



# The East Bronx Academy for the Future: A ClassLink Pilot



*Whitepaper*

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## I. Executive Summary

East Bronx Academy, like many urban schools, needs to solve the following problems:

- How can technology be used in a cost-effective manner to improve student engagement and achievement?
- How can student work be maintained and stored so that teachers and students can access it when they need it?
- How can software-based curriculum be accessed by students from home and school to increase student work time and enable teacher preparation?

For three weeks in June 2007, ClassLink worked with the East Bronx Academy to address these instructional and technology issues. ClassLink, a leading educational technology firm focused on any computer, anytime access, conducted a pilot of ClassLink LaunchPad™ with the 6th grade students and teachers at the Academy. The purposes of the pilot were to do the following:

- Deliver educational software to all computers for students and teachers from a central server.
- Give students and teachers a means to prepare and store their work.
- Provide access to instruction from a variety of locations in the building.
- See if the system provided promise for urban schools to improve the teaching and learning process by enabling the delivery and storage of teacher and student work and increasing technology access.

Despite the challenges of conducting the pilot at the end of the school year, the modest pilot was a success. Additionally, it was found that longer pilots and implementations could be of value to urban schools in their efforts to use technology in a cost-effective manner to engage students, support teacher-student collaboration, and improve outcomes.



## II. Overview and Introduction

The East Bronx Academy for the Future is part of an initiative in New York City schools that seeks to establish smaller learning communities and build partnerships with outside agencies, with the goal of improving student engagement and achievement. East Bronx Academy serves 500 low-income students in grades 6 through 11. A four-year partnership with Teaching Matters, a nonprofit educational group, has infused technology into the school to address educational improvement. A distinct feature of the school is a computer ratio of one computer for each student.

Sarah Scrogin, the principal of East Bronx Academy, states, "Our key . . . approach is technology-enhanced inquiry and community-focused, project-based learning to create increased achievement." Despite the collaboration with Teaching Matters and the 1:1 student-to-computer ratio, the inability for students to reliably access software and store and maintain their computer files has prevented the program from having its desired impact. Scrogin says, "Electronic storage of student work is central to technology-based, project-based learning so that students and teachers can keep track of their work, students can collaborate with each other, and teachers can comment on student work so that they can make progress."

In June 2007, ClassLink, a leading educational technology firm focused on any computer, anytime access, initiated a brief, three-week pilot program to address the application access, storage and collaboration issues. The objective of the ClassLink LaunchPad pilot was to see if the following components, in combination,

would engage students and teachers and show promise for improving student learning:

- The ability of students to use any computer in the classroom to access software and store their work, so students and teachers could have ubiquitous access to technology without being dependent on their own computer or one location.
- The ability of teachers to electronically interact with students using built-in classroom management tools.
- The ability of teachers and students to prepare work at home and access instructional software 24/7.
- The availability of high-quality instructional software on the system to engage students and improve learning.

Other benefits of using ClassLink LaunchPad not specifically included in this pilot include:

- The ability of the school to provide low-cost computing devices with a long life span.
- The ability of the school to reuse legacy computing devices and have them operate like new.

The LaunchPad Pilot involved 90 6th grade students and three teachers who worked with the ClassLink LaunchPad over a three-week period to deliver curriculum, prepare lessons, and store student work. Despite the fact that the pilot was conducted at the end of the school year, solid qualitative and anecdotal evidence indicated that the project was a success. The combination of home access, easy storage of student work, and collaboration showed great promise for an ongoing instructional program that can positively impact teaching and learning in urban schools.

ClassLink CEO Berj Akian proposed the project to Ms. Scrogin because he believed that the company's software had the potential to help East Bronx Academy achieve its instructional goals and address its storage and hardware concerns. ClassLink provided the added advantage of complete home access to



instructional software and files for students and staff.

The technology used in the pilot consisted of the following components:

- **ClassLink LaunchPad™**, a identity based electronic desktop for delivering software and work files to students and teachers from any computer, anytime. LaunchPad also includes classroom management tools to enable the teacher to teacher collaboration and teacher to student interaction.
- **ClassLink Information Console™**, a server management tool that enables administrators to configure LaunchPad and track and monitor software utilization.
- **Server hardware** that maintained both instructional applications and student work and supported all of the students and teachers in the project.
- **Laptop computers linked to the server and stored on carts** so that many students could have computer access throughout the day, creating and storing their work on the server.



### III. Initiation of the Pilot

Within a week of the school's agreeing to participate in the pilot, ClassLink engineers and the building technology coordinator configured a server and 50 laptop computers on mobile carts that could be moved throughout the building. ClassLink also installed its award-winning software, ClassLink Launchpad™, and the ClassLink Information Console™. All students and key personnel (including Teaching Matters representatives) were given an orientation and trained on the system.

The students and teachers met with Shelley Chawla, ClassLink's Manager of Educational Services, to learn the basics of the system in 40-minute sessions at the East Bronx Academy. Each child had his or her own laptop to work with as Shelley demonstrated how to use LaunchPad, the starting point where students log on using their student identification number and self-selected password, to see their own customized desktop. When Shelley used a video projector to show them what the school's own LaunchPad looked like, the students were able to see that all of their familiar software programs were accessible, including Microsoft Office applications, Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator, and various web resources.

Students learned that they no longer had to use the same machine to log on and access their work and that they now could work on individual projects throughout the day no matter where they were in the building. For example, these 6th graders are required by their English teacher to submit a year-end project of 16 poems of different styles and formats, a book report, a biography, and an autobiography. The students had been saving their written work on the hard disk of their individual machines throughout the semester.

Shelley demonstrated how the students could now transfer and save work in their "Home



Folder" on LaunchPad. As they transferred their files, students who were accustomed to saving their work in traditional ways learned that they no longer had to worry about losing flash drives, burning CDs, having to use the same machine at every session, or hardware breakdowns. One boy said, "You mean I don't have to worry if my machine breaks? I can use any of them?"

Once the students had a glimpse of the capabilities of LaunchPad, they had many questions. "Can I really see this stuff on any computer in the school?" one girl asked. "How does my work get on every computer?" another 6th grader wondered. Shelley explained that the work wasn't "on every computer," but that students could *access* their files on any computer in the school or at home. Other questions followed about how students could access the system from home. Shelley explained that the system would eventually allow them access, but for the purposes of this short-term pilot, it would not be available. New York City's Department of Education did not have sufficient time to authorize that access.

Shelley followed with a demonstration of how both students and teachers could use the "Shared Folder," another key feature of LaunchPad, to communicate with one another. Teachers can use this folder to post homework assignments and projects, give and receive feedback, put events of interest on students' own calendars, and direct students toward interesting course-related Web sites using the "Places to Go" folder.

As students worked on their machines under Shelley's guidance, more discussions developed. "Why would you use this at home?" their teacher asked. One girl responded, "To finish my work at home and see what my homework is from

my other teachers. I guess I could ask questions too."

"I can use this for my science project," said another student, "and I don't have to worry about putting it on my flash drive and losing it."



The teachers were impressed too. "I can see how I can use it in class," said one 6th grade English teacher. "Since I don't have to worry about distributing the same machines to the same students when I take them off the carts in the morning, it saves me time. Sometimes a student has lost all of his work because his machine crashed. With this system, I can switch him to another machine."

"I like the idea," he continued, "of accessibility at home for myself. I can look at their papers online, see how they're doing, and do some of my grading. I can even edit their work. I don't always have the time to do all that during the school day. I also think the "Places to Go" option on the 'Shared Folder' page is great too. If we're doing an art project, I can direct my students to the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the Louvre or anywhere I think is appropriate."

The science teacher who works with this group of students was also impressed, especially since he requires computer-based projects from every student. "This would make it much easier for me to manage," he said, noting that he typically receives an assortment of floppy disks, CD-ROMs, and flash drives with student work on them. "It's a big problem when they break or I can't read them, or when a student claims that he turned in



his work and we can't find it. This system would really work well for me."

Students also learned how to use the calendar function to organize their school work, assignments, and important personal information. They entered dates for birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, trips, and other information and spoke about how they would use this feature daily if they had the opportunity.

At a separate session with teachers, Shelley demonstrated other unique features of LaunchPad, including the ability to interact with students via the "chat" function, to grade papers from home, to take control of all machines in use in the classroom, and to share professional practices with colleagues. She also emphasized the security features of the system, pointing out that all teacher files were password-protected.

After the initial training, ClassLink provided help-line support but let the school manage the project.



## IV. Outcomes and Future Implications of the Pilot

After three weeks, ClassLink returned to revisit the 6th grade classrooms to gauge student and teacher reactions and answer any questions. The following are comments made by teachers and students at the end of the pilot.

One girl had already communicated her enthusiasm with a posting to the ClassLink Web site ([www.classlink.com](http://www.classlink.com)). "Please," she wrote, "I really want to finish my homework and classwork with ClassLink over the summer for the next grade."

Others were also enthusiastic. "They had a lot of fun downloading all of their work off their hard drives," one teacher reported. "It was great, especially when some of the laptops didn't work right. That didn't stop them at all. I just had them move to another machine."

"The laptops have as many as 9 or 10 students' work on their hard drives right now," he continued. "Some of the students have moved on to other grades, and we never get around to moving or erasing their files. ClassLink will solve that problem, and students will feel more confident that their work will remain private. They'll be more motivated knowing that only they can see their work, not five or six others. And their work can be saved from year to year."

There were many indications that a second, longer pilot at the East Bronx Academy would demonstrate the many advantages of ClassLink's programs, especially with its Home Access Kit™. Many students experienced frustration during the three-week trial because they were not able to access their work from home. A longer-term pilot including home connectivity would demonstrate that the program is an excellent way to put technology into the hands of all students and staff at a reasonable cost.



Financial benefits of the ClassLink solution includes potential savings of software expenditures. The system provides access to nearly all software on every machine in the building and at home through an integrated license management module easily controlled from one central location. Reports communicate software utilization for better purchasing decisions.

ClassLink can provide schools with a high level of support for their technology and instructional goals and concerns. The pilot at the East Bronx Academy also demonstrated that ClassLink software is easy to learn and use, lessening the time and costs of student and staff training. The students had no trouble learning the basics during their initial 40-minute sessions, and the teachers also found it easy to use. Of special note is the ease with which the students and teachers learned and made use of LaunchPad during a time of the school year, the month of June, when appetites towards trying something new may be especially low.



## V. ClassLink Background

ClassLink's overall solution to instructional technology is unique because it is a solution that combines computing platforms, instructional applications, curriculum management, and network management in a flexible, cost-effective, and efficient way. ClassLink, a recognized leader in computing for K-12 schools, provides any computer, anytime access to software and work files that can be delivered on a variety of platforms, including PCs, Macs, thin clients, and laptops. Its use of application server or thin client computing technology enables schools to spend much less on technology because they can use either legacy equipment or thin client terminals, which are simple computers linked to servers where the applications reside. The capability to deliver instructional applications on a variety of platforms such as PCs, Macs, laptops, and thin clients puts more reliable computing into use and thereby supports increased student abilities in writing, analytical skills, and problem-solving skills.

ClassLink provides a group of technical and instructional applications that can be both efficient and effective for a school such as the East Bronx Academy because a student's work can easily be saved, evaluated, and accessed all the way to graduation. Privacy is also assured because all student work is password-protected. Lowering the student-to-computer ratio supports increased student achievement in writing, math skills, problem solving, and motivation. The main applications in the ClassLink suite that can be value to urban schools are the following:



**ClassLink LaunchPad™** is the centralized point of access where teachers and students login to see a customized, dynamic desktop from which all applications can be easily accessed from any computing device in the school, community or home. It also includes a number of imbedded classroom management tools and calendaring and more. LaunchPad also provides an advantage in saving software deployment and installation time. Finding the time and personnel to individually install a new piece of software on every machine in a building is no longer a daunting task. A one-time installation on the server is all it takes to deliver software to any computer, anywhere.





**ClassLink Information Console™** is for use by system administrators, is a flexible and scalable server-based platform management tool expressly developed for the K-12 educational market. CLiC simplifies complicated technology tasks, enables real-time server monitoring and significantly reduces time spent troubleshooting by reducing the chances for potential costly errors. Through the built-in license metering module, administrators can produce accurate reports of software utilization to help drive purchasing and professional development decision making.



**ClassLink OnTrack™** is an instructional management program that allows planning and tracking of instruction for individual students. OnTrack enables:

- School administrators to create and share district curriculum
- Teachers to have one-click access to standards-aligned lessons
- Students to login and through work submissions build electronic portfolios of demonstrating subject mastery.





**ClassLink ClassSync™** is an application intended for the school technologists that transforms the frustrating and time-consuming job of user management in Microsoft Active Directory into an automated and effortless process. This software tool synchronizes your Active Directory (AD) schema with your Student Information System (SIS) data.



**ClassLink Command Center™** is an integral part of the ClassLink Solution. Command Center is the IT professional's information portal. With one login, the school administrator can easily obtain quick, accurate information on their network, monitor their server's health, access the ClassLink application testing knowledge base, and review outstanding help desk tickets health of their equipment and Universal Learning.



Founded in 1998, ClassLink provides any computer, anytime, anywhere access to instructional software and files to students and teachers. With ClassLink, school districts can deliver 24/7 access to their instructional software investment. Engineered for students and teachers, ClassLink's products are simple to use yet empower student achievement, while lowering the overall cost of technology. With ClassLink, school technologists can manage and monitor their entire system through a single console.

For more information, visit [www.ClassLink.com](http://www.ClassLink.com), call 888-963-7550 or email [info@ClassLink.com](mailto:info@ClassLink.com).

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