

Mastery Learning at Queens School of Inquiry

The mission of the Queens School of Inquiry (QSI), an Early College Initiative School, is to provide engaging, student-centered mastery-based learning to all students in grades 6 through 12. Our inclusive environment, designed to support the whole child, prepares students to enter and successfully complete college early. We expect our students to become compassionate, mindful, and self-confident adults who value a lifetime of learning. Our Graduate Traits are:

Creativity

Collaboration

Communication

Problem Solving

Inquiry

At the foundation of our mastery-based learning system are the following four questions, which drive our academic program:

1. **Where do we want our learners to go?** In addition to the clear outcomes for our graduates, each course at QSI has clearly articulated destinations for our students, which support our graduation goals.
2. **How do we know where our learners are?** Once we know where we are headed, we need accurate, authentic, and varied ways to assess where our learners are in relation to those destinations.
3. **How do we move our learners towards or beyond our destinations?** Our goal is to develop talent, not just sort or recognize it, and we use varied, differentiated, and engaging instructional strategies to ensure all students grow from where they are.
4. **How do we communicate where our learners are?** Our feedback, grading, and reporting systems are designed to fairly and accurately communicate where our students are in relation to the learning destinations.

Partnerships for Learning

Since 2005, QSI has partnered with Queens College CUNY to provide early college experiences for our students. Once in high school, QSI students are given the opportunity to earn up to 62 college credits while simultaneously completing their high school course work. Students who meet prerequisites begin college course work as a cohort in 9th grade. By senior year at QSI, students can independently take courses at Queens College CUNY among college aged students.

As a result of our unique partnership, students' high school transcripts illustrate both their college and high school courses if taken as a dual course. Through the college courses, students also earn their high school credit requirements. These dual courses allow students to succeed on a college level while still receiving necessary high school support.

Our strong partnerships with the Early College Initiative, Queens College CUNY, ASD Nest, Facing History and Ourselves, and BrainPower Learning support and frame our school culture. The work we do as a member school with each of these groups helps build our staff and students' capacities toward reaching our Graduate Competencies.



Common Language at QSI

Curriculum: Articulate Desired Results

- **Graduate Traits and Competencies:** QSI's five Graduate Traits of Creativity, Collaboration, Communication, Problem Solving, and Inquiry are foundational to our academic program, framing the skills to be mastered before a student launches into life as an early college student and into other post-secondary pursuits.
- **Performance Indicators:** Each of the Graduate Traits is broken into multiple indicators that communicate what it looks like to demonstrate the trait. These indicators drive the development of the course level standards.
- **K-U-Ds:** These course level curriculum documents provide a clear destination for learning. They outline the essential outcomes for each course at QSI through articulating what students will Know, Understand, and be able to Do by the end of a period of learning. K-U-Ds help us ensure clarity for students, teachers, and families, and offer a general roadmap for learning.
- **Course Standards:** The Ds in the course K-U-Ds are skills that are essential to student success in each class. These skills are called Course Standards, and each course will provide multiple opportunities to instruct, practice, assess, and report on these skills using a variety of course-specific content. The course standards are developed to provide direct evidence of the Graduate Traits.
- **Scales:** Each course standard exists within a skill progression called a Scale. The scales are a type of rubric, providing a clear understanding of what it looks like to demonstrate this skill at multiple, increasingly complex levels. The scales drive our classroom instruction and assessment, are used for feedback and self-assessment, and define the achievement for our reporting.
- **Unit Plans:** Teachers develop specific unit plans that outline how they intend to help students learn, practice, and demonstrate their knowledge, understanding, and skills within a unit of study.

Instruction and Assessment: Develop Targeted Assessment & Design Effective Instruction

- **Direct Instruction:** There are times when the whole class needs common instruction, and teachers use a variety of strategies and practices to provide engaging, active, and authentic learning experiences.
- **Differentiated Instruction:** There are also times when assessments show that students need targeted, individualized instruction in order to move forward from where they are.
- **Collaborative Instruction:** The vast majority of classes at QSI are taught by multiple teachers. Intentional collaboration occurs during planning, lesson delivery, and assessment and allows for greater flexibility and student support. Teachers use a variety of co-teaching models to ensure student progress.
- **Project-Based Learning:** Project Based Learning (PBL) is a teaching method in which students learn by actively engaging in real-world and personally meaningful projects.
- **Practice:** Much of what we do in and out of class is practice. Practice is essential and valuable, and just like with athletics or arts or drama, practice is what leads to excellence. Academically, practice may take the form of homework, group work, preparation, or any other activities or tasks that do not necessarily provide individual evidence of one or more of the course standards.
- **Formative Assessment:** While students are learning, we need to know where they are in relation to the course standards, so we formatively assess. Formative assessments are usually quick checks designed to give teachers (and students) specific evidence of progress so that they can provide feedback and adjust their instruction as necessary to ensure all students are on track to meet or go beyond the standards.
- **Summative Assessment:** At the end of a period of learning, students demonstrate achievement of the standards through intentionally designed assessments. Summative assessments are usually confirmation of learning, as both the teacher and the student know where they are in relation to the standards prior to the assessment (because of formative assessments).

Monitor and Communicate Learning

- **Scores:** All formative and summative assessments include scales for one or more course standards. Teachers provide a 1-4 score based on the scale, with the 3 being the *course standard* language from the KUD. Each scale has specific language attached to the four levels, but in general, the scores represent the following for the specific skill:
 - 4: Student work showed achievement at complexity beyond the standard level.
 - 3: Student work showed standard level achievement.
 - 2: Student work showed achievement approaching the standard level.
 - 1: Student work showed beginning-level achievement.
 - M: Student work was missing.
- **Progress Reports:** Students receive mastery grades on their midterm progress reports.
- **Report Cards:** Students receive letter grades on their end of year report cards.
- **JumpRope:** Throughout the year, students can monitor their learning progress through the JumpRope portal, which shows growth in the course skills over time.

Common Assessment and Grading Agreements

At QSI, learning doesn't stop at the end of an assignment or receipt of a score. Scores are not a judgment, but a tool to help communicate where a student is on their path towards mastery of a skill. Scores are accompanied by highly specific, constructive teacher feedback to help students better understand and improve performance on revisions and assignments. Even as the class moves on to different subject matter, skills continue to be honed.

Common Grading and Assessment Agreements:

- Assessments are designed to provide evidence of standards.
- Assessments are scored using 1-4 for each relevant standard separately (there will be no single scores on assessments unless assessing a single standard)
- Progress report scores and final course grades may be based on formative and summative work.
- Teachers will allow reassessment on course standards if/when new learning has occurred and the new scores can replace the old.

Curriculum Documents

The foundation of any mastery-based system is the clear articulation of the learning destinations for our students. These outcomes drive our curriculum, instruction, assessment, and reporting practices, and allow us to personalize experiences for our students.

School Level: QSI's five Graduate Traits are foundational to our academic program, framing the skills to be mastered before a student launches into life beyond high school. Our Performance Indicators drive the development of course instructional standards, ensuring that students have multiple opportunities to learn, practice, and demonstrate these essential skills across disciplines.

PORTRAIT OF A QSI GRADUATE

| Graduate Traits | Graduation Competencies | Performance Indicators |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Creativity | Graduates of QSI will think imaginatively and laterally, take risks, innovate, and create. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate originality, imagination, and new ways of thinking about things. • Transcend traditional ideas, rules, patterns, and relationships to create new or meaningful ideas, methods, or interpretations. • Generate and apply varied ideas and solutions in and to real world situations. • Reflect and evaluate choices to revise and improve creations. |
| Collaboration | Graduates of QSI will cooperatively, constructively, and respectfully work with others to pursue common goals. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and plan opportunities for effective and respectful collaboration • Guide, encourage, and challenge to advance personal and collective learning. • Participate in and contribute to the enhancement of community life |
| Communication | Graduates of QSI will listen and express themselves effectively for a variety of purposes and through a variety of means. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate intentional organization, purpose, and conventions in speaking, writing, presenting, performing, and creating. • Use evidence and logic appropriately • Consider and adjust to the audience, context, and purpose • Obtain, send, and correctly comprehend and interpret information, ideas and thoughts • Use technology and multimedia to make sense of, enhance and share information • Develop and use models, visuals and graphics to express thoughts, ideas, and concepts |
| Problem Solving | Graduates of QSI will work through challenges to solve complex and varied problems. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observe and evaluate situations in order to define problems • Identify and analyze patterns, trends, relationships, and outliers that apply to solutions • Evaluate and justify a variety of solutions. • Reflect on the learning process in order to move forward or iterate. |
| Inquiry | Graduates of QSI will be curious, critical thinkers who ask questions and seek answers. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frame questions, make predictions, and design data collection and analysis strategies. • Use evidence and reasoning to justify thinking. • Critically think about a variety of texts, topics, and issues to inform, influence, adjust, and/or justify thinking |