

The classroom environment sets the tone for the learning that occurs every day. Can you imagine an elementary student in today's world, leaving their technology at the door when they walk into their school...having to sit in desks that are perfectly arranged in rows...doing worksheets and test prep...only being able to talk when called on...only having limited access to technology? At Curtis Elementary, it's not your mother's classroom any longer.

"The mission of Curtis Elementary is to teach, challenge, and inspire each student in a safe, nurturing environment to succeed in the global community." Raymond E. Curtis Elementary is a PK-5 Title I campus with 673 students. Fifty-two percent of our students are economically disadvantaged with about twenty percent mobility. Seven years ago our Curtis team realized that school and learning was not just about "*The Test*." Traditional teaching and learning, with lots of worksheets and test prep, does not prepare students for their future. We asked ourselves, "What do students need to prepare for the future and to be successful in the global community?" Our answer was to create a positive school environment that promotes lifelong learners. In order to prepare students for the future, we provide them with opportunities and experiences to develop their ability to critically think, collaborate, communicate, and to create. The Curtis Elementary community continues the journey to transform learning, shift our thinking to that of an innovative mindset, and to empower students to love learning through our focus on The Visioning Document, specifically Article 1: *A New Digital Learning Environment* and Article 5, *Organizational Transformation*.

Students need authentic experiences to develop future ready skills. We began this transformation with mandatory global connections which has evolved into a common practice at Curtis. Students connect and collaborate with experts like Jane Goodall in order to create their own habitats in a PBL as they are learning about animal habitats and adaptations. This is just one of many examples of how these global connections inspire learning. While students were encouraged to bring their own devices to use in instruction, we equip them with technology. Many of our classrooms are one to one with Chromebooks or laptops. Teachers are not the sole owner of learning now. Students are encouraged to take control of their own learning through student centered methods like Project Based Learning, Flipped Classroom, Genius Hour or Passion Projects. These methods have transformed teaching and learning at Curtis Elementary by changing the role of the teacher from the owner to facilitator of teaching and learning as well as allowing students to have voice and choice in how they show mastery of learning standards. Teachers guide students through various platforms like GAFE, SeeSaw, and many other digital applications that enhance and differentiate learning. Much of our campus has embraced the use of Google Classroom guiding both teachers and students to a more individualized approach to learning. Teachers are able to provide immediate and specific feedback to students. Students are able to network and collaborate with peers, experts, and teachers. Learning is not limited to the classroom between 7:50 and 3:20 but is accessible any time and any place. Students are engaged in the digital environment in classrooms and at home. Students also are empowered by having choice in where they learn. Many areas on campus offer collaborative learning spaces with every classroom offering flexible seating options.

Five years ago we created a small makerspace located in a space in the library and there was limited access to it. Learning should be fun, and it should build upon all students' passions, natural talents and abilities. To improve on this idea we designed a room, the Innovation Lab that allows students to problem solve, collaborate, create, and think critically. Students attend Innovation class in this lab during collaboration each week where they engage in STEAM activities to support learning. This class has sparked excitement in all students. Students choose to go to the Innovation Lab instead of

recess! The impact that this has made on the campus is huge. Students that are unsuccessful with tradition learning in the classroom now have a place where they are encouraged to take risks, explore, discover and learn about their passions. This is an oasis for developing creativity and encouraging critical thinking.

Another way Curtis Elementary is transforming learning is through leadership and growth. Teachers and students become leaders through learning. Professional Development is not limited to a weekly meeting after school where teachers sit and get information. Teachers understand that they are leaders and learners. Teachers attend EdCamp style PD on and off campus giving them a voice and a choice of what and how they would like to improve their instructional practices. Curtis teachers collaborate each week with their Professional Learning Community (PLC). They are continuously looking for ways to improve instruction for students. Many of the digital platforms that we use with students are also used with teachers to provide flexibility for when and where learning takes place. Teachers use various social media avenues to learn and grow from other professionals and to build their Professional Learning Network. Great learners see opportunities everywhere in all kinds of places. Teachers also learn with students in after school clubs. The clubs are created by teachers and students which offer a variety of ways to learn about their passions. Students participated in clubs including music, ukulele, coding, robotics, basketball, knitting, art, makerspace, kindness, and media. Genius Hour and Passion Projects also allow students to develop as leaders. Through these projects, students see how they can positively impact the world. In the last three years, student driven projects centered around fundraising to make a positive impact on the community and the world. Students raised funds to donate to the local animal shelter, other countries in need of water sources, community organizations collecting food, supplies, and clothing. Our students have also designed some of the collaborative learning spaces on the campus and created T-Shirt designs to raise funds to build classroom libraries for teachers. Students connect with other educators or professionals in the community and around the world to build their knowledge and support learning in order to complete their projects.

Our transformation has developed student leaders. Student leaders have presented and served on panels at the Region XI Service Center and have showcased their projects at the Region XI STEAM Carnival. The Curtis Elementary STEAM Night is led by student leaders. They showcase STEAM activities for parents and the community. Curtis students have shown tremendous growth as leaders and have improved their capabilities to communicate, collaborate, and to think critically and creatively.

As the Lead Learner of Curtis Elementary, I feel it is imperative that we share our story with our community. We continually are improving our processes for telling the world about Curtis Elementary. Traditionally, teachers have always sent newsletters with information to parents each week. Campus newsletters with pictures and videos that highlight learning are now pushed out through Facebook and Twitter. School visits are scheduled monthly to allow us to share how we do school differently with parents, partners, and our community. This has helped to build positive relationships with our stakeholders and has created a desirable learning environment that is world class.

Curtis Elementary has transformed learning for students, teachers, parents, and our community partners in many ways and will continue to provide authentic, engaging opportunities that inspire students and prepare them for future success in the global community. I am proud of our learning transformation at Curtis Elementary, and I am honored to nominate Raymond E. Curtis Elementary for the Schools Transforming Learning Program.