
QAHS NEWS BULLETIN

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CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMNT GAP - Creating an Environment for Success

Imagine for a minute, two classrooms, one unkempt, disorganized, and void of student work; the other clean, organized and filled with high quality student work. Which one would you prefer to work in? If you are like most people, you would probably prefer to work in an environment that is clean, organized and attractive. Just like you, our students, though they may not always verbalize it, want to work in this same desirable environment.

We tend to overlook the environment that makes the classroom experience successful for our students. While instruction is of paramount importance, we should not avoid focusing on the surroundings in which we give academic instruction.

By the time students get to high school there is less emphasis placed on the physical environment. Many of the elements that make an elementary classroom desirable are discarded because they may be seen as unnecessary at the high school level. **FOR QUEENS ACADEMY HIGH SCHOOL, ENGAGEMENT, AMBIANCE, AND STUDENT WORK DISPLAYS ARE ESSENTIAL NOT ONLY IN THE CLASSROOM, BUT ALSO THROUGHOUT OUR SCHOOL.**

What makes “a successful environment?” When looking at the physical surroundings, we should consider the following: a) meeting basic human needs, b) **creating a physical environment that engages all students**, c) **sense of order**, d) space and design and e) **print rich environment**. While all of the elements are important, we will address the essentials in bold font.

If you haven't thought much about the physical environment you are teaching in, take a few minutes to answer the questions to see if you are meeting the needs of your students.

CREATING A PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT THAT ENGAGES ALL STUDENTS *(from the Professional Teaching Standards)*

It is important to create a physical environment that engages ALL students in purposeful learning activities, and encourage constructive interactions among students. The environment must be one that provides safe learning experiences in which all students are treated fairly and respectfully as they assume responsibility for themselves and one another. Expectations for student behavior are established early, clearly understood, and consistently maintained.

Is the classroom arranged and seating adapted to accommodate individual and group learning needs? Are

you able to manage student and teacher access to materials, technology, and resources to promote learning? Does the classroom environment reflect and promote student learning? Is the classroom environment safe and accessible for all students? Do students take risks in your classroom? Do all students know the rules and regulations of the school? Do you enforce the rules and regulations of the school consistently? Are expectations for class assignments clearly explained and written? Is instructional time used effectively so there is bell-to-bell on task interactions?

SENSE OF ORDER

Some students have difficulty with developing a sense of order, often as a result of the lack of order in their own lives. As teachers, we need to help our students develop organizational skills that will be useful to them in their daily lives. We can start to provide an example of good organizational skills by establishing a well-organized classroom to serve as a model.

Are you organized? Do you know where to find your materials? Is your desk cluttered? Are displays organized neatly, labeled properly? Have you developed routines for yourself as well as for your students? Are books neatly stacked and easily accessible? Are the chairs placed neatly under the desks when not in use? Is the room (books, walls, desks, etc.) graffiti-free? Do you leave your room at the end of day left neat and organized?

PRINT RICH ENVIRONMENT

A print rich classroom should reflect the learning that is happening in your room. Student work plays a critical role in promoting this type of environment. Teachers should exhibit exemplars, which serve as models of quality work.

Is there evidence of students' work on display (works of progress and good and excellent projects)? Are the displays changed often? Are the bulletin boards decorated with appropriate subject materials and changed frequently to reflect what is happening in the classroom? Are there posters, word walls, hanging in the classrooms which reflect subject matter? Do you get the feeling that high quality student work played a vital part in decorating the room?

If you answered more frequently with no than yes, think about what changes need to occur in your classroom to help students learn. Please see Derek, Bill, or Jen for assistance.

SIDEBAR

Professional Development will be held at the Flushing Campus on **Tuesday, November 3, 2009**. The topic will be *Understanding by Design*.

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

MID-TERM EXAMS ARE DUE TO THE ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS NO LATER THAN FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 6TH.

The week of **November 9th is Spirit Week**. Let's show our support and be a part of this school activity.

The next Notebook Check is scheduled for **Tuesday, November 10th**. The majority of students are prepared for school daily. Again, this is a result of your diligence in checking notebooks regularly. Let's collectively work on those students who are having difficulty with this requirement. Please speak with Derek, Bill, or Beverly to address this academic expectation.

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.

Good News Phone Calls are working. Students love to receive them and the phone calls have a positive effect on students and their parents. Thank you so much for your efforts in this initiative. Keep up the good work.

We would like teachers to join us for the **Learningwalk** scheduled for the **week of November 23rd**. Feedback has been given on the first walk and if you have any questions, please speak with us. 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.

Intervisitations are important for teachers to share ideas and best practices, materials, etc. If you need help in scheduling an Intervisitation, please speak with Bill and Derek.

College Night for the Flushing Campus has been postponed to a later date.

Progress Reports and LSS Recommendations are due on Friday, November 13th

Questions, Answers, and Suggestions

This is a clarification of the role of the literacy coach. Coaches will teach one regularly scheduled period per day which will be for the purpose of co-teaching and/or providing a demonstration lesson for the regular classroom teacher and/or other staff. Other than such regularly scheduled period coaches shall not be required to teach or cover other classes. In the event that the principal requires the coach to perform other appropriate duties during this regularly schedule teaching period, the coach will be relieved of such teaching period. UFT contract (p.76)

Duties and Responsibilities:

1. Develop and support a culture of reflective practice among teachers.
2. Coach teachers, model lessons, and provide feedback to colleagues in order to implement Core programs in literacy and other approved programs in the school:
3. Balanced Literacy4. NCEE/America's Choice Ramp up to Literacy Program
5. Conduct planning meetings with teachers to analyze student work, review information regarding classroom assessments, and plan for instruction with the Core programs.
6. Assist teachers to embed assessments into daily instructional activities.
7. Differentiate support for teachers based upon demonstrated need.
8. Organize opportunities for staff to observe and participate in discussion and conferences as part of the peer coaching process.
- 9. Work closely with the Principal and Assistant Principals to assess teachers' needs and student data and to plan relevant professional development.**
10. Facilitate workshops, courses, and study groups for teachers, supervisors, parents, and other members of the instructional and guidance staffs.
11. Maintain required records and reports to document professional development throughout the school year.
12. Attend all required sessions to roll out the Core curriculum initiatives to enable and provide staff development.
13. Co-teach one regularly scheduled period per day for the purposes of demonstrating lessons for the regular classroom teacher and/or other staff, to increase transfer of Core program application and to build system-wide capacity.
14. Complete professional development process to become certified trainers in Core mandated curriculum where appropriate.

I would strongly suggest teachers utilize the services of the literacy coach to model a literacy strategy, or look at some student work, or find resources for you. She can be contacted at jgreco5@schools.nyc.gov

I encourage you to speak to me in private if you have any concerns.