

EQUITY redesigned.

PEDAGOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Research Brief | ILA Signature Learning Pathways™

A research-informed pedagogy for developing innovators, leaders, and purpose-driven change makers.

ILA's Signature Learning Pathways are not a stand-alone curriculum. They are a flexible learning design framework that helps educators connect rigorous standards with authentic projects, learner agency, inclusive design, social-emotional development, leadership, and reflection.

01 Standards Alignment

Learning experiences begin with clear academic expectations and connect authentic work to the Texas Prekindergarten Guidelines and TEKS.

02 Project-Based Learning

Students investigate meaningful questions and create products, performances, solutions, or actions for authentic audiences.

03 Neurodivergent-Affirming Design

Learning is designed for learner variability, with multiple ways to engage, access ideas, communicate, and demonstrate understanding.

04 SEL + Leadership

Self-awareness, collaboration, empathy, decision-making, reflection, and leadership are developed through the learning experience - not added on afterward.

WE DON'T JUST PREPARE STUDENTS FOR THE FUTURE. WE EMPOWER THEM TO SHAPE IT.

1. Standards-Aligned, Developmentally Appropriate Learning

Foundation: ILA connects authentic learning to rigorous expectations without reducing learning to a checklist of standards.

The Texas Education Agency identifies the TEKS as the state standards for what students should know and be able to do. For younger learners, the Texas Prekindergarten Guidelines align with Kindergarten TEKS while recognizing developmental variability.

ILA uses standards to establish the destination while educators retain flexibility in how learners explore, practice, create, and demonstrate understanding.

ILA DESIGN PRINCIPLE

Start with the learning goal. Design an authentic experience. Provide multiple pathways to mastery. Gather evidence through what learners make, say, do, explain, and reflect upon.

2. Project-Based Learning as the Learning Engine

Foundation: ILA uses projects and authentic challenges as a vehicle for deeper learning, not as an activity added after instruction.

High-quality project-based learning places students in sustained inquiry around meaningful questions or problems and asks them to apply knowledge through authentic products, performances, or solutions.

1. **DISCOVER & BE CURIOUS** - Activate identity, interests, prior knowledge, and questions.
2. **EXPLORE & INVESTIGATE** - Research, observe, test, interview, read, and gather evidence.
3. **DESIGN & INNOVATE** - Generate ideas, prototype, create, revise, and solve.
4. **CREATE & COMMUNICATE** - Make learning visible through multiple forms of expression.
5. **LEAD & COLLABORATE** - Work with others, make decisions, contribute, and lead with purpose.
6. **REFLECT & GROW** - Use feedback, self-assessment, and evidence to identify growth and next steps.

ILA's distinction: The project is not the pedagogy by itself. The pedagogy is the intentional sequence of inquiry, standards, learner agency, creation, critique, leadership, authentic audience, and reflection surrounding the project.

3. Neurodivergent-Affirming & Social-Emotional Design

Foundation: ILA designs for learner variability from the beginning rather than treating differences as exceptions that must be accommodated later.

Universal Design for Learning organizes learning design around multiple means of engagement, representation, and action/expression, with learner agency as a central goal.

ILA uses these principles as a research-informed foundation for neurodivergent-affirming design. This means anticipating differences in attention, communication, sensory needs, executive functioning, pace, interests, and expression while maintaining meaningful, rigorous goals.

ACCESS - Varied ways to encounter ideas and experiences.

AGENCY - Meaningful choice in learning.

EXPRESSION - Multiple ways to demonstrate understanding.

BELONGING - Identity, strengths, culture, language, and learner differences treated as assets.

SEL is embedded in the work

Learners practice self-awareness through goal setting, self-management through persistence, empathy through community-centered design, relationship skills through collaboration, and responsible decision-making through authentic choices.

4. The ILA Pedagogy in Practice

The Signature Learning Pathways provide a common learning architecture that can be adapted across early childhood, expanded learning, summer programs, youth leadership, community learning, and future school-based models.

ENGAGING EXPERIENCES Active, hands-on learning connected to authentic questions and real life.	COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT Evidence of academic, social-emotional, creative, and leadership growth.
STUDENT VOICE & CHOICE Learners influence how they learn and demonstrate mastery.	AUTHENTIC AUDIENCE Work is shared beyond the teacher whenever appropriate.
COMMUNITY CONNECTION Learners investigate local assets, needs, stories, systems, and opportunities.	CONTINUOUS GROWTH Feedback, revision, reflection, and goal setting make growth visible over time.

Research & Practice References

Texas Education Agency. *Texas Prekindergarten Guidelines*.
Texas Education Agency. *Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)*.
Texas Education Agency. *Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Early Childhood Education*.
CAST. *Universal Design for Learning Guidelines 3.0*.
Kingston, S. (2018). *Project Based Learning & Student Achievement: What Does the Research Tell Us?* PBLWorks.

EQUITY redesigned.

ILA's pedagogy begins with a simple belief: rigor and equity are not competing goals. When learning is intentionally designed around high expectations, authentic work, learner variability, agency, belonging, and leadership, more students have meaningful opportunities to thrive.