

**“Quantum Roundtable”**  
*Voices For School Improvement*  
Cable Education Network Channel 17  
New Bedford, MA  
April 26, 2013



New Bedford Mentors And Students At The Kennedy Center

**Marlene Pollock, Host:**

I want to welcome our guests today. We have staff members and students from the Quantum Opportunities Program, under the leadership of the NorthStar Learning Center situated at New Bedford High School. I'd like to welcome Jenna Costa who is the Program Coordinator, Samantha Santos, who is one of the students in Quantum and an 11<sup>th</sup> grader and Jason Perry who is the Youth Coordinator.

**Jason Perry:**

Thank you for having us.

**Marlene Pollock:**

What is Quantum Opportunities and how did it get started?

**Jenna Costa:**

Quantum has 30 students. It is a four year program. It is year round. It starts in freshman year. Our students are now in junior year. We will continue working with them until they graduate. Quantum Opportunities is academic based. Participants come after school. We help them with homework. They eat some snacks, do some activities. There are a lot of leadership skills, developmental skills, going out into communities. The students have a place to go

after school rather than not really having anything to engage in. Jason and I like to talk to students. We are with them everyday and during the summers. We encourage them to be a little more active in school, get involved in extracurricular activities as well as Quantum. We have become a family rather than just an after school program. The same students are with each other in school as well as out of school. They help one another out – a lot of peer mentoring as well as mentoring by Jason and myself. We take a lot of field trips. Our Quantum students are able to go to UMASS Dartmouth. We really utilize UMASS Dartmouth as a space to get them used to the college environment. The goal of Quantum is for all students to graduate - hopefully on time. We want them to be successful and go on to higher education at a university or college.

**Marlene Pollock:**

So Jason, how did Quantum arise? What was NorthStar's interest? Why do you think your funders went to all this trouble to set up the Program?

**Jason Perry:**

There is desperate need for the students at New Bedford High School. The program is funded through the Eisenhower Foundation, based in Washington, D.C.

**Marlene Pollock:**

So was this an attempt to show, whether, with adult mentoring, you will get better results?

**Jason Perry:**

Absolutely, without a doubt.

**Marlene Pollock:**

You know there is a lot of negativity toward young people. You guys, how have you found dealing with young people? It sounds like 24/7.

**Jason Perry:**

Yes, absolutely. We are a family. Our goal is to just offer them some guidance. I wish I had such guidance when I was a high school student. Jenna and I are relatively young – and what our students are dealing with, we dealt with in some fashion or another. So it is just extremely important for us just to be there – to help them out with their daily decision making, exposing them to different things that we weren't exposed to. We are taking them out of the city. One of our trips was to Washington D.C. We toured all of the museums. We were fortunate enough to meet the funders of our program. It was pretty amazing.

**Marlene Pollock:**

So, in terms of you as a student, what has the program done to change your life?

**Samantha Santos:** Well in freshman year, when I started Quantum I was failing terribly and now I'm getting A's and B's.

**Marlene Pollock:** Wow that's fantastic. Right before the show, Jason said you are brilliant. Why were you failing?

**Samantha Santos:** I don't know. I have no idea.

**Marlene Pollock:** So that's changed your life a lot. How does that make a difference in how you see yourself?

**Samantha Santos:** I feel I'm making them (Jenna and Jason) proud of me. It makes me proud of myself. So it helps me do better in school.

**Marlene Pollock:** Do you feel as a result that you are less afraid to take on challenges?

**Samantha Santos:** Well, I have always loved challenges. (Laughs.)

**Marlene Pollock:** (Laughs.) So have you changed your academic program or even life goals? Before you were in Quantum did you think about post graduation or what you might be doing?

**Samantha Santos:** No, I didn't even think I wanted to go to college. But now I want to be an RN and I want to go to Curry College.

**Marlene Pollock:** So that's a pretty big change.

**Samantha Santos:** (Laughs.) Yes.

**Marlene Pollock:** Do you think there should be more Quantums in high schools?

**Samantha Santos:** Yes, I think after us, there should be more. Everyone needs a mentor like them (Jenna and Jason), in my opinion.

**Marlene Pollock:** How do you feel about these two guys (points to Jenna and Jason).

**Samantha Santos:** I could trust them with anything. I know if I ever need anything, I can go to Jenna or Jason and they would help me with anything I ever needed.

**Marlene Pollock:** What is parent involvement in program? A lot of us are concerned there are no place for parents to really be involved in their kids' education other than open house.

**Jenna Costa:**

I think Quantum Opportunities makes it a little easier for the parents to feel comfortable, to know what going on with their student academically. We work with students and we see them more than we see their parents – but there is always dialogue. Out of respect, Jason and I are constantly speaking with the parents who are involved. I think parents feel more empowered that their students are in an academic program, are doing well and are safe after school. We keep them involved. For instance, we had Quantum Family College night about a month ago. It was just for our students. We brought in an individual from UMASS Dartmouth to talk about college. Not in particular UMASS Dartmouth but just the college process.

We needed someone to come in and talk to parents as well as students. I think parents are definitely involved and vested. Their child is, so why wouldn't they be? They know we are here for them as well. Just like NorthStar, Quantum is a wrap around program. We are servicing not only our students but their family and siblings.

**Marlene Pollock:**

You all must feel – how did we luck out to be in this? How many people applied for Quantum?

**Jenna Costa:**

We had over 200 students interested. That broke down to roughly 150 applications received back. This is the 1<sup>st</sup> cohort of Quantum in the city and area. So it was a random lottery process that we did for the cohort. 30 of those students were picked for the program.

**Marlene Pollock:**

Samantha, do other students know about Quantum? How do they feel about the fact that you got in and they didn't?

**Samantha Santos:**

I don't know. But when I tell others about Quantum they say they wish they could be in it. That is what my sister tells me all the time.

**Marlene Pollock:**

Are you guys going to do another cohort?

**Jenna Costa:**

We are hoping to start another cohort. The present cohort graduates in 2014. So hopefully in September 2014 we can start another one.

**Marlene Pollock:**

Would it be possible to have a larger cohort the next time?

**Jason Perry:**

I would hope so. It comes down to resources and funding. It is extremely necessary. Quantum is amazing.

**Marlene Pollock:** You wish the funding was there for all kids to be in a program like Quantum because you (looks at Samantha) are our children and you are the future. I feel like we have money for bombs, battleships and war but we don't have money for our children. Just in terms of going on these various trips, what was your favorite trip that you went on?

**Samantha Santos:** Washington, D.C.

**Marlene Pollock:** On that trip, what inspired you the most?

**Samantha Santos:** I think I was most touched by the Holocaust Museum.

**Marlene Pollock:** Samantha, when you get to college, what is going to happen to your relationship with Jenna and Jason?

**Samantha Santos:** I would hope to still have this relationship. It is sad to say, but I can run to them before I can go to anybody in my family.

**Marlene Pollock:** And now that I know you are going to school to be an RN, does that mean that science is your favorite course?

**Samantha Santos:** It is not fun.

**Marlene Pollock:** What is your favorite course?

**Samantha Santos:** Math.

**Marlene Pollock:** Oh, these guys help you with math?

**Jason Perry:** Yes.

**Jenna Costa:** Jason is a pro.

**Marlene Pollock:** I could have used mentoring and tutoring. Thank you so much for all the work you do and keep up the good work Samantha. I know we will hear great things about you.

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