



# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**Benjamin Altman**

**Elementary School 042**

**71 Hester Street  
New York  
NY 10002**

**Principal: Rosa Cassiello-O'Day**

**Dates of review: November 7 - 8, 2007**

**Lead Reviewer: Melanie Spears**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Benjamin Altman is an elementary school with 739 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 2% Black, 5% Hispanic, 0.5% White, and 92.3% Asian students. The student body includes 38% English language learners and 2.2% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006 -2007 was 97.5%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 90% eligibility.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal and assistant principal are highly experienced and effective leaders with a relentless commitment to excellence and continuous improvement.
- The school provides exceptional support for English language learners who make excellent progress.
- The school has developed an extensive range of partnerships and is a professional learning community for higher education institutions, educators, and community-based organizations.
- There are excellent systems in place to help teachers improve their instruction and provide on-going feedback about practice and student learning.
- The school has been rigorous in collecting and analyzing data over many years and has an excellent basis from which to measure performance and progress.
- The rich and broad curriculum engages students and encourages them to develop a love of learning.
- Very good use is made of diagnostic assessments that are readily reported and result in rapid intervention and support.
- The school provides excellent support for parents to help their children to succeed.
- Leaders give significant attention to selecting staff with a high level of experience and proficiency relating to students from cultures, languages and socio-economic classes different from their own.
- Staff have the highest expectations for their students.

### What the school needs to improve

- Continue with the plans to develop even more enrichment programs based on the individual strengths of students.
- Maximize the use of technology.

## Part 3: Main Findings

### **Progress made since the last review**

The school has made good progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous Quality Review report

### **Overall Evaluation**

#### **This school is outstanding.**

The sense of community and the pursuit of excellence at Benjamin Altman School are exceptional. Student achievement is high and all students progress well, but the progress evident in the work of English language learners is phenomenal. The school has a long and successful history of meeting the needs of its students. Many teachers live in the community, many are former students, and retired teachers continue in part-time roles. The school has forged excellent partnerships with community-based organizations, institutes of higher education and cultural organizations to further the school's goals. Parents are fully involved in the life of the school and given every encouragement and support to help their children succeed. The work of the school is the work of an entire "village". The result is a validation of students' culture and community and an expansion of their thinking about the world beyond. The curriculum is such that it nurtures life-long learning, and is "uncovered" rather than "covered". Meaningful learning together with a wealth of arts and enrichment engage the students. The principal is an exceptionally skilled and charismatic leader and receives excellent support from her assistant principal. They have a relentless commitment to excellence and continuous improvement, centered on building capacity and empowering teachers to become experts. The environment is motivating and inspirational, and creates a desire to learn among all members of the community. The high quality use of data to inform decision-making has been a key part of the school's work for many years. Staff work together to solve problems and support each other through on-going professional development and the sharing of best practice. Since the last Quality Review, there has been a deeper concentration on differentiation and the purchase of more technology coupled with training in using new technology. It is typical of the school that it now intends to maximize the use of this technology and refine differentiation further by developing even more enrichment programs to match the individual strengths of students. There is a well-established understanding of the importance of an inquiry team, having long been a part of the school's approach to data analysis. The team is currently looking more critically at math based on gender.

### **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 the student’s progress over time.**

**This area of the school’s work is outstanding.**

The collection and use of data is highly sophisticated and has been a consistent part of the school’s practice over many years. Multiple on-site assessments are gathered and accurately analyzed for the implications for instruction beyond simply looking at the figures. Use is made of this analysis to inform a whole range of decision-making. In addition to the analysis of standardized test results, a collection of data emerges from work samples, classroom observation and feedback to teachers, students and parents. The high level of student performance reflects the very effective way in which data is used. English language learners make exceptional progress and the school ensures rigorous monitoring of these students. They take tests on entry and very regularly thereafter. The English as second language team teachers carries out continuous research resulting in very good progress for these students. The school leadership team checks that all reports speak to the sub-groups. The State has recognized the school for its progress with sub-groups. Excellent use is being made of a spreadsheet called “class at a glance” to ensure that teachers plan and assess individually. Each class has frequent student review with administration. The spreadsheet records the results of assessments, interventions, academic progress and teachers’ predictions for the half year. The school’s actions taken in response to data are comprehensive and accurate thereby ensuring that the analysis leads to appropriate classroom groupings and interventions. Excellent use is made of case studies to gain a holistic picture of individual students and has led to the development of safety nets to prevent slippage in student scores. The school continually strives to improve and has agreed plans to maximize the use of technology in this area.

**Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student’s next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student’s learning.**

**This area of the school’s work is outstanding.**

All staff use data very effectively to help them plan and set goals. Goals group into three areas, instructional activities, environment and professional development. Time frames vary according to the goal. The principal regularly meets with individual teachers and grade level teams to review their data analysis, student goals and teacher action plans. Teachers use the information carefully to shape their professional learning and adjust their classroom practice. They set realistic goals and their students complete self-evaluations about their progress using the school’s own standardized report card. The principal and assistant principal’s detailed knowledge helps them promote consistent practice throughout the school. Very good use is made of faculty conferences and school-wide initiatives to communicate whole school goals. Staff have very high expectations for their students, well beyond “pass the test” students. As the principal commented, “We strive for excellence not mediocrity”. The school questions whether students are active or reluctant learners, the latter leading to the identification of a student in need of improvement. Students know where they are with their learning and exactly what they need to do next. For example, in one classroom good use is made of a Jigsaw Kid rubric to help them progress through the stages of novice, apprentice, practitioner and expert in various aspects of math. Expectations are set out for parents and their children, with each grade having its own handbook. Parent orientation sessions reinforce this. There are detailed grade standards, such as for second grade, “children should be reading 15-30 minutes per day” and advice to parents, “Talk to them about what they are reading. If possible attend class trips”. A very important feature of the success of this school is its deep understanding of the community it serves and the particular needs of its parents and students. The executive board of the parent teacher association meets every morning in the principal’s office, sometimes formally, but always as a two-way process. The elected parent representatives make a big contribution, meeting frequently with parents, acting as

translators and helping those new to the country to settle quickly. Any parent can be involved in planning activities. The school has introduced an Even Start Literacy program for parents who can progress at their own pace. This has made a palpable improvement in engaging these parents.

**Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.**

**This area of the school’s work is outstanding.**

The school has developed a rich and broad curriculum, which engages students, helps them gain confidence and encourages them to be independent learners. It challenges students to use higher-order thinking skills. Teachers focus on the quality of students’ work and regularly encourage them to review the work of others. This is enhanced by the way in which the curriculum is organized so that two half-year studies support all areas of learning. Teachers work together to complete in-depth studies around established topics on a given grade, producing authentic learning experiences that integrate the curriculum. For example, a second grade lesson on the New York subways topic saw students engaged in discussing poems about the subway while comparing the arteries and veins in a human body to the New York transportation system. The school makes excellent use of its “Book of the Month – unifying a community of readers”. Staff try to choose a book that every age can connect with and teachers modify the message accordingly. The author of the last book, *Emma’s Rug*, came to visit. The in-depth study on each grade results in published pieces of a very high quality with clear differentiation to meet the specific needs of individuals and groups. There is a very strong emphasis and collaboration with the outside world. The recent Eldridge Street project is one example. The extended school day connects to excellence in projects by developing interests and strengths in the enrichment program. The school intends to develop this further as a means of high-level differentiation beyond the academic. The rich curriculum includes a specialist art teacher and studio, every child learning to play a musical instrument, a Kodaly music program, swimming, chess, modern dance and drama, which is woven throughout. The school provides Saturday and Sunday extended programs as part of its determination to support its students and community. School leaders manage these resources with as much purpose and creativity as they do the curriculum. Staff are chosen for their experience and proficiency in relation to specific groups of students. Corporate sponsorship provided laptops and helped with the integration of technology. Excellent systems are in place to free teachers for regular preps and professional development as required.

**Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.**

**This area of the school’s work is outstanding.**

The school’s commitment to continuous learning is evident in the quality of professional development opportunities and their impact on student learning. Developing teachers as “experts” and providing on-going opportunities to share excellent practice have increased the sense of community and shared commitment. The principal demonstrates and models an excellent understanding of pedagogy and shares teaching strategies with staff on a daily basis. Individual conferences, results of surveys and the daily informal observations inform professional development decisions. They link specifically to the school goals because of the planning structure described earlier. Excellent use is made of very regular “lesson study” to help teachers improve their instruction, which is built systematically into the schedule. Teachers watch a lesson with a lead teacher in a lab site. A less experienced teacher then tries to do the same while others watch. The focus is on giving feedback, with time allocated after the lesson. This strong emphasis on planning and

delivery is evident in the consistently high quality of teaching. New teachers receive intensive support through the lesson study in addition to having mentors and buddies. They receive support into a second year as part of a collegial approach carried out on an informal basis. The alignment of support services and range of partnerships are quite remarkable and form part of the school's holistic approach to education, which has been extremely successful. Examples include an art therapy program and a group for boys who have social difficulties with anger management. The community-based relationships are real partnerships and the collaborations inform decision making and forward planning. Seven current teachers were previously teachers in these community-based organizations, including the assistant principal. There are very strong links with institutes of higher education including student teachers from numerous universities and New York University houses a class in the building. Cultural links and partnerships are extensive including a rich relationship with the Guggenheim. As part of the Eldridge Street project, programs on architecture, history and culture enhance students' learning.

**Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.**

**This area of the school's work is outstanding.**

The school is outstanding in the range of high quality structures it provides for teacher data analysis. Improving teacher outcomes emerges from school-wide, grade and individual goals. There is a focus on the achievable and the frequent need to go back and check whether it happens successfully. The school schedule supports the plans for reviewing periodic assessment and diagnostic tools with varying timeframes to measure interim and longer-term goals. The principal is an exceptionally skilled leader who has the ability to think strategically, yet always in the context of "what we teach and how we teach". She provides teachers with on-going feedback about progress towards goals and teachers in turn provide it to their students. There are formal and informal opportunities for faculty to meet with school leaders, teacher leaders, coaches and as groups and grades to evaluate progress and plan future goals. The school is wise enough to recognize that it is not often that a goal disappears completely, more likely there will be a realignment of priorities. The school truly is a model. Benjamin Altman hosts learning visits such as that from PS170, grade level end of unit celebrations for parents, New York University professors and student teacher collaborations to share best practices. Faculty evaluate its practice and articulated strengths and next steps with grade level peers and similar school colleagues. The host visit is an excellent example of how the school carries out reflective dialogue to celebrate what is working well and to plan the next steps to meet its goals for learning..

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Benjamin Altman</b>	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
<b>Quality Score</b>					X

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

To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
1.1 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom, grade level?					X
1.2 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of special education students?					X
1.3 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of English language learners?					X
1.4 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of ethnic groups, gender groups and all other categories of interest to the school?					X
1.5 a measurement of performance and progress based on the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grades and subject areas?					X
1.6 a measurement of performance and progress based on comparisons with similar schools?					X
1.7 training, management systems and structures that support teachers in the use of school data to inform planning and instruction and to track the progress of students?					X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>					X

### Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each students learning.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set rigorous, objectively measurable goals for improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals?					X
2.2 focus 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 identify and improve the performance and progress of those students in greatest need of improvement?					X
2.4 share whole school goals with all members of the school community to rigorously improve the performance and progress of students?					X
2.5 convey consistently high expectations to students and their parents/caregivers?					X
2.6 regularly provide students and their parents/caregivers with information about the goals set for each student, and about each student's progress and performance, and how they can improve?					X
2.7 invite and enable parents/caregivers to provide useful information to teachers and the school about the learning needs and capacities of their children?					X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>					X

### Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
3.1 select core curricular approaches that facilitate and provide meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and focus on raising the achievement of students?					X
3.2 provide a broad and engaging curriculum, including the arts, to enhance learning both within and outside the school day?					X
3.3 hold teachers accountable for the progress and learning of the students in their charge, for making instruction interesting and compelling, and for creating a positive safe and inclusive learning environment?					X
3.4 ensure that teachers use school, class and student data to plan for and provide differentiated instruction that meets the specific needs of all the students in their charge?					X
3.5 make budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions strategically, based on data, to meet the school's academic goals for all students?					X
3.6 ensure that there is an environment of mutual trust and respect between all staff and students to support personal and academic development?					X
3.7 ensure that there are effective and consistently applied procedures to encourage and monitor student attendance and tardiness?					X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>					X

<b>Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.</b>					
<b>To what extent does the school . . .</b>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>◇</b>
4.1 use frequent observations of classroom teaching by the principal and other available information to develop a differentiated strategy for improving the quality of each teacher’s instruction?					<b>X</b>
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?					<b>X</b>
4.3 provide frequent opportunities for teachers to observe each other’s classroom instruction and to meet together in teams to plan, share effective practices, and evaluate one another’s instruction in an open and reflective professional environment?					<b>X</b>
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?					<b>X</b>
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?					<b>X</b>
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning, and effectively address discipline related incidents?					<b>X</b>
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?					<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>					<b>X</b>

<b>Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.</b>					
<b>To what extent do . . .</b>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>◇</b>
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?					<b>X</b>
5.2 the school’s plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?					<b>X</b>
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?					<b>X</b>
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?					<b>X</b>
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to makes strategic decisions to modify practices to improve student outcomes?					<b>X</b>
5.6 school leaders and staff use each plan’s interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning?					<b>X</b>
5.7 the principal and school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to effect change?					<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>					<b>X</b>

◇	<b>Outstanding</b>
+	<b>Well Developed</b>
✓	<b>Proficient</b>
➤	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>
Δ	<b>Underdeveloped</b>