

# Quality Review Report 2009-2010

**Curtis High School  
High School R450  
105 Hamilton Avenue  
Staten Island  
NY 10301**

**Principal: Aurelia L. Curtis**

**Dates of review: May 10 - 12, 2010  
Lead Reviewer: Richard D. D'Auria**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Curtis High School is a high school with 2,763 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 37% Black, 30% Hispanic, 25% White and 7% Asian and 1% American Indian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 7% special education students. Boys account for 46% of the students enrolled and girls account for 54%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 87%.

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This school is well developed.**

The experienced principal works closely with a loyal and conscientious cabinet, supporting a shared vision of continual school improvement among a professional and collaborative staff. The school offers a unique and varied curriculum through ten successful thematic small learning communities (SLCs). Students and parents alike both appreciate the school's cultural diversity and the breadth of programs offered through the SLCs. Each offers students opportunities to earn their high school Regents academic diploma while simultaneously completing a rigorous course sequence within a selected area of interest, including a renowned International Baccalaureate Diploma program. Key partners effectively support each of the school's diverse programs. Leadership has made great strides to improve rigor and inclusion for students with special learning needs. Although the school uses a variety of strategies to communicate with families, parents suggest a need to improve communication through greater follow-up by all faculty and more timely dissemination of written materials to them.

School leaders use data well as the basis for school-wide planning, and teachers are increasingly comfortable using ARIS, Acuity and related tools, including learning styles inventory data, as the basis for their lesson planning and instructional decisions. Students are actively engaged in their classes, usually working within interactive teacher designed groups that enhance their learning. Teachers are increasingly using technology as an effective instructional tool to illustrate abstract concepts, particularly in mathematics. Although teachers use data meaningfully, they do not yet routinely group students flexibly based upon available periodic assessment data using students' specific skill strengths and areas in need of improvement as their criteria for targeting instruction. Consequently, instruction is not always as strategic as it could be.

Teachers are actively engaged in collaborative planning and inquiry through weekly time devoted to professional learning communities. They enjoy autonomy and flexibility within these communities, often taking leadership roles and sharing their expertise. Although teachers use standards based rubrics to guide their assessment of student work, written feedback to students is currently often limited to brief evaluative comments such as "very good" rather than actionable feedback on what steps a student needs to take to improve the quality of their work. The school has effective systems in place to continually monitor and adjust both instructional and organizational decisions. However, transparent processes for establishing differentiated student learning goals, monitoring student progress and making adjustments over time are not yet fully developed or systemic. As a result, students have not yet developed reflective skills enabling them to articulate their own next specific learning steps to achieve skill mastery. They instead have a general awareness of a "need to be on time", "study harder", and "pass courses".

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Astute leadership provides a cohesive vision through highly focused and well defined school-wide goals that promote a broad base of support toward continual school progress.
  - The principal and administrative team work together effectively with staff, forging a professional community. They work collaboratively toward the common goal of continual school improvement. The principal routinely teaches one or more regular classes, garnering additional respect and credibility by experiencing the daily challenges faced by the faculty.
  - The school uses data well as the basis for several key instructional goals that build upon past work. These goals are focused and well aligned to the data and include increased academic rigor, support of professional learning communities, alignment of English language learner support, and strengthening of the school's ten small learning communities.
- The school's broad and rigorous curriculum, supported strategically with aligned resources, provides high interest, thematic instruction that engages and challenges students and provides tiered supports for all learners.
  - Students and parents enjoy the school's diverse programs, each housed within one of ten effective small learning communities. Examples include the International Baccalaureate Programme, Navy junior officer training, arts, nursing, journalism, legal studies, and business. Students complete rigorous sequences in addition to regents' diploma requirements.
  - The school implemented classes that are more inclusive for its most challenged learners. All ninth graders with special learning needs are in mainstream English language arts and math classes with tiered supports. Varying supports range from more structured learning programs to collaborative team-taught and reduced size classes. Data indicates that students are both taking and passing Regents exams in greater numbers.
- Teachers use a wide range of data meaningfully to analyze and drive instructional decisions, significantly improving student learning.
  - School leaders and faculty use many data sources to guide key decisions. ARIS provides insights on incoming students performing below grade level. Teachers increasingly use periodic assessments such as Acuity and similar tools. The school disaggregated and distributed learning styles inventory results to guide teachers' planning after administration to all students in social studies classes.
  - Strategic school-wide decisions such as the inclusion of special needs ninth graders into mainstream English language arts and math classes resulted from the analysis of school wide performance data of this sub-group. The deliberate decision to have the same high expectations and rigor for these students has resulted in noted improvements.
- Teachers use a variety of strategies to involve students through interactive groupings and technology that enhance learning.

- Teachers are making good progress differentiating instruction. Many use the learning styles data to organize students and address their needs. Many teachers use technology well as a tool to enhance lessons. Math teachers are most proficient using Smart boards to manipulate shapes, use on-screen calculators, and have students use the boards directly.
- Teachers effectively engage students in their own learning, with students strategically grouped primarily by learning styles or general ability. As a result, there are high levels of accountable talk among students, with lively discussion enhancing opportunities to learn from one another.
- Professional learning communities enable teachers to engage in collaborative activities using an inquiry approach that foster leadership and more reflective pedagogical practices that enhance the quality of instruction.
  - Teachers use weekly one-hour planning time well in professional learning communities to engage in inquiry work, whereby they analyze data, collaborate, share expertise, and implement various strategies to optimize learning. They alternate between subject and small learning community configurations, maximizing communication that supports greater school coherence. A school wide grading policy also enhances this coherence.
  - Teachers enjoy flexibility and autonomy within their teams, providing myriad opportunities for professional learning that is teacher driven, enabling distributed leadership. Teachers serve on the school's professional development planning committee, where they design and contribute toward offerings supporting their professional growth.
- The school carefully monitors and adjusts curricular and organizational structures, ensuring rigorous, highly inclusive learning environments that challenge all students.
  - The school has effective systems to continually monitor decisions and make adjustments. Analysis of transcripts revealed a pattern of failures by students repeatedly preparing for competency tests in US history. Counselors adjusted programs, transitioning students to a collaboratively taught, more rigorous Regents class with a highly effective teacher team.
  - Math teachers realized that double period algebra classes were not optimally effective. The school adjusted to single period classes with reduced size, resulting in more personalized and effective instruction.
- Multiple vibrant partnerships support the school's rich and diverse programs, providing opportunities that enhance the educational experiences for students.
  - Key partners support the school's programs. Local colleges provide college readiness and student research opportunities. The Federal Reserve has sponsored student mentoring for over twenty years. The community newspaper sponsors journalism internships, and local hospitals offer clinical nursing experience. Law enforcement and elected officials support legal studies, and the Navy is a vital partner for the vibrant officer training corps.
  - Students are comfortable going to staff members for support. The principal relates the well-known "The Starfish Story" by Loren Eiseley, reminding staff how they each can make a difference in the lives of students, one at a time. Many teachers have taken on the challenge, taking on one or more students to look out for them as an advocate.

## What the school needs to improve

- Refine processes to enable more transparent tracking and adjustment of measureable, differentiated student learning goals over time.
  - Teachers use a variety of data well, but work on individual student learning goals is not as well developed. Initial conversations about learning goals began this year. The school does not currently have transparent systems to routinely monitor and adjust student's individual learning goals. Students cannot currently articulate how or when they transition from one learning goal to the next as they develop skill mastery.
  - Inconsistent monitoring of differentiated learning goals based upon assessment data currently limits the criteria teachers use to group students flexibly in class. Some teachers identified tutoring and Saturday Regents review as strategies they think would be successful rather than what they could do differently during normal contact hours.
- Develop more consistent teacher practice providing students with actionable feedback on their work to foster student ownership of their own learning and reflective practices that enable articulation of next steps.
  - Use of standards based rubrics is evident, but there is currently inconsistent written feedback to students on how to improve the quality of their work or guide their next learning steps. Posted work and samples shared by students most often contain brief comments such as "excellent" or "very good" rather than critical commentary on how to improve.
  - Students have not yet developed reflective skills enabling them to assess their own progress and articulate their own next learning steps beyond the need to "study harder" or "get to class on time more often".
- Improve the consistency and timeliness of communication with parents by all faculty and staff, particularly the prompt follow-up to parent concerns.
  - The school employs a variety of effective strategies to communicate with its many families, including a messaging system, letters from the principal and monthly newsletters. However, some parents indicate that some staff members do not return their calls. Some find report cards their first notice of class cutting and that this information comes too late. Others perceive varying quality of communication from the different SLCs. The parent coordinator is making great efforts to improve coherence.
  - Parents find that information published in newsletters is not always timely, indicating it is sometimes as many as three weeks old. For example, several parents said they were unaware of the school's recent musical production or of a recent student-wrestling match until after they occurred.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: Curtis High School	Δ	▶	✓	+
Overall QR Score				X
<b>Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	Δ	▶	✓	+
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?				X
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products?				X
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs?				X
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 1				X
<b>Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	Δ	▶	✓	+
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?				X
2.2 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the team and classroom level?				X
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance trends?				X
2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students' learning needs and outcomes?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2				X

<b>Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning.</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community?				X			
3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support?			X				
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?			X				
3.4 Communicate high expectations to students and families, engage them in decision-making, and promote active involvement in the school community?			X				
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>				<b>X</b>			
<b>Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs.</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?				X			
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?				X			
4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes?			X				
4.4 Integrate child/youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?				X			
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>				<b>X</b>			
<b>Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?				X			
5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?				X			
5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time?			X				
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?				X			
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>				<b>X</b>			
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
Δ	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	➤	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>	✓	<b>Proficient</b>	+	<b>Well Developed</b>