

School Charts a Classroom Roadmap and Partners with Parents Using Ongoing Formative Assessment

Kennett Square, PA | serving 165 students in PK – Grade 9

SUMMARY

Upland Country Day is an independent school that focuses on helping students develop as life-long learners by balancing academics, the arts, athletics and citizenship. Upland's educators have been using the Children's Progress Academic Assessment (CPAA) since 2009. The assessment helps the team plan targeted instruction throughout the year, communicate with parents and maintain an objective longitudinal record of progress in the earliest grades.

The CPAA provides us with a thread of continuity from Pre-K through 2nd grade. The assessment format is non-threatening for young children and the visually appealing reports make it very easy for us to gauge each child's performance and progress.

Mary Ledger
Head of Lower School

CHALLENGE

Upland's educational team uses the Gesell Developmental Assessment in its Lower School admissions process and the Comprehensive Testing Program (CTP 4) from ERB in grades 3 through 9.

The team identified a need for an additional piece to add to its toolkit – a standardized formative measure for the early grades. Upland's Head of Lower School Mary Ledger recounts that upon reviewing the child-friendly format and instant narrative reports of the CPAA, teachers saw how it could help them drive instruction in their classrooms.

"It's important to have multiple pieces of information to inform teaching and learning. The combination of using a one-on-one developmental assessment for admissions and then checking up on learning throughout the year with a computer-adaptive tool works really well for us," says Ledger.

She adds, "Some parents of younger students were initially concerned. Once we explained that the CPAA is a developmental tool that helps us identify how to help each child grow, not a high stakes test, parents were at ease."

SOLUTION

Upland implemented the CPAA in the fall of 2009. Administrators shared general guidelines with teachers but offered them the flexibility to use the assessment in a way that best fits with what they are doing in the classroom.

All teachers administer the CPAA at least three times a year to get a sense of where students are developmentally at the beginning of each season. Some choose to administer it again to the whole class at the end of each season, while others re-administer on an individual basis. This flexible schedule helps Upland's educators integrate the assessment into their teaching and learning cycle with no disruptions.

In addition to using CPAA reports to plan instruction, teachers review them as they prepare for parent conferences in the fall. “The CPAA is an objective tool that supports teachers in what they want to convey to parents and assures parents that observations are not subject to teacher error,” Ledger explains.

As the Head of Upland’s Lower School, Ledger reviews CPAA reports to see how each grade and individual children are progressing. “There has not been a single incident where we’ve said ‘This really doesn’t line up with our sense of how the child is performing,’” she recounts.

If the educational team is concerned about a child, he or she is referred for a psycho-educational evaluation. Psychologist Helen Hamlet begins her evaluation by reviewing the child’s CPAA reports. “It really helps me to put performance in context and share that context with parents. From a clinical perspective, right away it gives me a sense of what the child is dealing with in the classroom and where he or she is in terms of the peer group.”

Hamlet explains that in some cases a child might be doing well academically but not feeling successful because he or she is part of an exceptionally bright class. Using CPAA reports to look at performance compared to grade level criteria as well as to peers helps Hamlet identify such cases quickly.

IMPACT

A Classroom Roadmap

“The CPAA gives us a roadmap for how to help each child. We like the fact that students are

grouped based on performance levels and that specific activities are suggested as a starting point,” Ledger explains. She adds, “The CPAA functions kind of like a pat on the back. It’s an objective measure that reassures us that we’re on the right track.”

Parents as Partners

Teachers share a CPAA summary report with parents during conferences. Moreover, they send CPAA parent reports home. These reports include not just an overview of performance but also activities parents can use to plan teachable moments.

“Some teachers were initially hesitant about sending the activities home, fearing that it might lead to pre-teaching. Once we tried it, we saw that parents loved the fact that we were asking them to be partners. They enjoyed having the results as a follow-up. The reports act as a guidebook for them, which is very empowering,” shares Ledger.

Data across Grades Keeps Everyone on the Same Page

Toward the end of each academic year, teachers meet with their students’ next instructor. In the early grades, they use CPAA data to share areas of strength and needs. Teachers also place each child’s year-end CPAA summary in his or her academic folder.

“Since we can look back at individual progress over the years, the CPAA really gives us a thread from Pre-K to grade 2,” says Ledger. In coming years, she also hopes to find time to discuss data at the grade level, sharing strategies across classrooms.

ABOUT CHILDREN’S PROGRESS

Children’s Progress (www.childrensprogress.com) is an award-winning educational technology company specializing in the development of engaging, computer-dynamic programs for young children that help educators pinpoint how to best challenge and support each child. The company grew out of decades of research at Columbia University and patented its products in collaboration with MIT. Children’s Progress products have been used by schools, districts and state agencies nationwide.