
QAHS NEWS BULLETIN

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CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

We have been talking for some time about academic rigor and raising expectations for our students; and I think that many of you believe that it is important that we do so if we expect our students to be able to become successful members of society as well as have an equal opportunity to succeed. The belief that students can achieve at higher academic levels is a good start toward helping our students make those strides. But, it is our actions that truly demonstrate whether or not the spoken beliefs can be accepted as true.

Many of our teachers are diligent caring professionals who go above and beyond to help the students in our school. These teachers take the time to carefully prepare for their classes and work with students to address their skills and assist them in preparing students to graduate from high school. This is commendable, and I would expect no less from our faculty. When we compare where we were two year ago to where we are now, we realize that we have made considerable strides toward improvement. However, we want our students to be able to become productive members of society and have every opportunity to go to college or into the work arena and have not just a fair chance to succeed, but an excellent chance to be successful.

Just as standards and expectations are raised for students (e.g. move toward passing at 65 or better on Regents), standards and expectations are higher for teachers and administrators. What do I mean by this? In order to expect students to reach a higher level of achievement, we must raise the bar for teachers and administrators. Many of the improvements and much of the progress we have made in the past two years is a positive step toward reaching a higher standard. However, we can not stop where we are now and expect our students to continue to grow and augment their skills.

Our mission is to provide an environment of high expectations which is respectful and nurturing where students, parents, and the academic community assume collective responsibility for all outcomes. It is important that we not only provide the atmosphere for high expectations, but we ensure that our students' achievement is at a high level. High expectations and high achievement must go hand in hand so students experience a rigorous academic curriculum.

This weekend, I had the opportunity to review and reflect upon some of the walkthroughs we conducted not just this school year, but also last year. As I reviewed these materials, I noted that we are addressing a number of the same issues as we have in the past. It is noted, however, that changes and improvements have been made in teaching practices, but they

are not consistent throughout every classroom and with every teacher. Let's review a few of the practices which we have spoken about that need to be seen school-wide:

1. Clear expectations –if expectations are not clear then the outcomes will not be what we expected. This also speaks to the level and quality of planning and preparation. Lessons must be well-thought-out to the slightest detail so we think about what and how we are working with students to obtain results.

2. Differentiation of instruction – some teachers are implementing this practice which can be seen through differentiation of product. We need to move beyond this method to incorporate differentiation of process and content.

3a. Student engagement - students need to know why they are doing an assignment. Students must be able to tell why they had to complete a task, the relevance of assignment, or how the task could be used in a real life situation. When students understand the purpose of the information, relate it to their lives, and see how the information could be applied, they are more likely to be motivated in the subject.

3b. Student engagement - students must be provided with opportunities to contribute and expand upon the dialogue in the classroom. It is not enough to ask a question and receive a minimal response from the student. The teacher must ask students to clarify, expand, evaluate and/or justify the answers to questions, and they should encourage more student-to-student interaction.-

How many of your students would be able to discuss their portfolios, notebooks, or other student work? What would students say if asked to describe the feedback you have given them to help propel them to a higher level of achievement? Would your students be able to tell what they are learning in your class and why they are learning it? Could students speak about their best piece of work and explain why it is their best? If students were asked about challenging assignments, projects, or class activities that have pushed their thinking, made them think hard, or stretched their thinking, what would they say about your class?

Getting to a higher level requires that we all push ourselves above and beyond our present level of performance.

SIDEBAR

We will continue our professional discussion on Understanding by Design UbD at the extended faculty meeting on Monday, **December 7th** in Jamaica and at the extended department on **December 14th** in Flushing.

December 8th

- Lesson on the Discipline Code – period 3. Please make sure you have the booklets and sign-off sheet. If you have questions, please see Derek or Bill.
- Counselors' Meeting - period 7
- Assessment Inquiry Team – period 8
- Good News Phone Calls – thank you for your outreach efforts. Keep up the good work.

December 9th

- LAP team Meeting – Daniel Conway to facilitate.
- PLATO Training for selected members at Flushing.

December 10th

- Inquiry Team Meeting – Jamaica

December 12th

- PLATO training for selected members at Flushing

December 14th

- Blood Drive in Flushing – see Daniel Shin for details.

December 15th –

- —HIV Lesson 3 period 7. Remember to complete the certification form. This is the last lesson for this semester. Thank you for completing these lessons.
- —Good News Phone Calls
- Notebook Check

December 16th

- School Leadership and Parent Association Meetings.

December 17th

- **Staff Holiday Celebration**

December 21st - Case Conferences

are scheduled. These meetings are not to be used as a complaint sessions about students, but as a means to engage in professional dialogue to develop a result oriented educational plan. The case conference team will create a student action plan with goals and specific timelines to measure student's progress and growth.

Portfolio Conferences –are listed on the calendar to be conducted weekly. This form of student contact is an excellent way to provide students with feedback that is essential to make progress. **I have noted that some of you have found a way to consistently integrate this practice into your weekly routine to have these most needed discussions. I applaud these teachers for their commitment to communication with students and their desire to help students make progress.**

Questions, Answers, and Suggestions

- **Are there things we must have in a lesson plan (required)?**

A similar questions was answered in a previous bulletin, but we will address it here again for further clarification. There are a number of elements that make a lesson plan effective. The key is **effective** planning.

Learning Objectives

What do you expect students to learn, understand, and do at the end of the lesson that they were not able to do at the beginning? You should be able to answer this question at the end of the lesson.

Development of the lesson

Developmental lessons depend upon effective discussions, with the teacher using Bloom's Taxonomy of higher order thinking questions to elicit wide participation. As a lesson unfolds, the teacher should make sure it is logical and sequential in nature, with exchanges leading students to refer to textbooks, experiments and other sources to support ideas and opinions. The teacher can best plan for critical thinking and differentiated instruction by writing into the lesson plan which questions will be asked and how differentiation will be implemented.

Student Engagement (from the Professional Teaching Standards) This element is vital for academic achievement.

Teachers, who plan for high levels of engagement, build on students' prior knowledge, life experience, and interests to achieve learning goals for all students. When teachers use a variety of instructional strategies and resources they respond to students' diverse needs. A high level of student participation occurs when the teacher facilitates challenging learning experiences for all students in environments that promote autonomy, interaction, and choice. Once students are actively engaged in problem solving and critical thinking within and across subject matter areas, concepts and skills are taught in ways that encourage students to apply them in real-life contexts that make subject matter meaningful. It is the role of the teacher to assist all students to become self-directed learners who are able to demonstrate, articulate, and evaluate what they learn.

Assessment (from the Professional Teaching Standards) This element is vital for academic achievement.

It is the conscientiousness of the teacher to establish and clearly communicate learning goals for all students. To establish learning goals, teachers collect information about student performance from a variety of sources. Teachers then involve all students in assessing their own learning using information from a variety of ongoing assessments to plan and adjust learning opportunities that promote academic achievement and personal growth for all students. When there is an exchange of information about student learning with students, families, and support personnel then there can be an improvement in understanding which can encourage further academic progress.

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