

# QEA Education Glows as shining example

## City's Best Kept Secret

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### Want to know Winston-Salem's best-kept secret in education?

Here are a few hints: it opened in 1997; students who come in at or below grade level increase their performance by 50 percent on average within two years; student progress is often monitored on a daily basis to encourage growth; and, as part of the North Carolina Charter School Program, students' education here is absolutely free.

For 15 years, Quality Education Academy (QEA) on the corner of Lansing Drive and Carver School Road has been educating students at an extremely high level due to the passion and dedication of the teachers, the desire of its students to succeed and the drive of parents who want more for their children.

The school's mission statement reads, in part, "Our vision is to create a sustainable educational organization that develops a replicable, self-sufficient, wholesome community."

The unwritten mantra is "whatever it takes" to help students excel, grow and succeed.

Alphonse Williams, a QEA eleventh grader, summarized the experience of many students. "I like this school. I've been here since the third grade. I tried going to a traditional middle school in eighth grade, but this school (QEA) got a hold of me and I couldn't wait to get back.

***"The teachers know and treat you like family, and I know I could not get the level of education I get here anywhere else."***

"The teachers want you to do well, and they work with every student to ensure a topic is understood by all before moving onto the next thing," Williams concluded.

As a K-12 school, students have the opportunity to go to and remain in the same school environment for their entire academic career. The passion for learning and teaching starts with QEA's kindergarten class and its teacher, Erin Winbush.

"I love it here," she said. "I have the freedom to really teach my kids what they need to know to progress to the next level. And the school as a whole is truly a family environment where we encourage and support one another," Winbush said.

Walking the halls of QEA, one quickly gets a sense that teachers, students and administration alike respect one another.

Uniforms worn by students create an air of equality. Teachers address students as "Mr." or "Miss," and students show their respect in return by acknowledging their teachers as "sir," or "ma'am."

Our students are taught to succeed, which means encouraging them to learn from their mistakes, not punishing for them. There is no 'me.' There is only what 'we' as colleagues can do to raise the quality of life for every student here. And if that means staying late or working on weekends to help a student or group of students, then that is what we do," she added.

"Whatever it takes" is a mantra repeated by the school's chief academic officer, Tamara Turner.



"If we see a weakness in a particular subject, it is not beyond us to hold open weekend sessions for students who need the help to get it. We truly do whatever it takes to help our kids learn and grow," Turner said.

If a student, or students, excels in a particular subject, "we do whatever it takes to ensure they are challenged at every level. It's not unusual to have middle school students taking high school honors English, as an example," Turner added.

If a student shows an interest in a particular subject not offered in the school's standard curriculum, he or she can take online classes via the North Carolina Virtual Public School System and get full credit.

Raquel Gutierrez, an eleventh grader, is a classic example. She arrived at QEA in the third grade and English was not her primary language. Today, Gutierrez is an honor student and is in her second year of Latin via the public school online course offering.

"I get more out of my education here than I think I could get anywhere else," Gutierrez said. "I am free to be myself, and am encouraged by my teachers to do my best every day."

Technology is not lost on QEA students either.

The school features a computer lab classroom, a mobile computer lab, Smart Boards, and the school is moving to become more paperless as text books and lessons published online become the norm.

The results for QEA's efforts speak for themselves. The graduation rate over the past three years is 94 percent. In 2010, 100 percent of graduating seniors went on to four-year colleges or community college, and 33 percent of graduates went into college with college credits they earned at QEA, or graduated early. Many students going onto college do so with academic scholarships.

Does it make a difference? Rooks' entire class last year passed the end-of-grade standardized state tests with scores of three's and four's, which equates to at, or above average when compared to other schools in the district and state.

With over 400 students enrolled now and with plans to break ground on a new 40,000 square foot high school building featuring a state-of-the-art gym, a 900-seat auditorium, and new classrooms, QEA chief executive officer, Simon Johnson, is preparing to manage significant growth at the school.

"Our five-star daycare/pre-school for ages one through four has slots available for 25 additional kids and it's our hope that the parents of these children see the many advantages our school offers over traditional public schools when they make the transition to elementary school," Johnson said.

For extra curricular activities in higher grades, students can partake in band or chorus, enroll in the Crosby Scholars program, which focuses on learning about community activism and service, or be a part of the yearbook club.

The Quality Education High School of Business and Entrepreneurship is a rich learning environment that is young adult centered, meets the developmental needs of youth and adolescents as well as the individual needs of students with varied learning styles and addresses the multiple interests of the students.

As far as sports, QEA's basketball program, headed by coach Isaac Pitts, has quickly grown into a nationally known powerhouse.



Since taking over the Fighting Pharaohs in 2008, Pitts' teams have amassed a record of 102 wins and 23 losses, and many of his former players can be seen playing on NCAA division one school teams, such as St. John's, Georgetown and Wake Forest.

Once the new high school is built, the entire school will be in a position to educate up to 650 students, but with the greater student population, Johnson contends little will change.

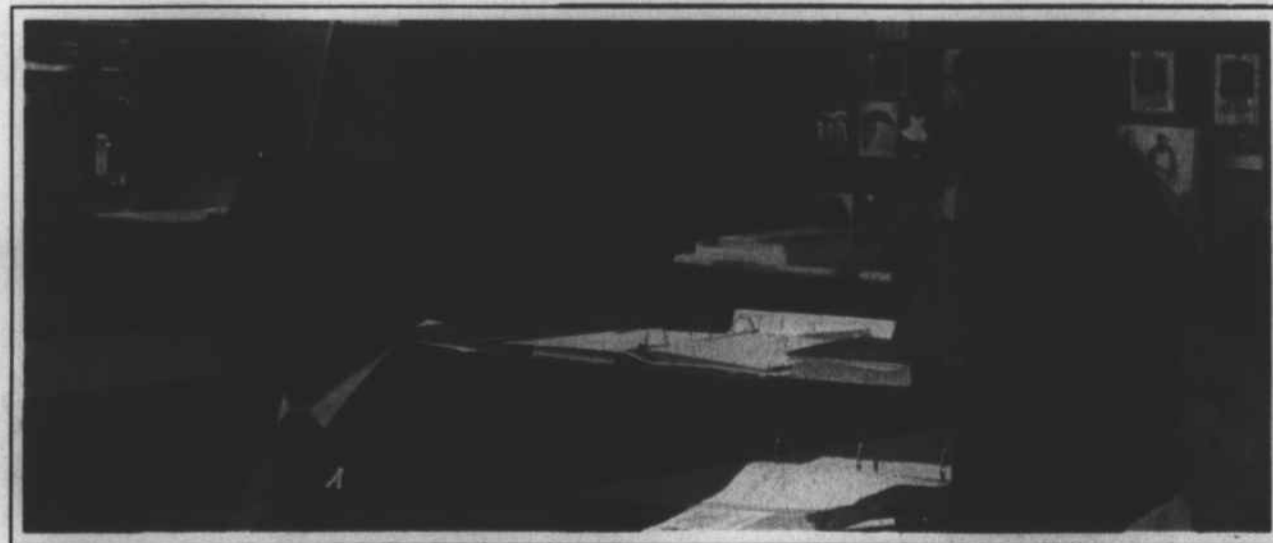
***"As we grow, we will continue building on the strengths of each student."***

"Quality Education Academy sets high expectations for all in an atmosphere that is nurturing and respectful.

"This is the culmination of a large part of our vision. We are fully capable of providing a safe, loving and user-friendly learning environment for all children from one year old through high school. The value of establishing long-term deep rooted relationships cannot be over estimated as it pertains to the impact on the development of emotional intelligence and student achievement," Johnson said.

So, while the Quality Education Academy may be Winston-Salem's best kept secret, one can see that the secret to its success is teacher passion, student desire, parent willingness, and the motivation for all to be treated equally and with respect. It is a winning formula that is worth looking into.

**Enrollment is now open for all grade levels, and tours can be arranged during school hours by calling 744-7138. Office hours are 8 a.m. – 4 p.m., Monday – Friday. To learn more, visit the school's web site ([www.qeschools.org](http://www.qeschools.org)).**



Another sense one prominently feels is "passion." Teachers, students, parents and staff are there because they want to be there.

"I have been teaching in Winston-Salem for over 20 years," said high school psychology teacher, Aisha Booth-Horton. "I've been a teacher here (at QEA) for the last eight and this is the only place I will ever teach."

When asked why, Booth-Horton's answer is swift and to the point: "as teachers, we are a team here.

A key ingredient to QEA's success in all grade levels is parent involvement. Whether its reading stories to younger students or learning lesson plans with teachers in order to help in the classroom, it further enhances the "family dynamic" the school exudes.

"Communication with parents is key, and we encourage all parents to make their children's education a family affair," said Shetelia Rooks, QEA's third grade teacher. "I love that I can talk to parents every day, if that is what they desire, or if that's what I need to do."