
QAHS NEWS BULLETIN

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CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP Accountability and High Expectations

Last week I stated that we could significantly impact students' success by addressing factors we have within our control in our school. One of these factors was accountability to high expectations for students, ourselves and others.

How does one define accountability to high expectations? We must follow policies and procedures that have been established, use state standards in which students learn specific content to meet benchmarks, align curriculum with the state standards, and use rubrics to define clear expectations for students and assess students' work.

Students are required to come to school prepared and must follow the rules and regulations of the school including academic expectations, which consist of having basic school supplies. Our role is to make sure students follow the rules. When we do not enforce the rules, even the simplest ones, it can negatively impact other classrooms and ultimately school tone as a whole. We must be cognizant at all times, in and out of the classroom, that students are abiding by the rules.

If the student is not prepared, the teacher must follow up until the student comes to class with the instruments needed for success. If a teacher allows unpreparedness, what are the expectations in the classroom? To the student it means, I can come to this class without paper or pencil. If the student does not have the right tools then how can s/he be expected to do any work in the class? What does this say about the teacher's expectations for this student? When teachers check students' binders regularly, the teacher cares about what the student is writing and will check up on the student. Our students need this monitoring and it is incumbent upon us to make sure it happens. You are making a statement to the student that what you are doing in my class is important enough for me to check to make sure it is done and it is done correctly.

Secondly, every subject area has a set of standards which must be used when developing curriculum, unit plans, and lesson plans. These standards are the foundation the teacher must use to align their classroom instruction. Students need to be familiar with the standards so they are informed of what is expected in each subject area and know when they have met the standard. This can be done by giving each student a class syllabus clearly explaining what will be covered in the course, the assignments to be completed, when students will be assessed, and how students will be graded.

Thirdly, engagement of students is paramount. Students are truly engaged when teachers develop the curriculum and write lessons consistently using the Professional Teaching Standards as part of their practice. The use of modeling, the workshop model, Bloom's Taxonomy (higher order thinking questions), wait time, accountable talk, etc. are best practices that will increase students' involvement in their learning. Some other things that lead to student engagement include having students work collaboratively, using authentic assignments, connecting content to students' lives, using developmentally appropriate texts and allowing for student choice.

On the other hand, lecturing, work sheets, copying information from books onto chart paper, asking literal questions, not providing students time to think, etc. do not engage students in their learning. We must move from these practices that involve students in a task (passive learning) to best practices that truly engage students in their learning (active learning).

A key to students' success is the way we perceive students' abilities and capabilities. While we say we have high expectations for our students, we must not only believe that our students have the ability to learn at higher levels, but we must provide opportunities within and outside the classroom to assure this happens.

In the book, *Managing Accountability* by Dealy and Thomas, they discuss the Pygmalion Principle, which is a theory that expectations affect performance. Its name is derived from a Greek myth in which a sculptor named Pygmalion sculpted a statue of a woman, and fell in love with it.

His love was so strong that it transformed the statue into a real woman. It is this transformative effect resulting from expectations which is the basis of the Pygmalion Principle. Research in the field of education has supported the theory by demonstrating that students who the teacher believed were smarter than the rest of the group (when they were actually randomly chosen) performed substantially better than those believed to be average. In these experiments, the only difference between the students who performed best and the rest of the group was the teacher's expectations.

Lastly, accountability is vital if we are to close the achievement gap. As professionals, every teacher should have professional goals they want to accomplish that will help them improve their students' performance. Teachers should set benchmarks for themselves so they can improve their practice, seek professional development that would help them in moving their students forward, work and share best practices with one another, hold each other accountable for the improvement of students' performance and celebrate as a team when you have succeeded in making strides. Accountability to our students speaks to a code of professional ethics and our integrity as individuals and as a community.

These are my expectations for faculty and staff to move our students forward to a higher level of academic achievement. If you are unclear about these expectations, unsure of how to incorporate these practices into your classroom, please speak with Bill, Derek, or myself. I am looking forward to seeing how each of you will raise the level of performance to help close the achievement gap.

SIDEBAR

NY Cares was Saturday, October 17th. It was wonderful! It was great to see so many people from various organizations, Verizon, Regal, and Hofstra University giving back to the community. Special thanks to all of the staff (David, Jen, Dan (his wife), Ricardi, Justo, and Bill) and students who participated in the beautification and organization of our school. Students who participated will receive a community service certificate. **A very special thanks to Jen who organized this worthwhile event.**

Marking period 1 grades are due on Wednesday, October 21st by noon.

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.

Student Goals should be subject specific. Each department modified the student goal sheet to address their content. The goal sheet should not be given to students to complete on their own. The best way to complete the goal form is by discussing goals with the student after completing a diagnostic assessment. Students need your help to create subject specific goals.

Good News Phone Calls

Let's work on recognizing students' efforts and make those calls. If you have been making good news calls, thank you for making a difference in a student and parents day. If you have not made calls, please stop by my office this week.

Notebook Check

Please submit names of students who are unprepared to Derek and Bill.

Learningwalks (focus – engagement of students) will begin this week. This will be a part of our practice as we are learning together as we walk. During one of our November walks we will ask some of you to join us.

Erica, Shaun, and Jeremy had the opportunity to conduct **intervisitations** last week. We are looking for all of our teachers to have this opportunity to share ideas, best practices, materials, etc. Please read the article on Peer Observations which you will find in your mailbox later in the week.

Case Conferences will be held on Monday, October 26th at each campus. We will discuss three students (give names to counselors by Wednesday, October 21st). In addition, we will look at a protocol for "learning from student work."

Questions, Answers, and Suggestions

• **How can we better handle verbally abusive students?**

There is a difference between students who becomes explosive and burst out a series of expletives which are not directed at anyone and the student who directs profanity directly at someone. Neither is acceptable in our school, but reasons for inappropriate behavior should be taken into consideration. Sometimes a student does not have the coping skills or failed to use coping skills. Their response to the situation was to spout out expletives because they did not see any other alternative at that time. In this type of situation, we must certainly guide and teach students how to handle provocative situations in an appropriate manner that is acceptable and help them reflect upon the behavior. When a student lashes out at an individual, it is directed on a personal level. The chancellor's Regulations are used to address inappropriate behavior.

It is also important to recognize that our responses or actions may have precipitated such reaction. Was the student called out in front of their peers? Was something said to a student that may have been interpreted as disrespectful?

- **What happens when a student verbally abuses a teacher?**
- **What action does a teacher take in the event a student becomes profane?**
- **What steps do I take if I observe this?**

These questions were grouped together since they are similar in nature. When a student commits an infraction, the incident must be reported verbally and in writing to the supervisor. Please note that paperwork must be done in a timely manner. The report must be written factually describing what transpired to cause the student to erupt. The staff member must speak with a guidance counselor so s/he can speak with the student. It is also beneficial (at a later date) for the staff member and student to discuss what happened to resolve the situation. Again, the Chancellor's Regulation will guide us in determining the disciplinary consequence.

SUGGESTION FROM A STAFF MEMBER (Flushing)

Can we turn the teachers' lounge on the second floor into a "printing room"? Teachers would be able to use the lounge in the basement for their breaks and lunch. What do you think?