



Strategic Plan

2026–2031

A Strategic Learning Framework
& Portrait of a Learner



Ellemercito Learning Community is a learner-centered, trauma-responsive, project-based learning community serving students in grades 3–12.



Rooted in belonging, curiosity, and connection, Ellemercito exists to reimagine education as a space where learners are known, supported, and empowered to flourish.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1 Ellemercito Beliefs About Learning
 - 2 Founder & Executive Director's Message
 - 3 The Process
 - 4 Mission & Vision
 - 5 Theory of Action
 - 6 Portrait of an Ellemercito Learner
 - 7 Ellemercito PoL Competencies in Detail
 - 8 How Learning Comes to Life: The 4Ps & 5Cs
 - 9 Strategic Objectives
 - 10 Strategic Initiatives
 - 11 Ellemercito Innovative Elements
-

ELLEMERCITO BELIEFS ABOUT LEARNING

At Ellemercito Learning Community, we believe education should awaken purpose, cultivate connection, and nourish the whole child.

We believe learning flourishes when learners feel safe, seen, known, and valued. Emotional safety, belonging, and trust are foundational—not supplemental—to meaningful learning. When learners experience a deep sense of belonging, they are more willing to engage, take intellectual risks, and persist through challenge.

We believe curiosity, creativity, and joy are powerful drivers of growth. Learners thrive when their interests, identities, and lived experiences are honored and integrated into the learning process. Learning should feel alive—inviting wonder, exploration, experimentation, and imagination.

We believe education should be personal, relational, and connected to real life. Learning is strongest when it is grounded in meaningful work, authentic problem-solving, and deep engagement with community and place. Learners develop understanding by doing, reflecting, and creating in the world around them.

Learning is an act of agency. Our role is to create the conditions in which it can emerge.



This is an exciting moment for learning!

We are living in a time of rapid transformation—technological, social, and deeply human. The world our learners are growing into is complex, interconnected, and full of possibility. This moment invites us to ask bold questions about what education can and should be.

At Ellemercito Learning Community, we see this not as a challenge to manage, but as an opportunity to reimagine.

From the very beginning, Ellemercito was built on the belief that education should feel alive. Learning should spark curiosity, invite creativity, and be grounded in connection. It should honor the whole learner—their ideas, identities, emotions, and potential—and meet them where they are.

Our learning model is intentionally designed to do just that. Through project-based learning, delight-directed exploration, and personalized learning pathways, learners are active participants in their education. Emotional safety and belonging are foundational here, because we know that when learners feel secure and supported, they are more willing to take risks, ask questions, collaborate, and grow.

Innovation is at the heart of our work—not innovation for its own sake, but innovation rooted in care, purpose, and real-world relevance. Learners engage with community

experts, explore meaningful questions, and create authentic work that connects learning to life. They are encouraged to discover who they are, how they learn, and how they can contribute meaningfully to the world around them.

This Strategic Plan reflects that vision. It is both a roadmap and a living document—one that will continue to evolve as our community learns and grows together.



With excitement and deep gratitude,

Lizette Valles

Lizette Valles
Founder & Executive Director
Ellemercito Learning Community

THE PROCESS

This Strategic Plan was developed through lived practice, reflection, and collaboration with learners, families, educators, and community partners.

Rather than emerging from a single moment in time, this plan reflects years of listening, iterating, and building alongside a community committed to reimagining what education can be. The process was grounded in research-informed, healing-centered, and real-world learning practices, and guided by the belief that those closest to the learning experience should shape its future.

The result is a living framework—one that aligns learning, wellbeing, and purpose while remaining responsive to the evolving needs of our learners and families.



Our

MISSION

To provide a real-world, highly personalized, and transformative education through project-based learning that nurtures critical thinking, cultivates a growth mindset, and develops profound empathy.

Our

VISION

We envision an education that inspires and catapults the next generation of thinkers, creators, leaders, and world changers to dream boldly and take meaningful action.

Ellemercito Learning Community represents the future of learning—blending education’s most enduring practices with experiential, trauma-responsive, and holistic approaches for learners who thrive beyond standardization.





THEORY OF ACTION

At Ellemercito Learning Community, our Theory of Action is rooted in the belief that learning is both an intellectual and deeply human endeavor. We believe education should awaken purpose, cultivate connection, and nourish the whole child. Ellemercito is a co-healing, co-learning community that prioritizes youth mental health and intentionally creates space for every learner to feel safe, valued, and empowered.

Our Theory of Action is informed by Mitchel Resnick’s 4Ps Framework—Projects, Passion, Peers, and Play—and aligned with whole-child competencies that emphasize creativity, curiosity, collaboration, critical thinking, and care.

Our approach is further shaped by a rich constellation of research-backed, heart-centered educational philosophies, including Charlotte Mason, Paulo Freire, Erin Gruwell and the Freedom Writers model, project- and inquiry-based learning, culturally responsive and place-based education, and healing-centered, trauma-responsive practices.

Therefore:

If we create emotionally safe learning environments grounded in strong relationships, healing-centered practices, and learner agency—and design learning through meaningful projects, passion-driven inquiry, peer collaboration, and playful exploration—then learners will develop the confidence, skills, and compassion needed to navigate complexity, advocate for themselves and others, and contribute meaningfully to the world.

Together, these influences form a dynamic and inclusive learning model—one where joy and justice meet, where structure supports freedom, and where every child is seen, supported, and inspired to become who they are truly meant to be.

PORTRAIT OF AN ELLEMERCITO LEARNER

An Ellemercito learner approaches the world with curiosity, confidence, compassion, and responsibility.



They understand who they are, how they learn, and how to advocate for their needs while remaining deeply connected to the wellbeing of others. They are grounded in self-awareness, guided by purpose, and motivated by a desire to create positive impact.

Ellemercito graduates are prepared to think critically, collaborate meaningfully, communicate with intention, and engage thoughtfully with the world around them. They are not defined by test scores or standardized measures, but by their ability to learn, adapt, contribute, and grow.



ELLEMERCITO PORTRAIT OF A LEARNER COMPETENCIES IN DETAIL

The following competencies describe the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and ways of being that Ellemercito Learning Community seeks to cultivate in every learner.



01 **A Mindful Learner**

Demonstrates self-awareness, emotional regulation, reflection, and wellbeing.



02 **A Solution Seeker**

Applies inquiry, research, and critical thinking to real-world challenges.



03 **An Inspired Innovator**

Engages creativity, curiosity, and purpose to generate and refine ideas.



04 **A Skillful Collaborator**

Communicates effectively, shares responsibility, and builds community.



05 **An Effective Communicator**

Listens deeply, expresses ideas clearly, and adapts communication across contexts.



06 **A Global Citizen**

Acts with empathy, ethical responsibility, cultural awareness, and stewardship.

HOW LEARNING COMES TO LIFE AT ELLEMERCITO

Learning at Ellemercito is guided by two complementary frameworks that shape both how learning is designed and who learners are becoming.

THE 4Ps:

HOW LEARNING IS DESIGNED

Learning through creating, building, and designing meaningful work.

PROJECTS

Pursuing interests and questions that matter

PASSIONS

Learning through collaboration and shared problem-solving

PEERS

Experimentation, exploration, and joyful risk-taking

PLAY

Asking questions and wondering deeply

CURIOUS

Analyzing, reflecting, and solving real-world problems

CRITICAL THINKERS

Generating ideas and designing solutions

CREATIVE

Practicing empathy and responsibility

CARING

Working with others and sharing leadership

COLLABORATIVE

THE 5Cs: WHO LEARNERS ARE BECOMING

Together, the 4Ps and 5Cs ensure that learning at Ellemercito is deep, engaging, human-centered, and deeply meaningful.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES (2026–2031)



- Center learner wellbeing, belonging, and agency
- Expand authentic project-based learning experiences
- Strengthen partnerships with community experts and organizations
- Scale personalized learning pathways and supports
- Redefine success beyond conventional academic measures

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES



- Community partnerships across arts, STEM, entrepreneurship, media, and design
- Learner-driven projects grounded in passion and real-world relevance
- Collaborative learning structures that center peer learning and mentorship
- Playful, inquiry-driven learning experiences
- Public exhibitions, portfolios, and celebrations of learning
- Healing-centered and restorative community practices



ELLEMERCITO INNOVATIVE ELEMENTS

- Project-Based, Passion-Driven Learning
- Learner Agency and Voice
- Healing-Centered & Reparative Practices
- Personalized Learning Pathways
- Community-Connected Learning Experiences





GET IN TOUCH WITH US!



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BOOK A CALL

Schedule a call with our team to discuss your child's needs and how Ellemercito can help them thrive.

LEARN MORE

Discover more about our educational and enrichment offerings, along with our educational philosophy and innovative approach.