



**Department of  
Education**  
*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

**Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning**

# **Quality Review Report**

## **2015-2016**

**Curtis High School**

**High School R450**

**105 Hamilton Avenue  
Staten Island  
NY 10301**

**Principal: Gregory Jaenicke**

**Date of review: April 5, 2016  
Lead Reviewer: Michele Ashley**

## The School Context

Curtis High School is a high school with 2,518 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 7% Asian, 37% Black, 37% Hispanic, and 16% White students. The student body includes 6% English Language Learners and 19% students with disabilities. Boys account for 47% of the students enrolled and girls account for 53%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 86.4%.

## School Quality Criteria

<b>Instructional Core</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
1.1 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards	<b>Celebration</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson <i>Framework for Teaching</i> , aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
<b>School Culture</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>

## Area of Celebration

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.1 Curriculum**

**Rating:**

**Well Developed**

### Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and content standards and embed rigorous habits and higher-order skills in curricula across grades and subjects.

### Impact

Strategic integration of the instructional shifts results in coherence across content areas so that all learners can make their thinking visible.

### Supporting Evidence

- Faculty has developed Common Core and content standards aligned curricula in English, math, science and social studies. In addition, the arts curriculum is aligned to the New York City Department of Education Blueprint for the Arts, foreign language is aligned to the Standards for Foreign Language Learning and physical education is aligned to the New York State Learning Standards for Physical Education. Across content areas faculty have developed customized curriculum maps that include unit plans, pacing calendars and lesson plans for each subject area. In addition, teachers utilize current resources from *EngageNY* to further align curricula to current standards and expectations for learning. Curricula reviewed include ongoing teacher notes to adjust pacing and include tasks and assessments from *EngageNY*. An algebra 2 pacing calendar includes the addition of *EngageNY* assessments, model tasks and notes to move a lesson on solving radical equations to be introduced before a lesson on “imaginary numbers.”
- Across the curricula teachers embed tasks that ask students to write from sources, English Language Arts (ELA) Shift 5. Across content areas, unit maps identify key ELA and/or math instructional shifts emphasized throughout each unit. A United States history and government curriculum map identifies that “students will be able to construct essays using content knowledge and evidence from primary and secondary sources.” A living environment unit plan identifies Knowledge in the Disciplines (ELA Shift 2) and Academic Vocabulary (ELA Shift 6) as key to a unit on scientific inquiry. All curricula reviewed strategically integrate the instructional shifts creating a coherent structure across content areas.
- Teachers use the Webb’s *Depth of Knowledge* (DOK) levels to develop rigorous essential questions and high level learning targets for each unit and lesson. A science unit asks students to consider “how scientists answer questions?” In this unit students would design an experimental plan to test a hypothesis and reach a conclusion. As part of the lesson students would also construct a graph with proper labels, scale and accurate plots and analyze data presented in graphic form. All students would demonstrate their thinking using a New York State Regents aligned assessment and share their analysis in an interactive student presentation. These tasks align to DOK levels three and four for strategic and extended thinking and are representative of the tasks identified in the vast majority of the units reviewed.

## Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

### Findings

Across classrooms teaching practices, student work products and discussions are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best.

### Impact

Alignment to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and integration of the instructional shifts have resulted in high levels of student thinking and participation but have yet to lead to student ownership of the learning experience.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders shared an articulated belief that students learn best when they are actively engaged in challenging activities that emphasize deep thinking. To that end, leaders encouraged teachers to engage students in high levels of participation and discussion. This year school leadership continues to focus on strengthening teacher expertise in questioning and discussion, Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, domain 3b. The school leaders shared that with this continued focus teachers are engaging students at high levels and with more rigorous questions. Across classrooms observed teachers posed questions aligned to DOK levels two, three and four for conceptual, strategic and extended thinking. In an algebra class the teacher asked students to predict what would happen to the graph of a function based on the “Do Now” example. After students completed several examples, the teacher asks students to explain how and why the graph changed. Students were then able to make generalizations about equations of functions and make accurate predictions of the direction.
- Across classrooms visited teachers embed the instructional shifts into their practice, providing opportunities for students to write from sources and use text-based answers in their arguments. In an English classroom students presented to their classmates on a character from *The Stranger*. Students shared their thoughts on the development and motivation of the character and supported their thinking by citing from the text. In a history class the teacher asked students to review the Supreme Court case of Charles Schenck versus the United States to decide if they agree with the Supreme Court decision. Students used historical documents, including the Bill of Rights, to support their responses.
- In most classrooms, student discussions were prompted by high-level teacher questions and teachers posed additional questions that guided discussion and encouraged student responses. In a science classroom, the teacher asked small groups to conduct experiments to answer the question “How does the sun effect life on earth?” The teacher visited each group posing questions that pushed student thinking: What is happening to the temperature? How is soil texture or color effecting the results? Why is the hot water rising? Students began to share possible hypothesis with their classmates. The high level of questioning present in this classroom was present across most classrooms visited, however, questions were most frequently posed by teachers. Teachers have yet to develop student questioning and discussion techniques so that students can lead discussions and engage in high level peer to peer discussions without prompting.

## Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms teachers use and create assessments aligned with the school's curricula that offer a clear portrait of student mastery. School leaders and teachers use common assessments to track progress, adjust curricula and make instructional decisions.

### Impact

Assessment practices provide meaningful feedback to students and teachers so that all students demonstrate increased mastery.

### Supporting Evidence

- All teachers use assessments aligned to the locally created curricula, Common Core Learning Standards, content standards and New York State Regents exams. Assessments include content and grade specific final exams, mid-term exams, unit exams, genre and topic specific rubrics and checklists. Students on each grade complete portfolio assignments at the end of each marking period. Across the vast majority of classrooms visited teachers use content specific rubrics and targeted verbal and written communication to provide feedback on mastery. Rubrics and written feedback was evident throughout all student portfolios reviewed. For example: Feedback on a math project included a math problem solving rubric which assessed reasoning, errors, terminology, notation, use of diagrams and sketches, neatness and organization. Feedback also included teacher written notes: Make sure you identify the "a" in your formula. Where is the table of values? You investigated two patterns but you only have an equation for one. Across the vast majority of classrooms teacher feedback clearly articulates student strengths, adherence to performance expectations and areas for improvement. Students are able to use this information to improve performance on future tasks.
- All students interviewed shared that they receive meaningful feedback on their work all or most of the time. Students receive feedback in the form of rubrics, teacher notes, verbal feedback and one on one conferences. Students clearly articulated their areas of academic strength and areas for improvement. Students also shared ways in which the feedback they receive from teachers and peers has impacted their work. One student shared that his writing has improved drastically and that he used guidance on his writing to complete an essay for a college scholarship. Another student stated that feedback from her teacher allowed her to persevere with a difficult physics assignment and receive a level 4. A third student noted that his teacher helped him connect his essay on mental disability to the work he is doing as a Boy Scout leader for autistic children. Teacher feedback on student work provides meaningful information to students regarding their achievement.
- Teachers track student progress and conduct item skills analysis of portfolio assessments, final exams, Regents exams and mock Regents assessments. Teachers use data to make adjustments to curriculum and instructional practices. For example: Based on Regents analysis the math department identified a focus on transformations and added lessons to the math curriculum on dilations, rotations, and transforming and the English department focused on the use of the Hochman writing format. Students have demonstrated increased mastery on internal math assessments, 46% passing algebra Common Core in January 2016 compared to 13% in January 2015 and improved in writing organization, formatting and the use of transitional words on rubrics across subjects.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

School leaders and staff effectively communicate expectations connected to a path to college and career readiness and successfully partner with families. Teacher teams and staff provide guidance and systematically communicate a unified set of high expectations for all students.

### Impact

Clear communication and guidance prepares students for the next level of learning and allows families to support student progress toward expectations.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders and staff communicate with families via Pupilpath, phone calls, email, letters, progress reports, a weekly parent coordinator newsletter and the school website. All parents interviewed use Pupilpath to access information about their child's academic progress. Parents note that the school maintains constant communication and they can request an in person meeting at any time. School leaders and staff send out regular communication regarding grade level requirements, expectations for learning, testing and college application deadlines. The parent and student handbook notes promotion, graduation and New York State Regents requirements as well as study strategies and what to do "If your student is getting poor grades..." It also identifies ways to keep in touch with the school, opportunities for school involvement and methods to support students at home. The parent's section states, "There are many things we can do every day that will show our students that we value education highly." Parents are key members of the School Leadership Team and actively participate in Parent Engagement Wednesdays.
- School leaders and staff hold a variety of information sessions to share college readiness information with families including workshops on college applications, admissions and the Federal Application for Student Aid (FAFSA). Parents interviewed shared that the support provided on the college application process is valuable. One parent highlighted the New York Cares FAFSA night where parents received individualized support to complete the online application and noted that there is a follow up session scheduled to help families review their financial aid packages once received. The school leader sends out notices to parents to encourage them to register their children for free SAT preparatory courses. A February 2016 letter states, "The great majority of colleges require students to achieve a specific target score on their SAT in order to be considered for admission. Curtis High School is offering free SAT classes to help prepare our students for this challenging task."
- Teacher teams and staff weave college awareness into the Curtis High School curriculum. Portfolio projects begin in grade 9 and develop through the final senior exit portfolio. The grade 9 memoir essay is developed across the grades and transitions into a model college essay in grade 12. College awareness begins in grade 9 during the parent orientation where parents and students receive information on graduation requirements, the advanced regents diploma and college expectations. College workshops address the specific needs of grade 11 and 12 students and college fairs are held on site. The Senior College Workshop for the class of 2016 included information on regular, early, and rolling decision and what to look for in a college. Students interviewed shared that they feel prepared for each step of the college application process. One student noted that internships and the opportunity to participate in the College Now program has prepared him for the college experience.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured inquiry-based professional collaborations that promote student achievement. Teacher teams consistently analyze assessment data and student work.

### Impact

Teacher team collaboration has strengthened instructional capacity and resulted in progress for groups of students.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams at Curtis High School meet daily within the four major content areas, ELA, math, science and social studies, during a scheduled common planning period. In addition, teachers meet for an hour on scheduled Wednesdays for faculty conferences, professional learning community meetings and small learning community. During common planning periods teams review item skills analysis and student-level data using an adapted Atlas protocol for looking at student work. Team meetings are led by content teacher leaders and follow an established format in which teachers are provided with copies of the student data and the assessment taken. During the math team meeting the teacher leader provided all team members with the January 2016 Common Core Geometry Regents Exam, the summary results for all grade 9 and 10 students by class and a copy of the Atlas Looking at Data Protocol.
- Grade teams analyze data from unit assessments, mid-term and final exams and Regents exams to identify difficult concepts and gaps in student comprehension. Teams collaborate to identify new areas of focus and adjustments that can be made to curriculum, assessments or instruction. Adjustments made by the math team based on student data include changes to the pacing to spend more time on “sine” and “cosine” and to move lessons on constructions to the end of the year and the addition of quarterly math exams to more closely monitor student progress. January Regents passing rates for Algebra Common Core and Algebra 2/Trigonometry have increased from 2015 to 2016, from 13% to 46.2% and 12% to 20% respectively. Adjustments made by the English team based on student data include the addition of lessons on citing text evidence to respond to student weakness in writing argumentative essays. Teachers noted that there has been progress across content areas in students’ ability to cite evidence.
- Teachers interviewed expressed that their instructional practice has improved based on their collaboration as a team. One teacher shared that she benefits from getting multiple perspectives on practice through the inquiry feedback. She also noted that through the small learning community meetings she is also able to get new perspectives on how her students learn in other content areas. Another teacher noted that through the use of the Tuning Protocol teachers refine their techniques and also adapt strategies used during content team inter-visitations. This teacher highlighted the use of read aloud and dialogue as a practice observed during team inter-visitation that she has incorporated into her practice that helps her students better understand the characters in a text.