



QUESTS

Charlotte Lab School

Quests are an interdisciplinary, challenge-based opportunity for students to research, investigate, and solve real-world problems and create authentic deliverables while building 21st-century skills.

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OVERVIEW

Quests are interdisciplinary, authentic, and purposeful challenges that provide an opportunity to teach the skills and concepts that students will be able to use in everyday professional situations. Each Quest is designed around real-world challenges as a way to enhance a student's understanding of big ideas and broad global concepts, as well as provide the space to develop and apply 21st-century skills. Quests are designed to meet the developmental needs of students from Kindergarten to grade 12.

Using content standards and 21st-century skills, Quests are framed around a central problem with a clearly defined final product that students work through while studying the issues over the course of a quarter. In a Quest, everything a student is learning, doing, practicing, and discussing is directly related to their successful delivery of their final product as a solution to the identified problem.

The Quest model is currently implemented at the Charlotte Lab School in Charlotte, NC, and NYC iSchool in New York City. Since this model was developed in 2008, over 13,000 students have participated in this challenge-based approach to learning. [Quests Overview](#)



What Makes This Model Innovative?



Relevance

Quests are authentic learning opportunities that allow students to explore their interests, while also building the skills they'll need to thrive beyond the classroom.



Rigorous Learning

Quests are designed to be interdisciplinary, incorporating skills, concepts, and knowledge from across all academic courses, while simultaneously developing critical thinking, collaboration, and professional skills.



Active Self-Direction

Students are able to self-select their Quest course and also choose a specific focus area that aligns with their own interests, prior knowledge, and passions.

DESIGN

Goals

Quests are challenge-based courses geared towards students to create authentic deliverables while learning critical academic and life skills. Each Quest is designed to focus on academic content standards and two to three 21st-century skills, informed by Tony Wagner's 7 Survival Skills for 21st-Century Students. [Survival Skills](#)

21st-Century Skills

21st-century skills help prepare students for lives beyond the classroom. These skills include critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and more.

Academic Knowledge and Skills

Students build, practice, and apply knowledge and skills related to the content-area standards that underpin each Quest course.

Experience

Quests are intentionally crafted in a developmentally appropriate manner, so that students of all ages can participate. Regardless of grade level, during each Quest, students engage in project-based and challenge-based learning to examine a localized challenge and then apply that knowledge to their final product. For Quests, the creation of this final product *is* the curriculum, not simply the culmination or outcome of the Quest curriculum. [▶ Intro to Quests](#)

In lower grades (K-5), teachers select the Quest topic for their classroom; in upper grades (6-12), students are able to select their own Quest based on their interests and passions. The upper school Quests are multi-age, which allows students to build relationships across grade levels.

Sample Quest courses have included:

Lower School

- **Lazy 5 Ranch Audio/Visual Tour:** Kindergarteners work together to create a local ranch's first audio-visual tour of animals to share with future visitors.
- **Rainy Day Recess Invention Convention:** Second graders work together to develop a better alternative to indoor recess for rainy days. During this Quest, they learn about the engineering design process, develop new games, and host a convention to showcase their creations.
- **Trash to Treasures:** After learning about sustainability, supply and demand, and recycling, first graders create a pop-up shop to re-home the items they no longer wanted.

[▶ Sample 3rd Grade Quest](#)

Middle and Upper Schools

- **The Lab Voice:** Students explore the world of literary and creative writing and work in partnership with local authors to write, publish, and sell a literary magazine.
- **Making It:** Students become product designers, electricians, and engineers as they use 3D modeling software, coding, and 3D printing. Their final product has students working in teams to create a working, life-sized solution to resolving local transportation inequality.
- **Preserving our Past and Preparing our Future:** Students explore the impact of urban renewal, gentrification, and development, and get involved in influencing policy and decision-making in support of economic opportunities for their communities.

 [Quest Course Catalog 23-24](#)

The Quest experience involves course time for students to meet regularly, engage with the community, and create a final product.

Regular Quest Block

Though the length of Quest blocks and the frequency of meeting can vary, the regularly occurring Quest course is chunked into work sessions for skill-building, knowledge acquisition, or targeted work towards the creation of their final product. Quest blocks generally follow the

same lesson template, regardless of the length of the class period: [📅 Sample Quest Planning Template](#)

- **Welcome, attendance, and socialization with students:** As students enter the room, the teacher welcomes them, takes attendance, and sometimes plays a quick warm-up game to get students ready for the class.
 - **Plan for the day:** This is either a discussion or a review of the day that features the establishment of clearly defined goals and the day's action items, as well as reflections from the previous lesson.
 - **Mini lesson:** This lesson, usually led by a teacher and/or community partner, is directly tied to either the skills or knowledge needed by students to successfully deliver their final products.
 - **Workshop:** Students engage in activities that practice their skills, apply their newly acquired knowledge, or work in teams to prepare and deliver their final product. Depending on the Quest, this is also a time where guest speakers may be welcomed into the classroom. *Students usually spend the largest chunk of time in this section of class.*
 - **Conferencing/feedback:** Students meet one-on-one with their teachers to receive targeted feedback related to their contributions to the final product, the content standards being assessed in the Quest, or the 21st-century skills being assessed.
 - **Closing:** Students find a stopping point for their work, review what was accomplished, create a list of action items for next class and, if relevant, complete an exit ticket.
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Engagement with Community Partners

Quests are created to be developmentally appropriate real work to help solve problems in the community. Importantly, the concept of “community” evolves over the course of a student’s journey. For example, early elementary students may be able to conceptualize their school or classroom community, but may not yet understand the concept of challenges in their local geographic communities. Older students, on the other hand, are able to work directly with external community partners to meaningfully solve problems. Regardless of how “community” is defined, students work alongside community partners in order to meaningfully solve localized challenges.



Engagement with community partners varies with each Quest topic and course. For some courses, a community partner may be co-teaching or co-facilitating alongside the classroom teacher, whereas other Quest courses invite a speaker in for a single guest lesson.

Though it is not required, most Quest courses leave the school grounds at least once during the Quest in order to learn and engage with the community.

Creation of Final Product

Throughout the duration of the Quest, students work in small groups towards the creation of their final product. The physical product may look different for each Quest course, or even each group within a Quest.

Students begin working on their final product during the first week of the Quest and continue working on it until it is complete. Everything a student is learning, doing, practicing, and discussing throughout the Quest is related to the successful delivery of their final product as a solution to the identified problem. [Sample Kindergarten Final Product](#)



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Supporting Structures

Quest courses can be built into any school's existing model but will require shifts in curriculum, adult roles, scheduling, and community partnerships.

Quests teach and assess 21st-century skills in addition to content-area standards.

Each Quest is grounded in content-area standards that serve to frame the knowledge and skill sets students will build, practice, and apply throughout the Quest. Teachers choose which core content area the Quest most closely aligns with and build intentional interdisciplinary connections between subjects.



CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, & ASSESSMENT

While topics vary between Quests, each course is grounded in content standards. For students in K-4, science and social studies standards primarily drive Quest content, whereas Quest teachers have more content standard flexibility in grades 5-12. In addition, teachers select 21st-century survival skill(s) they intend to teach and assess as a part of the Quest course. [Survival Skills](#)

The Quest model uses 3 forms of assessment to measure students' growth and mastery:

- **Survival skills growth assessment:** Teachers assess students on their growth of specific survival skills over the course of the Quest. Teachers choose easily observed, developmentally appropriate indicators to track behaviors and measure regularly using a simple

scale (e.g. Rarely, Sometimes, Most of the Time). [Survival Skills Sample Indicator: Collaboration](#)

- **Content standards mastery assessment:** Students in all grades are assessed using a 3-point scale from “Approaching Proficiency”, to “Achieving Proficiency,” to “Exceeding Proficiency” to communicate progress. Students in grades K-4 complete weekly assessments in the form of exit tickets, class assignments, and informal check-ins that monitor the progress towards mastery. Teachers also use pre- and post-assessments to measure growth across the whole Quest. Students in grades 5-12 complete at least 4-5 assessed activities related to the mastery of the relevant content standard over the course of the class, which feature measurable skills (e.g., correct/incorrect answers), narrative responses, and/or teacher observations. Students also receive near-daily informal feedback from their teachers, which allows them to monitor their own progress toward mastery.
- **Final product:** Teachers develop and provide a comprehensive rubric to grade students’ final products. This is a summative assessment of students’ learning throughout the Quest. The final product is delivered to the group’s target audience, which can range from their grade-level peers to a national business or organization.

Classroom teachers are responsible for leading Quests, which includes attending training, developing Quest content and materials, and teaching the course.

In the Quest model implemented at Charlotte Lab, all content teachers develop, plan, and teach their own Quest course. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of Quests, teachers often choose to co-plan and co-teach these courses.



**ADULT ROLES, HIRING,
& LEARNING**

New teachers must attend a week-long training during the summer in order to learn, plan, and develop their Quest courses. Returning teachers are required to attend 3 days of this professional development in order to refine and improve their Quest (or develop an entirely new Quest).

An adult at each school needs to be responsible for the implementation and ongoing professional development and coaching required for the Quest model. Though this could be a full-time role for bigger schools with logistically complex community partnerships, instructional coaches or other current school leaders could also integrate these responsibilities into their workload.

Schedules must be able to accommodate large blocks of time for Quest courses.



SCHEDULE & USE OF TIME

To maximize the Quest experience, students should meet for approximately 5-10 hours per week for 9 weeks (in alignment with school quarters). This serves to provide students with the opportunity to dive deep into a challenge *and* to maximize the number of different Quest opportunities students can engage with each year.

There is also considerable flexibility with implementing the Quest model. Teachers with limited time or resources might introduce “mini Quests” as a 1-day or 1-week opportunity within the confines of a more traditional curriculum and school schedule. Similarly, schools or teachers who want to go “all in” might choose to do an “expanded Quest,” a year-long in-depth project with a community partner that could provide a life-changing experience for a group of students. The key driver is the authenticity and clarity of the final product.

While each Quest course is different, schools might also consider flexible scheduling to allow for field trips into the community.

Strong community partnerships are foundational to the success of Quests.



FAMILY & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

In the Quest model, students partner with experts in the community to ask questions, learn, and solve problems together. During the Quest planning process, teachers identify a local partner with expertise related to the problem being solved and make a direct ask (e.g., reaching out to a master gardener and dietitian to speak with high schoolers for a gardening quest. These partners might provide recommendations for winter planting and resources to fight the frost, and provide a demonstration with winter vegetables).

The final product helps to solve a real-world challenge in the community (e.g., students in a graphic design Quest put a call into the community to help small businesses design marketing materials). Importantly, challenges are not created simply for students, and final products are not poster board presentations or PowerPoints; rather, students grapple with and propose solutions and products that help their community partners solve an actual problem.



Though not required, schools should consider budgeting for field trips.

Given that Quests are intentionally designed to engage students with others in the local community, it's recommended that schools earmark funds for field trips.

BUDGET & OPERATIONS

IMPLEMENTATION

Supports Offered

[Charlotte Lab School](#) offers the following supports to help you implement the Quests model.

Teacher's Lab

Cost Associated



The Teacher's Lab serves as a professional learning opportunity, set up as a Quest for educators, to guide participants through the process of developing a Quest course or unit. This hands-on approach offers single and multi-day workshops for teachers to better understand and prepare for implementation. Participants walk away with an entire Quest planned and ready to implement at their own school.

Aspirations for the Teacher's Lab include the creation of a Quest sharing platform, the maintenance of mentoring relationships to provide ongoing support, and a research-based consortium of best practices and student impact that measure the quantitative and qualitative impact of Quest programming.

[Get in Touch](#)

Custom Professional Development & Training

Cost Associated



Charlotte Lab School can provide training and coaching for schools interested in exploring the Quest model. These partnerships are customized to the needs of the school to both launch the Quest model within the school's context and provide ongoing support throughout the school year.

Personalized support is also offered to school leaders and school system leaders to help them think about and plan the structures, systems, and culture that foster the implementation of the Quest model.

[Get in Touch](#)

Site Visits

Free

Educators interested in seeing Quest courses in action are welcome to visit the Charlotte Lab School to better understand the model.



[Get in Touch](#)

Reach

13,000

Students served since 2008

40%

Economically disadvantaged students

200+

Community partners

43

Quest courses available

Impact

Students report that Quest courses have helped them learn skills that align with their interests, career goals, and other academic courses:

- "I want to study fashion at FIT in college. Before I took our fashion Quest at Lab, I'd never threaded a needle. Through this Quest, I was able to learn a new skill that is directly related to a career goal of mine. I can sew!" – 11th grade student
- "I learned how to adapt my writing to different topics, express myself through writing, and come up with new ideas." – 8th grade student
- "In this Quest, I learned the importance of connections, the ability to work in the 'real world,' and how great it feels to be trusted and recommended to an organization by a working adult." – 10th grade student

Contact

Mary Moss, EdD

Founder and Executive Director

moss@charlottelabschool.org

RESOURCES

Introduction to Quest
Quest is Lab's approach to challenge-based learning that blends elements from project-based learning, internships, experiential learning, and community-based projects. It asks students to deeply investigate a topic or issue then apply that set of knowledge and skills to make an authentic challenge in their community.

1 Intro to Quest
Hear a brief 5-minute video on what Quest is and how it works.

2 Example Quests
Take a look at the 100+ Quests from past years to see what our teachers and students have done together.

3 Bird's Eye Quest Plan
See how a Quest is planned over 10 weeks and what topics and activities are planned for students.

4 Quest Planning Cycle
See the Quest planning to understand the components to planning a Quest.

Quest Topics Brainstorming Game
Having trouble imagining ideas and final products? Check out their tool to discover rich Quest experiences through their Dinner Party game.

Quests Overview

Charlotte Lab School's introduction and overview to Quests.

Survival Skills

Survival Skills are the 21st Century skills that are sometimes less tangible and not explicitly taught. They ground the work of Quests. Review the list below and consider 2 or 3 Survival Skills most relevant for your Quest that you will explicitly teach and specifically assess. After deciding on the Survival Skill(s) you'll then choose indicators that are observational.

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving is a habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events as well as applying knowledge and skills in practical ways to solve real world problems.

Collaboration across networks is the ability to work together with diverse groups to facilitate the exchange of ideas to achieve a goal, make decisions, and solve problems. **Leading with influence** is the ability to generate results collaboratively, in a variety of contexts without direct authority.

Survival Skills

Charlotte Lab School's explanation of Tony Wagner's 7 Survival Skills for 21st-Century Students.

Example Quest: It's Getting Hot in Here! A Quest where students will work in a real bakery to host a pop up sale to fund a healthy vending machine for their school.

Big Ideas:	Content:	Skills:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What/how people bake is telling of culture, values, geography and history Importance of following recipes and measuring accurately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> History of baking, methods, traditions, roles, etc. Ingredients (biological origins, origins of use, chemistry) Volume and capacity Heat and chemistry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Measurement Pouring, stirring, etc. Etiquette around serving Cleanliness and proper handling of food Survival Skills + Design Thinking

Intro to Quests

An introductory video to the Quest course experience.

CHALLENGE-BASED LEARNING QUEST
REAL WORK, DONE BY REAL PEOPLE, IN THE REAL WORLD.

Sample 3rd Grade Quest

A video showing a sample 3rd grade Quest class.

QUEST NAME	CONTENT/ISSUES	Overview	Rubric
Kindergarten Quest
Kindergarten Quest
Kindergarten Quest

Quest Course Catalog 23-24

Quest offerings for the 2023-2024 academic year at Charlotte Lab School.

Quest Workshop Plan

Longer Quest blocks are the sessions where you "do" the Quest. This generally focuses on skill-building and knowledge-learning related to the Quest topic. This is where you tap into the activity/experience bank you brainstormed while planning. Generally, it's best for these days to be structured using the workshop model.

TIME	TASK	NOTES
5 mins	Attendance, Welcome, Time-to-Talk	Suggested activity would you rather or This or That?
5-10 mins	Review Plan for the Day	This is either a discussion or a review of the day. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish clearly defined goals Assign/Review work teams List off action items as a TO DO list on board
15-20 mins	Mini Lesson	This is already tied to either the SKILL or KNOWLEDGE needed by students to successfully deliver the Final Product
60-90 mins	Workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activities to practice skills/knowledge Time teams to deliver Final Product Guest Speakers
10 mins	Conferencing / Feedback	This can be embedded within workshop time or handled after while students wrap-up.

Sample Quest Planning Template

A planning template that helps instructors chunk their Quest lessons in a 120-minute class period.

Map showing the Charlotte Lab School campus with various buildings and outdoor spaces. Includes a legend for different areas like 'Lab 1', 'Lab 2', etc.

Sample Kindergarten Final Product

A sample final product from Charlotte Lab School kindergarteners.

Collaborative Across Networks & Leading by Example					
LOWER ELEMENTARY		UPPER ELEMENTARY		UPPER SCHOOL	
Developing	Appropriate	Developing	Appropriate	Developing	Appropriate
Student works at appropriate level of procedural skill and conceptual understanding	Student follows the procedural skill and conceptual understanding	Student progresses to the next level of procedural skill and conceptual understanding	Student demonstrates the next level of procedural skill and conceptual understanding	Student demonstrates the next level of procedural skill and conceptual understanding	Student demonstrates the next level of procedural skill and conceptual understanding
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Survival Skills Sample Indicator: Collaboration

Sample indicators for how teachers might assess students on their growth in collaboration.

TEACHING & LEARNING FOR THE NEXT GENERATION
Apply Here Now accepting 6-12 Student Applications for 2024-25.

Charlotte Lab School

The Charlotte Lab School's website.