

## Quantum students take leap toward their futures

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NEW BEDFORD — Debora Andrade says that in middle school, she "just didn't care."

Her grades were "bad. Ds and Fs," said the 17-year-old New Bedford High School junior. "I didn't have any support to push me."

Andrade now consistently earns As and Bs, plays soccer, works at a day care center, and tentatively plans to apply to Lasalle College in Newton next year to study fashion design.

She credits her academic 180 to the Quantum Opportunities Program at NorthStar Learning Center in New Bedford.

"Now school is different because I have Quantum to help me. It's made me a responsible person. I feel more comfortable with myself," she said.

Andrade is one of 19 New Bedford High School students who signed up to be part of the fledgling class of the NorthStar Learning Center's Quantum Opportunities Program in January of 2011 when she was a freshman. Today, the Quantum class is in its junior year.

Quantum is a four-year program for students entering high school that aims to boost graduation rates and college enrollment numbers by fully supporting them seven days a week for their entire high school career.

"There are so many programs out there that help kids just for one year — Quantum is seven days a week, every week for four years. It's about consistency," said Quantum Director Jenna Costa.

Funded by the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit, Quantum is a regimented schedule over some 250 hours per year.

The students are mentored daily after school at NorthStar; they're tutored regularly by students at UMass Dartmouth; have taken field trips to Washington D.C., New York City, and the White Mountains of New Hampshire and have been on college tours.

They've also been placed in summer and after-school jobs — and those are just some of the ways they've been helped by Costa and Youth Coordinator Jason Perry.

"These kids have improved drastically; I can't stress enough how much, socially and academically, these kids are really blooming into beautiful young adults. They're determined to succeed," said Costa.

"These were kids who did not want to be in school in middle school. They had low-attendance rates and high suspension rates. They averaged Ds and Fs," said Costa, adding there have been no suspensions this year.

She said most students come from single-parent homes and qualify for free or discounted school lunches, which classifies them as lower-income. On paper, they might be considered "at-risk."

This current cohort applied for Quantum when they were freshmen in 2011, along with some 160 others. Thirty students were chosen through random lottery by the Eisenhower Foundation; 19 are still in the school system.

When this fledgling class graduates next year, a new group of ninth-graders will be chosen and led through the same intense support, Costa said. She said the New Bedford Quantum program is one of nine throughout the U.S.

"We know these kids; we've followed them on their academic journey. We help them transition from junior high to high school, and now high school to college," she said. "They started with us at 13 or 14, now they're 16 turning 17. They've come so far."

Six of the 19 are currently on the Honor Roll, although many of them have made the list over the last three years, said Costa. Depending on the season, between four and six play sports. Three are in ROTC and some have moved up to honors classes, too, Costa said.

She said the group "did excellent" on their last report cards and estimated that the average GPA of the entire group would be around a B.

A few of the 11 boys have expressed interest in the military, Costa said. Another student wants to be a police officer, and one wants to be a firefighter. A few of the girls have shown interest in nursing.

Costa said April vacation was spent taking the students to visit colleges, including Johnson & Wales, University of Rhode Island and Providence College. They also took a recent trip to Washington D.C. for a week.

"It was amazing; the kids got to see the National Mall, the monuments, ate at beautiful restaurants, met with our funders at Eisenhower," Costa said.

She said one boy gave a poignant speech to the funders. His father had just died of cancer, and he was left in the custody of his 22-year-old brother. "He shared with them his struggles with his school and his father's death, and how having consistent adults in his life was able to save him," Costa said.

Student Debora Andrade said "Quantum just helps with life. If kids are on a wrong direction, they can get on a right path and have a good support system."

The NorthStar Learning Center, located on Linden Street, was founded in 1974. It is a state-certified minority non-profit organization that was born from local community action during the civil rights movement.

Its mission is "to provide individualized, strength-based, family-focused programs that help children, youth, and families realize their strengths and dreams" | We are committed to serving the underserved and reaching the 'hard-to-reach.'" For more information, visit <http://www.eisenhowerfoundation.org>.