Desert View High School and Sunnyside Unified School District
for High School Teams of Educators, Students, and Key Partners

April 28–May 1, 2025

*At-Home Activities Begin March 25, 2025

See innovative learning in person, exchange strategies to equitably transform learning, and apply what you learn to transform teaching and learning within your own school/district.

[Complete the Spring 2025 Innovative Schools Learning Excursion Application](#)

Apply by February 7, 2025. This program is capped at 70 participants, and NGLC is committed to an inclusive and equitable selection process based on a set of criteria. Mini-grants of \$1,400 per team member are provided to defray costs for travel and support collaboration, planning, and application of learning.

Spring 2025 Innovative Schools Learning Excursion to Tucson, Arizona

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Overview

The national nonprofit [Next Generation Learning Challenges](#) (NGLC), with funding from the [Barr Foundation](#), is excited to announce the Spring 2025 Innovative Schools Learning Excursion to Tucson, Arizona, April 28–May 1, 2025! We invite applications from New England-based high school-focused teams of 6-9 educators, students, and key partners that are interested in redesigning the high school experience and are ready to work together to apply new strategies in their own schools.

Seeing is believing. The Innovative Schools Learning Excursions are more than a school tour, they are a learning experience. Facilitators will help every participant learn with and from the host sites. The excursions are designed to deepen participants' knowledge of "next generation learning" (see below) approaches in use at the host sites and will provide teams a foundation for applying what they learn to their own vision for teaching and learning in their school/district.

Next generation learning. Learning approaches that develop students in well-rounded ways share some common characteristics: They respond to the strengths, needs, and cultural backgrounds of each individual student. They make sure students successfully acquire skills and knowledge before moving on. They connect academic knowledge and skills to on-the-job work experiences and real problems in our communities, adapted for even our youngest learners. They use the most advanced tools available in our society, including technology but also what is known in education as "learning science." Educators often refer to these learning approaches as student-centered, personalized, competency-based, equitable, experiential, authentic, and/or technology-enabled. At NGLC, we use the term [next generation learning](#) to capture all of these learning approaches.

Inclusive community engagement. A key takeaway from NGLC's work with schools and districts that have had success in transforming teaching and learning is this: "If young people are going to graduate from U.S. public schools with the skills and mindsets needed to address 21st century challenges, we who serve them—and the schools and organizations we are a part of—must develop and use those same skills

and mindsets ourselves.” Most importantly, the change process should be owned by educators, students, parents, and community members, with care taken to be inclusive and equitable. A diverse team of partners doing work that matters for their community and for their students is truly transformational. It’s exactly what needs to happen for real and lasting change to take root. It’s what all our students deserve. (For more, see our research at www.transformation-design.org.)

Learning Goals and Activities

Innovative Schools Learning Excursions are first and foremost learning experiences for participants and their teams. The experiences are designed to support your team’s vision for transformed learning and shared purpose for the excursion—this shared purpose is expressed as a “Brave Question.” Your team will begin to identify these guiding ideas in your application and clarify them through use of a [learning log](#). The learning log is our primary tool to organize and support your team’s learning.

Goals

- See high schools in the midst of transforming learning, focusing on next gen learning approaches.
- Notice the school culture, the ways that adults and youth work together, and school and district policies; explore how these conditions support innovative teaching and learning.
- Connect with others in similar roles—educator, student, parent, community partner—to understand how each role is involved in the work of transforming learning at the host school(s) and consider ways your role can be involved in redesigning the high school experience in your own community.
- Develop strategies for applying what you learn during the learning excursion to your school/district and create an artifact to share what you learn with a wider group of colleagues and partners in your school/district community.

Activities

- *Before the trip:* To develop team goals for the learning excursion based on a shared vision for teaching and learning, attend a virtual session with NGLC, the host schools, and other participating teams; complete sections of your team learning log; go on a “learning walk” to observe learning in one of your own high schools; join a virtual team coaching session with an NGLC facilitator; and independently review the materials and resources we provide in advance to learn about the host site.
- *During the trip:* Tour the host schools to observe their approach to next gen learning; meet with students, teachers, and administrators to discuss their high school learning redesign; meet with partners who have been involved in the learning redesign; participate in

- team work sessions; participate in work and social sessions with other teams attending the learning excursion and the host schools; and create an artifact of your team's experience to share with a wider group of partners in your school and community.
- *After the trip:* To make the team's learning visible to your school community, to inspire action to redesign the high school learning experience, and to apply what you learn from this program, finalize a set of ideas or actions to try and complete your learning log, join a virtual team coaching session with an NGLC facilitator, and share your experience with partners in your school/district community.
 - See the [draft agenda](#) below for dates and times of all activities.

NGLC will organize and share the agenda, materials to prepare for the event, and other essential information via email. All participants will be able to access all information and materials, including your team's learning log, from a participant agenda available as a Google doc. Participants are invited to access learning logs from other teams as well. This is one way to live out a shared commitment to making learning visible.

Application and Eligibility

Each team must submit the required [application form](#) by **11:59 p.m. ET on Friday, February 7, 2025**. Participation in this excursion is capped at 70 participants, approximately 7-10 teams. NGLC is committed to an inclusive and equitable selection process; applications will be reviewed on a set of criteria to make selections.

Eligibility

- The application is open to all public school governance types (traditional, innovation, charter) in New England.
- We require that teams be focused at the high school level.
- We require that teams include **at least one high school or district leader with decision-making authority** and **at least two students**. Teams may also include district and school teachers, counselors, non-instructional staff, and administrators as well as parents, school committee/school board members, workforce industry partners, nonprofit partners, local government officials, and other key partners.
- We recommend team size to be 6-9 members. *If your team is less than 6 or more than 9, please provide a rationale in the application. Please note that if selected, we may not be able to accommodate more than 9 members on your team, in order to provide inclusive access to the program.*

- We recommend teams balance *educator* and *partner* roles. This balance helps ensure that all voices and perspectives have an opportunity to contribute equitably and inclusively to team discussions and team work. An individual team member may represent multiple roles, such as a teacher who is also a parent.
- The lead applicant may represent an educator or partner role.

Application Details

The [application form](#) collects basic information about the lead applicant and your team's school/district. The application also asks for your team composition, vision for transformed learning, and goals for participating in the learning excursion. And as part of the application, you are asked to certify that you have secured assurances from the appropriate building and/or district leaders for your team to conduct a learning walk at your team's high school. The learning walk is a required activity for all team members; see the draft agenda below for when the learning walk needs to occur.

Selection Process

NGLC will review all applications once the application closes on February 7, 2025. Using information obtained from the applications, NGLC will make final selections with feedback from Barr Foundation program officers. If needed, NGLC may conduct calls with a set of finalist teams. NGLC will contact all teams that apply by the deadline with selection decisions no later than February 25, 2024. At that time, information about registration and travel will be distributed. *Please wait to make any travel plans until we have confirmed your selection.*

Selection Criteria

NGLC is committed to an inclusive and equitable selection process based on a set of criteria. The Innovative Schools Learning Excursion to Arizona is capped at 70 participants. We expect to select 7-10 teams of 6-9 members each.

- Teams will be selected based on the quality of the application responses and evidence of meeting the criteria set forth in the application, including team composition with required roles, vision for transformed learning, and goals for participating.
- Priority will be given to fully-assembled teams that are interested in redesigning the high school experience, meet the expectations for team size, and balance educator and partner roles.
- If NGLC conducts calls with a set of finalist teams, those calls will be used to determine the strength of foundational structures known to support effective change efforts, implementation, and long-term sustainability.

Mini-Grants and Commitments

To relieve costs for travel as well as to support learning, collaboration, engagement, planning, and implementation of learning, we offer each participating team a mini-grant of \$1,400 per team member. Mini-grant funds will be distributed in two equal payments: one at the time of the grant award and one upon completion of all commitments. In order to receive the full mini-grant, we kindly request the following commitments from **each team member**:

1. Engage as active members of the learning community by...
 - a. Completing all activities before and after the visit, including but not limited to readings, virtual sessions with NGLC, and a learning walk at your team's high school.
 - b. Attending all segments of the Innovative Schools Learning Excursion programming while onsite at the host school(s). Start and end times are posted within the draft agenda below.
 - c. Sharing your thinking and learning visibly during in person and virtual sessions.
 - d. Creating an artifact of your team's experience to share with a wider group of partners in your school and community.
2. Complete the participant survey at the end of the learning excursion.
3. Submit a completed [learning log](#) at the end of the learning excursion.

Following your school/district's policies, mini-grant funds may be used to cover costs of participating that are not directly paid by NGLC, including but not limited to travel-related costs; associated costs such as substitutes, food and supplies for planning meetings, and stipends for working sessions pre/post event; and costs related to applying the learning and continuing the work following the visit.

Travel Costs

NGLC will provide lodging for all participants and meals during the excursion as described below. The excursion will have a designated headquarters hotel with buses to shuttle participants to the school sites.

- **Lodging:** NGLC will reserve and directly pay for up to four nights at a designated hotel.
- **Meals:** NGLC will provide dinner on April 28; breakfast, lunch, and breaks on April 29; breakfast, lunch, breaks, and dinner on April 30; and breakfast, lunch, and a break on May 1. You will be responsible for costs for dinner on April 29 and any meals during travel (mini-grant funds may be used for these costs).

Teams need to pay for all other travel-related expenses, such as car rental, train, airfare, taxi or shared ride services, any non-hosted meals, incidentals, etc., up front with their own funds; these costs may be supported by mini-grant funds. *Please wait to make any travel arrangements until we have confirmed your selection.*

Draft Agenda

At Home Sessions	
Between February 25 and March 25	45 Minute Virtual Coaching Session for Team Lead with NGLC, scheduled by team lead
Tuesday, March 25, 3:30 pm - 5:30 pm	Virtual Kickoff with NGLC and Sunnyside hosts for all teams
Between March 25 and April 11	Learning Walk in one of your own high schools, scheduled by your team
Between March 31 and April 18	1 Hour Virtual Team Coaching Session with NGLC, scheduled by your team with NGLC
Programming in Arizona (Tucson is MST, which is 3 hours behind New England, EDT in April)	
April 28, 2025	
5:00 pm - 5:30 pm	Registration and Reception
5:30 pm - 7:30 pm	Dinner Hosted by NGLC
April 29, 2025	
6:00 am - 7:00 am	Breakfast provided by NGLC
7:00 am - 5:00 pm	Desert View High School Visit and Day One Programming <i>includes lunch and breaks provided by NGLC</i>
5:00 pm -	Personal rejuvenation and dinner on your own
April 30, 2025	

6:00 am - 7:00 am	Breakfast, provided by NGLC
7:00 am - 5:00 pm	Sunnyside Unified District Visit and Day Two Programming <i>includes lunch and breaks provided by NGLC</i>
5:00 pm - 6:30 pm	Personal rejuvenation
6:30 pm - 9:30 pm	Cohort Dinner, hosted by NGLC
May 1, 2025	
7:00 am - 8:00 am	Breakfast, provided by NGLC
8:00 am - 3:00 pm	Day Three Programming <i>includes lunch and break provided by NGLC</i>
3:00 pm	Departure
At Home Sessions	
Between May 1 and May 22	Team Action Planning, scheduled by your team
Between May 1 and May 22	Virtual Team Coaching Session with NGLC (optional), scheduled by your team with NGLC
May 22	Completed Learning Logs submitted to NGLC

About the Host Site



Website: <https://susd12.org/district/>

District Demographics:

- Grades Served: PK-12
- Number of Schools: 21
- Enrollment: 13,739
- Race/Ethnicity: 90.2% Hispanic, 3.2% White, 2.6% American Indian, 2.5% Black or African American, 0.3% Asian or Pacific Islander
- Free/Reduced Price Lunch: 83%
- Homeless: 2%
- English Learners: 17%
- Students with Disabilities: 11%
- Languages Spoken: American Sign Language (ASL), Arabic, Amharic, Dari, English, Filipino, French, Hindi, Hopi, Kirundi, Maay, Navajo, Pashto, Punjabi, Somali, Spanish, Swahili, Tohono O'odham, Vietnamese, Yaqui

SUSD Land Acknowledgement: "We acknowledge that we gather as the Sunnyside Unified School District in a culturally and linguistically rich community on the land of the Tohono O'odham Nation and Pascua Yaqui Tribe, past and present. We honor with gratitude the land itself and the Indigenous people who have been stewards of the land. As a learning institution, we commit to learning how to work, serve, educate and uplift our youth while maintaining a diverse and inclusive environment with respect and appreciation of all."

Located in Tucson, Arizona, Sunnyside Unified School District serves just under 14,000 students and families. The district's mission is to develop students with a strong sense of **identity, purpose, and agency**, so that they leave the district as effective learners who act with purpose to achieve the conditions they desire in their own and others' lives. In a district with 12 elementary schools, 5 middle schools, and 2 comprehensive high schools plus an early childhood center, and an alternative high school, a sense of **coherence and clarity about a**

common purpose is essential. The district's [Profile of a Graduate](#) provides that clarity, and participants will see how everyone in the district—youth and adults—live out the profile's competencies every day: Knowledge for Learning, Knowledge for Impact, Creative Confidence, Critical Consciousness, and Self and Social Awareness.

Sunnyside's learning model is anchored to formative assessment which is the catalyst for actualizing identity, purpose, and agency as students' lived experience. Alignment is not enough—coherence is required to ensure that programs and initiatives, such as Student Learning Ambassadors program, equitable grading, College and Career Academies (CTE), dual enrollment, inquiry learning, and more, intentionally and deliberately support the tenets of the Graduate Profile. A "learning culture for all" guides the district's efforts to transform learning in support of the Profile of a Graduate. A learning culture for all means that **everyone is a learner**, creating coherence across their work including teacher professional learning, school leadership moves, and student learning experiences. That's when the district has observed the most growth and change. As the chief academic officer, Pam Betten, explains, "If adults are not authentic, then kids won't be either."

Learning Excursion participants will experience the coherence and learning culture throughout the visit, with opportunities for discussions with students, teachers, and school and district leaders to understand how they built this culture over time, why it's so important, and practices that encourage it.



Website: <https://susd12.org/desert-view/>

School Demographics:

- Grades Served: 9-12
- Enrollment: 2,225
- Race/Ethnicity: 87% Hispanic, 4% African American, 4% White, 4% Native American, 2% Multiple races, <2% Asian
- Free/Reduced Price Lunch: 61%

- English Learners: 11%
- Students with Disabilities: 10%

A Title I school, like all Sunnyside Unified School District schools, Desert View High School is one of two large comprehensive high schools in the district serving over 2,000 students. In line with the district's learning culture for all, the high school is a place where all members of the community, students, teachers, and staff, see themselves as learners, actively engaged in learning. This is evident in the school's vision statement; "Desert View High School will become a place where all members of our community; students, teachers, and staff, are actively engaged in learning. Learners will believe in and act on their own agency through reflection, vulnerability, and curiosity. At Desert View High School, we are all learners!" This vision lives through various aspects of the school.

Desert View employs a more comprehensive approach to professional development that relies on research about effective professional collaboration and prioritizes student-focused learning/instruction. Adult learning at the site aims to develop evidence-based instructional practices that honor students' funds of knowledge and build partnerships between teacher and student. All learning opportunities work to emphasize developing learner agency in an organic way.

Learner agency is a cornerstone of the learning experience, and goes beyond choice toward ownership, motivation, independence, and contribution to learning. Participants in the Learning Excursion can observe learner agency through formative assessment practices in particular, where students use evidence to inform their learning, while they are learning it. For instance, [Learning Ambassadors](#) are a student organization that explores how student agency and formative assessment impact their learning. The group was built to explore the impact of making pedagogy clear to students and providing them a seat at the "instructional table." In its third year, the group has helped co-design and co-facilitate teacher professional learning on student agency, mentor elementary students, and work with peers to influence classroom practices across the district.

Desert View High School Freshman Academy introduces students to high school life. Real-world learning through career and technical education (CTE) and internships prepares students for college and the workforce and provides a wide range of transferable skills to succeed in multiple careers. The school houses four of the district's six [College & Career Academies](#) with multiple CTE programs, which provide innovative, relevant, and engaging connected learning opportunities centered on the career interests of students. Precision Manufacturing, Education Professions, Culinary, and Air Force JROTC are some of the programs that students are engaged in. In addition to the CTE programs, students can earn both high school and college credit in dual enrollment courses through partnerships with Pima Community College and the University of Arizona.