
QAHS NEWS BULLETIN

Volume 1, Issue 8

October 26, 2009

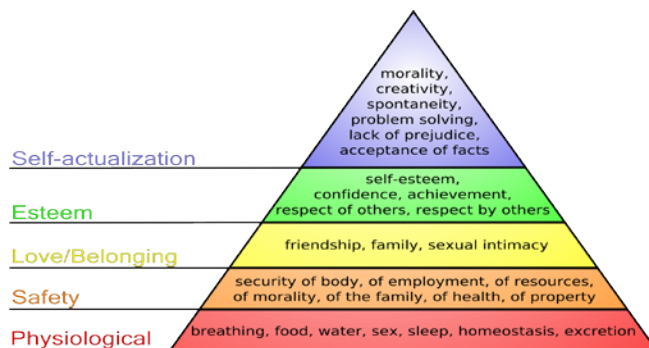
CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP Creating an Environment for Success (part 1)

Earlier this week I spoke to a young woman about the inappropriate way she was dressed. Deciding to leave and later returning to school, I noticed that she had changed her clothes, but much to my surprise she was dressed very similar to her first outfit. Speaking with her in my office I asked, "Why do you feel you have to dress this way?" Much to my astonishment, she responded, "Nobody notices me." I was saddened by her response because one of the reasons of being in a small school is that you are noticed. We often know the students who overtly require more attention; and it is "easy" to neglect those who are quiet and blend into the fabric of the school. This is exactly what happened to a number of students in their former school. **We have to make sure this does not happen. No student should ever feel that they are unknown in our school.**

Teachers should know the names of every student in their class and ensure students feel welcome in the classroom. Greeting students at the classroom door, calling them into the room, recognizing when students were absent from class are all ways to show a student s/he is important. These basic salutations are a must for all members of the school community, including support staff, counselors and administrators.

It is unfortunate that a number of our students have had setbacks that impact their learning. We are concerned that students are learning and that we concentrate on the academics so students can take steps toward graduation. However, connecting with students and learning academics are not separate entities. They are closely intertwined and staff members can positively impact and influence students to achieve. While we can not solve many of our students' problems we can provide encouragement and support.

One suggestion is for us is to be aware of Maslow's Hierarchy. A key aspect of the Maslow's Hierarchy is the



nature of needs. The lower the needs in the hierarchy, the more fundamental they are and the more a person will tend to abandon the higher needs in order to pay attention to sufficiently meeting the lower needs. For example, when we are ill, we care little for what others think about us: all we want is to get better. (changingminds.org). This does not mean that an individual go through every one of these stages before they come to self-actualization. We all know of students who face tremendous burdens, yet they are extremely resilient and have been able to overcome obstacles. However, most students when faced with an adverse situation are overwhelmed by the situation which often negatively impacts upon many aspects of their lives.

As professionals in our learning community, we have to be responsive to students' needs and remain accessible to them. One of the things I have learned during my career is to make sure that when a student comes to speak to me about something personal is that I find the time to listen to them. I know this can be time consuming, but if a student seeks you out, it is because they felt that you are someone they can talk to about something that is important to them. **Remember, the situation is important to the student.** That is the key consideration.

If for some reason, you can not immediately speak with the student, give the student a time when you can reach out to them and follow up to make sure you have a conversation with the student. Your response shows the student you took the time to follow through and listen.

The job you do every day is challenging. You have chosen to work in an "alternative" school because you know our students face obstacles, and you want to make a difference in the lives of students. Let's make sure every student in our school feels like one of the students who attended the SLT meeting on Wednesday night. The parent stated that her son came home stated that he *liked the school because he could talk to the teachers and they listen to you.*

This is a wonderful testament to our staff. Let's work to ensure that every student feels this way.

SIDEBAR

Professional Development will be held at the Flushing Campus on Tuesday, November 2, 2009. The topic will be *Understanding by Design*.

Students are expected to participate in a **Service Learning Project**. On Monday, November 2nd, we will be starting our **can food drive**. The holiday season can be difficult for some people, especially if they are in need of food. Please work with our COSAS (Dan and Erica) to make this a most successful event.

The **English Curriculum Committee** (Bill, Jenny, and Daniel) will begin on Tuesday, October 27th at the Flushing Campus from 3:30 – 5:00.

The **Credit Recovery Committee** (Derek, Lorie, Ron, Jeremy, Marguerite, and Beverly) will begin on Tuesday, October 27th at the Jamaica Campus from 3:30 – 5:00.

There is a school-wide trip to the Bronx Zoo scheduled for Friday, November 6th. This activity is planned to engage both campuses to allow students to get to know one another. All students are expected to attend this trip.

Portfolio Conferences need to be consistently conducted in the classroom. It is an excellent way to meet with students to discuss their progress and how to make improvements in a subject area. These conferences are scheduled for Fridays. Please make sure they are conducted each Friday in your class.

Notebook Check is scheduled for Wednesday, October 28th.

Bill, Derek and Beverly completed their first official **learningwalk (focus – engagement of students)** at the Flushing campus on Friday. We will be giving the entire school community some written feedback later in the week. Remember, these walks are not evaluative, but a way for all of us to learn about our practices and what we need to further develop as a school community.

I would like feedback from the social studies teachers in Flushing about their **intervisitations**. **Math teachers at both campuses need to develop a schedule (give me a copy) of intervisitations for this week and.** This is an opportunity for all teachers to share ideas and best practices, materials, etc. You should have received the article on Peer Observations which will help you when you visit classes. If you need the article, see Derek or Bill.

Mid-term exams are due to the Assistant Principals on Friday, November 6th.

Questions, Answers, and Suggestions

• How can morale be improved?

Before answering this question, I wanted to make sure that I could define what morale means. There are a number of definitions, but the one that resonated with me states, *“Classically, the concept of morale includes several key components: enthusiasm, dedication, a common shared goal and unification. When all of these elements work in synergy, we claim a team has high morale. When they do not, or when they unify the team in a direction we do not approve of, we say a team has low morale.”*

Morale may mean different things to different people. For some, it means high expectations and accountability for them to achieve at a higher level, a work environment that is pleasant, collegiality with colleagues, support by supervisors, and recognition for student success to name a few.

High morale in a school is important to the productivity of all of us. It may not be possible to know what will motivate each and every individual; however we can surely come to some consensus of what morale may mean to the majority of staff. Once we assess staff morale, we can then develop and implement some systems that can improve staff morale. If you are interested in creating a survey on morale, please see Beverly.

• What or how is corporal punishment and verbal abuse defined?

While we addressed corporal punishment in an earlier issue, there were a number of questions on this topic. Let’s clarify the difference between verbal abuse and corporal punishment.

Verbal abuse is not corporal punishment, but is separately proscribed by this regulation. Prohibited verbal abuse includes:

- language that tends to cause fear or physical or mental distress;
- discriminatory language based on race, color, national origin, alienage/citizenship status, ethnicity, religion, gender, disability, or sexual orientation which tends to cause fear or physical or mental distress;
- language that tends to threaten physical harm; or
- language that tends to belittle or subject students to ridicule.

See Chancellor’s Regs A-421

Corporal punishment is defined as any act of physical force upon a pupil for the purpose of punishing that pupil. Such term shall not mean the use of reasonable physical force for any of the following purposes:

- to protect oneself from physical injury;
- to protect another pupil or teacher or any other person from physical injury (e.g., breaking up a physical altercation without using excessive force);
- to protect the property of the school or of others; or
- to restrain or remove a pupil whose behavior is interfering with the orderly exercise and performance of school.

See Chancellor’s Regs A-420