



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Benjamin Altman School

Elementary School M042

**71 Hester Street
New York
NY, 10002**

Principal: May Lee

**Date of review: May 15, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Darryl Alhadeff**

The School Context

The Benjamin Altman School is an elementary school with 781 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 1% Black, 3% Hispanic, 3% White, and 93% Asian students. The student body includes 29% English language learners and 14% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 98.0%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
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	Additional Findings	Well Developed
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 Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products	Additional Findings	Well Developed
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	Focus	Proficient
School Culture		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	Celebration	Well Developed
Systems for Improvement		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	Additional Findings	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The principal consistently communicates high expectations to the staff. The staff partners with parents to communicate expectations connected to college and career readiness to support student progress towards expectations.

Impact

The schools' communication of expectations and trainings provided, results in a culture of mutual accountability among all stakeholders. Staff and parents partnerships support students' progress toward goals.

Supporting Evidence

- The school provides parents with the information and trainings needed to be involved in the planning and decision making process to support the education of their children. During parent engagement time, participation in classroom activities, monthly meetings to plan with the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) and content driven parent workshops for all parents make parents feel part of their child's education.
- The school provides an intensive series of workshops on middle school options that begin in the early grades. Parent attendance at the workshops is above fifty percent. The majority of students at PS 42 get into their first choice middle school. In fourth and fifth grades, the students and parents begin to think about high school. The school supports additional workshops and offers advice from the guidance counselor. The school prepares the students for the next tier of education by exposing them to life outside their neighborhood. Some of the unique collaborations and trips include: Chen Dance, Midori and Friends, Center for Architecture Foundation, Audubon Society, and The New York Historical Society. Parents are encouraged and welcomed to accompany their children to trips and the school provides a translator for the parents. These activities foster college and career readiness.
- The PS 42 handbook outlines all school protocols and expectations. It is available on -line and as a hard copy. In addition, it is available translated into Chinese. The administration has clear staff expectations. They expect rigorous units of study and daily lesson plans across all grades and subjects. The school also orchestrates events that match the community's needs. Last week, on Saturday the school had their 15th annual Family Day and neighborhood. A small entry fee was charged but all the activities were free for parents and children.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Most classrooms use common assessments and rubrics aligned with the schools curricula. The school uses assessments to determine student progress toward goals across grades and subject areas.

Impact

The teachers give actionable feedback to students to support their progress; however, there are a few missed opportunities for student feedback across subject areas. Assessment results are used to adjust curricula and student's goals accordingly to increase student outcomes.

Supporting Evidence

- To ensure consistency across classrooms in determining students reading levels, all teams have dedicated professional development learning time to norming texts and scoring the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). To ensure further consistency across grade levels, grade team leaders met with each other to norm as well. The norming exercises have resulted in increased reliability in assessing student's strengths and next steps as readers, and more productive independent reading time as students have become increasingly well matched to books. This practice of assessing student's strengths and next steps is expanding across all subject areas.
- In mathematics, teachers rely on the pre and post assessments aligned to the Common Core that come with the Investigations curriculum. For literacy and social studies, grade level teams develop their own assessments. The teams are guided by Understanding by Design and by the Common Core Standards. For English language arts (ELA), teachers create open-ended pre and post assessments that enable them to adjust instructional decisions. For example, at a fourth grade team meeting the teachers refined assessments for the American Revolution unit.
- Teachers design their own rubrics and performance tasks and adjust them depending on the needs of the students. For example, in a fourth grade class, results of the performance task for the start of the unit on Eastern Woodlands Indians suggested that the students needed more engagement about the subject before beginning the unit. Teachers changed their unit design to allow the students to select their own expert groups, and informal (e.g. notebook entries, post-its) measures began to show increased engagement. The fourth graders who had struggled most on the unit pre-assessment showed much higher scores on the end of unit assessment.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The school leader and staff ensure curricula are aligned to the Common Core Standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Rigor and high level thinking skills are embedded in academic tasks across grades and subject areas.

Impact

There is coherency across grades and subject areas that promote college and career readiness for all students. All learners are able to demonstrate their thinking across subject areas.

Supporting Evidence

- The school believes in inquiry based learning that guides students in planning and selecting their choices. The school implements three multi-disciplinary units a year integrating social studies and science. The students conduct research using technology. During the student meeting, fourth graders discussed the slavery unit *When I Was a Slave*. They shared the slave narrative collection from *Memoirs from the Slave Narrative Collection*, by Norman R. Yellman. They spoke about the audiotope recordings of selected slaves they listened to in class and the Drama Tableau project they were working on via You Tube. Another student spoke about making a tableau film, which is a dramatic approach to reading comprehension.
- A staff created template is used for lesson plans across all subject areas to build coherency across grades and subjects. The template aligns to the Common Core Standards and includes the following components: 1. Standards addressed in the lesson. 2. Learning targets: What the students will know and be able to do as a result of the lesson? 3. Relevance/Rational: Why are the outcomes of this lesson important in the real world? Why are they essential for future learning? 4. Formative assessment criteria for success: How will the students know they have successfully met the outcomes? What specific criteria will be met in a successful product/process? 5. Activities /Tasks: What learning experiences will students engage in? How will the task impact formative and summative assessment? 6. Resources/ Materials: What texts and material will students use? ; Access for all: How will the teacher ensure that all students have access to and are able to engage in this lesson? A second grade class used this template to plan a lesson on Bridges.
- The school has several multi-disciplinary studies at different grade level. The second grade is studying bridges, first grade is focusing on a bug study and fifth grade is currently studying slavery. Every unit in the school has a detailed unit plan, which is refined by the staff. For example, third grade is doing Individual Country reports in non –fiction. The unit plan was adapted from a Teachers College unit *Learning through Reading: Countries across the World*. The unit has an overview combining literacy with social studies, which includes essential questions, a lists of standards addressed and 21st century skills, followed by unit objectives. The unit also lists websites, resources, mini lessons, teaching points, the active engagement and vocabulary. In addition, a calendar maps out the weeks in a unit and all units are available in binders by grade. During the fourth grade teacher meeting, the staff brought the binders and began revising a social studies unit for next year.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across classrooms teaching practice are aligned to the curricula, which is informed by the Danielson's Framework for Teaching and the instructional shifts. Teaching strategies strategically provide multiple entry points and supports for all learners.

Impact

Teaching strategies supports all students with appropriately challenging tasks and all learners demonstrate higher-order thinking skills in student work products.

Supporting Evidence

- During a first grade classroom visit, the students were involved in studying bugs during station teaching. There were five stations working at once and students signed up for the bug they wanted to study, supporting student choice. The first grade students traveled from station to station as they finished the task. For example, there was an iPad station playing a video on bugs. Students had clipboards and were taking notes. Another station had live bugs that students were sketching. A third station had teacher support and students were having conversations about bugs using question starters. The class had many English language learners and two students chatted about bugs. They asked about their origin and what happened to them as they grew. Two other students were comparing different types of bugs. The lesson provided multiple entry points for all learners.
- In the vast majority of classrooms visited, students were in stations or small groups. During a bridge study in a third grade class, the students designed their bridge in groups of three or four. There was a resident architect present to support the young designers. Each group had a picture of the bridge they were designing. The bridges were intricately built and had more than one level. The class had many English language learners who were involved the task. The groups were formed to support all learners. Partners supported partners when necessary. The teacher circulated and attended to groups that needed support. Some students were given instructions with pictures that supported their work. One student was on the computer doing research for a written bridge project.
- The school uses art to connect and support mathematics in their multi- interdisciplinary units. For example, in a third grade class the students were studying Van Gogh. The lesson began by exploring essential questions. What does three-dimensional mean? How do you change the paper to look like a Van Gogh brush stroke? What is texture and what are the different ways to make texture with paper? The students stood at tables and became artists. The teacher walked around and coached students. At the end of the class, the children reflected on the challenges of making a three-dimensional art by asking themselves: "Did my collage show movement and lines like Van Gogh's paintings? Did I change the paper five different ways to create different lines?"

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry based structured professional collaborations. Teacher teams analyze assessment data and student work in teacher teams.

Impact

Teacher team collaborations strengthen the instructional capacity of the staff and results in improved teacher practice and progress towards goals.

Supporting Evidence

- The schools prep schedule supports grade level common planning time. The teams meet both vertically and horizontally when refining academic tasks aligned to the Common Core Standards. Inquiry teams meet weekly to discuss school wide goals. This current six- week cycle, the group is working on new strategies for supporting English language learners. The protocol the staff used required them to name the standard, then name the tasks associated with the standard and then look at what worked or did not work. By identifying how and why the tasks are working allows teams to develop action plans to target standards needing more support.
- The use of protocols during teacher team meetings has strengthened the capacity of the teachers to refine and revise the curricula integrating the Common Core Standards. The protocols also supports coherency within the grades and school. Lead teachers and coaches support the planning sessions. All notes related to the sessions are available on- line for all staff to reference.
- Teachers use team meetings and discussions to develop and refine interventions and strategies to improve student performance. The teams look at the students DRA results and include current running records. Children’s needs are identified and there is a teacher designated to follow-up with individual students. Together in pairs, teachers create an intervention scenario. Children are carefully monitored for progress as interventions continue.