



Learning done somewhere ELSE...

IISD Experimental Lakes Area (IISD-ELA) is the world's freshwater laboratory: a group of 58 lakes and their watersheds in northwestern Ontario on Treaty #3 lands. IISD-ELA is the only place in the world where scientists can research and manipulate real lakes to build a more accurate and complete picture of how ecosystems and their watersheds work naturally and what human activity is doing to freshwater lakes.

The findings from over 50 years of ground-breaking research have influenced environmental policy around the world—from mitigating algal blooms to reducing how much mercury gets into our waterways—with the ultimate goal of keeping the world's fresh water clean for generations to come.

At IISD-ELA, we believe in the power of engaging students directly in hands-on science to inspire, interest, and motivate young people to examine the world around them, encouraging the process of lifelong learning.

About the Program

The Experimental Lakes Student Experience (ELSE) is a 2-week high school field course for students interested in hands-on environmental science. Eight grade 11 and 12 students from various high schools throughout Manitoba and northwestern Ontario gather at IISD-ELA for a 2-week immersive field course.

By engaging directly with the science happening at IISD-ELA—through observing, helping, asking, answering, and doing—students learn about the “whole-system” concept, ecological interactions, limnology, chemistry, and human impacts on the environment.



What do the 2 weeks look like?

During week one, students accompany different scientists and research teams each day to participate in, and learn about the fieldwork conducted at IISD-ELA.

Over the weekend (between weeks one and two), students participate in a backcountry canoe trip. With lots of paddling, multiple portages, tenting, and cooking, many memories will be made.

During week two, students will follow their own unique path of research, learning more about the processes of environmental science in the field and about the ongoing IISD-ELA science that interests them most.

What else do students gain?

- Meaningful hands-on field and lab experience
- The ability to apply knowledge to practice
- New skills, different perspectives, and an expanded range of science-related knowledge
- Opportunities to work collaboratively and individually
- New friends, memories, and mentors



Successful applicants need to be:

- Responsible and mature for their age
- Independent and self-sufficient, but know when to ask questions
- Capable communicators who strive to build respectful relationships with others
- Physically strong with endurance as this is a physically demanding course with fieldwork and a 4-day canoe trip
- Ready to teach others back at school.

Transportation, accommodation, meals, costs

-  Transportation will be provided for students between Winnipeg and the IISD-ELA site.
-  Students will sleep in dormitory-style accommodations at the IISD-ELA field station, except when out on their canoe trip, where they sleep in tents.
-  All meals are prepared by the on-site summer chefs at IISD-ELA except during the canoe trip, when students and staff will prepare meals themselves.
-  The cost of the course is \$2,000 per student. This covers transportation to and from Winnipeg, accommodation, the use of equipment and laboratory space, and meals. We have bursaries available for successful applicants.

APPLICATION PROCESS

To learn more about the ELSE program, contact education@iisd-ela.org or scan the QR code.

If you are interested in applying for the upcoming ELSE program, running July 19–31, 2026, fill out the [online application form](#) by February 15, 2026.

To correct the conditions of social injustice and disadvantage in employment around the world, we encourage candidates from historically marginalized groups, including women, Indigenous Peoples, people with disabilities, people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, and those who identify themselves as 2SLGBTQIA+ to apply for this program.

The IISD-ELA High School Experimental Lakes Student Experience course is made possible with generous support from our donors.

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