

Thoughtful Classroom Partner Profile: Early Success in the South Bronx



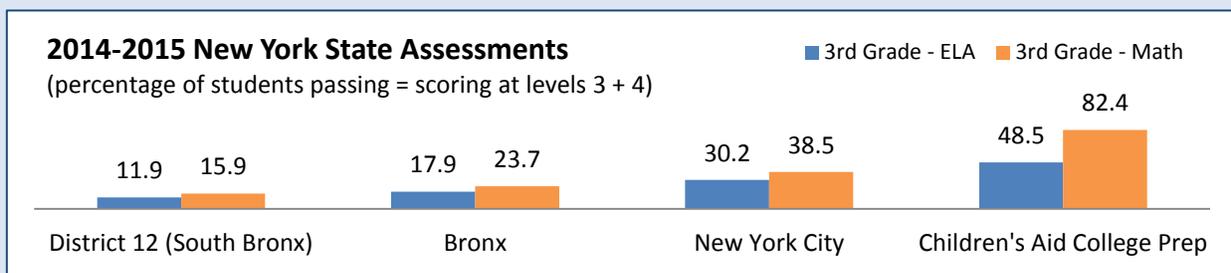
Since 1853, the Children’s Aid Society has been helping children in poverty succeed and thrive throughout New York City. Children’s Aid focuses its efforts on the communities with the greatest needs, such as the South Bronx, where the Children’s Aid College Prep Charter School (CACPCS) opened in 2012. The school employs a lottery for enrollment and gives preference to students in the district who are English Language Learners, have been with Child Welfare, come from single-parent homes, live below the state self-sufficiency line, or have not attended Pre-K.

The school population of just over 300 students is diverse (43% Hispanic, 52% African American), with 85% considered economically disadvantaged. The school is committed to high expectations for all and preparing all students for future success in school, college, and life. To help make this goal a reality, CACPCS partnered with Silver Strong & Associates.

Since August of 2014, Silver Strong & Associates’ coaches have been visiting the school monthly to help teachers learn and refine their use of Thoughtful Classroom instructional tools. Many of these tools focus on building core literacy and thinking skills. Thanks to the commitment of CACPCS’s teachers and their regular use of tools* such as Reading for Meaning, Scavenger Hunt, and Writer’s Club, young readers can independently process rigorous texts and write about what they’ve read. Students readily explain their opinions using reason and evidence. Students tackle challenging math problems systematically. High-level thinking is the norm for young scholars.

But the team at CACPCS recognizes that there is more to a quality education than academic skills. At a time when many urban schools have become obsessed with short-term gains on tests, CACPCS has embraced a whole-child approach to education. In the school’s recent work with Silver Strong & Associates, the staff has been working to select and refine tools that enhance the social and emotional well-being of its students. Thoughtful Classroom tools* like Respectfully Yours and Rules to Live and Learn By, which promote a positive learning culture for all students, have also become a significant part of every teacher’s repertoire. According to Academic Dean, Casey Vier, these tools have helped CACPCS “raise student achievement and fast track improvements that produce significant and measurable results.”

What about results? This past school year, the inaugural class of students moved into third grade and became the first students at Children’s Aid College Prep Charter School to take the rigorous New York State Assessments for ELA and Math. Here’s how they did compared to other third-graders across their district, borough, and city:



At a time when Common Core assessments evoke lowered expectations and “test anxiety,” the students at CACPCS have distinguished themselves. Of course, there’s still work to be done—work that Academic Dean Vier can’t wait to tackle: “We’re very proud of our scholars. We acknowledge that this is the first step in their paths toward success in college, career, and life. We plan to use the momentum of these accomplishments to launch us into greater excellence.”

***NOTE:** These Thoughtful Classroom tools can be found in *Tools for Thoughtful Assessment* (Boutz, Silver, Jackson, & Perini, 2012), *Tools for Conquering the Common Core* (Silver & Boutz, 2015), and the forthcoming *Tools to Start the School Year* (2016).