

January/February 2017

## Japanese educators, students explore Curtis High School



Curtis High School's Community School Director Marie Rodriguez, center, presents gifts to NPO Katariba's Kumi Imamura and Yusuke Yamada during a meeting with the delegation from Japan. NPO Katariba is an educational non-profit organization in Japan.

The UFT's Community Learning School Initiative, now in 28 schools citywide, is attracting interest internationally. Curtis HS, a community learning school on Staten Island, played host on Jan. 5 to a delegation of 10 educators and seven students from Tokyo and other parts of Japan.

While the Japanese students visited classrooms, the Japanese educators had a spirited question-and-answer session with the school's community school director, the principal and other staff members before touring the Curtis HS health clinic run by the Children's Aid Society. Cadence Turner, a journalism teacher at Curtis who also speaks Japanese, described how the community school model gradually involves everyone in the school.

"I had a student who was absent on a regular basis, but had improved attendance after the health clinic was introduced," Turner said.

"She had chronic asthma, and the clinic was able to monitor her so she wasn't absent as much. I learn more every day about what a community school can do."

The guests from Japan, who traveled under the auspices of a Japanese youth development group, took copious notes on paper and on laptops.

"I want a community school in Japan, especially a health clinic," said Ayako Masunaga, who teaches elementary school. "It would make it easier for the students." The visit was part of the Global Kids program, a nonprofit organization that promotes global understanding and local action through in-class and after-school programming. In 2011, Global Kids became Curtis' community partner, providing additional instructors who collaborate with social studies teachers to bring to life topics such as human rights, social studies teachers to bring to life topics such as human rights, social justice and the environment.

This after-school leadership program provides workshops on everything from voting rights to the Zika virus, and students come up with their own hands-on projects, such as creating a garden or painting a mural in a bus shelter.

Diana Aversa, an AP social studies teacher at Curtis, has seen the changes in students involved in the program.

"Students participate in the Global Kids discussion who usually never do," Aversa said. "It's not a class but an experience."