



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## What is game-based learning?

At Quest to Learn, we believe that kids learn best when curricular content is presented in an inquiry-based format that puts learning in context and promotes real world problem solving and creativity. We do this by creating immersive game-like learning environments. At Quest, students learn by “taking on” the behaviors and practices of people in real life. Students learn to be biologists and historians and mathematicians instead of learning about biology or history or math. By using the structure of games, Quest to Learn creates powerful educational tools to teach sixth- to 12th-graders. Games work as rule-based learning systems, creating worlds in which players actively participate, use strategic thinking to make choices, solve complex problems, seek content knowledge, receive constant feedback, and consider the point of view of others. **It is important to note that Quest to Learn is not a school where children spend their day playing commercial video games.** Instead it is a school that uses what researchers and educators know about how children learn and the principles of game design to create highly immersive, game-like learning experiences in the classroom.

## What motivated the founding of Quest to Learn?

The students of today will soon be the scholars, scientists, entrepreneurs, writers, designers, and leaders of tomorrow. The goal of Quest to Learn is to educate children for college and career success in the 21st century. In a world that is increasingly networked, collaborative, global, and systems oriented, the ability to resource knowledge, judge the credibility of information, and collaborate across disciplines are necessary literacies. While Quest to Learn leverages educational technologies and digital media, the strength of our model is our focus on 21st century learning, creating authentic assessment, increasing student engagement, and equipping students with strategies to become lifelong learners.

## What grade levels does Quest to Learn serve?

Quest to Learn, now in its second year, has a sixth and seventh grade class. One grade will be added each year so that the school will eventually serve sixth through 12th grades.

## What are the class sizes at Quest to Learn?

Quest is committed to small class size. Classes average 25 students. Home Base groupings average 10–12 students in order to ensure that each student’s needs are closely monitored by faculty. Trimester projects are also conducted in these smaller Home Base groupings.

## Do students spend their day in front of a screen?

No. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Our Wellness philosophy influences our thinking about where and how kids are learning. This means we have given a lot of thought to what students are doing both with their minds and bodies during the school day. At Quest, we believe many kids learn in physical, tactile, and visual ways, through moving their body, touching physical materials, and interacting with the kinds of spaces around the school. Our use of mobile phones is in part intended to get kids moving; so too is the use of one of our learning labs (SMALLab) that allow kids to use their bodies to interact with large-scale digital projections on a floor mat.

## What kinds of students are a good fit for Quest?

Quest’s program is predicated on collaborative education in the classroom. Therefore, students who are eager to participate in group problem solving and learning in many ways are a good fit for Quest. The innovative, integrated curriculum utilizes 21st-century digital media incorporating games, animation, and other platforms into classroom instruction. The curriculum is based on New York state standards. The Quest curriculum employs an innovative application of those standards; families who understand the innovative and immersive nature of this curriculum become strong supporters of their child within the Quest to Learn community. Curriculum developers and teachers have designed class work to help children become creative, imaginative, and resourceful learners.

## What is the homework load at Quest?

Students are expected to learn and work outside of the traditional school day. While the amount of homework varies from class to class, we have designed a homework website specifically for Quest, which allows students and parents access to all school assignments and materials,

including homework. This allows students to organize long-term workloads. At Quest, we believe that middle school is the time to develop capacities, such as organizational skills, which are crucial for higher education and the workplace.

### **Are there internships at Quest?**

Internships begin in the eighth grade and continue through high school.

### **What is the sequence from middle school to high school at Quest?**

The integrated curriculum from sixth through 12th grade follows a particular sequencing. Students attending Quest middle school will have priority admission to the high school. However, attendance at Quest middle school will prepare students equally well for attendance at the other citywide high schools.

### **What is an integrated curriculum and what are domains?**

At Quest to Learn students learn standards-based content in classes that we call domains. These domains organize disciplinary knowledge in 21st century ways — around big ideas that require expertise in two or more traditional subjects, like math and science, or English language arts (ELA) and social studies. One of our domains — The Way Things Work — is an integrated math and science class organized around ideas from design and engineering: taking systems apart and putting them back together again. Another domain — Codeworlds — is an integrated ELA, math, and computer programming class organized around the big idea of symbolic systems, language, syntax, and grammar. A third domain, Being, Space and Place — an integrated ELA and social studies class — is organized around the idea of the individual and his/her relationship to the community and networks of knowledge, across time and space. Wellness is the last of our integrated domains, a class that combines the study of health, socio-emotional issues, nutrition, movement, organizational strategies, and communication skills.

### **What is Wellness?**

Wellness is both a class and a philosophy at Quest. Throughout the curriculum and during the school day, students gain practice in ways of understanding and managing their own health and wellness. Home Base, our daily small group advisory period that bookends the day, is part of our Wellness program, as is Morning Meeting, a time when all members of the school get together and to talk about issues affecting the school. In addition, PE, health, and nutrition are part of the Wellness curriculum.

### **What foreign languages are offered at Quest to Learn?**

Quest offers an especially engaging language instruction program. Unlike most middle schools, Quest offers a choice of five languages: Spanish, French, Mandarin, Latin, and German. Quest is fortunate to be able to offer language training tailored to each student's academic and cultural interests.

### **Does Quest to Learn offer academic services for children with special needs?**

We have a strong Instructional Strategy Team, comprising three highly qualified Special Educators. Afterschool academic support is also available, based on teacher recommendation or by teacher request.

### **What afterschool programs are available to students?**

Quest offers a variety of afterschool clubs that include soccer, a design and digital media enrichment program, chess, art workshops, math for students who are struggling, math for students who need to stretch their abilities, a competitive math challenge for students who excel at math, as well as test prep.

### **Are students safe going to online sites?**

A core mission is to teach children to navigate the Internet safely and responsibly. Quest has a rigorous policy for both teachers and students around the etiquette of online activity. All students will sign an Internet contract, which outlines dos and don'ts of working online. We believe in media sanity, not censorship. And since we cannot always cover our kids' eyes, we have to teach them how to see. Part of our curriculum has been designed to help our kids stay Internet safe and smart.

### **How are students' Internet activities monitored?**

Quest's media literacy curriculum equips students with an understanding of how to be safe and smart on the Internet. We hold high expectations for all students in this area, as we believe learning how to self-monitor choices made around media is critical. In addition, all of our teachers have been trained in working with and monitoring student online activity.

### **Who are the key partners involved in supporting Quest to Learn?**

Quest to Learn has been provided with generous support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the New School University. Quest to Learn is also part of an ongoing collaboration between the Institute of Play and New Visions for Public Schools, and the Department of Education of New York City.