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NEW YORK CITY'S COLLEGE READY COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE
Evaluation and Documentation
2009-2012

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I. Introduction

More students nationwide are graduating high school than ever before. College enrollment is at an all-time high, having grown more than 37 percent over the last decade. It is expected to hit 23 million students by 2020.¹ Their motivation is clear: For most people, a bachelor's degree has a big economic payoff over a graduate's lifetime. In 2008, men and women with bachelor's degrees had median earnings more than 70 percent higher than those who had only a high school diploma.² A recent study by the Pew Charitable Trust found that during and following the 2009-2010 recession, men and women aged 21-24 were far more likely to lose employment and income if they had no college degree.³

Yet most students who aspire to college never complete a degree. For every 100 middle school students in the United States, 93 say they want a college degree, writes Professor David T. Conley of the University of Oregon, a leading authority on college readiness. Of these, 70 will graduate high school, 44 will enroll in college and only 26 will earn a bachelor's degree within six years of enrolling.⁴

New York City's track record is similar. Among students who entered ninth grade in a typical public high school in 2006 (excluding charters, transfer schools and special education schools), just over half graduated and enrolled in college on time. At the City University of New York (CUNY), the destination of choice for a majority of public school students, the average three-year graduation rate for the community colleges is 12 percent and the average six-year graduation rate for the senior colleges is 59 percent.⁵

Graduation rates at the city's high schools improved during the last decade, yet success in college for the majority of graduates remained elusive. City officials have intensified their efforts to improve college readiness among students: The Department of Education now includes a variety of college-related metrics in its school accountability measures, including success on state Regents tests, and is beginning to hold high school principals accountable for the college matriculation rates of their graduates.

For students from low-income neighborhoods whose families have little or no experience of college, however, college readiness requires more than getting good grades and passing their Regents tests. Students must not only do well academically, they must also understand what it takes to succeed in college courses. They must be persistent and able to complete their work. They must have basic

¹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2012). *Digest of Education Statistics, 2011* (NCES 2012-001).

² U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey. Median annual earnings of bachelor's degree-holders was \$47,094, while for high school graduates it was \$27,479.

³ Pew Charitable Trusts, *How Much Protection Does a College Degree Afford? The Impact of the Recession on Recent College Graduates*, a report of the Economic Mobility Project, January 2013.

⁴ David T. Conley, *The Complexity of College and Career Readiness*, Educational Policy Improvement Center at the University of Oregon, Power Point Presentation at The New School, June 20 2012.

⁵ Data from the New York City Department of Education and CUNY's Office of Institutional Research and Assessment.

research skills and analytic abilities. And they must know how to choose the most appropriate colleges, apply to them, find adequate financial support, and show up when classes begin.

In 2009, the Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation launched the College Ready Communities initiative in order to leverage the resources of New York City's community development corporations (CDCs) and advocacy organizations to help public school students prepare for higher education and employment. Deutsche Bank has long worked with CDCs to redevelop New York neighborhoods. As these organizations sought greater economic stability for local residents, many had developed programs that aimed to improve the public schools. The foundation set out a new strategy to make use of CDCs' community roots and organizational strength to improve connections between neighborhood residents and their local schools, with a focus on college preparedness.

The initiative that emerged included four unique collaboratives, each of which included a CDC and one or more educational advocacy organizations, along with a handful of public middle or high schools. Each of the collaboratives operated in different neighborhoods—in some cases, more than one—in Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx and Upper Manhattan.

The four collaboratives were active in a total of 12 high schools and two middle schools. Most of the students in these schools were from low-income families, and some had a very high percentage of students who had limited English proficiency. Few of the students had parents or siblings who had completed a college degree. In their ethnic and racial diversity—Latino, African American and Asian—they reflected the diversity of the city's school system more generally. The large majority scored below grade level on math and English standardized tests, so in their levels of academic achievement they manifested the huge challenges of college preparation in large urban school systems in the United States.

Nonetheless, like their peers nationwide, the students at the College Ready Communities schools have very high aspirations. More than two-thirds of the 10th and 11th graders we surveyed said they expected to finish at least a four-year college degree. Most harbored visions of successful careers in a profession, in business or in a trade.

Each of the four collaboratives set out its own strategies to achieve the goal of college readiness. They ranged from intensive college guidance and mustering of new resources for college preparedness to youth leadership development, financial literacy training, tutoring, mentoring, early awareness workshops, school culture change and even curriculum-oriented academic improvements.

More than three years later, we can see the fruits of their work. This report describes the methods and impact of the four collaboratives in the schools, documenting their work with students, teachers, administrators and the wider community. We note key lessons learned, and we describe the transformation over time of each of the collaboratives and the honing of their strategies as they matured in their third year, which ended in June 2012. At the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year, the organizations were incorporated into a new project sponsored by the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, named College Within Reach. The data included in this report provide a

valuable baseline for the new program, particularly as new metrics become available and many of the students who were in 10th grade when the College Ready Communities make their way through their first year of college.

II. Summary of Research Findings

After three years of observation, documentation and analysis of data gathered from the College Ready Communities initiative and from administrative databases, we saw notable results in a range of areas, including the accessibility of college for students from low-income and immigrant families, knowledge about what it takes to succeed there, and the development of college-oriented cultures in many of the participating public schools.

In the areas of college access and college knowledge:

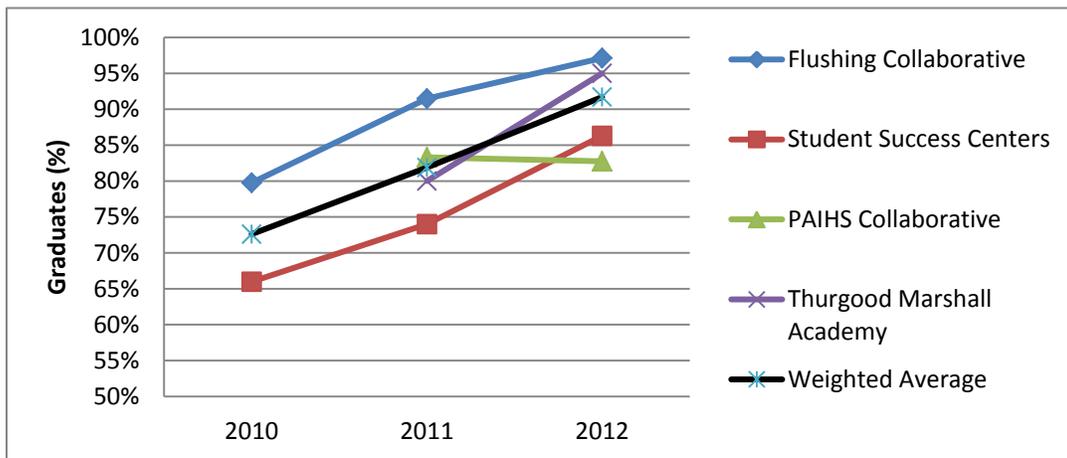
- **The College Ready Communities initiative brought substantial college guidance resources to high schools that were otherwise barely able to provide this essential support for students.** College guidance counselors employed by New York City high schools face an enormous challenge. Nearly all of them have very high caseloads, as high as 500 students per counselor, and most have other responsibilities. As a result, many New York City high schools perform triage when it comes to college guidance. They encourage students to fill out applications, and, if possible, provide extra support to those students who appear to have the greatest likelihood of success. At several schools participating in the initiative, most of this was true. What's more, few of the designated college counselors had received formal training in college guidance.

The College Ready Communities partner organizations honed in on this quickly and filled the guidance gap. In some cases, staff from community groups became near-full-time college guidance counselors. In others, staff coordinated trained volunteers and prepared peer leaders to work with fellow students. They designed and led frequent student workshops on college, tying the content directly to the high school curriculum. They steered students to college courses at nearby CUNY campuses. In sum, each of the high school College Ready Communities programs provided substantially more intensive college guidance and support than the schools themselves could have provided. Through their workshops and other programs, most of the collaboratives helped younger high school students learn what was required of them if they hoped to apply to and attend college.

- **The rate of graduating students applying to college increased steadily among all students in the College Ready Communities high schools, and at most of the individual participating high schools.** In 2010, just over 70 percent of the graduating classes at the College Ready Communities high schools applied to college. In 2012,

92 percent of the graduates applied to college. This is the most stark data point in our evaluation, and reveals the near-immediate impact of the collaboratives' very strong focus on college application support. The differences across the four collaboratives are shown on Chart 1. While the application rates at the two PAIHS schools remained flat between 2011 and 2012, these schools have each had only one or two graduating classes apiece and many newcomer immigrant students need a fifth year to graduate. Their college application rates will likely increase during the years that follow.

Chart 1: Percent of graduates applying to college



Source: Data collected by CNYCA with school guidance offices and Student Success Centers

- **Each of the collaboratives established one variation or another of a “college office” model in order to provide guidance support to students.** The need for this was overwhelmingly clear in most of the schools, and the community organizations found this to be an area where they could quickly make a clear and concrete difference for students.
- **College Ready Communities high schools significantly outperformed comparable city high schools on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion rates.** For the 2012 graduating class, the College Ready Communities schools’ average FAFSA completion rate outpaced that of other New York City high schools with very similar students by 8 percentage points. The comparison group was composed of all city high schools with the same rating on the Department of Education’s “Peer Index.” The Peer Index provides a strong comparison group because it is calculated annually and uses each school’s average 8th Grade math and ELA scores (for all current students), as well as the percentage of special education students and the percentage of over-age students.

The College Ready Communities schools FAFSA completion rate, using a weighted average, was 91.3 percent. The weighted average among the comparison group of schools with the

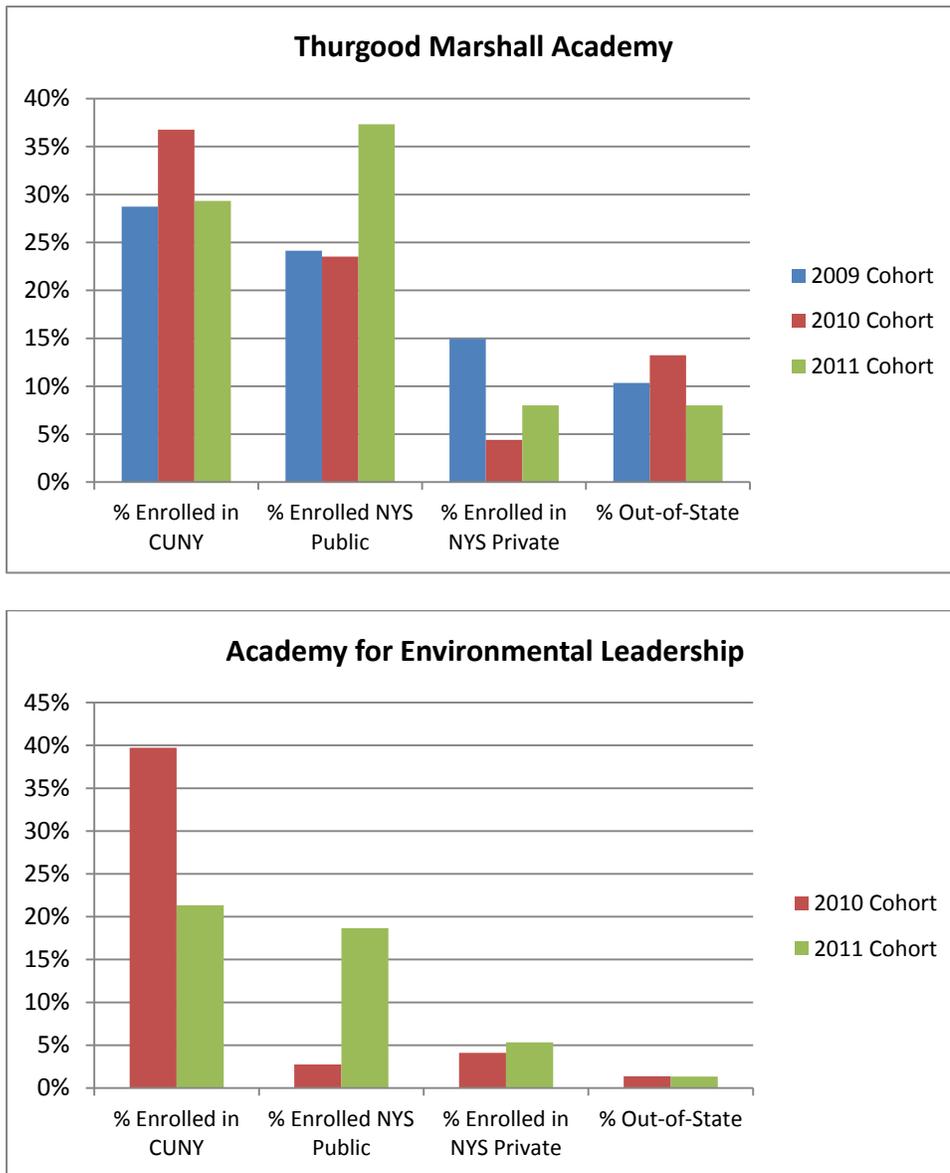
same Peer Index scores was 83.5 percent. (The citywide weighted average of all high schools was 88.9 percent.)

Therefore, despite the high number of students in the College Ready Communities schools who face substantial academic challenges and have limited English and other special needs, a greater percentage of them completed the financial aid application than at all high schools citywide—and substantially more than at comparable New York City high schools. The College Ready Communities schools had more intensive college access support systems in place than most comparable schools. The difference was even apparent among the College Ready Communities schools themselves: for example, the completion rates on the Franklin K. Lane campus, at the Internationals high schools and at Flushing High School were especially high, and appeared to reflect more intensive and intentional financial aid support.

Administrative data on FAFSA completion rates are now gathered and reported by the U.S. Department of Education, beginning with the 2011-2012 academic year. Comparable data for 2013 graduates will be available in September or October 2013.

- **The number of graduates of several College Ready Communities high schools who matriculated to SUNY colleges increased sharply from 2009 to 2011.** More students at College Ready Communities high schools attempted to enter SUNY than in past years, and more succeeded. This is a direct reflection of the college guidance support that students received, especially at the Bushwick Educational Campus and Thurgood Marshall Academy, where counselors and peer leaders were particularly focused on steering students to SUNY and other four-year colleges. The SUNY system is significantly more difficult to get into than CUNY and, thus, requires much greater effort from college counselors and peer educators. The Academy for Environmental Leadership saw a six-fold increase in SUNY matriculation, to 19 percent of graduates, while the Bushwick School for Social Justice saw a four-fold increase to 14 percent of graduates. Meanwhile, at Thurgood Marshall Academy, 37 percent of graduates enrolled in SUNY in 2011, up from 24 percent in prior years. The SUNY schools have higher retention rates than the CUNY community colleges, so this up-front investment may well lead to better college outcomes for students.

Chart 2: College enrollment patterns of two College Ready Communities schools



Source: NYC Department of Education "Where Are They Now?" All Schools Report, 2012

- Each year, the collaboratives brought into the schools a substantial array of outside resources to help students learn about and prepare for college.** The number of partnerships and program-related services that the community organizations brought into each of the schools increased steadily during the three years of our observations. The organizations brought in volunteer tutors. They formed partnerships with CUNY campuses. They organized CUNY students to provide college preparation and support to current high school students. They organized financial literacy workshops, and English as a Second Language training for parents. They developed funded initiatives such as the College Access Research and Action (CARA) Summer Bridge Program and financial literacy services.

The capacity for fundraising and program development was a strength of some of the Community Development Corporations. The Abyssinian Development Corporation raised money to support multiple staff members in Thurgood Marshall Academy's college office at a time when the school itself had very limited funding for college activities. The Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation supplemented its College Ready Communities grant with substantial additional resources, and in late 2012 the organization received a federal Department of Education Promise Neighborhood planning grant that could eventually have an impact on the schools at the Franklin K. Lane Campus. And Asian Americans for Equality brought new foundation-funded resources to both Flushing High School and Flushing International, supplementing guidance staff and providing new student financial aid and college financial planning supports.

In the area of college readiness:

- **There were measurable improvements in critical areas of college knowledge among students during 10th and 11th grades.** Our series of surveys of large cohorts of students at six College Ready Communities high schools found a growing understanding of the academic and procedural requirements of college applications and acceptance, as well as improved awareness of which colleges were most appropriate and an increase in knowledge about the likely cost of college and how to seek financial aid.

Table 1: Sample question on college knowledge from surveys of students in six high schools

What has changed as a result of either speaking to someone or attending an event about college?	2010-11 Survey Responses 10th Graders	2011-12 Survey Responses 11th Graders
I better understand what I need to do to go to college.	53%	72%
I have a better idea of what kind of college would be good for me.	29%	55%
I have a better understanding of what college costs and how to pay for it.	24%	47%
I didn't think I'd go to college, but now I think I will.	10%	13%
I did not learn anything new.	4%	3%
I did not speak to anyone about college or attend at events about college.	7%	5%
I don't know.	12%	11%

Source: Surveys administered by Center for New York City Affairs

- **At the end of 11th grade, student aspirations for college and careers remained very high.** More than three-quarters of the 11th graders we surveyed at six high schools said they expected to complete a two-year or four-year college degree. While this sounds perhaps overly optimistic, their objectives had grown somewhat more realistic than they were in 10th grade: far fewer expected to become professional athletes, for example, and many more planned to enter the business and technology professions. Nonetheless, there was a stark divergence between students' goals and their academic performance. More than two-thirds incorrectly believed that simply graduating high school would prepare them for college, and 40 percent of the 11th graders surveyed reported that their grade average was a C or below.
- **Most students attending College Ready Communities high schools and middle schools had visited a college by May of their junior year.** Most of the 11th graders we surveyed at six high schools had visited at least one college and had also spoken with a representative from a community-based organization about going to college. At the two middle schools in the program, a substantial majority of students surveyed had visited a college by 8th grade, most often as part of an organized school trip.

In the areas of academic achievement and college-ready culture:

- **A substantial number of students at College Ready Communities high schools had access to—and were passing—college-level and/or Advanced Placement courses.** More than 36 percent of the students in the Class of 2012 at Flushing International High School passed a college-level course for college credit—well above the citywide average of 22 percent—reflecting a longstanding commitment by the Internationals Network for Public Schools to provide access to CUNY courses. Other schools were supporting this kind of work as well: Between one-fifth and one-third of students in the Class of 2012 at eight College Ready Communities high schools passed some form of course or rigorous assessment defined by the city Department of Education as a “College and Career Preparatory Course.” While several of the schools performed lower than the citywide average on this metric, increasing the number of true college preparatory courses has become a priority at most of the schools. These metrics were not available for any years prior to 2012, so this provides an important baseline measure.
- **Each successive cohort of students at the College Ready Communities high schools performed better than its predecessors on the New York State English Language Arts (ELA) Regents test.** While this improvement cannot be directly attributed to the work of the College Ready Communities initiative, it does appear to reflect a growing effort across the high schools to boost achievement beyond what is required of students simply for graduation. In 2011 (the most recent data available), a very small percentage of graduates scored below 65 on the ELA Regents, and more than 40 percent of students scored above 75, which is the cutoff that exempts students from remediation in CUNY colleges. The

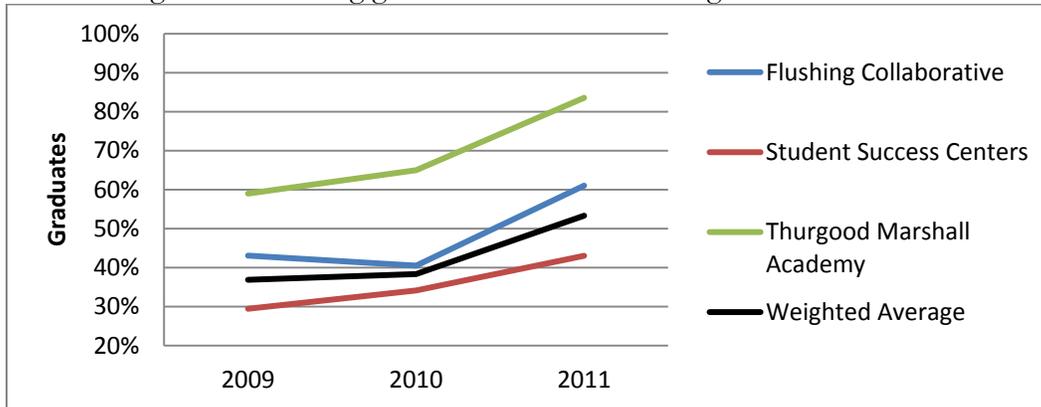
number of graduates scoring 75 or above on their ELA Regents exams has been rising steadily from 2009 to 2011.

Table 2: Graduates taking and passing college preparatory courses

Percent of students who first entered high school during the 2008-09 school year, passed Department of Education-approved rigorous courses and assessments (i.e. “College and Career Preparatory Courses”), and graduated in four years.	
Bushwick Campus:	
Academy for Environmental Leadership	23.8%
Academy of Urban Planning	7.6%
Bushwick School for Social Justice	6.1%
Franklin K. Lane Campus:	
Academy of Innovative Technology	30.4%
Brooklyn Lab School	7.3%
Multicultural High School	24.2%
Cypress Hills Collegiate Preparatory School	21.5%
Flushing International High School	
Flushing High School	36.4%
Pan American International High School	
Pan American International High School at Monroe	32.5%
Thurgood Marshall Academy for Learning and Social Change	
	20.2%
	34.0%
	22.4%

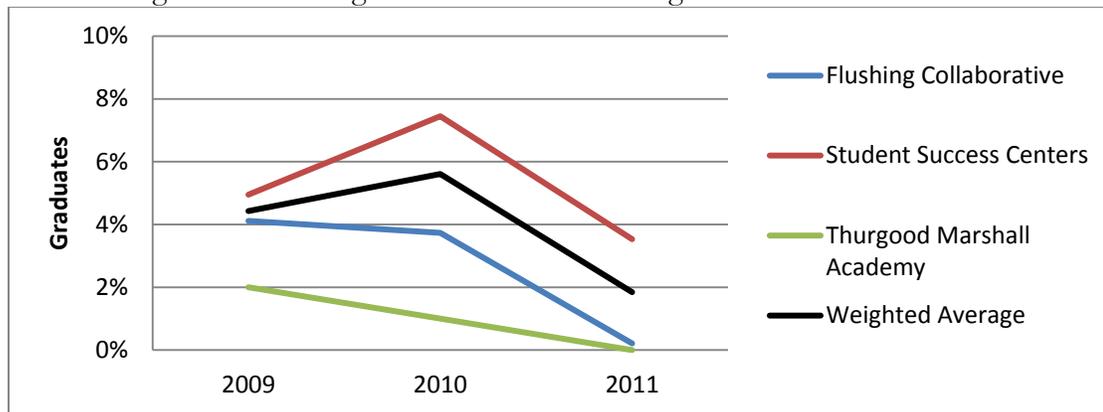
Source: New York City Department of Education Progress Report, 2011-2012

Chart 3: Percent of graduates scoring greater than 75 on ELA Regents Exams



Source: New York City Department of Education Individual Student Data, 2009-2011

Chart 4: Percent of graduates scoring less than 55 on ELA Regents Exams



Source: New York City Department of Education Individual Student Data, 2009-2011

- High schools that focused closely on individualized course counseling and academic college-preparatory skills also experienced measurable improvements in their college-oriented culture.** At the schools on the Franklin K. Lane Campus (home to the Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation Student Success Center collaborative) annual teacher surveys from 2009 to 2012 revealed a large increase in the percentage of teachers who believed “the school makes it a priority to help students select the best courses to achieve their college or career goals,” from a low of 38 percent in the 2009-2010 school year to a high of 93 percent in 2012. Similarly, students at these schools reported almost uniformly in 2012 that they were receiving “helpful counseling on how to get a good job or how to get into college.” This was the same year that Cypress Hills officially took ownership of many college guidance services at these schools.

Student responses to annual survey questions about whether they are learning certain critical skills necessary for college work—such as how to produce research papers that cite multiple sources, or how to use evidence to defend an opinion—varied considerably across the College Ready Communities schools. Some saw steady improvements, including the Pan American International High School at Monroe, Flushing High School and Renaissance Academy middle school. Others hardly changed from year to year. This variation suggests that this is a legitimate metric worth watching—and that these numbers can be improved with attention to a school’s college culture, course offerings and teaching methods.

- Volunteer mentors and well-supported tutors made major contributions to the college-going culture at many of the high schools.** For example, at PAIHS Elmhurst, 10 Baruch College student volunteers, organized by the Latino Youth in Higher Education Program (LYHEP), provided high school students with valuable personal guidance and insight from peers of nearly the same age. Twice each week, they shared their knowledge about getting to college as an immigrant, and they spoke with students about their own college experiences. They spoke empathetically and personally about their academic

challenges, they offered encouragement, and they tutored dozens of PAIHS students. These college students also organized and presented annual college and career fairs, making sure that PAIHS students saw the connections between college and their career aspirations. The PAIHS students said they viewed the LYHEP volunteers as role models who were easily accessible and approachable.

At the Student Success Center on the Lane campus, staff recognized that good academic performance was essential, so they organized a tutoring program for the students at each of the four campus schools to help improve their grades as well as their knowledge of college-level academic requirements. The staff hired as tutors local college students who were recent graduates from the Lane campus. As in Elmhurst, the tutors served as peer mentors, describing their own experiences and gaining the respect of the high school students. Beyond the help they provided with course content, they also spoke with students about the pay-off for their hard work, and how best to avoid remedial classes in college.

High hurdles remain:

Other findings were less hopeful, or reflect outcomes for which there are still insufficient data. These relate to two of the most substantial challenges facing these schools and others like them, including college enrollment and persistence, and high-level academic success:

- **After two years of College Ready Communities activity, the rate of college arrival had not improved significantly among graduates of the College Ready Communities high schools.** In 2011, 10 of the College Ready Communities high schools had graduating classes. Of these, just six had 50 percent or more of their graduates enroll in college the following year. (See Table 3.) There were standouts: 83 percent of the 2011 graduates at Thurgood Marshall Academy entered college, and the graduates of Cypress Hills Collegiate Preparatory School and Flushing International High School nearly matched the citywide average of 70 percent. But even these rates were no higher than the previous year.

That said, two years is likely too soon to judge the schools and the collaboratives on such an important metric. The Class of 2012 was the first cohort at most of these schools to experience full participation in counseling services, workshops and other supports provided by the collaboratives. Data on college enrollment for the 2012 cohort will not be available until the summer of 2013. At that time, reliable data will also be available on college persistence, showing whether students from the Class of 2011 have remained enrolled.

This metric illuminates a valuable lesson learned by many of the collaboratives: Even students who apply and are accepted to college don't always matriculate. During the summer after senior year, we learned of many young people who simply changed their mind. Some got a job, or felt the financial pressures were too powerful. Others couldn't handle the requirements of paperwork and planning. A few were fearful of leaving home, or their

parents needed them to help out with the family. The “summer melt” presented the collaboratives with a clear message: perseverance matters—and they created summer bridge-to-college programs to support young people across this difficult period directly following high school graduation. The results of these summer initiatives should begin to appear in the data for the Class of 2012.

- **Few 2010 and 2011 graduates from College Ready Communities high schools earned Advanced Regents diplomas.** The Advanced Regents diploma is the highest possible diploma a student can achieve. It is awarded to students who pass a series of advanced math and science Regents exams, and who have three years of coursework in a foreign language. The rigor of the course load required to achieve an Advanced Regents diploma has been shown to better prepare students for college. Of the College Ready Communities schools with graduating classes in 2011, only Flushing High School had an Advanced Regents rate above 5 percent.

Table 3: College enrollment patterns of College Ready Communities graduates

Percent of students who graduated in 2011 after four years of high school who were enrolled in a 2- or 4-year college program the following fall.		
	% Not Enrolled	% Enrolled
Citywide 2009 Cohort	28%	72%
Citywide 2010 Cohort	30%	70%
Citywide 2011 Cohort	30%	70%
Thurgood Marshall Academy 2009 Cohort	22%	78%
Thurgood Marshall Academy 2010 Cohort	22%	78%
Thurgood Marshall Academy 2011 Cohort	17%	83%
Franklin K. Lane High School 2009 Cohort	52%	48%
Franklin K. Lane High School 2010 Cohort	47%	53%
Franklin K. Lane High School 2011 Cohort	50%	50%
Multicultural High School 2011 Cohort	56%	44%
Cypress Hills Collegiate Preparatory School 2010 Cohort	34%	66%
Cypress Hills Collegiate Preparatory School 2011 Cohort	32%	68%
Pan American International High School 2011 Cohort	45%	55%
Flushing International High School 2009 Cohort	25%	75%
Flushing International High School 2010 Cohort	34%	66%
Flushing International High School 2011 Cohort	33%	67%
Flushing High School 2009 Cohort	32%	68%
Flushing High School 2010 Cohort	40%	60%
Flushing High School 2011 Cohort	39%	61%
Academy for Environmental Leadership 2010 Cohort	52%	48%
Academy for Environmental Leadership 2011 Cohort	53%	47%
Bushwick School for Social Justice 2009 Cohort	51%	49%
Bushwick School for Social Justice 2010 Cohort	52%	48%
Bushwick School for Social Justice 2011 Cohort	52%	48%
Academy of Urban Planning 2009 Cohort	31%	69%
Academy of Urban Planning 2010 Cohort	51%	49%
Academy of Urban Planning 2011 Cohort	51%	49%

Source: NYC Department of Education "Where Are They Now?" All Schools Report, 2012

III. Summary of Key Lessons Learned

The research project had more than one dimension. In addition to evaluating the impact of the programs, the Center for New York City Affairs also devoted substantial time to observations, interviews and other forms of field work. Over the course of three years, we had routine meetings with program staff to offer feedback on what we were learning, not only from their organizations and schools but across all of the collaboratives. The lessons outlined below stood out, and offer insights that should be useful to anyone seeking to pursue similar projects.

Lessons on organizational strength:

- **Community development corporations with prior experience in schools accomplished more, faster.** Those organizations that already had an educational mission at the time they launched College Ready Communities were more flexible and adaptive, and had a deeper understanding of college readiness work in their staffing and organizational structures. Abyssinian Development Corporation, which years ago partnered with the Department of Education to create Thurgood Marshall Academy, raised money for school support and added five new staff members with responsibilities that reflected the evolving college readiness needs of their partner schools. Asian Americans for Equality made internal organizational changes, reorganizing their youth and community development department to better support the educational work. The organization also made a strategic move away from center-based programming to school-based services as a result of their efforts at Flushing High School, placing staff directly into schools rather than bringing young people into program centers. This strengthened their relationships with other school-based staff and established more effective collaborations.
- **Organizations with pre-existing relationships with their partner schools were able to implement their programs more quickly, with better communication, and with a sense of shared purpose.** Several of the groups participating in College Ready Communities had previous relationships with their partner schools. In some cases, the organization was a founding partner in the creation of a small school, or was involved in the school's initial planning. This included not only Abyssinian Development Corporation's relationship with Thurgood Marshall Academy, but also Make the Road's relationship with PAIHS Elmhurst and Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation's relationship with Cypress Hills Collegiate Prep. This was a tremendous advantage for these groups, who already knew how to plan and operate programs within the limits set by school staff. In contrast, the newly established partnerships often spent at least the first year creating the relationships, setting goals, defining program activities and learning how to work together. Building trust, establishing good communications, planning together and learning how to do shared decision-making took a great deal of time.

- Community development corporations were able to train and develop staffing to implement college readiness work more quickly than overstretched public schools.** The community organizations in the College Ready Communities collaboratives needed staff with the professional competency to support college readiness and counseling in the schools, including knowledge and skills that aligned with the specific needs of the students and families served by the schools where they worked. This staff expertise was often added quickly and led to better student outcomes, providing the partner schools with valuable new capacity. For example, in three out of four of the collaboratives, staff from the development corporation or other community partner groups received training in the college application process from the Goddard Riverside Community Center’s well-regarded OPTIONS Institute. Usually they received this *in advance* of the Department of Education’s school-based personnel, who had many other responsibilities. Thus, they had information and access to college resources that were of tremendous benefit to the students, while also adding to the professional knowledge of the school-based counselor or college advisor.
- A lead nonprofit partner organization—usually the community development corporation—proved essential for program coordination, brokering of services and managing relationships.** In each collaborative, the lead nonprofit was a relatively large organization that had the capacity to broker services and programs. Smaller organizations did not have the resources—either staff or time—to fully participate in the relationship-building that is often required in effective school-community collaborations. It is also more difficult for many of the smaller organizations to raise money needed to expand or increase services at one particular school site. A strong, local lead partner, such as a community development corporation, is most effective in negotiating school and funder relationships on behalf of a collaborative’s shared college readiness goals. The role of smaller organizations within the collaboratives was formalized under the grant and limited to the direct contract services they provided. They were looked upon as resources only as needed.

Lessons on school culture:

- By the third year of College Ready Communities, we observed greater awareness among principals, guidance personnel and teachers of the requirements for college access and college readiness.** Most schools adapted slowly from a culture focused on high school graduation to one that supported college-going for a majority of their students. Over time, there was increased training of college counselors, increased collection and use of data about college applications, more support for students to complete financial aid applications, and more emphasis on Regents exams and Regents test preparation. Some of these changes can be attributed to the convergence of system-wide policies, including more rigorous New York State graduation requirements and new college-related accountability metrics put in place by the city’s Department of Education. In 2012, the department also began to pay for at least one staff member at each high school to participate in the Goddard Riverside OPTIONS training.

As a result, schools focused greater efforts on making changes to the instructional program and supports to address the new, higher graduation standards and to support college prep. Many schools restructured their schedule to provide more preparation time for Regents exams, and Thurgood Marshall Academy introduced more Regents level courses and exams into the middle school curriculum. Community partners facilitated the development of the College and Career Center at Flushing High School, supported students' transition to college and persistence through coaching and counseling at the Franklin K. Lane and Bushwick campuses and PAIHS, and maintained an ongoing conversation about college among the school staff and administration.

- **Building an effective college-going school culture takes time.** College readiness is complex. To integrate it into the life of the schools, the collaboratives and schools had to consider how to support a variety of interrelated skills, behaviors and attitudes while also giving attention to the school's academic offerings and course rigor. In many College Ready Communities high schools, community organizations initially focused on supporting high school seniors and the college application process because it is highly structured and the work usually involved only a few guidance counselors or college advisors. Once the application infrastructure was in place, the collaboratives then looked at the needs of students earlier in high school. They found that attention to younger students paid off by helping them to visit colleges, make better college choices, learn about admission requirements and prepare for the financial aid process. This was most effective in cases where the collaborative and the school established a seminar within the standard curriculum or where counselors, peer leaders and advisors were included in student advisory periods. Some collaboratives added college awareness workshops in the 9th and 10th grades, although at that age many students were still acclimating themselves to high school (becoming "*high school-ready*," as one assistant principal called it) and their teachers were less willing to devote instructional time to college readiness.
- **College counselors and advisors needed to develop allies within the school in order to move the conversation beyond the guidance suites.** The College Ready Communities initiative succeeded in generating new attention to college readiness in several schools, and reduced the isolation often felt by guidance counselors and others who dealt with students' college needs. In addition to offering grateful counselors their assistance, the collaboratives brought more college-oriented voices to the table. The effect was significant. At Flushing High School, for example, the combined voices of the school college counselor and the College Ready Communities staff member spurred school leadership to create a guidance task force on career and college readiness. The work of the task force, led by one of Flushing High School's assistant principals, spurred the creation of a prominently placed college and career suite on the first floor of the school building and new visibility among teachers and administrators.

The College Ready Communities groups also pushed for more teacher involvement. At the Franklin K. Lane campus, the director of the Student Success Center worked with schools to create college readiness “study groups” of teachers to analyze student data and discuss how each school could better prepare students for college. This work was challenging. Many teachers and administrators were not aware of the details of the college application process, for example, or of financial aid. Guidance counselors pointed out that teachers needed more training. Conversations between the Flushing International High School site coordinator and the school’s grade-level advisors helped them develop college awareness threads for their advisory curricula.

- **The College Ready Communities collaboratives were often successful in helping schools set up and promote systems for “distributed guidance,” giving students access to college support beyond the guidance counselor’s office.** When done well, distributed guidance offers students far more support than they could ever get solely within the traditional guidance counselor model. Using this approach, teachers, coaches and peer leaders provide students with multiple entry points to information—as well as more hands on deck for helping them complete their college applications, navigate the financial aid process and, ultimately, make the best choices about college.

If the conversation about college is not happening at home, others must keep the conversation going with students, making inquiries, asking questions and offering encouragement. The College Ready Communities collaboratives were able to provide youth leaders, peer counselors, community organization staff, tutors, volunteers and alumni mentors to provide this kind of help. The groups found that using youth leaders and peer counselors were particularly cost-efficient and effective. Three of the four collaboratives adopted this model to support their college readiness work. The groups also found that college-educated tutors, mentors and volunteers were effective role models and very helpful to students, particularly during the summer after senior year, in advance of college, when school staff was not available.

With coordination, tutors, mentors and other volunteers provided sustainable ways to develop a consistent college culture in and around the school, whether it was in the hallways, lunchrooms, the library or out front of the building, as well as in an office. This was especially true when they made contact with reluctant college applicants—the students who encountered obstacles, missed deadlines and needed strong and frequent encouragement. Fewer students fell through the cracks when more people paid attention to the college application process and served as sources of good college information.

- **The peer-to-peer and youth development leadership activities in the College Ready Communities initiative provided opportunities for high school students to engage in the college process, and in personal development, in a much deeper way.** The effect of these activities on a small but important group of students should not be ignored. As Leia

Petty, the 12th grade guidance counselor at the Academy for Environmental Leadership, noted, “Students are much more motivated by their peers, and therefore youth leaders’ relationships with students have proven invaluable in terms of motivating students to apply to college.” A number of counselors, teachers and principals concurred.

Many of the high school students who were trained as peer leaders by the Student Success Centers or who participated in the Flushing project’s youth development leadership programs had already exhibited leadership characteristics, to some degree, before joining the program. But when contacted after graduation, several of them reported that the additional training and engagement increased their ability to advocate for themselves in college and find friends to support them there. In addition, Student Success Center leaders returned to their high schools as paid or volunteer mentors. This group tends to have excellent college outcomes: More than 90 percent of the youth leader participants who graduated have been accepted to college and self-reported that they are enrolled.

IV. Community-Based Strategies and College Readiness

The premise underlying the creation of College Ready Communities was that community development corporations (CDCs) and education advocacy groups could have a significant impact on neighborhood schools by cultivating community resources to support a culture of high achievement while strengthening family engagement and improving student outcomes.

The CDCs and other nonprofit groups had a long history of designing and implementing programs, developing leadership, and building constituencies around issues that affect low-income and minority families in New York City neighborhoods. The CDCs had revitalized neighborhoods through residential and commercial projects, and also offered a range of youth programs and social services. Some of the organizations had helped develop new public schools; others had established afterschool programs and organized parents and students for school reform.

At the outset, the College Ready Communities initiative's theory of change incorporated four key areas, each reinforcing the others:

- **Increase parent and community involvement and engagement in the schools:** The collaboratives would encourage parents, community members and organizations to contribute time and talent to the schools.
- **Shift norms and values to support a college-ready culture:** The collaboratives would catalyze changes within the schools. Administrators and teachers would come to value the participation of community members. Parents, students, teachers and administrators would come to see college-going as the norm.
- **Increase public will for college readiness:** New champions and advocates would become involved in education issues. More voices would advocate for improved student outcomes and college readiness. There would be an increased understanding across communities and schools of the need for college readiness and college-going.
- **Promote innovative college-readiness practices in the schools:** Schools would improve curricula and the school climate, provide more student supports and implement new programs to promote parent and student engagement. Administrators would track and share data to support these practices.

These objectives are related to key lessons found in research literature. There is a broad consensus in the literature that academic preparation is the single most influential variable that defines whether a young person from a low-income family enters college and attains a degree. "There is general agreement that rigor is the crux of the matter," write the authors of a white paper by the Bridgespan consulting group. "The academic intensity of the curriculum a student takes in high school counts more than grades or test scores."⁶

⁶ Bedsworth, W., Colby, S., and Doctor, J. (2006). *Reclaiming the American Dream*. Bridgespan Group, Boston, MA.

Yet these and other authors also note that other factors carry significant weight. In fact, even the highest-achieving students from certain demographic groups—including low-income families, students of color, and students who would be first in their families to attend college—are far less likely to attend college. And when they do, they are far less likely to complete a degree. For example, high-achieving low-income students enroll in four-year colleges at about half the rate of high-achieving high-income students.⁷ The data on college completion is even more dismal. While 74 percent of high-achieving high-income students attain a bachelor’s degree, only 29 percent of high-achieving low-income students attain a bachelor’s degree by age 26.⁸

“The highest achieving students from high-income families—those who earned top grades, completed the full battery of college prep courses, and took AP courses as well—are nearly four times more likely than low-income students with exactly the same level of academic accomplishment to end up in a highly selective university,” write Gerald and Haycock (2006).⁹

When students from low-income families enter college, they frequently require remediation in core subject areas. “While the precise number of students requiring remediation is difficult to ascertain, federal statistics indicate that 40 percent of admitted and enrolled students take at least one remedial course, reducing dramatically their probability of graduating and costing up to an estimated \$1 billion per year,” write the authors of a white paper from ACT, the nonprofit testing and research organization.¹⁰

Today, federal, state and local education bureaucracies measure success by relying heavily on high school graduation rates and content-area standardized tests. But there is extensive research evidence that shows that these indicators do not reflect the broad spectrum of skills, knowledge and experience required for college preparation. Several studies of college faculty nationwide reveal near-universal agreement that most students arrive unprepared for the intellectual demands and expectations of postsecondary education.¹¹ For example, in one study, faculty identified critical thinking and problem solving as the primary areas in which first-year students needed further development.¹²

⁷ Carnevale, A. & Desrochers, D. (2003). *Standards for What? The Economic Roots of K-16 Reform*, Educational Testing Service, Princeton, NJ. ; Bowen, W., Chingos, M., & McPherson, M. (2009). *Crossing the Finish Line*. Princeton University Press.

⁸ National Center for Education Sciences, (2003). *The Condition of Education*.

⁹ Gerald, D. & Haycock, K. (2006). *Engines of Inequality: Diminishing equity in the Nation’s Premier Public Universities*. The Education Trust, Washington, DC.

¹⁰ ACT.(2005).*Crisis at the core: Preparing all students for college and work access*. Iowa City, IA: ACT, Inc.

¹¹ Conley, D. (2003). *College Knowledge*. Jossey Bass, Boston, MA.

A young person’s readiness for college is shaped by a wide array of factors both internal and external to the school environment. David Conley of the University of Oregon, co-chair of the Validation Committee for the Common Core State Standards Initiative of the National Governors Association, defines college readiness across four major dimensions:

- key cognitive strategies;
- key content knowledge;
- academic behaviors; and
- contextual skills and awareness.

The first two dimensions are the domain of the school and its teachers, and include everything from writing and algebra to problem-solving, curiosity, research skills and critical thinking. The latter two, academic behaviors and contextual skills and awareness, are most relevant to the work of the College Ready Communities collaboratives. These two areas are where the CDCs and other community organizations could exercise the most influence and autonomy.

As Conley defines them, students’ key academic behaviors consist largely of self-monitoring skills and study skills.¹³ Self-monitoring includes understanding one’s own abilities and competencies, and the ability to make adjustments and improvements in completing tasks. This permits students to persist in the face of challenges, knowing they can make necessary adjustments or employ different strategies. Study skills—including time management, research skills and the use of study resources—are necessary for success in college level courses because of the significant amounts of independent time devoted to learning and assignments.

To prepare for college, students also must have contextual understanding. They need to master the application process in order to get in the door. But they also need to understand something about college culture and expectations, in order to adapt and cope in a setting likely to be very different from the community in which they were raised.

In many urban communities, succeeding in high school and getting in to college are not rites of passage, but rather avenues to better jobs and economic security. As the structure of work continues to shift towards service employment and away from manufacturing and manual trades, young people need more skills and more education to secure a job that pays a living wage.¹⁴ Good high schools are one pathway to college, but even a good school may not be sufficient in itself. The challenges these students face are substantial, in part because many low-income families have little or no familiarity

¹² Lundell, D. B., Higbee, J. L., Hipp, S., & Copeland, R. E. (2004). *Building bridges for access and success from high school to college: Proceedings of the metropolitan higher education consortium's developmental education initiative*. Minneapolis, MN: Center for Research on Developmental Education and Urban Literacy, University of Minnesota.

¹³ Conley, D. (2007). *Redefining College Readiness*. Center for Education Policy Research, Eugene, OR

¹⁴ In 2000, median earnings for workers with a bachelor’s degree were \$16,000 more than those without a college degree. US Bureau of the Census, “CPD Annual Demographic Survey,” Supplement, March 2001.

with the college experience. Few family members can share their own experiences or serve as an adequate guide.

Most high schools orient students to what Conley calls “college knowledge”—that is, information about college admissions, testing, application requirements, type of colleges, tuition costs and financial aid, and so on. But this often comes only when the college process is imminent.¹⁵ Application deadlines require college counselors and advisors to have manageable caseloads and students to have good time management skills. Without a good postsecondary advising or support at home, deadlines are easily missed.¹⁶ Financial aid options are largely unknown or substantially misunderstood by students most in need of such support. The economically well-off are more likely to have this knowledge than are the working-class families or families whose children will be the first generation to attend college.

College readiness consists of a complex bundle of knowledge, skills, behaviors and attitudes that young people develop through their school-based interactions as well as through their home, family and community life experiences. In communities without a reserve of these college experiences and knowledge, students can easily dismiss college as an option and set their sights on addressing more immediate necessities, perhaps dropping out of school altogether. One strategy for increasing social capital in a community is to help young people see college as a viable option.

With this in mind, community development and advocacy organizations have increasingly turned their attention to school improvement, college readiness and college access, in an effort to engage students and families in local schools. Recent research by Bryk, et al (2010) looked at community capacity in Chicago to support school improvement efforts and concluded that there are two local mechanisms that influence student achievement and school effectiveness: “The level of social capital in a school community and the density of students living under extraordinary circumstances.”¹⁷ With proper support and direction, organizations and schools can tap into or build upon existing community social capital, and these relationships can then add value back into the community. Where these resources are in short supply and the pressures of community life permeate into the school building, community organizations and advocacy groups can seek to directly address community needs and establish schools as institutional hubs for stronger communities.

Community initiatives that partner schools with local organizations can have an impact on a range of school improvement issues, from student achievement to graduation rates. Community schools that

¹⁵ Conley (2007), p. 8.

¹⁶ Public school postsecondary counselors spend 22.8 percent of their time on postsecondary admission counseling – less than half the amount of time as their counterparts in private schools. The College Board (2010), *The Completion Agenda*.

¹⁷ Bryk, A., Sebring, P., Allensworth, E., Luppescu, S. and Easton, J. (2010), *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. University of Chicago Press.

incorporate health care and other services, youth development supports and other elements have been shown to improve reading and math scores in both Chicago and New York.¹⁸ In addition, community schools have been found to improve graduation rates, attendance and dropout rates in several cities, including Cincinnati, Philadelphia and Chicago. Community partners working with eight high schools have demonstrated that strong partnerships, with integrated programs and services and actively involved leadership can make a strong impact on graduation and college going rates.¹⁹ There is also a body of recent research literature that describes advocacy organizations' efforts to improve school quality by engaging parents and community members in school reform.²⁰

Each community organization brings its particular strengths to school improvement efforts. These organizations can provide a cultural and communications bridge between the local community and the schools.²¹ They can connect the public sector and the philanthropic community, attracting external funding and services to under-resourced schools and communities. They can be flexible, operating outside of the school bureaucracy. And community organizations have useful programmatic experience, whether in advocacy and organizing, youth development, job readiness, housing services, extended-day programs, adult education, GED programs or other fields.

There has been only limited research on the impact of community-based organizations on college readiness and college access. The Teagle Foundation's College-Community Connections has demonstrated that focused and intensive partnerships between highly motivated students, community organizations and universities can help raise student awareness and understanding of college life and expectations, intensify their interest and motivated them to work harder to gain admission to college. Projects funded through the U.S. Department of Education's Talent Search Program have shown that collaborations with schools can result in high numbers of college applications, financial aid applications and college enrollment by low-income college ready participants.²²

The College Ready Communities initiative offered a compelling test of new strategies for bridging schools and communities, for the benefit of students.

¹⁸ Coalition for Community Schools (2009), "Research Brief 09", p. 2, www.communityschools.org.

¹⁹ Axelroth, R. (2009), *The Community Schools Approach: Raising Graduation and College Going Rates – Community High School Case Studies*. Washington, D.C.: Coalition for Community Schools, Institute for Educational Leadership.

²⁰ Mediratta, K. (2004), *Constituents of Change: Community organizations and public education reform*. New York University Institute for Education and Social Policy.

²¹ Warren, M. (2005), "Communities and Schools: A New View of Urban Education Reform," *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 75, No. 2.

²² U.S. Department of Education, Federal TRIO Programs, Talent Search performance reports 2002-2008.

V. Research Methodology

In the College Ready Communities initiative, each of the four collaboratives defined their own target populations, objectives, and activities for the project. We collected data about participation in many of these activities, and we observed the work first hand. We also collected data across all of the sites on a set of shared indicators, including student college knowledge, preparation and access to college. We sought to contextualize the school-specific college ready strategies and outcomes while also capturing the overarching lessons to be drawn from the collaboratives' experience.

The combination of project-specific data, government administrative data and qualitative field research we have put together over three years allows us to provide a first-hand description of what college readiness efforts looked like in the participating schools. Our research documented progress in student college readiness, including:

- Who participated in the programs and services offered by the schools and organizations to support students along a pathway towards college?
- What are students' college aspirations, knowledge and goals? What contextual knowledge do they have about the college process and what resources do they have to help them get ready? How do students' aspirations match their performance?
- Are more students applying to college, what types of institutions are they applying to, and are they increasingly applying for financial aid as a result of these programs and services? What approaches are most effective in achieving these objectives?
- How are student cohorts progressing in relation to benchmarks of college readiness?

We also addressed a series of questions about the activities of the four community collaboratives:

- Under what conditions did programs develop, expand or deepen over time? Did program activities become more integrated into the curriculum or the daily life of the schools, and did the school communities become more aware of or engaged in the activities?
- What organizational characteristics influenced the effectiveness of the programs? What internal changes occurred in relation to organizational structures and program focus? In the management and coordination of program services? In student access to additional resources?
- What can other groups and schools learn from these collaborative efforts? What are the important lessons about how community organizations and the schools worked together?

Sources of Data

We have relied primarily on data we collected from the schools and the NYC Department of Education, cross referenced with local metrics from the collaboratives themselves. Over these, we layered qualitative observations about the day-to-day work of the collaboratives, including the insights and experiences of students, school staff and organization staff. Our qualitative data collection includes observations in the schools and communities; focus groups of students and teachers, online surveys, and in-depth semi-structured interviews with participants.

On-site observations: Evaluators made more than 90 site visits to the schools during three school years, from 2009 to 2012, to observe project-related activities (including workshops, meetings, classes and special events), to gather information about the schools and to record general observations about how the targeted constituency uses services.

Focus groups, surveys and in-depth interviews: To the extent possible, we included the voices of all the participant and stakeholder groups in our research, providing opportunities for them to discuss their experiences and their evolving ideas about college readiness. We conducted focus group interviews with 7th, 8th, 10th and 12th grade students over the three years, as well as with groups of teachers and counselors at some of the schools to learn about their views on school, college and their own aspirations. We conducted student surveys to compare how student aspirations, knowledge and understanding of college (and their sense of the path to college) changed from the 7th to 8th grades and from the 10th to 11th grades. We also surveyed 12th grade students at two schools about their participation in the college application process and support services.

Our student surveys were designed to gather data about student aspirations and expectations for continued education, and their college-contextual knowledge. We drew on questions from the annual Chicago high school student survey developed by the Consortium on Chicago School Research²³ and drew middle school questions from a Middle School College Readiness survey developed for the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation by WestEd.²⁴ We surveyed more than 1,000 students in 12 College Ready Communities schools over the two years.²⁵

In addition, 183 teachers from 10 schools responded to an online survey, representing approximately 48 percent of the teaching staff at those schools. Teachers provided both closed-ended and open-ended responses to questions about their perspective on student readiness for college, school supports for college preparation, family engagement and teacher's roles in supporting access to college.²⁶

We conducted structured and follow-up interviews with most of the key school-based and community-based staff, including college counselors, principals, parent coordinators and site coordinators. We conducted in-depth interviews with 20 students participating in youth leadership programs at two high schools and serving as youth leaders at schools served by the two Student

²³ Consortium on Chicago School Research, *Survey Reports for Public Schools*, December 2007. Sample High School Report.

²⁴ "Developing a College-Going Culture in a Middle School: A Tool-Kit" by WestEd for the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, July 2009.

²⁵ Seven hundred and fifty six students in nine schools participated in the 2011 survey, including some 9th grade students, as the International High Schools employ mixed grade classes in the first two years. For the purpose of our analysis, we discarded all but 7th and 10th grade surveys. In 2012, 11 schools participated in the surveys, involving 545 8th and 11th grade students.

²⁶ We derived survey questions from the Consortium on Chicago School Research for their annual school surveys, as well as from William Sedlacek's research on non-cognitive variables that impact college readiness and success. Sedlacek, W. (2004), *Beyond the Big Test: Noncognitive Assessment in Higher Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Success Centers. We also conducted in-depth interviews with 20 parents of students attending the Pan American International High School in Elmhurst to learn about their engagement in the school and the college process.

High school administrative staff collected college application data. The information collected for 2012 is consistent across schools and includes the number of applications by type (CUNY, SUNY and private college, as well as two- or four-year institutions); the percent of students who completed Free Applications for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and the percent of students that took the SAT exam. We were able to cross-check most of the self-reported program data with Department of Education reports.

We also collected and analyzed New York City Department of Education administrative and student data. We tracked student academic progress (e.g. course progress and grades, number and level of Regents exams passed) in the College Ready Communities schools over time to see if the activities in the schools are associated with improved academic outcomes and compared those outcomes with well accepted benchmarks for college readiness. We also included college matriculation data for the College Ready Communities high schools from the NYC Department of Education's June 2012 "Where Are They Now" report, which shows the status of students who graduated from these high school in 2009-2011.

VI. The Students and the Schools

Twelve high schools and two middle schools participated in the College Ready Communities initiative. As a group, they embodied challenges and strengths found throughout the city's diverse array of hundreds of public high schools. All were high-poverty schools, and nine had substantial percentages of special needs students. At four of the schools, more than 90 percent of the students had limited English proficiency. All but one had fewer than 500 students. Flushing High School, one of the city's large neighborhood high schools, had more than 3,000 students.

The racial and ethnic mix varied. In two schools, the majority of students were African American. In one, Asian students made up the majority, including many immigrants and children of immigrants. In the rest, Latinos, both immigrant and US-born, were a substantial majority. In our surveys, we found that only 22 percent of the high school students had an immediate family member who had graduated college, and only 30 percent had a parent who had ever attended college.

The communities served by the initiative included the Soundview section of the Bronx; Bushwick, Cypress Hills and East New York in Brooklyn; Central Harlem in Manhattan; and Flushing, Elmhurst and Corona in Queens. The schools were grouped in four collaboratives:

Student Success Centers at the Franklin Lane and Bushwick campuses:

- On the Bushwick Educational Campus
 - Bushwick School for Social Justice
 - Academy for Environmental Leadership
 - Academy for Urban Planning
- On the Franklin K. Lane Educational Campus
 - Multicultural High School
 - Cypress Hills Collegiate Preparatory High School
 - Academy of Innovative Technology
 - Brooklyn Lab School
 - Franklin K. Lane High School (closed in 2012)

The Pan American International High Schools Collaborative

- Pan American International High School in Elmhurst
- Pan American International High School at Monroe

Project College Bound

- Flushing High School
- Flushing International High School

The Harlem Middle Schools Project

- Thurgood Marshall Academy
- Renaissance Leadership Academy

Table 4: Demographic overview of the College Ready Communities schools

School Name	Enrollment	% IEP	% Self Contained	% Overage	% Free Lunch	% Reduced Lunch	% Stability	% LEP
Academy for Environmental Leadership	354	17.8	9	10.5	88	5	89	31
Academy of Urban Planning	471	20.2	11	7.9	76	2	90	20
Bushwick School for Social Justice	420	17.9	3.6	9.8	80	4	83	17
Academy of Innovative Technology	302	20.2	0.3	8.9	75	10	85	16
Brooklyn Lab School	314	21	0.6	10.5	76	8	82	15
Multicultural High School	415	1.2	0	23.9	73	3	100	92
Cypress Hills Collegiate Preparatory School	433	12	1.6	7.2	67	5	99	14
Flushing High School	3041	12.4	4.2	6.6	71	7	93	22
Flushing International High School	400	1.5	0.3	14.3	89	8	100	91
Pan American International High School	347	1.4	0	12.7	78	6	100	90
Pan American International High School at Monroe	337	0	0	40.4	100	0	97	92
Thurgood Marshall Academy (grades 6 to 8)*	190	13.3	0.3	3.6	69	5	82	2
Renaissance Leadership Academy (middle school)	257	20.6	--	--	83	6	92	9

*Thurgood Marshall Academy is a combined middle school and high school. In the year reflected on this table, only the 190 middle school students in grades 6 thru 8 participated in the College Ready Communities Initiative; however, separate demographic data were not available for these students. The other columns on the table describe the full student population, grades 6 through 12.

Source: New York State Education Department School Report Cards, 2011

Table 5: Racial and ethnic summary of student population, College Ready Communities schools

School Name	Enrollment	% AIAN	% Black	% Hispanic	% Asian	% White
Academy for Environmental Leadership	354	1	23	75	1	1
Academy of Urban Planning	471	0	31	66	1	2
Bushwick School for Social Justice	420	1	29	69	0	1
Academy of Innovative Technology	302	1	36	51	9	4
Brooklyn Lab School	314	0	33	65	1	1
Multicultural High School	415	0	1	99	0	0
Cypress Hills Collegiate Preparatory School	433	2	18	70	8	3
Flushing High School	3041	0	25	52	19	4
Flushing International High School	400	0	1	42	55	2
Pan American International High School	347	0	0	100	0	0
Pan American International High School at Monroe	337	0	0	100	0	0
Thurgood Marshall Academy (grades 6 to 8)*	190	0	77	23	0	0
Renaissance Leadership Academy (middle school)	257	0	57	40	2	0

* Thurgood Marshall Academy is a combined middle school and high school. In the year reflected on this table, only the 190 middle school students in grades 6 thru 8 participated in the College Ready Communities Initiative; however, separate demographic data were not available for these students. The other columns on the table describe the full student population, grades 6 through 12.

Source: New York State Education Department School Report Cards, 2011

VII. The Four Collaboratives

In the College Ready Communities initiative, four collaboratives of community organizations, schools and advocacy groups joined together to work with mostly students of color from lower income families. Each of the collaboratives had unique organizational characteristics, resources, experiences, strategies and perspectives on community engagement and education. The schools, too, differed in many respects. Following are short profiles of each collaborative and its participating organizations.

The Student Success Centers at the Franklin K. Lane and Bushwick high school campuses both established drop-in college readiness centers that opened onto common areas in these former large public high schools, which have both been broken up into several small high schools. The centers identified, trained and employed groups of students to motivate and support their peers—including those who might not otherwise apply to college—while also providing resources and guidance throughout the college search and application process. Each center was sponsored and managed by a community organization: Make the Road New York on the Bushwick campus, and Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation on the Lane campus, in eastern Brooklyn.

The goal of the Student Success Centers was to increase the number of students applying to and attending college, including state universities and private colleges. Each Student Success Center was staffed by a director, an organizer and as many as eight paid youth interns called “youth leaders” or “ambassadors.” The centers capitalized on these leaders’ relationships with their student peers—the youth leaders encouraged other students to plan for college and to spend time in the center, where students could benefit from a carefully designed college application support system. The centers also worked with the campus high schools to provide college awareness workshops.

Make the Road New York started the center on the Bushwick Campus during the 2008-2009 school year. Make The Road is a member-based community organization, based in Bushwick, that uses community organizing and leadership development to promote workplace and environmental justice, civil rights, and the improvement of health care, housing and education opportunity. The organization provides direct services to families, adults and young people, and also organizes parents to press for better schools in Brooklyn and Queens.

The organization had helped to develop the Bushwick School for Social Justice, one of the small high schools on the Bushwick campus that participated in the College Ready Communities collaborative. Another partner in the initiative, the Urban Youth Collaborative (UYC), provided trainings on community and issue-based organizing to young people involved with the Student Success Centers.

The schools at the Bushwick campus included the Bushwick School for Social Justice, the Academy of Urban Planning, and the Academy of Environmental Leadership. They served a predominantly Latino and African American student population, and nearly all of the students qualify for free or

reduced lunch. Many of the students were eligible for either special education services, English as a Second Language services or both.

The Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation opened its Student Success Center at the Lane campus at the start of the 2009-2010 school year. The 30-year-old nonprofit corporation promotes housing, economic development, youth and family services, community organizing and child care in Cypress Hills and East New York. It runs education programs for adults and young people, including after-school, college access and youth organizing programs. It also informs parents about educational options for their children.

All of the schools on the Franklin K. Lane campus participated in College Ready Communities, including Cypress Hills Collegiate Prep, which the Department of Education founded in 2006 in partnership with the Cypress Hills LDC. The others on the campus included Multicultural High School, the Academy of Innovative Technology and the Brooklyn Lab School. In addition, a group of students from the original Franklin K. Lane High School remained enrolled on the campus as the high school wound down through its final phase of closure.

At the start of the 2011-2012 school year, Cypress Hills LDC signed a memorandum of understanding with each of the four main schools on the Lane campus. These agreements detailed the services that the Lane Student Success Center would provide each school and the expectations for the schools to support this work. Each school contributed funding in return for school-wide college guidance and early awareness provided by the Success Center. The cost was a fraction of what the schools would normally pay for even a portion of a guidance counselor's salary, and by all accounts a bargain considering the quality and breadth of services that were made available to the students. This became possible because Cypress Hills LDC aggressively sought and secured outside funding, including a five-year TRIO grant from the U.S. Department of Education that supports college access services for young people from disadvantaged communities. The MOUs helped assure support, participation and compliance on the part of the schools, while Cypress Hills pursued its commitment to help students at the Lane campus gain access to post-secondary education.

Both Student Success Centers shared several key characteristics. They were easily accessible by students during lunch periods, after school and before classes. Their drop-in format provided a safe space for students who were interested in college, a place where they could speak about their interests and gain encouragement, information and support. They each offered a library of college resources and had computers available for the purpose of online research, completing applications or writing and storing essays for college applications. And they each relied on students to help guide and staff the programs.

The Student Success Centers also sought to promote a college-oriented culture in the schools. On the Lane campus, the Success Center staff held regular meetings with the principals and teachers, both to improve the alignment of services between the schools and the center and to educate school staff about college readiness, and about what everyone needs to do in order to help the students prepare. One Student Success Center staff member told us that many of the adults working in the

schools had only limited knowledge of the college preparation process. “I think adults are not informed about data, the process, about outcomes,” this person said. What’s more, this staff member said, many teachers expressed frustrations about the limited academic preparation of many of their students and thus found it difficult to think about focusing on and working toward college readiness. Staff saw that addressing and overcoming this point of view was an important part of their day to day interactions with school staff.

The Student Support Center also set out to devise ways to overcome the isolation of many young people in Cypress Hills and East New York, creating new experiences for students in the community, after school and in the larger world. They need “to see themselves in other settings ... do more things than going only to school to home,” one staff member said.

“It’s a cultural thing,” a Lane campus student agreed, referring to students’ aspirations and the limits of their experience. “I have been in Manhattan, worked in Manhattan, been with friends visiting to colleges. But here [in East New York], people are stuck in a cycle... The more experience you get, the more knowledge you get.”

The Pan American International High School (PAIHS) Collaborative was rooted in two new, small high schools developed to serve immigrant students from Latin America who have been in the United States for four years or less. One of the schools is on the Monroe High School Campus in the Soundview section of the Bronx. The other is in Elmhurst, Queens.

The collaborative sought to help these recent immigrants develop college awareness and address non-academic barriers to college. The organizations linked students’ families to social services, provided students with intensive support in the college application process, and promoted college readiness in the school and among students and their families.

The PAIHS Collaborative had three nonprofit partners. The Internationals Network for Public Schools was a co-founder of both schools and is a school support organizations for 14 New York City schools that serve recent immigrants. The organization helps schools develop teaching methods that allow students to learn English and prepare for college at the same time, and provides mentoring, professional development and other school development services.

Pan American International High School at the Monroe Educational Campus in the Bronx opened its doors in 2008 and graduated its first class in 2012. The South Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation (SoBRO) was the collaborative’s local partner on the Monroe campus. SoBRO offers community economic, business and housing development services, as well as educational and career development programs for youth and adults.

Make The Road New York was the local partner at the Pan American International High School in Elmhurst, Queens. The organization co-founded the school in 2007 with the Internationals Network. The school serves 400 students in grades nine through 12, and graduated its first class in 2011. It shares a renovated industrial building with three other small high schools. Make The Road

worked with students on college readiness and college guidance, while also supporting and at times mobilizing the students' parents and families on school-related issues. A Make The Road staff member was integrated into the school staff in order to support the development of college readiness and college access in the school's curriculum, and to help parents learn about the process.

For many students, this work took shape in two components: an 11th grade college awareness seminar and a 12th grade college application seminar. These seminars were co-taught by school staff and the Make The Road staff member.

Since students were newcomers to the United States, the college application process was unfamiliar to most of them and their parents. The 11th grade seminar previewed the steps that students would take to apply to college, presented resources to support the college search process, and introduced students to a variety of topics including the SAT exams an overview of different types of colleges, and information about how to pay for college. Students explored the College Board web site, wrote drafts of personal statements and made their first lists of possible colleges. They explored the "vocabulary" of college, so that they understood the language of identifying, selecting and applying to college and seeking financial aid. All during the year, the program offered college trips to students in the seminar. Some trips were within the city, while others went to Boston and Connecticut.

Eleventh graders also participated in internships at businesses and nonprofit organizations, and the internship seminar dovetailed with the college awareness seminar so that students were encouraged to think about the connections between their internship experience and higher education.

The 12th grade seminar was a semester-long class on applying for college. Students picked their colleges and completed their applications in class. The site coordinator for Make The Road walked students through the details of the selection and application process along with the school's 12th grade counselor. The two adults found it especially challenging to work with students to align their dreams and visions of college with the reality of where they were likely to be accepted and do well, based on their academic abilities.

In their second year of graduating students, the staff made connections with new colleges and learned about educational opportunity programs that helped their students. Through one such program, a 2012 graduate enrolled in an upstate community college that has a joint program with Syracuse University. Once he is completed with the two-year program, he will be able to transfer his credits and enroll at Syracuse. "He is one of the highlights of our school with Make the Road since he is an undocumented student who received full scholarships," says the site coordinator. The student's success is a direct result of the staff at PAIHS making the necessary connections and developing a relationship with the admission counselors at the community college.

Project College Bound, another of the collaboratives, focused on the needs of English Language Learners in two high schools in Flushing, Queens. Its staff members provided college counseling and support for students in Flushing High School and Flushing International High School. They also developed student and parent leadership groups that reached out to Asian and Latino

immigrants, building public support for college as an achievable goal for the young people of Flushing. One important focus was on financial literacy and financial aid; the collaborative provided workshops, counseling and support to students and families completing their Free Applications for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and other documents.

The project's partners included two community-based organizations: Asian Americans for Equality (AAFE), a community development group with a comprehensive approach to housing, immigration and social services, community planning, advocacy and small business development; and the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF), an advocacy and policy organization that supports Asian families through education and organizing. CACF trains students and parents to advocate for school reform and services for recent immigrants and English Language Learners.

Flushing High School is a large, comprehensive high school that serves more than 3,000 students from throughout Queens and has specialized programs in law, business and science and technology. The majority of the students are zoned for the school, which was in the midst of a state-mandated reorganization during the period of the College Ready Communities initiative. Nearby, Flushing International High School serves 400 students who arrived in the United States within the previous four years and have limited English language skills. Ninety-six percent of the students are either Latino or Asian. Its teachers work in teams to provide interdisciplinary, project-oriented instruction in humanities, science and math. There is a strong focus on both native language and English language development, and students work in groups to support content learning and literacy.

At Flushing High School, students could make appointments or just drop in at the college guidance office—but with one college counselor for 452 seniors, the wait was often long. After the arrival of Asian Americans For Equality (AAFE) on campus, however, students had an alternative: a second part-time counselor who was trained to work with English-language learners, known as “ELL” students.

In addition, Project College Bound recruited a group of ELL students to join a leadership group that developed their own college readiness skills and college knowledge, while also training them to serve as a vanguard for college among the many other students from Asian and Latin American countries. These students organized events and promoted the project through their personal and school networks. The activities ranged from brown-bag lunch talks about college and what it takes to get there, to financial literacy workshops, college fairs for 11th grade students, career fairs and college trips. The youth leaders also took turns representing the students on the school's Career and College Task Force, a school-initiated group of guidance counselors, teachers and support staff seeking to improve the ways that students were supported in preparing for life after high school.

More than 40 youth leaders took part in the leadership program, known as the Asian American Student Advocacy Project (ASAP). The youth leaders told interviewers that they could be more accessible to their peers, and less intimidating, than teachers and other adults. They were trained to answer questions, and several said that they enjoyed the work because it gave them a strong sense of belonging.

The Harlem Middle Schools Project, the fourth collaborative, aimed to raise student and parent awareness of college while also increasing the rigor of middle school by training teachers and developing curriculum aligned with the new Common Core Standards. The project sought to create a culture of high expectations among students, staff and parents by using a combination of professional and curriculum development, youth development and parent organizing.

The project focused on sixth, seventh and eighth grades at two public schools in Harlem, Thurgood Marshall Academy for Learning and Social Change (TMA) on West 135th Street, and the Renaissance Leadership Academy on West 129th Street.

The project had three community partners: the Abyssinian Development Corporation (ADC), Brotherhood/Sister Sol, and the Coalition for Educational Justice. ADC, a comprehensive community development corporation with housing, economic development and social service programs, became involved in education through its Head Start program and, in the 1990s, founded the Thurgood Marshall Academy for Learning and Social Change. Brotherhood/Sister Sol works to develop black and Latino young women and men as critical thinkers and community leaders, offering in-school, after-school and summer programs for youth and training programs for adults who work with youth. The Coalition for Educational Justice organizes parents to advocate for better public schools—particularly middle schools—and to ensure equitable access to school facilities and supports that give students access to higher education.

Thurgood Marshall Academy Middle School serves 180 predominately black and Latino students in grades six through eight. The school provides a bridge orientation program for incoming students and offers the International Baccalaureate Program, with its focus on rigorous instruction, as well as an extended day program with a range of enrichment and remedial opportunities. The school screens students for admission, and most continue on to the Thurgood Marshall Academy upper school.

Renaissance Leadership Academy serves 230 students in a building it shares with three other schools. The school focuses on creating a supportive environment for students' emotional, social and academic development, supporting youth development and providing extended-day opportunities in sports, the arts and academic enrichment.

Table 6: Collaborative participation metrics, 2011-2012

	Participant Totals		Participant Totals
Student Success Centers			
LANE CAMPUS		BUSHWICK CAMPUS	
College Application Support	244	College Application Support	209
College Awareness Workshops ²⁷	1,088	College Awareness Workshops	522
Youth Leadership	8	Youth Leadership	6
Project College Bound			
FLUSHING HIGH SCHOOL		FLUSHING INTERNATIONAL	
College Application Support	402	HS	30
Financial Aid or Literacy	269	Direct Counseling	303 ²⁹
Youth Leadership	20	Financial Aid or Literacy	20
Parent Leadership	13 ²⁸	Youth Leadership	13
Parent Outreach & Services	20	Parent Leadership	
ELL Teacher Development	6		
Pan American International HS			
PAIHS/ELMHURST		PAIHS/MONROE	
College Applications	60	College Applications	23
College Awareness	82	College Readiness	90
Internships	82	Internships	65
Youth Leaderships	2	Parent Services	25
Parent Services	40		
Harlem Middle School Collaborative			
THURGOOD MARSHALL ACADEMY		RENAISSANCE LEADERSHIP ACADEMY	
Academic Preparation	181	Academic Preparation	197
Youth Development Programs	181	Youth Development Programs	197
At-Risk Support	15		
Parent Engagement	40		
Total student and parent touches (includes duplication)			4,453

²⁷ This includes students in grades 9 thru 11.

²⁸ The total number of members of the parent leadership group represents parents from both Flushing high schools.

²⁹ The project expanded the financial literacy program beyond the original target group of 11th grade students to include 9th and 10th grade students as well.

VIII. The Strategies

Strategy 1: College Guidance and Application Support

Official, school-based resources for college guidance in most of these high schools was very limited. The College Ready Communities collaboratives provided a substantial improvement in the availability of these essential services. Many of the significant changes we observed in the metrics of college access were directly attributable to this work.

In our 2011 survey of college counselors at eight College Ready Communities high schools, we found that each counselor carried a load of between 60 and 400 students. Most had other substantial job responsibilities. Some were teachers, others had administrative roles—tracking attendance, creating students’ schedules—and many were engaged in guidance counseling with students in many grades, usually on issues such as special education. Some were also the school social worker. A few of the counselors had guidance licenses or worked as college counselors for several years, but most served as part time college advisors.

With large caseloads, guidance counselors and advisors reported that their job often felt like an assembly line for helping process students’ online CUNY and SUNY applications. In some schools, this work took place in a computer lab or a library with enough work stations for a class full of seniors. The step by step instruction on filling out forms left little time for students to discuss their college choices with counselors or hear about alternatives. Students were often on their own when it came to filling out applications for private colleges and completing financial aid or scholarship applications. A relatively few students who were most able to advocate for themselves, and to be persistent, were usually able to get more help from counselors.

The students in the College Ready Communities schools were mostly from working class and lower income families, and many were English language learners and recent immigrants. Most were from the first college-bound generation in their family. They required a great deal of support to navigate the college process from start to finish. The pathway to college for such students is more complicated than for their middle class peers, thanks in part to the unfamiliar demands of the application process, the lack of assistance at home, and the sometimes unusual family details that can make the financial aid process complicated—ranging from having undocumented-immigrant parents to being raised by a relative or a single parent.

To serve such students well, college counselors need to know more than just the mechanics of the college application process. They need to understand the process, the universe of colleges and the particular ways in which their students’ lives can be accommodated within the forms and requirements for admissions and financial aid. For example, they have to know which colleges have programs that support incoming students, which four-year colleges accept applications without SAT scores, and which offer scholarships for undocumented students. It takes time to develop relationships with college admission offices and to master the intricacies of the college and financial

aid applications. Just one-third of the school staff members providing college counseling in the College Ready Communities schools had more than three years of experience as college counselors.

Working in partnership with the host schools, the College Ready Communities collaboratives supplemented school-based college counseling services by filling in the gaps, bringing new skills and expertise. The collaboratives engaged and supported a broader group of students in the college application process, expanded access, and brought specific college access knowledge that was relevant to the students, the families and the communities. In several schools, the collaboratives' staff members were more accessible and more engaged than school college guidance staff in outreach to the students who needed encouragement and support to stay engaged in a process that for many seemed beyond reach. Often, the staff members from community organizations had cultural backgrounds similar to the students and knew their native languages, which strengthened their ability to communicate with them. They also had current knowledge about the application process that helped make obstacles surmountable.

At many of the high schools, the collaboratives routinely increased the capacity and reach of the schools' own college guidance efforts. For example, at the Academy of Urban Planning, one of the schools located in the Bushwick Educational Complex, all 12th grade students participated in a twice-per-week college prep class led by the school's college advisors. "It starts in September," explained one 12th grader. "You got to think about what you want to do. There are lots of deadlines. You have to think about what you want to study, what college you want to go to." The Student Success Center staff from Make the Road tailored their involvement to support the AUP model, helping to develop tools and curriculum. Youth leaders trained by the Success Center walked around the class, from work station to work station, helping students complete parts of the application, answering questions and offering encouragement when the process or the obstacles seemed overwhelming.

Students often followed up by going down to the Success Center to get feedback on their essays, to talk through their college choices, or seeking information about scholarships and financial aid. "I didn't know a lot," acknowledged one student. "So they helped me a lot with the applications and the fee waivers." After most of the students pushed the "submit" button on their college applications, they shifted focus to financial aid. On a couple of Saturdays, one advisor arranged for students and parents to come into the Success Center for a financial aid boot camp with students and their parents, and the youth leaders walked them through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). In the end, more than 80 percent of the graduates completed their FAFSA applications. (See Table 9, page 46.)

At the Lane campus Student Success Center in Cypress Hills, the college access support provided by the schools and the community organization was one part guidance and one part management. Staff and youth leaders sought to keep students organized and on task, meeting a succession of deadlines, and moving forward towards graduation and college matriculation. A team of four guidance counselors, eight youth leaders and a number of other support staff and volunteers sat at desks or

near banks of computer stations inside the Success Center, helping a steady flow of students from four campus schools fill in the details on their applications. In some cases, counselors and peer leaders focused on keeping students engaged in the college application and financial aid process through lengthy conversations, trying to help students overcome feelings of frustration or exhaustion. Common obstacles included poor grades, low self-esteem, fear about the cost of college or of leaving a job that was important for a family's income, worries about immigration status, and family indifference.

Each of the four schools in the building signed a memorandum of understanding with the Success Center and paid part of the cost of a full-time college counselor, in addition to the basic services the center provided "Myth Buster" workshops, aimed at the early high school grades, attempted to address misconceptions or misinformation that 15 and 16 year olds might have about college, while serving as an early introduction to the work of the Success Center. Youth leaders and counselors visited classrooms and presented information about the cost of college, the importance of tests and good grades, and the benefits of a college degree. They did this in easily digestible nuggets of information, meant to serve as an introduction; for many of the students, it was the first time they had ever discussed the possibility of going to college.

"I didn't really think about college, it was about [making] money. I started thinking about a job," explained one Lane student when asked about her first contact with the Success Center. Then, Myth Busters came to her English class. "They told us about the money we could make with a college degree," she said, and for the first time she understood why college needed to be included in her thinking about her future.

In 2011, Cypress Hills hired an early-awareness counselor to help students in ninth and tenth grades to better understand the college path ahead of them, and to create targeted youth groups in each school. Each of the youth groups had a different theme, such as dance or adolescent development, depending upon the school, but each used a group-work model to support youth development and student success in school and beyond.

The Success Center also sponsored Saturday SAT prep classes for students, took students on college visits, found college-level educational programs for qualified students, and helped find scholarships.

As these profiles describe, the College Ready Communities collaboratives brought substantial college guidance resources into high schools that otherwise struggled to provide this essential support for students. Through this work, they contributed to a steady and in many cases sharp rise in the number of students applying to college from each of the high schools.

Over three years, the number of seniors receiving support from the community organizations to apply to college increased by more than 37 percent, from 763 students to 1,044. This is in part attributable to the fact that some of the small schools did not have graduating classes in 2010 and 2012. The fact that the rate of applications went up significantly—from 67 percent of graduating students to more than 91 percent—is more to the point.

Table 7: Total number of college applicants, 2010 through 2012

School	2010 Applicants	2011 Applicants	2012 Applicants
Academy of Environmental Leadership	49	54	55
Academy of Urban Planning	67	71	79
Bushwick School Social Justice	52	55	75
Cypress Hills Collegiate	57	76	63
Multicultural HS		44	53
Academy of Innovative Technology	0	0	65
Brooklyn Lab	0	0	41
Franklin K Lane	100	119	no data
Flushing International High School	58	62	61
Flushing High School	306	323	402
Pan American International HS (Elmhurst)	0	46	61
Pan American International HS (Monroe)	0	0	23
Thurgood Marshall Academy HS	74	71	66
TOTALS	763	921	1,044

Source: Data collected by CNYCA from guidance offices and Student Success Centers

Engaging all seniors in the college process, regardless of their graduation status, builds college knowledge and experience they can potentially use at some later point in their lives. But engaging most seniors in the college application process provides them with immediate access to college if they can meet the other challenges of matriculation, including graduation, financial aid, remedial courses and family obligations. College Ready Communities has worked aggressively to increase the participation of graduating seniors in the college application process.

For the most part, the collaboratives became steadily more effective, consistently increasing the percentage of graduates who applied to college. The International High Schools showed more fluctuation in the numbers than the others; these schools tend to have more students who need a fifth or sixth year to graduate, because they are recent immigrants, and they have more undocumented immigrant students.

Table 8: Percent of June graduating class that applied to college

School	2010 Graduating Class (#)	% of 2010 Graduates Applying to College	2011 Graduating Class (#)	% of 2011 Graduates Applying to College	2012 Graduating Class (#)	% of 2012 Graduates Applying to College
Flushing International H.S.	51	100%	54	100.0%	52	81.0%
Flushing High School	360	76.9%	358	90.2%	405	99.2%
Academy for Environmental Leadership	66	74.2%	76	88.0%	70	86.0%
Academy of Urban Planning	55	65.4%	84	84.5%	62	87.0%
Bushwick School for Social Justice	74	70.2%	71	82.0%	75	88.0%
Thurgood Marshall Academy HS	68	86%	75	80.0%	67	95.0%
Cypress Hills Collegiate Preparatory School	61	93%	53	94.0%	51	98.0%
Franklin K. Lane (closed 2012)	189	52.9%	151	53.6%	no data	no data
Multicultural High School	n/a	n/a	54	64.8%	31	93.0%
Brooklyn Lab School	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	47	87.0%
Academy of Innovative Technology	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	61	100.0%
PAIHS (Monroe)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	23	91.0%
PAIHS (Elmhurst)	n/a	n/a	36	83.3%	40	78.0%
Totals	924	67.3%	1,012	81.9%	984	91.7%

Source: Data collected by CNYCA from guidance offices and Student Success Centers

Strategy 2: Financial Aid Guidance and Support

Student responses on our surveys and in focus groups revealed a widespread concern about the cost of college, and some insights into how this defines students' choices. Among 11th graders responding to our survey, 71 percent indicated they needed more information about how to pay for college. In follow up interviews they explained their concerns. "For me the decision about money is so important," one 11th grade student responded. "If it's too high, there no chance I can get in, so I have to lower my standard to go to a community college." Another student said that "Private universities are very expensive and CUNY is getting expensive," and that limits her choices. "The best option for people with little money is a community college and then transfer to a four-year," another student said.

By providing students and their families with support in filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), the College Ready Communities collaborative high schools completed these applications at a much higher rate than comparable New York City high schools.

In most of the College Ready Communities high schools, the collaboratives introduced the FAFSA to students and families through workshops in the fall. Beginning in January, it would have been difficult for a senior with an unfinished FAFSA form to walk into the Student Success Center on the Lane campus without being encouraged by a counselor or a youth leader to sit at a computer and finish the task. Frequently, youth leaders and counselors sought students out in the hallways and classrooms upstairs, to remind them to come down to the center to get it done.

At PAIHS in Elmhurst, Make The Road staff worked alongside the school's 12th grade counselor to help students find information on financial aid and to help those who weren't living with a parent, or who had other unusual family situations, fill out the FAFSA. They met with the families of nearly every graduating senior, and developed financial guidance information for students who were undocumented immigrants.

Meanwhile, Project College Bound used a variety of strategies to help make college more affordable for students and families. Staff developed a financial literacy curriculum for immigrant youth, organized workshops on how to fill out the FAFSA and provided individual counseling sessions for students and families seeking assistance. Asian Americans for Equality hired a program assistant to develop and teach a financial literacy course for students and to support financial aid counseling with students and parents at Flushing International and Flushing High School. The collaborative also developed and distributed a financial aid newsletter and a book of scholarships for documented and undocumented immigrant students.

During the 2011-2012 school year, more than 360 students in grades 9 through 11 participated in the financial literacy program. In addition to training in college financial aid, they learned about the uses and importance of credit histories and how to set up and manage a bank account. All of this work was funded with the help of Capital One's corporate citizenship program.

Altogether, the collaboratives spurred a substantial increase in the number of graduating students completing their FAFSA forms at most of the high school. More importantly, for the 2012 graduating class, the College Ready Communities schools' average FAFSA completion rate outpaced that of other New York City high schools with very similar students by 8 percentage points. This is another example of how the College Ready Communities schools had more intensive college access support systems in place than most comparable schools.

The College Ready Communities schools FAFSA completion rate in 2012, using a weighted average, was 91.3 percent. The weighted average among the comparison group of schools with the same Peer Index scores was 83.5 percent. (The citywide weighted average of all high schools was 88.9 percent.) Thus, despite the high number of students in the College Ready Communities schools who face substantial academic challenges and have limited English and other special needs, students completed the financial aid application at a higher rate than at all high schools citywide—and at a much higher rate than at comparable New York City high schools.

The comparison group was composed of all city high schools with the same rating on the Department of Education's "Peer Index," which is calculated annually for every high school. The index uses the average 8th Grade math and ELA scores for all current students as well as the percentage of special education students and the percentage of overage students.

The difference is even apparent among the College Ready Communities schools themselves: for example, the completion rates on the Franklin K. Lane campus, at the Internationals high schools and at Flushing High School are especially high, and appear to reflect more intensive, intentional financial aid support.

Administrative data on FAFSA completion rates are now gathered and reported by the U.S. Department of Education, beginning with the 2011-2012 academic year. Comparable data for 2013 graduates will be available in September or October 2013.

The financial aid support made a visible difference, according to Matt Ryder, the financial assistance program associate at Project College Bound. "Before, nobody was doing the work that I'm doing. Nobody was offering advisories with their financial aid applications. There were classes being taught, but only through random programs and projects. Depending on the day, I meet 10 to 30 students a day. I've worked with about 200 students this year. I've worked with them between two and four times each.

"I helped over 150 kids get grants from the federal government or loans," he added. "It's just about making enough phone calls, writing enough e-mails, following through with those odds and ends. A lot of the students are not accustomed to any of this."

By his own account, between January and April 2012, Matt's work with students made them eligible for between \$624,672 and \$700,000 in federal and state education grants.

Table 9: 2012 Free Applications for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), by school

School Name	# of Graduates	# of Applications Submitted	# of Applications Completed	% of Applications Completed
Academy for Environmental Leadership	70	27	24	89.0%
Academy of Urban Planning	62	60	50	83.0%
Bushwick School for Social Justice	75	60	52	86.6%
Brooklyn Lab School	47	29	25	86.2%
Academy of Innovative Technology	61	40	35	88.0%
Cypress Hills Collegiate Prep	51	49	47	95.9%
Multicultural HS	31	27	24	88.8%
Flushing High School	405	244	220	90.2%
Flushing International HS	52	31	29	93.5%
Pan American Int'l HS/Bronx	27	12	11	91.6%
Pan American Int'l HS/Elmhurst	40	28	27	96.4%
Thurgood Marshall Academy HS	67	60	53	88.3%
Total	988	667	597	89.5%

Source: US DOE Office of Federal Student Aid. The data reflect the number of submitted and completed FAFSAs among applicants no older than 18 who received their high school diploma by the start of the 2012-2013 school year.

Strategy 3: Academic Preparedness

The community organizations in the College Ready Communities collaboratives could not be expected on their own to accomplish huge gains in academic achievement. Nonetheless, all of the organizations developed a profound understanding of the academic challenges facing the students at their schools, and all of them sought, at the very least, to improve students' understanding of what would be expected of them academically in college.

The students in the College Ready Communities schools have very high aspirations. In our 2011 survey of hundreds of 10th graders in 11 of the high schools, nearly one-third told us they planned to be a doctor, a lawyer or some other kind of professional. Just as many reported that their parents hoped for the same.

Many teachers, too, said they would like to see their students do well, but many of them are worried about their students' academic skills. Asked to define "college readiness" as it applied to their students, more than 130 teachers in six schools responded. About half remarked on their students' poor academic preparation and insufficient study habits, often compounded by language struggles or academic apathy. "Most of them are going out into the cold neither having, nor realizing the need of, a coat to keep them warm," lamented one teacher. Preparation is "very poor," wrote another. "Students have been led to believe that high school is their 'admission ticket' to get into college."

"Reading is fundamental" for success in college, wrote a teacher, "and most of my students dislike reading and make no effort to read, either for recreation or for coursework." Their schools, some added, have been complicit in letting students slide by. "Most of our students are babied and passed along even if they don't meet the course requirements," wrote one teacher. The focus is all wrong, says another: "Too much energy is spent on short-term passing—and not enough energy on long-term college planning."

The fact is, students in these schools—and in very low-income communities across New York City—contend with tremendous academic and personal challenges. At most New York City high schools (84 percent of them in 2010), the majority of students had scored below grade level on their 8th grade math and English state tests. This can hinder teachers' efforts to ramp up the speed and rigor of their classes.

What's more, high school students in New York City often learn very late in the process that their grades and coursework limit their college choices to two-year community college degree programs. One senior on the Bushwick campus described her experience in high school: "When I first started, I thought high school was going to be fun. So, in 11th grade I got into trouble. That's when you realize you need to do something for your future."

Some students can improve their grades late in the game, recover missing credits and study hard for the most important Regents exams. But a very large number find their college options limited and change their goals to a technical school or a two-year college, with the hope of eventually transferring to a four-year degree program.

Knowing what it takes to be successful, or to at least have choices, requires good information about the process—"contextual knowledge," using Conley's term—but also good guidance and advisement to help students self-assess and adjust. The misalignment between what it takes to graduate high school and what it takes to be ready for college-level work leaves many students at a disadvantage. On the one hand, students are working towards meeting a set of graduation standards set out by the New York State Board of Regents. On the other hand, the City University of New York and other institutions of higher education have higher, more demanding standards. Most students are not aware of the difference until very late in their high school careers.

Among the collaboratives, two groups focused most heavily on helping students not only graduate, but be ready for college-level studies. These were the two organizations with the tightest

connections to the academic side of their schools, the Internationals Network for Public Schools, with Make The Road, at PAIHS in Elmhurst, and the Abyssinian Development Corporation at the Thurgood Marshall Academy Middle School.

At PAIHS, the collaborative participated in after-school tutoring sessions and Saturday academies for Regents test preparation. Staff also worked with students to prepare portfolios of their work, for colleges that require such submissions. College-student mentors from Baruch College also worked with dozens of students on their academic preparation.

At Thurgood Marshall Academy, the challenge was different. Middle school students have their college pathways heavily influenced but their choice of a high school. Those who end up in high schools with a college-prep orientation are more likely to receive the support they need to enter a four-year college. Students who perform poorly on middle school state achievement tests, have too many absences, or receive too little guidance in the high school choice process, begin high school at a significant disadvantage. One advantage at Thurgood Marshall Academy is that successful students in middle school are likely to move directly into the academy's upper school in 9th grade.

The Abyssinian Development Corporation focused on increasing the amount of time focused on learning, improving instruction and increasing rigor in the academic culture. The work included a summer program for incoming students, remedial help for students who had fallen behind, and enrichment opportunities including special math and science sessions to help students prepare for honors classes in both subjects.

The extended day program—or expanded learning time, as Abyssinian called it—includes additional instructional time in key subject areas, with more flexibility and time for questions and exploration. “The afternoon schedule, with smaller class size and activities that are more hands on for students, provides an environment where kids are not afraid saying: ‘I don’t know. I don’t understand. Someone help me to get it,’ said Principal Sean Davenport. “In the daytime you still have to have ... structure and a teacher still needs to maintain that type of classroom environment. In the afternoon they still have that, but this allows students to make mistakes more freely.”

“Every kid knows that they have the opportunity to come to you to get it right,” he added. “Expanded learning time does that. They realized that they are not in an after-school program. They are in a real program.” The true pay-off for this middle school work will be visible only after these students move into and through high school.

For students who entered high school in 2008, graduation requirements in New York City included completion of 44 credits of coursework in the major subject areas and electives, and passing, with a grade of 65 or higher, five of the New York State Regent exams. To qualify for an Advanced Regents diploma, students must have taken three years of a foreign language and four additional Regent exams.

These requirements were more rigorous than in past years, so many city high schools devoted extra time to helping students prepare for their Regents exams. If students scored well on the math and English Language Arts Regents tests, they could bypass CUNY's remediation requirements. This is a big boost: students who enroll as CUNY freshmen able to take courses for college credit are far more likely to finish a degree than those who must take remedial courses after high school. Student performance on Regents tests, then, is a very important element of college readiness in New York.

The city Department of Education recently implemented two new high school accountability metrics for college readiness. These were meant to measure how well students were prepared for life after high school on the basis of passing advanced courses, meeting English and math standards, and enrolling in a post-secondary institution.

Each high school received a college readiness index score based upon how well its students collectively performed on key measures, including the percentage of students who completed approved rigorous courses, the post-secondary college and career rates, and the number of students capable of enrolling at CUNY without remediation.

In the high schools participating in all four collaboratives, a substantial number of students have access to—and are passing—college-level and/or Advanced Placement courses. More than 36 percent of the students in the Class of 2012 at Flushing International High School passed a college-level course for college credit—well above the citywide average of 22 percent. This reflects a longstanding commitment by the Internationals Network for Public Schools to provide students access to CUNY courses. Other schools supported this kind of work as well: Between one-fifth and one-third of students in the Class of 2012 at eight College Ready Communities high schools passed some form of course or rigorous assessment defined by the city Department of Education as a “College and Career Preparatory Course.” While several of the schools performed lower than the citywide average on this metric, increasing the number of true college preparatory courses has become a priority at most of the schools. (See Table 2, page 11.)

On the Regents scores, the results are mixed. Each successive cohort of students at the College Ready Communities high schools has performed better than its predecessors on the New York State English Language Arts (ELA) Regents test. While this improvement cannot be directly attributed to the work of the College Ready Communities initiative, it does appear to reflect a growing effort across the high schools to boost achievement beyond what is required of students simply for graduation.

In 2011 (the most recent data available), no College Ready Communities high school graduates scored below 55 on the ELA Regents. Only a very small percentage scored below 65, and more than 40 percent of students scored above 75, which is the cutoff that exempts students from remediation in CUNY colleges. The number of graduates scoring 75 or above on their ELA Regents exams has been rising steadily from 2009 to 2011.

Table 10: Percent of graduates earning 75 or higher on ELA Regents exam

School	2009	2010	2011
Academy for Environmental Leadership	N/A	55%	66%
Academy of Urban Planning	41%	41%	52%
Bushwick School for Social Justice	36%	43%	43%
Cypress Hills Collegiate Preparatory School	N/A	34%	53%
Franklin K Lane High School	27%	27%	35%
Flushing High School	47%	42%	62%
Flushing International High School	19%	30%	50%
Thurgood Marshall Academy HS	59%	65%	84%

Source: New York City Department of Education Regents test data, 2009-2011

On the math Regents, fewer graduates of College Ready Communities high schools scored in the lowest ranges of math scores in 2011 than in past years, and more scored in the middle range. This result is cautiously optimistic, because it shows that more students were nearing the threshold above which they will not require remediation.

Nonetheless, few 2010 and 2011 graduates from College Ready Communities high schools earned Advanced Regents diplomas, the highest possible diploma a student can achieve. The rigor of the course load required to achieve an Advanced Regents diploma has been shown to better prepare students for college. Of the College Ready Communities schools with graduating classes in 2011, only Flushing High School had an Advanced Regents rate above 5 percent.

Strategy 4: College Knowledge and Early Awareness

Most New York City high schools orient students to college only very late in the process, rarely before 11th grade. For most 9th and 10th graders, the focus of academic counseling—and counseling in general—is on completing high school with enough course credits to graduate. If a school’s culture isn’t college-oriented, any early information provided to students about college is unlikely to be heard amid the general noise of high school. It is not that college information does not come their way, but that it is not personalized or personally meaningful, and students whose families have little or no experience of higher education don’t have any useful context.

When a student develops early awareness about college, she comes to understand the kinds of experiences that will help prepare her for college. She knows about the importance of good grades and attendance as early as 9th grade, and she understand the types of courses that will give her an advantage in applying to college. She knows about college options, including the different types of higher education, the possible degree programs and majors, and the types of campuses that foster different kinds of college experiences. She understands how college connects to careers. And she knows how to find guidance in applying both to the colleges themselves and for financial aid.

During the three years of College Ready Communities, we documented a growing awareness of college among students at each grade level. We observed increasingly frequent presentations of college-related material in the schools, year after year. The presence of the initiative, along with a growing emphasis on college readiness by the city's Department of Education, increased the visibility, pervasiveness and availability of college-related information in both the middle and high schools where College Ready Communities collaboratives were active. Schools put up college readiness timelines in hallways, showing students what they needed to be doing at each grade level in order to be prepared for college. Charts appeared showing the locations of CUNY and SUNY colleges. Posters informed students about SAT exams and reminded them to file their financial aid applications. One principal even posted—and updated—a color-coded list of students showing whether or not they were on-track to graduate and become college ready. The color code was based on their credits earned and their Regents exam scores. Green meant they were well on their way.

In particular, our student surveys during 10th and 11th grade revealed not only very high expectations among students, but also a steadily growing awareness of the requirements for college. Some of the expectations were not realistic or accurate, but this also improved from year to year and survey to survey.

We surveyed students twice when they were in 10th grade and again when they were in 11th grade, asking among other things how far they expected to go in school and what they hoped to do for work later in life. From one year to the next, the number of students saying that they expected to go to college (and beyond) were slightly higher than the national average.

While the students had high aspirations, only a few initially realized that their path in higher education would most likely begin in community college.³⁰ As the prospect of college came closer and their own academic standing perhaps became more clear, a growing percentage came to see a two-year community college as their goal, while somewhat fewer saw four-year college or a professional degree as a realistic expectation. Others became less certain about what was possible: the percentage of students who said “don't know” more than doubled.

³⁰ According to recent reports from the NYC Department of Education, more than half of the graduates from College Ready Communities schools at least initially attended one of the City University colleges, and in most cases 60 percent or more of those students started at the community college level. (Where Are They Now reports, cohorts 2009-2011).

Table 11: Ultimately, how far do you expect to go in school?

	2010-11 10th Graders		2011-12 11th Graders	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
High School diploma	21	4.7	17	4.9
GED	9	2.0	1	.3
Technical training (computers, arts, medical technician)	21	4.7	23	6.6
Two-year Community College	43	9.6	45	12.9
Four-year college degree	186	41.4	134	38.3
Professional degree (doctor, lawyer)	125	27.8	86	24.6
Don't know	20	4.5	34	9.7
Multiple or blank	24	5.3	10	2.9
Total	449	100	350	100

Source: Surveys administered by Center for New York City Affairs

The 11th grade students at all of the schools we surveyed revealed that their parents expected great things of them. This included students whose parents and family did not attend college themselves. Exactly two-thirds of the 11th graders we surveyed said that their parents expected them to complete at least a 4-year college degree. More than one-third said their parents expected them to earn professional graduate degrees. These parental expectations fit well with our interviews with 12th graders. “My generation is the first to go to college, so my parents motivate me,” one senior told us. Another added, “My parents want me to do better than they did. My dad said, ‘Don’t struggle like I did, go to college.’” Not surprisingly, a very high percentage of the students who persist in high school as far as 12th grade said they had supportive parents.

Nonetheless, some parents set limits. “My dad wanted me to stay close, so I applied only to Cornell,” responded one student when we asked about her family’s involvement. Another student on the Lane campus said, “My parents decided that I have to be near them.” For some 12th graders, the lack of family experience of college posed a challenge. “They don’t want me to go to college, and I’m not sure if I’m going or not,” said one immigrant senior. “It’s hard to convince them because they didn’t go to college.”

In our survey, there was also a change toward greater realism in students’ career aspirations as they advanced from 10th to 11th grade. Fewer students saw themselves becoming professional athletes, and the proportion of students who saw themselves working in technology, business or the arts more than doubled.

Table 12: What type of job or career do you expect to have in the future?

	2010-11 10 th Graders		2011-12 11 th Graders	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Medical, law or other profession	136	30.3	92	26.3
Other	33	7.3	31	8.9
Technology or Computers	18	4.0	36	10.3
Teaching or Education	27	6.0	12	3.4
Law Enforcement or Military	37	8.2	25	7.1
Arts or Entertainment	11	2.4	22	6.3
Service or Hospitality	26	5.8	11	3.1
Professional Athlete	52	11.6	19	5.4
Business	29	6.5	47	13.4
Don't know	42	9.4	37	10.6
Multiple or blank	38	8.4	18	5.1
Total	449	100	350	100

Source: Surveys administered by Center for New York City Affairs

In a focus group interview with 12th grade students, one student spoke about the interplay between her aspirations and the reality of college and careers. “When I was younger, I thought I was going to get this magical career. When you are in middle school, you can dream what you are going to be. But when you’re older, reality sets in.”

Generally, the students at the College Ready Communities high schools said they felt supported in their college expectations by their teachers. More than three-quarters of 11th grade students (76.9 percent) answering our survey identified teachers as the source of “a lot of information about college”—even more so than school guidance counselors. And almost 88 percent of the 11th grade students answered “yes” when asked “Do you think your teachers expect most of the students in your school to go to college.” In the later surveys, nine out of 10 students also reported that their teachers spoke with them about what they needed to do to get into college.

“We have students who have great aspirations,” explained the site coordinator for Make The Road New York at PAIHS in Elmhurst. “You hear they want to go to Columbia, Harvard, Stanford, Yale and Princeton, which is amazing. And it’s good that my students have such great dreams. However, there is also a reality piece in terms of where they stand academically. Something we emphasize is to look more at safety and target schools, knowing that there are schools that are going to be considered reach schools....”

“When our students’ SAT scores are not so great, how could you tell them that they could definitely do that, but also give them other options? You might advise them to go to a community college and then transfer to a four-year school, for example. And there are students that are very open to building this pathway.”

The challenge for most of these schools has been to create a balance between reinforcing students' high aspirations, helping them understand what it takes to truly be ready for college, and, at the same time, help them simply to get through high school. Most of the graduates of these high schools—and of most New York City high schools—are not academically prepared for college, and must take remedial courses in order to enroll in a CUNY degree program. This, too, has to be communicated without undermining students' high hopes.

The application process itself is daunting. College Ready Communities collaboratives recognized that, in order for students to identify appropriate and suitable colleges, develop strong personal statements and narratives for their applications, and fully understand the other components of the college application process, students needed to begin to prepare by 11th grade at the latest.

College visits and tours played an important role highlighting the differences between high school and college, in making their abstract vision of college concrete, and helping to set specific criteria for selecting colleges, according to the students we interviewed. Among the students we surveyed at six high schools in May of their junior year, 56 percent said they had visited a college with their school. Several had visited a college with a community organization, and 11 percent went with a family member. Most had also spoken with a representative from a community-based organization about going to college. Remarkably, more than 80 percent of the 8th graders surveyed at Thurgood Marshall Academy said they had already visited a college. College visits are scheduled weekly as part of the academy's summer bridge program.

Table 13: Have you visited a college?

	2010-11 10th Graders		2011-12 11th Graders	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	246	54.8	242	69.1
No	175	39.0	101	28.9
Multiple	2	.4	0	0
Blank	26	5.8	7	2.0
Total	449	100	350	100

Source: Surveys administered by Center for New York City Affairs

The Student Success Centers offered early awareness workshops to 9th and 10th grade students to introduce the idea of college and address misconceptions. Their “Myth Busters” workshop was one example of how youth leaders in Student Success Center schools built awareness among the younger students. Each spring, Cypress Hills organized teams of college counselors and student youth leaders to meet all of the 9th grade classes and begin a conversation about what they knew, or thought they

knew, about college. For many of the students attending one of the four small high schools on the campus, the idea of college was a somewhat abstract notion in a community where many of the residents are foreign-born and only 8 percent of the adults have completed college.

One Friday just before lunch, more than a dozen 9th graders sat at desks facing DeSean, the school's college counselor, and Shevanna, a 12th grade student youth leader from the Student Success Center at the Lane campus. After a warm-up exercise got all of the students on their feet, the main activity of the morning was called "Agree or Disagree." DeSean and Shevanna read the students a series of statements related to college, and they had to decide whether they agreed, disagreed or were unsure by moving to one side of the room or the other (the "unsure" stand in the middle). "There are not many people to talk with about college," DeSean reads aloud. Most students lingered in that unsure middle of the room before everyone eventually disagreed. A few of the students affirmed there were lots of people to speak with, "and there's the [Student Success] Center downstairs," one of them pointed out.

They read eight statements and, for each one, asked students if they agreed, disagreed, or were unsure. Some statements, such as "College is just like high school," and "People who go to college make more money than people who don't," generated active discussions. Students brought up examples of people who didn't go to college but were successful. Nonetheless, the students ended up agreeing that college would give them more options, and DeSean then explained that college graduates make as much as a million dollars more in their lifetime than those who finish only high school. Statements about paying for college, eligibility for undocumented immigrants, and the importance of course grades and SAT test scores brought a more serious mood to the group. One young man said he knew the SAT was some kind of test. He asked, "What kind of score do you need to get into an Ivy League school?"

It was hard to tell from his expression what he thought of the answer, which explained the SAT scoring system and how most four-year colleges expect applicants to have high scores. On the other questions, students were mostly both unsure and curious. At the end of the session, DeSean invited students to come down to the Student Success Center during lunch or after school. "You don't have to wait until 12th grade," he told them. One student's arm shot up enthusiastically and she asked, "Can I come down today?" The young woman stayed behind to talk with Shevanna for a few minutes.

"We want to start the conversation from where they are about college and what they understand, and build on that," Shevanna said later. "They know about college, but they don't know about what they need to do to get there and be successful," DeSean added. "That's our job, to give them that information and help them work through the steps."

Meanwhile, at PAIHS in Elmhurst, the collaborative developed early awareness workshops for 9th and 10th graders, including regular advisory sessions with two youth leaders trained by Make The Road New York. PAIHS students took part in college tours and spent time with college-age mentors. These mentors, Baruch College student volunteers organized by the Latino Youth in

Higher Education Program (LYHEP), put together college fairs and provided dozens of PAIHS students with personal guidance and tutoring. They often met with students informally to discuss their own college experiences, the challenges of finding financial aid and the hurdles that some immigrant young people face in the American system of higher education and the job market. The PAIHS students said they viewed the LYHEP volunteers as role models, and said they were easily accessible and approachable. LYHEP was most active at Elmhurst, but in year two of College Ready Communities, two mentors from Baruch College also spent time at PAIHS Monroe in the Bronx..

Ultimately, by the end of 11th grade, students in several of the College Ready Communities high schools showed measurable improvements in critical areas of college knowledge. Our series of surveys of large cohorts of students at six high schools found a growing understanding of the academic and procedural requirements of college applications and acceptance, as well as improved awareness of which colleges were most appropriate and an increase in knowledge about the likely cost of college and how to seek financial aid. Students attributed much of this improvement to their interactions with counseling from adults and peer leaders, including the guidance staff from both the schools and the community organizations.

Strategy 5: Youth Development and Peer Leadership

The intense challenges high school students face are not exclusively academic. Their brains and bodies are developing rapidly. Social requirements and complicated peer relationships are evolving. For many of the students in the College Ready Communities schools, hurdles of immigration, acculturation and family were woven through all of this. What's more, by 11th grade, students are speedily approaching a key decision point in their lives, asked to choose a pathway beyond high school. The list of options contains both the familiar and the unknown, and many of the challenges are abstract and daunting.

Engagement in youth development activities can benefit young people's confidence, strengthen aspirations, improve school attendance and retention, and clarify their personal understanding of academic and personal success while helping them to draw connections between their plans and their actions.³¹ There are many parallels between so-called "non-cognitive" college readiness skills and behaviors identified by researchers and the important competencies nurtured through youth development programs. These include qualities such as character-building, developing personal connections, contributing to the community.³² They also include more personal characteristics, such as the ability to thrive, adapt, respond and learn in the midst of changing circumstances, as well as long range goal-setting. Emotional and behavioral competence help students to strengthen relationships, control impulses and respond effectively to criticism.

³¹ Conley, D., (2007), Redefining College Readiness, American Youth Policy Forum.

³² Pittman, K., Irby, M., Tolman, J., Yohalem, N., & Ferber, T. (2003). Preventing Problems, Promoting Development, Encouraging Engagement: Competing Priorities or Inseparable Goals?. Washington, DC: The Forum for Youth Investment, Impact Strategies, Inc.

Self-efficacy—that is, taking action to achieve one’s own goals—as well as developing a positive personal identity and taking action to help others are all social skills and competencies with real life application.³³ From their research on the experience of black students attending mostly white college campuses, Sedlacek and Brooks created a similar list of non-cognitive traits and characteristics that are important for college readiness, including positive self-concept or self-confidence; realistic self-appraisal (similar to Conley’s notion of self-monitoring); the capacity to understand and deal with racism; community service and successful leadership experience; and the ability to focus on long-range goals.³⁴ While the rigors of the high school curriculum allow little time for this kind of work, many community organizations—particularly those with a youth development focus—can devote time and resources to helping young people develop these traits.

At the start of the College Ready Communities initiative, the principal at Flushing International High School spoke about the need to have both a strong youth development and academic learning strand in the high school curriculum. “I’ve seen schools do well with one or the other piece, but rarely do I see them do both parts well,” he observed.

His successor witnessed the impact of Project College Bound and its youth leadership development model in many aspects of school life. “There were a lot of benefits we got from the partnership,” the new principal told us during year three of the initiative. “The group has become very much a part of our school culture. They’ve been involved in some of our school-wide campaigns.... It helped our staff to start thinking about college and career readiness across the board. Now, the 9th and 10th grade teachers are interested and want to know more of what they could do.”

More than 40 students volunteered to take part in Project College Bound's Asian American Student Advocacy Project (ASAP). They participated in and led student workshops and trainings, and they took part in school campaigns on racism, college awareness and other issues. ASAP leaders met with local elected officials, including City Councilmember Peter Koo. They presented policymakers and administrators, such as representatives at Queens College with talks on issues facing many Asian and Pacific Islander students, including “model minority” stereotypes, the lack of representation in the curriculum and the harassment of immigrant students. Several ASAP students participated in a live web conference sponsored by the White House on issues affecting the Asian and Pacific Islander community, presenting research they had gathered on education and college access.

ASAP had college preparation as a regular thread, helping students to understand the process of college preparation and completing college applications, developing financial literacy workshops and understanding of how to pay for college, including FASFA and other financial aid training, and learning about college options and university life, with periodic visits to college campuses.

³³ Weissberg, R.P., Caplan, M.Z. and Sivo, P.J. (1989), “A new conceptual framework for establishing school-based social competence promotion programs.” In Bond, L.A., and Compas, B.E. (Eds) *Primary Prevention and Promotion in Schools*, Vol 12, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

³⁴ Sedlacek W.E., and Brooks, G.C., Jr. (1976), *Racism in American Education: A model for change*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall.

“When the new students came ... I don’t think they understood what ASAP is about,” said the site coordinator at Flushing International High School. “They knew that you learn leadership skills, they knew it’s for Asians, they knew that it’s about college readiness, but I don’t think they know that it’s about working on a campaign and how intense it may be.... They come in and they don’t understand what advocacy means. The term ‘advocacy’ is still very foreign to them. We always try and have them understand our model, college readiness and youth organizing stuff, because we see that we’re training immigrants, we’re training low-income people, whatever it may be, to be advocates while strengthening their communities and that process makes them college and post-high school ready.” Several ASAP members told us in interviews that the youth leadership experience gave them more confidence about pursuing their own goals, and confidence to help other students and the larger community.

Many students told us that the opportunity to help their peers was a powerful experience. Youth leaders in the Student Success Centers, for example, spoke of how they made sure their friends had begun the college application process, and then proceeded to develop larger networks, drawing other students in to the centers and encouraging them to participate.

Through their training and experience as youth leaders at the Student Success Centers, students had opportunities to plan and set goals for themselves, and to hold themselves accountable for achieving those personal goals. Project College Bound’s ASAP and Brotherhood/Sister Sol’s programs both included goal setting, reflection and self-assessment as key activities. More broadly, youth development activities allowed students to see themselves as members of a cohesive and productive group.

The community organizations implemented youth development and youth leadership programs using small-group work and trainings; self-assessment and goals-clarification activities, and community service and peer leadership projects. While relatively small in the total numbers of participants, College Ready Communities youth development and leadership work promoted attention to college readiness in the schools and influenced the school culture, while also providing additional resources to support college aspirations and college going—especially in those critical months before applications were due.

Youth leaders for the Student Success Centers were trained over the summer by CARA (College Access Research in Action), using the Goddard Center OPTIONS model to learn about youth advocacy, the college and financial aid application process, and importantly, peer counseling strategies. In school, these students were easily accessible and shared college knowledge with students and teachers through workshops, classes, informal conversations and school social networks. They also sought out students who were missing pieces of their applications package, who had pending deadlines or who needed additional encouragement or motivation to continue to move forward. In the centers, the youth leaders provided technical assistance and support for students who came in during their free periods to complete their applications.

Not every youth leader viewed him or herself as a leader prior to joining the Student Success Center team. The work often began simply as a job, but many of the students rose to new expectations. Through the combination of training and experience, the leaders learned how to manage their time, speak before groups of students, work closely with adults and assume a new level of responsibility.

The youth development groups in Flushing, at the Lane campus and Thurgood Marshall Academy offered students weekly activities to support personal growth and skills development as well as community service opportunities. The groups, often led by students themselves, became safe places where students could address the challenges that confronted them in school and in their personal lives, including their resident status, English language skills or family expectations. The discussions helped students to clarify and articulate their goals, create short term and long term plans, and receive support from the group in carrying them out.

At the middle school, Thurgood Marshall Academy partnered with Brotherhood/Sister Sol to offer youth development programming during and after school. Working with selected students, the activities helped students develop critical thinking and problem solving skills, develop their own voices as self-advocates, and learn about the community. During extended learning time, the school staff incorporated a youth development approach into each of the activities, whether academic or enrichment-focused. The Abyssinian Development Corporation helped establish collaborations outside the school to provide students with opportunities for community service projects. The extended day program collaborated with five teachers, guidance counselors, and an after-school program coordinator to offer students “intimate experiences” of college. By the ninth grade, most students at the academy had already gone on several college visits.

At several schools, the leadership program opportunities reached beyond the classroom and school to include participation in larger educational, cultural and community forums. The youth leaders in the Student Success Centers participated in citywide activities, meeting with peers from other schools to take part in projects focused on improving college access and organizing for immigrant rights—including the DREAM Act campaign organized in part by Make The Road New York. One student summed up this aspect of the program: “This was to encourage us to be leaders, to encourage us to take the step to stand for what we believe.”

The College Ready Communities initiative illuminated the extent to which college readiness includes a bundle of overlapping attitudes, skills and behaviors that go well beyond academic learning. Preparing for the more demanding, ambitious and self-directed work of college, and developing the perseverance required to meet the challenges of higher education, are fundamental to success—but not generally taught in high school. Community-based organizations with extensive experience in youth development, leadership and community organizing were natural allies for the schools in fostering these competencies, and in the process supported college readiness. The result was a cadre of students providing peer leadership in the college process; advocating for themselves and each other, elevating their expectations and understanding what it takes to get into college—while slowly changing the culture of their schools.

Strategy 6: Gathering Resources to Support College Readiness

The community development corporations and advocacy organizations that participated in College Ready Communities brought with them substantial experience in fundraising as well as identifying and coordinating programs and volunteers. All of them, to different degrees, deployed this expertise to secure a vast array of additional resources to the schools and their students and families. The groups built new relationships with CUNY and other colleges; they developed programs on financial literacy and assistance, they brought in volunteers from colleges and elsewhere to help with the application process, and in many cases they won substantial outside funding—beyond that provided by the initiative itself—to boost college-prep services and change college culture across the campuses and schools.

For the students at the Pan American International High School at Monroe, the arrival of a new college advisor was an unexpected gift. The Helmsley Foundation National College Advising Corps partnered with the Internationals Network and PAIHS to place a recent graduate from New York University in the school as an intern for two years to help students navigate the complex process of college admissions and matriculation and securing financial aid. The 28 seniors in the first graduating class had the guidance and support of a college advisor in addition to working with a part-time coach from SoBRO, as well as their school guidance counselor and their 12th grade English teacher. For these first-generation college bound students, this unusual level of assistance made all the difference, helping them find a good college fit, identify the financial aid they needed to make it to college and overcome other hurdles common for immigrant students finishing high school.

Working together, the college team at PAIHS helped students develop and revise their college essays and applications and guided them through the financial aid process. The SoBRO coach came from a background similar to many of the students. He could say, “I did this, you can too.” The college advisor sat with them at the computer terminal to help them double check their applications, making sure everything was complete before hitting “submit.” The guidance counselor made sure families were informed about their options and knew their commitments before they made them. One student, in 11th grade, had gone on all the college trips, attended the Saturday college readiness classes at Lehman College, took College Now courses at CUNY and completed an internship. “She came in last year not knowing English, she learned it. She finished top of her class,” said the counselor. “She was scared of the separation. We had to bring in her mother” to explain all of the options. “She got accepted into other colleges, but the money wasn’t as good. We explained to the mother, and she understood. She’s going to Russell Sage College in Troy, New York.”

The PAIHS project exemplifies the types and degree of support mustered by community groups across each of the College Ready Communities initiatives. In the high schools, each of the collaboratives helped students connect with CUNY colleges and take pre-college and college-level courses. Each raised additional funding for workshops and college guidance. And each sought to wrap additional services around the students and families.

Table 14: New resources brought to schools, students and families, by organizations

Organization	New Resource	Target Areas
Abyssinian Development Corporation	Private and foundation funds Federal Promise Neighborhoods grant	Expanded learning time Professional development Funding for college office
Cypress Hills Local Development Corp.	Federal TRIO grant MOUs with schools Volunteer mentors College Now/CUNY Sarah Lawrence College	College access College readiness Academic support Writing support
Internationals Network	In-kind network resources Volunteer mentors Guidance intern College Now at LaGuardia CC	School development College guidance College readiness
Make The Road NY	Volunteers Cooperative agreements CUNY at Home	Student applications College readiness
Asian Americans for Equality	Government and corporate grants	Adult literacy Parent resources Financial literacy
Coalition for Asian American Children and Families	Small grants Volunteers	Program for Asian youth Career fairs
SoBRO	Government grants	After school programs Job training (internships)

Table 15: New partnerships and resources, by collaborative

Resources and Partnerships	
Student Success Centers	Expanded guidance services via school contracts CUNY at Home (Math & English classes, fee waivers) Brooklyn Law School volunteers College Now/CUNY coordination SAT prep classes Summer Bridge to College support for graduates (CARA)
Project College Bound	Flushing Family Resource Center for parents (NYC DYCD) Financial Literacy and FAFSA counseling (Capital One Bank) College Now/CUNY Summer Bridge to College (Internationals Network and CARA)
Harlem Middle Schools	Capital One bank branch, financial literacy
Pan American International High Schools	College Bound Program at Lehman College Partnership with Latino Youth in Higher Education at Baruch College (LYHEP) College NOW/CUNY Helmsley Trust National College Advising Corp at NYU Summer Bridge to College (CARA)

The Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation signed memoranda of understanding with each of the four high schools on the Lane campus, defining in detail the services the Lane Student Success Center provided each school and the expectation that the schools themselves would support this work. The cost to each school was a fraction of what they would otherwise have paid for a part-time guidance counselor's salary, and principals saw the arrangement as a bargain for the quality and breadth of services they received. This entire structure was possible only because Cypress Hills LDC secured substantial outside funding, including a five-year TRIO grant from the federal Department of Education that supports college access for students in low-income communities. The schools themselves had to help pay for the services, thus assuring support and compliance on their part.

SoBRO supported the program at PAIHS using resources from two city-funded after school programs, which included homework help, tutoring, drama and arts workshops, and job readiness training which helped students develop portfolios of resumes and personal statements, which they could use for college applications and job searches.

AAFE secured multi-year private grants to support college readiness, financial literacy, parent engagement and services targeted to improving academic outcomes for English language learners and recent immigrants. The organization also has substantial government funding, including a three-year grant from the Department of Youth and Community Development that supports efforts to mobilize parent participation in the Flushing schools, including Parent Association meetings and other events.

Cypress Hills, Make the Road New York and the Internationals Network all coordinated or helped organize student participation in college-prep and college-level courses, including CUNY's College Now and CUNY at Home programs. Cypress Hills coordinated College Now courses provided on the Lane campus by certified high school teachers. The Student Success Center there organized SAT-preparation classes as well.

There are numerous examples where volunteer services, other in-kind services and cooperative agreements benefitted students. Volunteers worked with students to edit their personal narratives, mentor and tutor students in preparation for tests or portfolio presentations, guide them through internship experiences, speak about career opportunities and preparation, and share their own college experiences. Referral agreements allowed students and family members to participate and receive services at agency offices or through cooperative agreements with other community based organizations.

The Project College Bound financial literacy program, funded by Capital One, was highly valued by the teachers and became a core part of the culture at Flushing International High School. "It became part of the school culture. Students started coming by on their own. They know this was a service offered at the schools," explained the project coordinator.

A 12th grade advisor at one of the Bushwick campus schools spoke about their partnership with a CUNY program that brought students to the various university campuses. "It gave the kids the opportunity to visit the Community Colleges and meet their future mentors and counselors. I thought that was huge."

A Note on Parent Engagement

One of the initial objectives of College Ready Communities was to mobilize parents in support of their children's aspirations for higher education. Across many of the collaboratives and schools, part of the day-to-day work involved sharing information with parents and helping them understand the hurdles and opportunities their children face. Mobilizing parents to play a larger part in school life, however, proved difficult. Over the three years, the collaboratives accomplished relatively little in the way of parent organizing. Instead, direct services and information sharing were the primary vehicles for this work.

In most of the schools, parent-teacher meetings, monthly parent association meetings and other parent forums did not attract much participation. This was true both before and after the collaboratives became involved. In urban middle and high schools, parents must often balance school participation against work responsibilities and the demands of other children. Parents may also be discouraged by their adolescent children's desire for greater independence, and many parents are uncomfortable with the English language or with school itself, where they may have struggled themselves as teenagers. What's more, in New York City, high schools are often far from home.

The College Ready Communities initiatives found that parent events organized around on college-centered topics were not well-attended, especially in grades before senior year. While 77 percent of

11th graders on our student survey said their parents expected them to attend college, few of the parents we interviewed had the college knowledge or experience to actively support their children in the decision making or the application process. In most cases, students were expected to take the lead in the college process, gathering information, making decisions and completing the applications.

It was not uncommon to hear 12th grade students say, in our focus groups, that the decision was theirs, because it was their life. “I did everything on my own,” reported one student. “I talked to my mom briefly about it.” While many students said they had conversations with their parents around college, it was most often in relation to the financial aid applications, where family income information was required.

In the second year of the initiative, the collaboratives began to make adjustments in their parent engagement strategies. A growing number of parents attended school-based activities on topics that were of direct concern to them, including sessions on ESL and computers, or on adolescent development, immigrant workers’ rights and health care. The Pan American International High Schools surveyed parents about the topics for monthly workshops and developed annual presentations for them, integrating information about the high school academic program and the college process. Project College Bound focused on providing services and information that parents wanted, and once engaged, they shared other information with them. Through this process they identified about a dozen parent leaders who began to leverage more parent participation at the two schools.

Parents also responded to personal outreach and individually scheduled meetings with counselors that addressed student academic progress. These also incorporated college and career information. These meetings were either designed for every student—and thus not viewed by parents as likely to bring up negative issues about a child—or they were scheduled to address the concerns of particular parents. The Pan American International High Schools institutionalized this process, though it is time and labor intensive, and cover topics including the cost of college. Student Success Center staff also met frequently with individual parents to discuss financial aid packages, assuage particular parent concerns about sharing income information, or to mediate when student college choices conflict with parental concerns about their child living on a distant campus.

Ultimately, the community organizations learned to be as flexible and responsive as they could be in working with parents. In many cases the collaboratives brought a valuable understanding of culture and community into the schools. This, combined with access to direct services and programs, provided many parents with a level of comfort that made them more likely to engage in discussions about their children’s future.

IX. Conclusion and Update

Following three years of the College Ready Communities initiative, we found clear improvements in college access, readiness and culture in several schools. More students were applying to college, and the collaboratives had helped a growing number of students seek financial aid. Community organizations leveraged new resources, ranging from volunteers to huge federal grants, and built valuable new relationships with CUNY and other colleges. The collaboratives provided students with their first experience of college-level courses and college-prep programs. More students were applying to a wider variety of colleges, including a large increase in the number of students admitted to the State University of New York, thanks to improved guidance. Over three years, we saw growth in students' understanding of what it takes to get to college and succeed there. Finally, we observed notable changes in the supportive college culture in many of the schools.

At the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year, elements of the College Ready Communities collaboratives were incorporated into a new project, sponsored by the Local Initiative Support Corporation, named College Within Reach. At the same time, many of the students who were in 10th grade when College Ready Communities began were now making their way through their first year of college. In another year, we will begin to receive data from the city Department of Education that will show whether or not these students have persisted there. We will also learn whether a second cohort of graduates has enrolled in college at a higher rate than their predecessors.

In the meantime, we continue to see significant progress during the 2012-2013 school year. A higher percentage of graduating seniors completed and submitted college applications, compared to previous years. Larger numbers of federal financial aid applications were filed as well. College Within Reach has already served more than 1,200 seniors, assisting them with college applications, financial aid forms and counseling. It has provided financial literacy training for 170 students in the 9th through 11th grades, and engaged 350 parents in meetings related to college or financial aid.

As of March 15, 2013, 1,026 seniors in 11 high schools had submitted college applications, an increase of 5 percent over last year's end-of-year total for those high schools. As of April 12, 2013, 500 seniors had also completed their Free Applications for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) applications—a 3 percent increase over last year's to-date total.

While graduation rates have improved citywide and the number of young people pursuing college has grown each year, the fact remains that most New York City high school students are not academically prepared for college without remedial coursework. The vastly improved college access and peer leadership efforts deployed by the College Ready Communities collaboratives made a meaningful difference—but New York City has major challenges ahead in terms of increasing the academic preparation of its students. During the years of this project, awareness of these challenges has grown, as has the public clamor for improvement. In terms of improving college access, college knowledge and college-going culture, the College Ready Communities initiative helped reveal valuable steps that the city, its schools and the civic sector can take in the years to come.