
QAHS NEWS BULLETIN

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Understanding by Design-Social Studies GRASPS Activity

Again, we want to thank Justo, Pooran and Zakir from the math department for sharing their GRASP activity with us last month. This issue we will highlight the GRASP activities of Erica, Izabella, Shaun, Jeremy and Daniel from the Social Studies department.

GRASPS Activity: New Credit Cards by Erica Esposito

I created an activity for my economics class that would be a culminating project for our unit on credit. Students were allowed to work individually or in pairs. Their task was to create a new credit card geared towards individuals who are unable to get credit (due to age restrictions and debt problems). Students had to research the advantages and disadvantages of different credit cards in order to make their card desirable. Students learned that they have to charge interest otherwise the credit card company (their group) would not make a profit. After students decided on the name of the credit card, benefits, interest rates, minimum payments etc, they had to design their own credit card. I was astounded by the level of creativity students exemplified in this process. They loved using the computer to create graphics for their card, and each card was really tailored to their individual personality.

GRASPS activity: The Federal Reserve System by Izabella Abramova

The GRASPS activity that was created was for my Economics class. Students had a choice of either writing a 2 to 4 pages research paper or create a 3 to 4 pages comic on the Federal Reserve System. Students were given class time to complete the project. Students had to use several resources such as the internet, books, and class notes. Students also had to attach a page with all the sources that were used for the project. The purpose of the project was for students to enhance their research skills and their understanding of the Federal Reserve System. Majority of the students chose to write a research paper, instead of the comic, in both cases students were graded based on a rubric created through rubistar).

GRASPS activity: Federalism by Jeremy Borenstein

For my GRASPS activity students were asked to create a 90-second commercial that promoted one aspect of Federalism. (Federalism is a system of government that divides power between local governments and a national government.)

First, I distributed a packet that included literature on Federalism as well as a series of scaffolded activities designed to help students acquire sufficient knowledge of the subject to reach the goal. The packet also had a rubric and a cover sheet. The cover sheet stated the goal, tasks, essential question, key vocabulary and directions. Students were allowed to choose a partner if they wanted to.

Next, students tackled the scaffolded activities. Students were asked to propose their own division of 20 powers and have a rationale for their proposal. Students chose whether or not the power to coin money or raise an army should be exclusively in the hands of a national government, state governments or shared by both, for example. After students came up with a rational proposal (I circulated to make sure their systems made sense), they took a look at the way the U.S. Constitution actually divides power. Students had to compare and contrast their proposal with the real system. Now that students understood the powers delegated to the federal government, those reserved for states and those held concurrently, students had to choose which set of powers they could promote in a commercial. Students came up with a reason for selecting the set of powers, which they used as a slogan or sales pitch in their commercials.

Finally, students created visuals to use in their advertisements. The visuals listed the powers they had selected and displayed their slogans. The more creative ones had phone numbers folks could call to place orders and other neat gimmicks. When students delivered their 90-second commercials, some were entertaining.

I think creating the posters and advertisements helped students retain the knowledge better than they had in previous semesters when we went through the scaffolded activities without doing the GRASPS.

GRASPS activity: Newspaper article by Shaun Smath

The GRASPS activity that I implemented with my students was actually something I have done with them in the past; however, the GRASPS framework helped me to format the activity and make it clearer for the students. We had just finished a unit on the early 1800's and we were heading into the Civil War, I wanted to have the students create something that would tie some of the things we discussed together. Each student was to create a newspaper article highlighting one of the events we discussed but they had to meet a few criteria. First, they had to write it as if they were living during that time period, so they had to be aware of their audience and the things that they wrote about. Second, they had to include an illustration and at least a half a page of text. After reviewing the rubric the students used their notes, textbooks, and the internet to gather their research. The finished product came out really nice and the kids seemed to enjoy creating them. More importantly, each student took ownership of their topic and in doing so had a deeper understanding of the material.

SIDEBAR

In the next bulletin we would like to highlight our science teachers' GRASPS activities. Please submit to Beverly by Wednesday, February 10th for the next publication.

As we begin the new semester, please make sure all students have the required materials – binder (not a notebook, loose-leaf paper, dividers, pens, pencils). Please call parents if you see students coming to school unprepared.

A graduation celebration will be held on Tuesday, February 9th in Jamaica and in Flushing on February 10th in Flushing from 3:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. We need three teachers from each campus willing to help coordinate, set-up, participate in presentation, and clean-up. If you are interested, please let me know in writing as soon as possible. This will be a 1½ hour per session activity.

Let's remember that Chinese New Year is Wednesday, February 10th. Celebrate Chinese heritage.

Case Conferences will be held on Monday, February 22nd from 3:05 p.m. to 4:05 p.m. These meetings will now be referred to as Teacher Inquiry Teams. We will identify a small number of students (no more than five) who are struggling academically in classes. **Students who exhibit solely attendance or behavioral issues will not be discussed at these meetings.** Only teachers who work directly with the students would attend these meetings to discuss student's strengths and weaknesses based upon data, identify strategies implemented and tried successfully, share data, provide samples of student's work, and create action plans with specific objectives and time frames to check student's progress. These students would be followed over a period of time to monitor progress and revise action plans if need be. Teachers would meet during a Teacher Inquiry Meeting (based upon budget).

Q: Is there a contradiction between bullet #2 and bullet #3 of the criteria for admission? Bullet #2 says excessively absent students as indicated by a grade of 45 or code 32 are not eligible. Yet bullet #3 says students who failed a course but earned a 65 on the Regents exam for that subject are eligible regardless of their grade. No. If a student has the ability to pass a Regent with 65 or better, he/she has sufficient mastery of the subject to warrant entry into the program even if he/she was excessively absent.

Q: Only Social Studies and Science are being offered in cycle one this spring. Will any other subjects be offered? Our goal is to offer English, Government and Math as well. These courses should begin in cycle two this spring.

Q: What is the seat time requirement for earning a credit? What's stopping a student from taking the project and completing it at home? Students are required to attend an orientation and complete 6 conferences with a teacher in each cycle.

Q: What if a student does not complete the three projects in time? Credit is awarded to those who complete all 3 projects, attend the orientation and attend all mandated conferences. Those who do not will be evaluated on a case by case basis. Extenuating circumstances such as incarceration, hospitalization and/or death in the family will be taken into consideration.

Q: What's the front-end cutoff, meaning if a student does not show up for the first two days of this course, then what? Students must attend an orientation, sign a contract, and attend class to receive their first project. After that, students must attend the 6 conferences.

Q: Looking at the duration of the course and how it's a PM course offering, what accommodations can be made for those who cannot stay for PM school because they are on the basketball team or have to work? Credit Recovery is offered as PM school in the spring for courses failed in the fall, and as day school in the summer for courses failed in the spring.

Q: Why is the summer session longer than the spring session? The spring term has vacation days, Regents week, and a lot of off time off as compared to summer term.

Q: What about the students who earn a 45 for a class but pass the Regents with a 65 or better? Refer to bullet two of the proposal and/or Q 1 above. The student is eligible.

Q: What about a student who comes to QAHS having passed the Regents exam and still needing credit in that subject area. Can we place them in Credit Recovery? It depends on their Regents score. Students whose Regents score is 70 or higher will be eligible.

Q: What about a student who earned a report card grade 45 but got placed in Credit Recovery anyway? Can we make them complete five of the five projects instead of three of five, you know, to compensate for the excessive absences? No. The standard for earning a credit in Credit Recovery will be the same for these students. The projects require a certain amount of study time and the length of the program is suited to 3 projects. It may not be realistic for any student to complete more than 3 projects in the amount of time allotted.

Q: What if there are more eligible students than we can enroll? Which students get priority? Priority goes to graduating seniors, students in the 6 year graduation cohort, those about to age-out and those who received NC (in other words, those recommended by teachers). Students who received 45 but got higher than 65 on their Regents should be considered last if they do not fall into one of the categories mentioned above.