The Rocky Mountain School of Expeditionary Learning
Executive Director Communication

Wednesday, January 21, 2015

Re: Expeditionary Learning – National Announcement

Dear RMSEL Parent Community,

I am writing to inform the parent community of a recent decision on behalf of the national Expeditionary Learning network. Expeditionary Learning is a national consulting agency that provides professional development services to Expeditionary Learning schools through an annual contract of services. On November 18, 2014, I was notified by Scot Hartl, CEO, Expeditionary Learning, of an important announcement (see below):

Dear Chad,

I am writing to give you a heads up about an important change at Expeditionary Learning that will affect us all. We have come to realize, after careful consideration, that a combination of factors make a rebranding of Expeditionary Learning, including a name change, desirable. With so much opportunity ahead of us to expand our impact, we believe that this is the right time to undertake a rebranding that reflects our dynamic evolution.

Though our name will be changing, I can assure you that what we stand for – our mission, our values and the way we work – will remain the same. We will be the same non-profit organization with the same approach. Our Outward Bound roots and the enduring values held in our Design Principles will continue to be what defines us.

Technically, the name Expeditionary Learning is owned by Outward Bound USA, and we have used that name under a license that will not continue. We are committed to working with you over the coming months to make the transition to a new name as seamless as possible, including discussing options with respect to ongoing use of your existing school name.

We anticipate the transition to the new brand will begin this coming spring and that full adoption will take time. As we go through the branding design process, we will be involving many of you in focus groups and interviews to understand the impact that this change will have on you and help assure a workable path through the transition.

Our work matters to kids and teachers across this country. This rebranding is an opportunity to raise awareness of the great work you do, reinforce the values of our growing network and advance the impact of our mission. No matter what, I am committed to ensuring that this change honors your work and the vision and values that we all share.

We are crew,

Scott

After receiving this communication from Scot, I set up a time to ask questions regarding the intentions behind such a monumental decision to undergo a rebranding process, which will include a severability of interest with Outward Bound as well as a name change desirable at this time. The decision to undergo an extensive rebranding process as well as a name change is tied to the ownership of the Expeditionary Learning name by the original founding partnership with Outward Bound USA. Outward Bound USA is the registered trademark holder.
must extend beyond the classroom into authentic experiences to create a lasting impact on our students. Hahn also said, “Learning is an expedition into the unknown. Expeditions draw together personal experience and intellectual growth to promote self-discovery and the construction of knowledge.” The daily work in our classrooms and fieldwork settings are directly tied to our belief that learning must extend beyond the classroom into authentic experiences to create a lasting impact on our students. Hahn also

After further discussion, we were invited to attend two open sessions regarding the impact to schools at the National Conference in Boston, MA on December 6-9, 2014. We were represented at the conference by two teacher leaders who attended the open session, recording the meeting for further review upon their return from the conference. Disclosed during the meeting, Scot shared with the audience of impacted schools that we would be required to change the name of our school over the course of the next year, not to exceed a period of 18 months, or explore a secondary agreement with Outward Bound USA. This directly impacts schools that include “expeditionary” or “expeditionary learning” in the name of their organization. Expeditionary Learning and the subsequent new brand will not incur the local cost required of a school for rebranding and renaming their individual program. Expeditionary Learning will provide support materials to families to assist in understanding the dynamic evolution of the new network. The legal expert present in the session shared with the audience of school leaders that the only impact to schools is a name change; Expeditionary Learning, and subsequently the new brand, will retain all intellectual property.

During the meeting time, Scot addressed our indirect tie to Outward Bound, and the influence of the design principles and enduring values of the original organization will continue to have a defining impact on the rebranding process. Over the course of the past month, I have also been in direct contact with Steve Matous, CEO, Outward Bound USA. During our conversation, I shared the direct connection of the roots that define RMSEL as tied to our founding agreement with the Public Education and Business Coalition (PEBC) and the Colorado Outward Bound School. Steve listened and documented our conversation pertaining to the impact faced by our program based on the severability of interest between Expeditionary Learning and Outward Bound USA. At this time, Steve was unable to disclose any negotiations between the two organizations regarding the cost or impact to ongoing intellectual property rights. Outward Bound USA is open to continued conversation and agreements with local organizations after the transition period between Outward Bound and Expeditionary Learning expires.

On January 8, 2015, I requested a timeline for disclosure of this announcement to individual public school communities. It was shared that this would take place by the end of the month. As of Tuesday, January 20, 2015, we have not been notified of a forthcoming announcement on behalf of Expeditionary Learning and feel it incumbent upon our leadership team to share the information we have at this point with our school community.

How will the “rebranding” of Expeditionary Learning impact RMSEL?

We were founded in 1992 by the Public Education and Business Coalition (PEBC) and the Colorado Outward Bound School, as the Denver Expeditionary School. Our school was created as a Board of Cooperative Education Services partnering with multiple local school districts to operate a school of choice in the Denver metro community. Our founding program was a “break the mold” model for education funded by the New American Schools Development Corporation. The Denver Expeditionary School was one of five pilot programs to begin developing curriculum as a national Expeditionary Learning School. During the first year of operation, the students and community participated in the naming of our school program, which resulted in the name we retain today, the Rocky Mountain School of Expeditionary Learning (RMSEL). Individual school programs do not hold licensing agreements pertaining to the name of each school with Expeditionary Learning.

The founding design principles in connection to Outward Bound are an essential element to the mission and vision of our school. The founder of Outward Bound, Kurt Hahn said, “Learning is an expedition into the unknown. Expeditions draw together personal experience and intellectual growth to promote self-discovery and the construction of knowledge.” The daily work in our classrooms and fieldwork settings are directly tied to our belief that learning must extend beyond the classroom into authentic experiences to create a lasting impact on our students. Hahn also
shared with his students that “Education is tied unequivocally to experience, to what one does and not so much to one’s attitudes and opinions.” At RMSEL, we provide an exceptional in-depth learning community tied to our founding mission, vision, and principles. This community is directly tied to our world-class school adventure program found only at RMSEL, not at all Expeditionary Schools. Our school’s tie to Outward Bound is intentional and not by accident, remaining a vital and essential part of our learning experience.

At this point, you are wondering what impact this will have on our school and our children. We have retained private legal counsel to review the impact of Expeditionary Learning’s decision to the name of our school. At this point, we have no intention of changing the name of our school to follow that of the rebranding process and the severability of interest with Outward Bound USA. We will continue to teach engaging, challenging, and complex learning expeditions in our classroom with authentic fieldwork experiences. We will continue to foster a world-class adventure program tied to the design principles of Outward Bound USA.

As Expeditionary Learning goes through the process of “rebranding” and the dynamic evolution that Scot references in his announcement to school leaders, we will continue to partner with the new organization in a similar manner as we do today. This partnership will be outlined in our annual consulting contract for services. We are shocked by the announcement to chart a new course by the national organization, but also understand that change is essential to growth and development to further the work of their organization. We will continue our status as an independent school of choice and partner with outside professional development groups in support of our teachers in service of exceptional instructional practice in our classrooms.

I recently completed a research text by Amanda Ripley titled The Smartest Kids in the World, the focus of the text is an in-depth study of the most successful countries in the world as tied to student achievement and success. The author studies Finland, Poland, and South Korea through the lens of three American foreign exchange students. In conclusion of her research, she states, “One thing is clear: To give our kids the kind of education they deserved, we had to first agree that rigor mattered most of all; that school existed to help kids learn to think, to work hard, and yes, to fail. That was the core consensus that made everything else possible.”

This statement embodies who we are and what we believe at RMSEL, we will not charter a new course. Our course has proven successful, creating lifelong learners and explorers. We are crew, not passengers, always have been and always will be!

In support of answering any questions that may arise after reading this communication, I will be available tomorrow January 22, 2015, from 2:00-3:15 pm and Friday, January 23, 2015 from 8:00-9:00 am. Also, I am available via telephone or email at any time.

Sincerely,

Chad