



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Curtis High School

High School 450

**105 Hamilton Ave
Staten Island
NY 10301**

Principal: Aurelia Curtis

Dates of review: January 8 - 11, 2007

Reviewer: Denis Pittman

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Curtis High School services approximately 2700 students in grades 9 to 12. Students are enrolled in 10 small learning communities. It is located on the north shore of Staten Island. The school receives federal Title 1 funds. Founded in 1904, it is the oldest public high school on Staten Island, as well as the most ethnically diverse. There are 33.95% Black students, 31.81% White, 27.52% Hispanic and 6.32% Asian. Eleven percent of students receive special education support, a slightly smaller proportion (6%) receive support with their English language development. Attendance rates including long term absences is 89.6%, without these absences it is 91.2%; these attendance levels are similar to those of similar and City schools.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has created a strong vision for the school which is based on achievement, a positive attitude to learning and regular attendance.
- Staff are very committed and supportive of each other and there is a strong family ethos in the school.
- Students make good progress and there has been a significant improvement in the Regents scores particularly in mathematics.
- Staff collaboration and professional development are strong features of the school's culture.
- Students value the support and care they receive from the school.
- Portfolio assessment is detailed, challenging of students and effective in promoting progress.
- Teaching reflects an emphasis on academic rigor and high expectations.
- The curriculum offers a diverse range of electives to stimulate the interests and motivation of students with after school activities that are extensive and valued by students
- The school uses data very effectively to identify areas for improvement in student achievement.
- The school has a very positive working relationship with a number of agencies in its community which work to the benefit of its students.

What the school needs to improve

- The school should continue to develop teachers' understanding of differentiated instruction to meet the diverse needs of all students.
- The school has to continue to raise the achievement of students with learning difficulties by setting challenging targets.
- Develop the use of teaching technology in lessons to help promote interesting and motivating learning activities for students.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well-developed school.

Curtis High School provides students with a very good education. It has a family culture in which everyone is valued; high expectations are conveyed to staff, students and parents. Staff know the students very well through academic tracking, careful observation in the classroom and in the wider context of the school. Data is used very well in decision making at all levels, whether to plan programs for individual students or informing school improvement strategies. The detailed analysis of data is central to the improving position of the school. The school provides an extensive range of courses which are enjoyed by students. The teamwork between the staff is a strong feature. This promotes a community where ideas are shared and staff support each other in order to improve the welfare and well-being of students. Parents are very satisfied with the school and appreciate the progress that children make. Parents value the help and guidance which their children receive from all adults in the school.

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.

This area of the school's work is well-developed.

The school is very effective in generating and evaluating data on the basis of students' individual performance, achievement in classes and grade levels. The information it holds in each of these categories is constantly updated to be able to identify areas for improvement or to show progress. For example, the information about the progress of specific cohorts is detailed and reflects the improvement in achievement shown by students. For the cohort entering the school in 2003, 30% of the students were achieving levels 3 and 4 in English language arts. For the same cohort, 75% of students, in 2006, were achieving at level 3 and 4. This is clear evidence of an improvement in standards. In a different context the school is able to identify small groups of students who need particular help and support. For example, in planning for the Regents examinations, the school has compiled a detailed analysis of the performance of all students and is able to identify specific groups who need support in particular subjects. This practice has been particularly successful in mathematics. The school identifies the needs of English language learners well. On entry to the school a series of tests appropriately identifies the level at which the individual is able to operate in terms of language acquisition. As a consequence of this information a program of support is put in place, which is monitored and re-evaluated regularly. The school's regular analysis of data has identified that students with special education need are not achieving in line with expectations. It has shown that students have not been assessed on sufficiently small enough time scales for the school to be able to put into practice strategies for improvement. At risk students were being protected from the possibility of failure by delaying the administration of the test until they were ready; and readiness very rarely arrived before the fourth year of high school. Therefore, at risk students were given the fewest opportunities to demonstrate

competency. When the opportunity did arrive, they were burdened with multiple tests and in consequence their performance was adversely affected. As a result of this analysis the school has amended its testing procedures. Appropriate use is made of the data to compare with the school's past performance. As a result issues are identified and included in the school's program for development such as focus on writing. The school uses its data to well to monitor its performance against similar schools.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student collects learning.

This area of the school's work is well-developed.

The substantial data the school collects is used as the basis for discussion about long-term goals. For example, a focus for the current year has been on the themes of balanced literacy, accountable talk in the classroom and the development of model classrooms to show good teaching practice. These themes are then thoroughly discussed within faculty to identify objectives and timeframes completion. These discussions also effectively focus upon the academic needs of particular groups of students. The school identified a group of students in their senior year who were struggling to achieve. The students all had the same characteristics of poor attendance, a deficiency in credits and a failure to take one of the core Regents courses. An innovative one semester program, named Curtis Prep, staffed by experienced teachers, assistant principals and the principal, is establishing the confidence of these students and enabling them to make clearly identifiable progress. In a broader context the school has identified the performance of students with special education need as an area which will enhance the school's overall performance against external standards. The data which has been collected on individual students forms the basis of specific intervention strategies such as the emphasis on improving basic literacy skills particularly in writing. The school has high expectations of performance and these are regularly conveyed to parents and students through newsletters, letters of congratulation on particular levels of achievement and the detailing of outcomes of interim reports. A particular focus has been on emphasizing the importance of high levels of attendance; these are improving. The school has agreed challenging targets for raising achievement. These emerge from the high quality professional discussions which teams of teachers, assistant principals and the principal conduct and this drives the activity of all members of staff.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.

This area of the school's work is well-developed.

The curriculum provision is exceptionally strong and diverse. It is based upon the provision of 10 small learning communities with opportunities for students to choose from a broad range of courses. The programs are very successfully aligned with the requirements of mandated curriculum but in a unique way which is stimulating and motivating for students. The data which is collected within these communities enables the instructional program to meet the specific requirements of students. For example the International Baccalaureate program is designed to help intellectually gifted students to reach their fullest potential. The program offers an innovative, culturally enriched

curriculum in the arts and sciences to students who have a 90% cumulative average and meet reading and math requirements. In order to meet the demands of these courses there is a clear accountability on the part of teachers to reflect and improve upon the instruction which is provided. The school has identified differentiated instruction as a focus for improvement within the school. This theme is regularly discussed within the faculty, at grade level and within the specific learning communities. The outcomes of curriculum discussions and the effective analysis of data drive budgetary decisions. Resources are efficiently administered so that the needs of the learning communities are met. The increasing range of opportunities for students is reflected in the improvements in standards within the school. Staffing decisions have clear criteria for implementation and reflect the needs of students and the requirements of the diverse curriculum. Staff are highly qualified, being able to teach to the requirements of the International Baccalaureate, or the more specialized requirements of nursing and the performing arts. It is the range of these specialized courses which attracts students to the school. They are enthusiastic about the programs they are following and the value the instruction they are given. Staff are very supportive and give willingly of their time to assist students in their work. The importance of attendance is stressed regularly. There are effective administrative systems in place to monitor and check upon student absences.

Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school's work is well-developed.

There is a strong commitment from the leadership of the school to improving the quality of the data collected and how it is analysed. It is recognized that effective data management provides the context for sustained change and development. The school has very effective procedures for collecting information about individual student performance. Teachers have access to an individual report card on each student. This information is analyzed to identify and progress toward graduation. There is a good awareness among the staff of students' grades in the areas requiring further attention. The use of data is supplemented by the effective use of rubrics to assess student performance and achievement. Students understand the language of the rubrics and are able to identify the next stages required to improve their performance. Lessons are regularly reviewed by senior team leaders. Where good practice has been identified this is shared with other members of staff. These actions add to the strong team ethos which exists within the school.

The school has created an effective learning community for staff as well as students. There are numerous opportunities during the school week for teachers to work collaboratively. Professional development needs often arise out of these discussions. The focus on differentiated instruction is an example of such collaborative discussion. These activities are often supplemented by professional development courses which take place at other institutions. The principal actively supports these professional development activities with budgetary resource provision whenever possible. The school is well led by the principal who has a clear vision of how the school needs to develop, strongly supported by an effective leadership team. Management systems are very effective which help the school run smoothly. The school works well with community-based organisations including the College of Staten Island, St John's University and New York Centre of Inter-personal Development. A specific program which the school is involved in is the 'black male' initiative. The project is specifically designed to help black males overcome the inequalities that lead to poor academic performance. Given that the substantive range of

its professional activities and the support it gives to students, the school has a good capacity for continuous improvement.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.

This area of the school's work is well-developed.

The school is strong in its use of collaborative teamwork to identify issues and strategies for improvement. Data is used well to inform these discussions. The school has a continuous review cycle of its plans and stated goals. The Comprehensive Education Plan is detailed and well developed; goals are realistic and attainable. In the light of periodic assessments, goals are revised to meet the needs of students. This was evidenced by the focus on writing within the school. There is a strong awareness of where students are succeeding and in need of additional support. Individual student performances are well documented. These interim diagnostic assessments are used to make comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms. The school is looking to achieve greater consistency in this aspect of its work. The school is developing the concept of model classrooms to share good practice. This is proving an effective way for staff to reflect upon their own instructional programs with the view to improving them. In a broader context the review of the data of a specific cohort of students leads to changes in the school's planning. For example the school modified the curriculum of at-risk students to introduce more academic rigor by focusing their instructional programs on the Regents endorsed diploma. It also modified their programs to include aspects of their preferred learning styles of the students in classrooms. The objective was to raise the level of expectation and the performance of the students. This is a reflective school which has a flexible approach to modifying its practices to meet the needs of students.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Curtis High School (HS 450)	∅	✓	+
Quality Score			X

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • each student, classroom, grade level, 			X
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ethnic groups, English Language Learners, special education students* 			X
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all other categories of interest to the school* 			X
1.4 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			X

* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.	∅	✓	+
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.			X
2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject, and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area.			X
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.			X
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.			X
2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.			X
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			X
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.			X
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.			X
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X
Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	∅	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.			X
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.			X
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.			X
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.			X
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.			X
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.	∅	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.			X
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.		X	
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.			X
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X