

Quantum leap

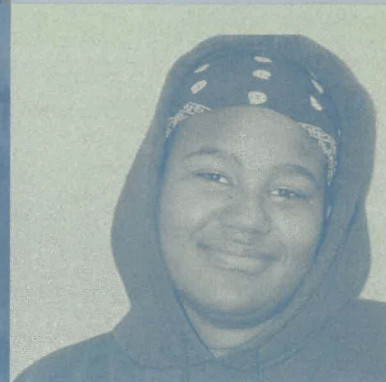
Bennington College
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Quantum leap



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OVERVIEW

Quantum Leap was conceived in 1999 by Bennington College faculty members Susan Sgorbati and Daniel Michaelson as a response to the escalating problem of truancy in primary and secondary public schools, a problem nearing crisis levels nationwide. The program is designed as an alternative to the often punitive, and by and large unsuccessful, measures typically used to address truancy across the country. Quantum Leap believes that the same principles that enable Bennington College students to excel can also re-engage the most at-risk students in area elementary, middle, and high schools. The program's results bear out this belief: Since its inception, 90% of Quantum Leap students have reconnected with their educations and are enrolled in an accredited academic program.

THE IDEA

Quantum Leap works because co-directors Sgorbati and Michaelson, both professional mediators, both performing artists, and the Bennington College students and community members who serve as mentors and tutors, are committed to a fundamental educational idea: that students actively participate in the design of their educations.

Quantum Leap students are assisted in developing personal learning plans. These plans ensure that each student's education is inseparable from his or her individual interests, and that each student takes a shared responsibility for that education.

Three components are critical to this process: discovering what ideas matter to a student; identifying the primary issues preventing a student from succeeding; and giving that student tools to negotiate the obstacles to his or her success. Mediation plays a significant role throughout: mentors trained in mediation facilitate meetings between the students, families, school personnel, and, when

necessary, social service representatives. Essential aspects of the program for students include: engaging in exciting academic experiences, training in conflict resolution and creative problem solving, and forging relationships with the community.

THE RESULTS

The impact of Quantum Leap on the community has been enormous. The program breaks the well-documented relationship between student dropouts and substance abuse and crime. Instead of losing these students, the program primes them to become citizens who participate in and contribute to their community.

A central key to the program's success is the active and ongoing partnership between Bennington College and the local public school district (the Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union). Both students and area schools have responded to the Quantum Leap program in extraordinary and unequivocal ways. In 2002, the local high school, (Mount Anthony Union School) invited the program's directors to set up a Quantum Leap classroom in their building and to lead a training workshop on program principles with more than 100 teachers.

Interest in Quantum Leap has spread well beyond Bennington. In addition to becoming a model across the entire southern Vermont region (from Bennington to Wilmington and Brattleboro), interest in the program has spread to several major urban areas, including New York City, Rochester, New York, and Bellefontaine, Ohio. With a proven model in place, Quantum Leap is positioned to transform the education of those students at greatest risk of being left behind in traditional academic programs, both in rural and inner-city environments.

For more information, please contact:

802-440-4471 or 802-447-7511 ext. 227

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THE FACTS

- Since its beginning in April 1999, Quantum Leap has served a total of 155 elementary, middle, and high school students.
- There are currently 96 Quantum Leap students participating in the Quantum Leap classroom, being mentored outside of the classroom, and participating in the after-school program, Project Leap.
- Of the 96 students participating in the program, 92 are currently enrolled in an accredited academic program and are reconnected to their education.

MENTORING

Quantum Leap believes that one important way to reconnect the student to education is through a connection to a person, a mentor. Quantum Leap mentors are paid, professional, part-time educators trained in mediation skills. Each Quantum Leap student, referred to the program by a guidance counselor, teacher, or administrator, is matched with a mentor. In addition to being a positive adult role model, the mentor serves as the student's academic advisor, guiding the student through the Plan process.

THE CAREER PROJECT

An emerging component of Quantum Leap, the Career Project exposes students to career options, and intellectual and cultural experiences outside of school while exploring and deepening their individual interests. These experiences involve collaborations with local businesses, individuals, and parents in a variety of projects and workshops.

The first of these has just concluded: a five-session culinary workshop with Bennington College alumnus William Scully, owner and executive chef of Pangaea, a gourmet restaurant in North Bennington. This spring, Quantum Leap students are working with a master gardener on the design and implementation of a new garden for the courtyard at Mount Anthony Union High School in Bennington.

THE CLASSROOM

Beginning in the fall of 2002, Quantum Leap expanded its presence in the public schools when it received a dedicated classroom at Mount Anthony Union, the local high school. This classroom is supervised by educators trained in the Quantum Leap approach and is used for teaching classes, meeting with students, and facilitating meetings and conferences with teachers. All students in the classroom are at-risk and have been referred by teachers, guidance counselors, or administrators. In many instances, the students have been removed from the traditional school setting, and might otherwise have dropped out.

Quantum Leap activities have included:

- *War or Peace*—a popular, for-credit course in anger management that allows students to discuss the conflicts in their lives and explores possible ways to resolve them;
- *Project Leap*—an after-school leadership program using an adventure-based, experiential learning approach;
- *Operation Leap of Faith*—a letter writing exchange program between high school students and their peers in Pakistan;
- *Global Network of Understanding (GNU)*—a pilot international exchange that uses the Internet to connect middle school students in Bennington, Vermont, with students in Kenya, Nigeria, and Pakistan.

CONTACTS

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