

# SUCCEEDING IN THE CITY

A Report from the New York City Black and Latino Male High School Achievement Study



Graduate School of Education  
**PennGSE**

Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Message from the Project Director	1
Message from Chancellor Dennis M. Walcott	2
Message from the Open Society Foundations	3
Young Men of Color in Urban Schools	5
About the Expanded Success Initiative	7
The Research Process	9
The 40 High Schools	10
The Study Participants	12
Key Findings from High School Participants	15
Key Findings from College Students	25
Improving Student Success in Urban Education	33
The Research Team	40



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## ON THE FRONT COVER:

**Edgar Emmanuel Torres** (sophomore, Ursinus College) and **Lasana Ian Williams** (sophomore Siena College), 2012 graduates of Essex Street Academy.

This report can be downloaded in PDF (at no cost) from [www.gse.upenn.edu/equity/nycReport](http://www.gse.upenn.edu/equity/nycReport)



# MESSAGE FROM THE PROJECT DIRECTOR

I begin with a plea to the nation: please stop mischaracterizing young men of color as hopeless thugs who care nothing about their education, communities, and futures. Ways in which Black and Latino male teens, especially those who reside in America's largest cities, are persistently portrayed in media and elsewhere negatively affect society's expectations of them and, at times, their expectations of themselves. Visions of them in urban high schools are almost universally negative – they are expected to be the perpetrators of school violence and at the bottom of every statistical metric of educational excellence. Viewing these young men through deficit-colored lenses sustains a depressing, one-sided narrative about their social and educational outlook. They deserve to be seen differently, hence the purpose of this study.

This report is the first publication from the New York City Black and Latino Male High School Achievement Study, a project that entailed individual interviews with 415 students from 40 public high schools – 90 were enrolled in 44 colleges and universities, the rest were college-bound high school juniors and seniors. Understanding how these young men succeeded in and out of school, developed college aspirations, became college-ready, and navigated their ways to postsecondary education was the primary aim of this project. Instead of further amplifying deficits and documenting failures in urban schools, 12 Black and Latino male researchers from the University of Pennsylvania and I chose to study students who figured out how to foster productive relationships, resist pressures to join gangs and drop out of high school, and succeed in environments cyclically disadvantaged by structural inequities. Albeit important, we decided against studying factors that lead to underachievement and alarmingly high dropout rates. More interesting to us were the positive effects of families, communities, teachers, school leaders, and educational policies and practices on student achievement. We believed more could be learned about high school success in urban contexts from young men who have actually been successful, as opposed to their lower-performing peers who are repeatedly the focus of social science and educational research. Some of what

we learned is presented herein.

This 40-school study was made possible through a grant from the Open Society Foundations. I am grateful that Shawn Dove deemed our research worthy of investment. I also appreciate the myriad ways Julian Cohen, Joshua Thomases, Victoria Crispin, Michelle Paladino, Noel De La Rosa, and others at the NYC Department of Education supported this project. I am especially indebted to Paul Forbes, Director of the Expanded Success Initiative, for his help and amazing partnership at every juncture in this experience. I also recognize Shawn K. Hill, Jonathan Berhanu, Wayne Thomas Wilson Jr., Carlos Burgos, Joyce Cook, Coral Haas, Susan Scheerbaum, Leonor Tendido, and Dr. Michael D. Hannon for their assistance. Executing this study with such excellence and efficiency would have been impossible without the 12 Penn GSE researchers who traveled with me to NYC each week for data collection and devoted their summer to data analysis. Their names are listed on Page 40. Fond memories of our extraordinary teamwork will gratify me for the rest of my career.

Above all, I proudly salute the 415 Black and Latino male students who participated in this study – their educational trajectories are inspiring, instructive, and praiseworthy. My teammates and I are beyond grateful for the access each young man gave us to his life and his willingness to share strategies that will undoubtedly help improve rates of success for others like him. I am proud of who they are and inspired by the extraordinary college-educated men they are destined to become. No one has taught me more about high school achievement and succeeding in the city than them.

Thank you for taking time to read this report; feel free to share it with others who may find it interesting and useful. Please direct your questions, feedback,

and reactions to our team at [equity@gse.upenn.edu](mailto:equity@gse.upenn.edu). I hope this report inspires you to see young men of color and the urban schools they attend differently.

Warmest regards,

**Professor Shaun R. Harper, Ph.D.**

Director  
Center for the Study of Race and Equity  
in Education, University of Pennsylvania

*The New York City Black and Latino Male High School Achievement Study is Dr. Harper's second major research project on successful young men of color. His National Black Male College Achievement Study, which included students attending 42 colleges and universities in 20 states, remains the largest-ever qualitative study of Black undergraduate men. A report from that project is also available on the Center's website.*



## MESSAGE FROM CHANCELLOR DENNIS M. WALCOTT



*Chancellor Walcott leads a system of more than 1,700 public schools with 1.1 million students, 136,000 employees, and a \$23 billion budget. Building on Mayor Bloomberg's Children First reforms, Chancellor Walcott is committed to cultivating teacher talent, expanding school choices for families so that students attend schools that best meet their individual needs, creating strong partnerships with parents, and preparing students to graduate from high school and succeed in college and careers.*

Over the last decade, under the leadership of Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, we have transformed the educational landscape in New York City. Since 2002, we have increased options for students and families by opening 656 new small schools and creating 126,000 new seats for students. The overall four-year graduation rate has steadily risen to 65% since 2005, including for Black and Latino young men.

Presented in this report are major findings from a comprehensive qualitative study of young men of color in 40 New York City high schools. It identifies enablers of their academic success and furthers our commitment – through the Expanded Success Initiative – to examining what truly works to graduate college and career ready Black and Latino students. Through schools participating in our Expanded Success Initiative, we will learn even more ways to dramatically increase outcomes for these and other students.

Thirteen researchers from the University of Pennsylvania interviewed over 400 students who have risen up in their communities and explored how our schools played a role in shaping who these young men are and will become. Participants in this study (mostly high school juniors and seniors when they were interviewed) were young students in our early childhood classrooms when the mayoral administration began in 2002. The young men in this study stand out as beneficiaries of the bold efforts we started then, having benefited from new autonomies granted to school leaders who were empowered to make school-level decisions about curriculum, culture, and hiring. As these young men progressed through middle school and into high school, they benefited from greater school choice.

When these young men applied to high school, the overwhelming majority of their families selected small schools – 37 of the 40 Expanded Success Initiative schools serve fewer than 600 students. They chose to join communities that would recognize who they were and, more importantly, would invest in their potential. These schools

ranged in contemporary themes, from science and sports management, to law enforcement and performing arts. Regardless of the theme of their school, these successful young men joined educational environments that nurtured their learning, resilience, and curiosity. We are now seeing them grow into leaders, problem solvers, and critical thinkers, in part because their schools cultivated their academic and personal behaviors. Additionally, through the Common Core, schools are raising academic standards so that even more students enter college and careers prepared with the skills to succeed.

We still have a lot to accomplish on behalf of the extraordinary Black and Latino male students who participated in this study. We owe it to them to strengthen our mission and continue our efforts to graduate more students who are college and career ready. Although this publication only captures a small segment of our progress in New York City, I share the report with great pride and as an introduction to these talented young men who will become our future innovators, visionaries, and leaders.

Sincerely,

**Dennis M. Walcott**  
Chancellor  
New York City Department of Education

# MESSAGE FROM THE OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS

When the Open Society Foundations launched the Campaign for Black Male Achievement in 2008 to address the economic, political, social, and educational exclusion of Black men and boys from the American mainstream, it was clear to the Campaign's leadership that we could not successfully advance a vision for Black male achievement without investing in efforts that promote educational equity and ensure Black boys are afforded opportunities to excel academically, to prepare for college, and to learn skills essential for productive lives and careers. What was also crystal clear to us was that we needed to be intentional in approaching our strategy with an asset-based mindset and messaging. Contrary to much of the public discourse, our vision for the work has been rooted in an understanding that there is nothing "wrong" with Black boys in America, and that it is indeed misguided policies and inequitable practices that fuel racial disparities in public education.

In 2011, when the opportunity was presented to the Open Society Foundations to partner with Bloomberg Philanthropies and the City of New York to launch the Young Men's Initiative (YMI) – the nation's most comprehensive effort to improve life outcomes for Black and Latino young men across several key indicators – we were especially excited about the Expanded Success Initiative (ESI) component of YMI. The prospect of demonstrating how to increase the college and career readiness of thousands of Black and Latino young men in 40 public high schools across New York City clearly aligned with our risk-taking, entrepreneurial approach to grantmaking.

Recycling hopeless, deficit narratives about young men of color and the schools they attend does not offer solutions for the philanthropic sector to invest in or promote. This is why I am absolutely thrilled about the report you are reading and will hopefully share widely. Led by the brilliant and insightful approach of Dr. Shaun R. Harper, along with his team of researchers from the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education, this report seeks to reveal what winning looks like for over 400 Black and Latino young men who attended the 40 ESI high

schools. What you are about to read reflects the vision, values, and fortitude of students who reveal to the nation how they were able to change the odds of their educational trajectories. What we learn from these young men should be promoted and reinforced in not only school districts across America, but in the collective consciousness of teachers, administrators, policymakers, researchers, parents, and others who care about the educational success of our nation's Black and Latino young men.

The Open Society Foundations is grateful for Dr. Harper's work and truly appreciates that he saw fit to put a dozen Black and Latino male researchers in front of the 415 young men who were interviewed for this study. We are also thankful for our partners at the NYC Department of Education and Fund for Public Schools who are all going the extra mile to ensure that ESI will have a historic impact on demonstrating how to increase the college and career readiness of Black and Latino male high school graduates. And while we have only completed the first full school year of ESI, it is not too early to acknowledge the leadership of the Open Society Foundations U.S. Programs, which has elevated expectations in the field of philanthropy about what it means to boldly respond to how America views, values, and invests in Black boys and other young men of color.

Through the Campaign for Black Male Achievement and our ongoing support of the NYC Young Men's Initiative (including ESI), the Open Society Foundations will maintain a firm commitment to confronting what we have identified as a formidable challenge to an open society. Our investment in projects that improve the lives of young men of color sends a critical signal to our society that we cannot exclude and subjugate broad segments of our citizenry without damaging democracy and open society values for all. Fortunately, this report advances these same values. I therefore applaud its authors and the

415 Black and Latino male students on whom it is based.

Many blessings,

**Shawn Dove**

Manager

Campaign for Black Male Achievement  
Open Society Foundations U.S. Programs

*Shawn Dove joined the Open Society Foundations in 2008 to launch and lead the Campaign for Black Male Achievement. He has over 25 years of youth development, education, and community-building experience designing and managing national and local programs, including serving as one of the first leaders of New York City's Beacon Schools movement during his tenure with the Harlem Children's Zone.*



## PUTTING STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER STAGE

Launched by Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg in 2011, the NYC Young Men's Initiative (YMI) is a multidimensional effort that aims to address education, health, criminal justice, and employment disparities that disproportionately affect Black and Latino males. More than \$43 million in annual investments from public and private sources fund YMI.





# YOUNG MEN OF COLOR IN URBAN SCHOOLS

## Beyond Deficit Narratives and Depressing Statistics

Their futures are hopeless. All but a few will remain trapped in generational cycles of poverty and crime-infested neighborhoods. Their lazy, drug-addicted, government-dependent single parents care little about their schooling. Consequently, they inherit from their families and communities a staunch carelessness for learning and educational attainment. More appealing to them are guns, gangs, fast money, and one pair of career options (either becoming rappers or professional athletes). They are to be feared, stopped and frisked, and mass incarcerated, as they are the antithesis of law-abiding citizens. When they show up to school (which isn't very often), administrators and teachers should expect them to be disengaged, disrespectful, unprepared, underperforming, and violent. For sure, they are most likely to drop out of high school and least likely to enroll in college. This caricature of young men of color in urban contexts is both pervasive and longstanding. It also is one-sided, terribly racist, and far from universal.

"The careful and strategic construction of Black males as jesters, clowns, entertainers, sex-crazed brutes, violent hustlers, and law-breaking thugs was centuries in the making" (Howard, Flenbaugh, & Terry, 2012, p. 98). Brown (2011) discovered that the same pathological narrative about Black men has been recycled in social science and educational research since the 1930s. Similarly, despite tremendous diversity among them, Noguera and Hurtado (2012) maintain that Latino men are routinely imagined, researched, and misrepresented in ways that are dehumanizing and monolithic. They also acknowledge an imbalance in the literature on men of color. Accordingly, in comparison to scholarship on Black American men, considerably less has been published about Latino men in U.S. social contexts. But like their Black counterparts, what has been written about Latino men is one-dimensional, almost entirely negative.

Doom and gloom statistics about these two groups are seemingly endless; there are surely enough to fill these 40 pages and dozens (perhaps hundreds) of books. Because

this report is about Black and Latino male student success, not much space is devoted to rehashing depressing data – in fact, we do so only in these two pages. Here are a half dozen troubling statistics about young men of color and the schools they attend:

- Based on their analysis of data from the U.S. Department of Education's Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey, Sáenz and Ponjuan (2011) report that 49.5% of Black and 29.6% of Latino male students in grades 6-12 had been suspended from school, compared to 21.3% of their White male peers. Furthermore, Black boys had been expelled at a rate 13 times higher than that of White boys.
- In comparison to their same-race female peers and White students, young men of color are more often misdiagnosed and overrepresented in special education. For example, the representation of Black boys in special education (excluding gifted and talented programs) is more than twice their representation in the overall public school population (Thomas & Stevenson, 2009).
- Of 12,532 respondents to the National Crime Victimization Survey School Crime Supplement, 47.2% of Black and 43.2% of Latino students were more than twice as likely than were White students to report that gangs were present at their schools (Toldson, 2011). Over 90% of students in the sample attended public schools.
- Nationally, 52% of Black and 58% of Latino males graduated in four years from high schools where they began as ninth graders, compared to 78% of their White male classmates (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012). In 38 states and the District of Columbia, high school graduation rates for Black males were lowest among

both sexes and all racial groups. Rates for Latino men were lowest in 11 states.

- Across all postsecondary degree levels (from associate's through doctoral), women enroll in higher numbers and earn degrees at rates higher than their male counterparts; these sex gaps are more pronounced for Black and Latino students than they are for other racial groups. In 2011, 36.9% of Black undergraduates at U.S. colleges and universities were men, and male students comprised 42.3% of Latino undergraduate enrollments (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Moreover, women earned 64.9% of associate's degrees and 63.4% of bachelor's degrees awarded to Black and Latino students in 2011.
- Across four cohorts of Black male undergraduates at public four-year colleges and universities, 33.3% earned bachelor's degrees within six years from the institutions at which they started as freshmen, compared to 48.1% of students overall (Harper & Harris, 2012). Black men's college completion rates are lowest among both sexes and all racial groups in U.S. higher education.

## DEFICIT-ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- ▶ How does family dysfunction affect Black and Latino male student achievement in school?
- ▶ What makes young men of color so apathetic and unmotivated at school?
- ▶ Why are Black and Latino male teens so easily lured into gangs, drug trafficking, and other criminal activities?
- ▶ Why are Black and Latino men so underrepresented in college and overrepresented in prisons?
- ▶ Why are generations of Black and Latino families trapped in urban ghettos and seemingly inescapable cycles of poverty?

## ANTI-DEFICIT REFRAMING

- ▶ How do these students maintain academic focus despite chaos in their homes?
- ▶ What strategies engage young men of color and make them excited about learning?
- ▶ How do these teens effectively resist pressures to join gangs and commit crimes?
- ▶ Fact: There are considerably more 18-24 year old Black and Latino men in college than in prison – what made higher education more appealing to them?
- ▶ What inspires young men from low-income neighborhoods to see beyond their present condition?

These statistics and countless others presented in policy reports, academic journals, news stories, and elsewhere paint a grim national portrait of Black and Latino men's status in the U.S. education system. But the situation in urban contexts, including New York City, is often worse. For example, NYC has the sixth largest Black-White male gap in four-year high school graduation rates among urban districts that enroll 10,000 or more Black male students (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012). In a recent report, Villavicencio, Bhattacharya, and Guidry (2013) provide data specific to Black and Latino male students in NYC public schools. These three data points are among the statistics published in their report:

- Among Black and Latino males who entered high school in 2006, 59.3% and 56.9%, respectively, graduated within four years. Villavicencio et al. note this was a 14 percentage point increase over students who entered in the 2002 cohort and graduated four years later. Despite these gains, gaps still existed between young men of color and other students in the graduating class of 2010. Seventy percent of Black women, two-thirds of Latinas, and 78.3% of White male students graduated from NYC public high schools within four years.
- Only 9.3% of Black and 11.4% of Latino men who entered high school in 2006 were deemed "college ready" four years later. Villavicencio et al. also highlight racial and sex differences in readiness. One metric they used was the percent of high school students who graduated with a New York State Advanced Regents Diploma. Accordingly, graduating with this type of diploma ensures that students will not be required to take remedial courses at four-year colleges and universities. Only 6.2% of Black males and nine percent of Latino males graduated in 2010 with Advanced Regents Diplomas, compared to 10.6% of Black female students, 10.9% of Latinas, and 34.3% of White men.
- The rate at which students enroll in college within six years of beginning high school is another area in which Villavicencio et al. found inequities. There was a 12.6 percentage point difference between Black men and Black women (46.1% vs. 58.7%) and a 9.8 percent gap

between Latino men and their same-race female peers (45.9% vs. 55.7%). Comparatively, 68% of White men who started high school as freshmen in 2006 enrolled in college by 2012. Villavicencio et al.'s data also reveal that Black and Latino male graduates of NYC public high schools are considerably less likely than are their White and Asian American classmates to enroll in four-year postsecondary institutions.

We are not arguing in this report that these statistics are anything short of alarming or are unworthy of exposure, serious conversations, and bold interventions. Even if we tried to somehow disregard these trends, researchers, journalists, and others would not let us. To be sure, we feel these numbers should outrage anyone who cares about equitable schooling and a just society. However, our argument is that there is another side of the story that, at this point, is much more instructive than focusing entirely on failures. For instance, we have chosen to see some educational possibility in the national Latino male high school graduation statistic – instead of repeatedly asking why 42% did not complete high school within four years, exploring what factors enabled 58% of them to graduate on time seemed sensible and important. In the side bar on this page are examples of other commonly asked questions about young men of color that we chose to rewrite in an anti-deficit fashion.





# ABOUT THE EXPANDED SUCCESS INITIATIVE

The New York City Department of Education's Expanded Success Initiative (ESI) uses innovative approaches to tackle the educational achievement gap and increase the number of Black and Latino young men who graduate high school prepared to succeed in college and careers. ESI is one component of the Office of the Mayor's Young Men's Initiative (YMI) and is supported by Open Society Foundations. YMI is the nation's most comprehensive effort to address education, health, criminal justice, and employment disparities that disproportionately affect Black and Latino males.

ESI was launched in 2012 with a competitive design challenge for public high schools across the City. Forty schools that submitted the most compelling design plans were selected to receive capacity-building grants over a three-year period. In each school, at least 35% of students are Black and Latino males, and 60% or more qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Grants enable school leaders and teachers to create and implement practices to achieve coherence within three interrelated areas:

## Academic Rigor

These strategies relate to Common Core standards and expectations for what students must know and demonstrate in each grade to be on track for college success. For example, schools can opt to redesign course curricula to increase the number of students enrolled in four years of math and science, Advanced Placement, and other rigorous college-level courses.

## Youth Development

These strategies emphasize building student resilience, commitment to life beyond high school, and restorative approaches to school discipline that prevent negative outcomes, like suspension. For example, the 40 selected schools possess structures where adults use a strengths-based approach in their interactions with students, provide social and emotional support, and communicate clear behavioral expectations and high standards for college and career readiness.

## School Culture

These strategies promote a college and career focus among Black and Latino male students, influencing the ethos, mission, and explicit (and implicit) communications in the entire school building. For example, strategies include workshops for students to develop their interests; opportunities for students to acquire skills outside the classroom; chances to join a variety of extra-curricular offerings; options to participate in academically aligned internships and workplace experiences; and a commitment to giving students and their families a clear voice within the school.

This three-pronged ESI model encompasses shifts in academic programming, instructional delivery, development of students' aspirations and goal commitments, and strengthening cultural competence and expectations for student success among educators. Moreover, embedding college-going cultures in each school is an important component of the model.

ESI schools are provided frequent data snapshots to shine light on the progress of Black and Latino male students over time. The implementation of ESI is being researched, formally evaluated, and documented so that its successful practices can be replicated and scaled. Professional learning, development, and sharing – within and across the 40 school sites – are also important features of the Initiative.

ESI schools represent the benefits of sweeping changes in NYC over the last decade. Thirty-seven are "small schools" that serve fewer than 500 students, where every person in the building is well known. They also enroll students who enter below grade level, students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and first generation college-bound students. These schools are well positioned to develop new strategies that raise the bar for Black and Latino male success in urban education. The return on investment will be more broadly felt

as lessons learned from the Initiative influence broader citywide goals of increased college and career readiness and equitable rates of postsecondary educational attainment.

Lastly, ESI is developing a breakthrough high school model – its success will be measured by college and career outcomes of the Black and Latino students it will serve. The ESI school model builds from the success of small schools that have made a large contribution to increasing high school graduation rates, especially for Black and Latino students. To develop this model, ESI launched a school design fellowship in 2013 that brings together a diverse cadre of educational leaders. The fellowship integrates design-thinking approaches and nimble start-up principles with proven educational practices that provide culturally relevant teaching and learning for students. The model will create a personalized learning experience around end-user needs, including meaningful college and career apprenticeships. This breakthrough school model leverages community resources and student assets to push forward a multidimensional understanding of what is required to raise student achievement, particularly in urban contexts. By 2014, the new school model will be ready to launch at scale.

For more information, visit:  
<http://schools.nyc.gov/ESI>



## MEETING OURSELVES

Thirteen Black and Latino male researchers from Penn GSE were afforded an incredible opportunity to interview over 400 young men of color in New York City who reminded us of ourselves – they were intelligent, ambitious, resilient, focused, and uncompromisingly committed to personal success and community uplift.





# THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Four months after the publication of *Black Male Student Success in Higher Education*, Penn GSE Professor Shaun R. Harper delivered the keynote address at a symposium in New York City for administrators and teachers from the 40 ESI schools. The NYC Department of Education subsequently invited him and researchers from the Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education to undertake a similar study in high schools. Specifically, we were asked to adapt Harper's (2012) anti-deficit achievement framework for a research project focused on Black and Latino male student success in urban education. In January 2013, the Open Society Foundations generously committed funds for the study.

The process began with the construction of a 13-member research team that included Dr. Harper, a postdoctoral researcher from the Center, and 11 Black and Latino male graduate students at Penn GSE. The team met over two months to design research instruments, rehearse effective interviewing and rapport building techniques, and work through logistics for data collection in NYC. Reflecting on our own educational histories as young men of color was an important first step. Much of this occurred in our first few team meetings, as well as in one-on-one interviews we later conducted with each other. We created structured opportunities for each team member to think retrospectively about many of the questions that we eventually posed to students in NYC. Team members were also given journals for reflective memo writing throughout the research process.

Consistent with the Harper (2012) framework, we began instrument development by identifying in literature and media recurring topics concerning young men of color in urban high schools. We then inverted commonly pursued, deficit-laden research questions to explore the upside of achievement. For example, instead of asking, "Why do so many drop out of high school," we wanted to know what helps Black and Latino males graduate. Understanding how they resist

pressures to join gangs, use or sell drugs, and skip school is another example of how we reframed questions repeatedly asked about these teens. In addition to administering the protocol to each other, we pilot tested it with young men of color who were currently enrolled in public Philadelphia high schools. The final protocol for the NYC high school interviews was 83 questions, including probes.

After receiving approvals from Institutional Research Boards at the NYC Department of Education and the University of Pennsylvania, our team began contacting principals, assistant principals, and guidance counselors at the 40 ESI schools. Specifically, we asked these administrators to identify Black and Latino male juniors and seniors who maintained grade point averages above 3.0 (or 'B'), were engaged in multiple school clubs and activities, planned to enroll in college immediately after high school, and had taken a sequence of courses (thus far) that would qualify them for admission to a four-year postsecondary institution. ESI Director Paul Forbes aided in our outreach to colleagues at the research sites. We also negotiated with these administrators dates for our team to visit their schools for face-to-face individual interviews with students. Between March and May 2013, 13 researchers traveled weekly from Philadelphia to NYC for data collection. We visited schools on Thursdays and Fridays to conduct one-on-one interviews with college-bound Black and Latino male achievers. We had reflective team meetings once data collection ended each Thursday, and logistics meetings every Friday morning. We ultimately interviewed 325 high school students, each for approximately 90 minutes.

The NYC Department of Education asked us to include in the study a subsample of Black and Latino male college students who graduated from the 40 ESI high schools. Identifying what

helped these undergraduates access higher education, having them reflect on their college transition experiences, and determining their readiness for the academic, social, and financial realities of higher education were among the aims of the college portion. We once again relied on administrators at the ESI sites to identify college men who graduated from their respective schools within the past four years. Undergraduates we interviewed also connected us with peers from their high schools who were presently in college. The college interview protocol was 115 questions, including probes. We conducted 2-3 hour face-to-face individual interviews with 90 undergraduate men.

Each interview was audiorecorded and professionally transcribed – this project produced over 12,000 single-spaced pages of verbatim interview transcripts. Transcripts were uploaded to a qualitative data analysis software program wherein team members manually performed line-by-line readings of the text and attached code words that represented recurring patterns in the data. Separate codebooks were established for the high school and college interviews, which included 124 and 143 codes, respectively. Before the coding process began, standardized statistical methods within the software were used to measure and strengthen interrater reliability.



# THE 40 HIGH SCHOOLS

SCHOOL	BOROUGH	ENROLLMENT	FREE LUNCH	BLACK OR LATINO	FOUR-YEAR GRADUATION RATE	COLLEGE ENROLLMENT WITHIN 6 MONTHS POST-GRADUATION	COLLEGE ENROLLMENT WITHIN 18 MONTHS POST-GRADUATION	COLLEGE READINESS INDEX 4 YEARS
Academy for Young Writers	Brooklyn	400	70.3%	96.0%	70.9%	59.2%	64.1%	8.1%
ACORN Community High School	Brooklyn	731	77.7%	97.0%	71.9%	39.3%	49.4%	7.4%
Bedford Academy High School	Brooklyn	367	49.9%	96.5%	96.8%	75.6%	93.4%	50.0%
Bronx Leadership Academy II High School	Bronx	502	81.9%	97.2%	64.8%	37.3%	50.8%	7.6%
Brooklyn Academy of Science and the Environment	Brooklyn	470	67.7%	94.0%	68.8%	46.9%	71.2%	21.1%
Brooklyn High School for Law and Technology	Brooklyn	405	55.1%	98.0%	71.7%	41.2%	45.1%	5.1%
Brooklyn Preparatory High School	Brooklyn	400	73.0%	96.5%	76.1%	61.7%	58.7%	11.3%
Central Park East High School	Manhattan	445	75.5%	91.5%	85.4%	58.1%	48.5%	37.1%
Channel View School for Research	Queens	409	59.4%	80.4%	90.9%	72.3%	90.1%	21.6%
Collegiate Institute for Math and Science	Bronx	543	73.3%	83.6%	89.5%	61.2%	67.7%	64.8%
Eagle Academy for Young Men	Bronx	457	60.7%	98.2%	72.6%	52.6%	68.9%	11.3%
East Bronx Academy for the Future	Bronx	367	81.3%	97.8%	75.0%	42.0%	37.3%	10.2%
East Side Community School	Manhattan	357	69.6%	77.9%	72.7%	55.7%	76.9%	58.0%
El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice	Brooklyn	218	72.0%	97.7%	68.1%	35.6%	36.6%	2.1%
Essex Street Academy	Manhattan	343	63.3%	88.3%	77.4%	61.3%	68.5%	11.9%
Explorations Academy	Bronx	362	62.4%	96.4%	62.5%	41.7%	41.8%	10.7%
Frederick Douglass Academy VII High School	Brooklyn	365	45.8%	98.9%	63.3%	41.8%	56.5%	10.1%
George Washington Carver High School for the Sciences	Queens	474	61.2%	88.4%	75.7%	42.0%	70.9%	19.8%
Gregorio Luperon High School for Science and Mathematics	Manhattan	472	91.7%	100.0%	76.4%	51.7%	64.8%	12.4%
High School for Civil Rights	Brooklyn	401	69.3%	96.3%	61.6%	29.3%	38.9%	2.2%

SCHOOL	BOROUGH	ENROLLMENT	FREE LUNCH	BLACK OR LATINO	FOUR-YEAR GRADUATION RATE	COLLEGE ENROLLMENT WITHIN 6 MONTHS POST-GRADUATION	COLLEGE ENROLLMENT WITHIN 18 MONTHS POST-GRADUATION	COLLEGE READINESS INDEX 4 YEARS
The High School for Enterprise, Business and Technology	Brooklyn	976	71.3%	94.8%	77.3%	54.4%	54.9%	22.7%
High School for Law and Public Service	Manhattan	694	71.3%	97.4%	65.2%	52.8%	67.9%	10.9%
High School for Law Enforcement and Public Safety	Queens	536	61.6%	88.6%	71.2%	54.6%	63.2%	14.4%
High School for Service & Learning at Erasmus	Brooklyn	422	71.6%	96.0%	75.0%	43.5%	55.1%	16.1%
High School of Sports Management	Brooklyn	370	48.9%	91.4%	70.0%	58.5%	71.6%	17.1%
Manhattan Bridges High School	Manhattan	541	56.4%	99.8%	87.3%	51.7%	61.8%	26.5%
Mott Hall Bronx High School	Bronx	354	72.9%	98.0%	81.9%	67.6%	78.5%	15.7%
New Design High School	Manhattan	423	52.5%	92.4%	79.3%	47.8%	48.5%	10.9%
Performing Arts and Technology High School	Brooklyn	453	78.4%	98.9%	63.4%	38.1%	52.3%	8.1%
Queens Preparatory Academy	Queens	441	63.0%	92.5%	57.0%	43.2%	54.1%	6.5%
Queens Vocational and Technical High School	Queens	1368	74.7%	81.1%	74.5%	52.6%	57.2%	26.2%
Renaissance High School for Musical Theater & Technology	Bronx	469	52.9%	89.3%	65.6%	39.4%	48.7%	12.3%
The School for Human Rights	Brooklyn	251	78.8%	96.4%	84.7%	36.0%	56.7%	11.9%
Science, Technology and Research Early College High School at Erasmus	Brooklyn	313	66.2%	92.9%	98.6%	84.3%	93.4%	63.4%
Teachers Preparatory High School	Brooklyn	422	43.5%	97.4%	81.6%	39.6%	54.1%	22.4%
Thurgood Marshall Academy for Learning and Social Change	Manhattan	395	74.0%	99.0%	89.5%	65.3%	69.9%	22.4%
Transit Tech Career and Technical Education High School	Brooklyn	1317	44.6%	93.6%	70.7%	48.5%	57.9%	18.2%
The Urban Assembly Bronx Academy of Letters	Bronx	317	85.0%	98.1%	77.8%	66.3%	64.5%	19.0%
Urban Assembly School for Careers in Sports	Bronx	477	76.1%	97.7%	72.9%	54.9%	74.7%	8.2%
The Urban Assembly School of Design and Construction	Manhattan	431	71.9%	88.9%	61.0%	46.5%	71.3%	28.0%

# THE STUDY PARTICIPANTS

## HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT PARTICIPANTS (N = 325)

### Class Standing

Juniors .....	45.2%
Seniors .....	54.8%

### Race

Black .....	54.5%
Latino .....	40.6%
Biracial/Multiethnic .....	4.9%

### Student's Birthplace

United States of America .....	75.4%
Other Countries .....	24.6%

### Age of Student's Immigration

(Immigrant Students Only)

Five and Under .....	24.1%
6-10 Years Old .....	31.6%
11 and Older .....	44.3%

### Mother's Birthplace

United States of America .....	31.7%
Other Countries .....	68.3%

### Father's Birthplace

United States of America .....	23.5%
Other Countries .....	76.5%

Experienced Homelessness .....	4.9%
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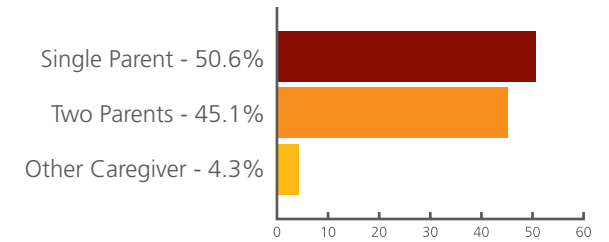
### Morning Commute to School

15-29 minutes .....	53.7%
30-44 minutes .....	25.9%
45-59 minutes .....	12.4%
60 or more minutes .....	8.0%

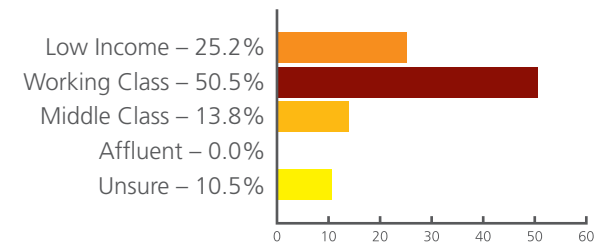
Average High School GPA .....	3.28/4.00
.....	85.2/100

High School Students with Jobs .....	17.0%
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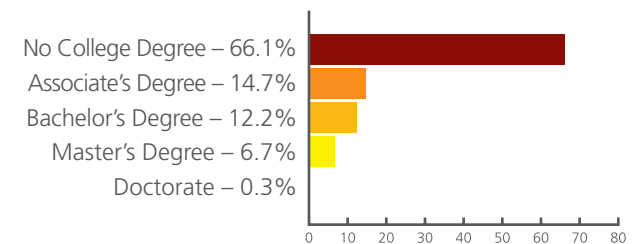
## FAMILY STRUCTURE



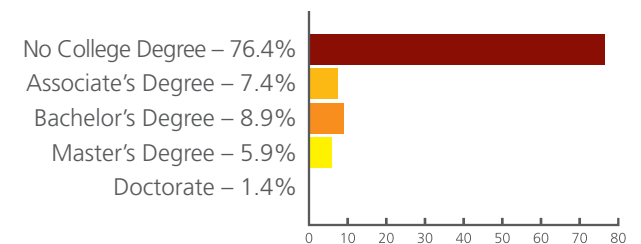
## SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS



## MOTHER'S HIGHEST EDUCATION



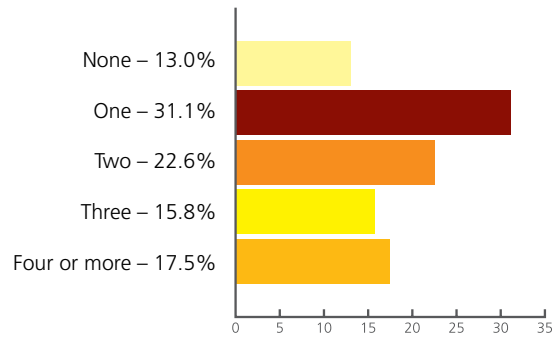
## FATHER'S HIGHEST EDUCATION



*More than two-thirds  
of the high school  
student participants  
in this study were  
sons of immigrants*



**Advanced Placement (AP) Courses Taken by Seniors**



Seniors Who Had Taken SAT and/or ACT ..... 98.8%

Average Number of College Applications Senior Submitted ..... 7

Average Number of College Admission Offers Senior Received ..... 4

**COLLEGE STUDENT PARTICIPANTS (N = 90)**

**Race**

Black	60.0%
Latino	40.0%

**Class Standing**

Freshmen	63.3%
Sophomores	22.2%
Juniors	6.7%
Seniors	7.8%

**Student's Birthplace**

United States of America	77.8%
Other Countries	22.2%

Average High School GPA ..... 3.10/4.00

Average College GPA ..... 2.89/4.00

Full-Time Undergraduates ..... 97.8%

Pell Grant Recipients ..... 67.8%

Student Loan Borrowers ..... 51.1%

**Student Employment**

Students with On-Campus Jobs ..... 18.9%

Students with Off-Campus Jobs ..... 27.8%

Work 20+ Hours Per Week ..... 16.7%

**Residence During Prior School Year**

At Home with Family ..... 58.4%

Campus Residence Hall ..... 39.3%

Off-Campus Apartment ..... 2.3%

**Undergraduate Major**

Business	12.2%
Humanities	15.6%
Social and Behavioral Science	30.0%
Science, Technology, Engineering & Math	22.2%
Other	15.6%
Undecided	4.4%



## 40 OPEN DOORS

Principals, assistant principals, and guidance counselors welcomed our research team into their schools and provided space for us to conduct individual interviews with college-bound, college-ready Black and Latino male juniors and seniors. The success of this study is largely attributable to their responsiveness and accommodation.



# KEY FINDINGS FROM HIGH SCHOOL PARTICIPANTS

Nearly 500 hours of individual, face-to-face interviews were conducted with juniors and seniors across the 40 ESI high schools. Hence, it is impossible to present all our findings in this 40-page report. Data from the New York City Black and Latino Male High School Achievement Study will be presented in greater depth in peer-reviewed journal articles and conference presentations, as well as in Dr. Harper's forthcoming book, *Exceeding Expectations: How Black Male Students Succeed in High School and College*. The next several pages of this report are devoted to summarizing some key findings that emerged from our analyses of the 325 high school students' interviews. Here are 15 (of many) important things we learned about college-bound young men of color in NYC public schools:

## How their families value education

We met few students who reported that their families cared nothing about education. In fact, most recalled parents and other family members conveying to them at a young age powerful messages about the value of schooling. "It's hard growing up in the ghetto, so my parents keep telling me that school is my way out," one participant shared. Other low-income and working class students also talked about how family members used their current socioeconomic condition as persuasive rationale for educational attainment. Several parents expressed regrets about having dropped out of high school themselves and made sure their children understood the consequences, financial and otherwise. A mother who stopped attending school in eighth grade told her son the following about completing high school: "I didn't do it. I want you to do it. Because I didn't make it, I want you to make it." Participants did not mistake their parents' educational pathways as disregard for the value of formal schooling. It was instead the opposite – they knew parents wanted them and their siblings to be better educated, struggle less, and have higher-status jobs that offer respectability and financial security.

A junior in the study noted, "a lot of my family members dropped out of high school, and so my mom is like, you've gotta be the first in the family to break that cycle."

He and many others understood the effects of poverty on generations of Blacks and Latinos in the U.S. and other parts of the world. Therefore, their nuclear and extended families (which included neighbors and church members) pushed these young men to regularly attend school, strive for academic excellence, and continue onward to postsecondary education. Those who would be first in their families to attend college were often reminded of why doing so was significant. Although two-thirds grew up in homes where neither parent possessed a college degree, students we interviewed often noted that their college aspirations were shaped by a non-negotiable set of expectations from parents. Young men who would be second or third generation college goers knew no other pathways to occupational or economic success besides what they had seen work so well for their mothers and fathers. Nearly every student we interviewed, regardless of his parents' levels of educational attainment, said he always knew he was going to college because it was the only post-high school educational option presented in his home.

Many parents valued American schooling so much that they traveled far (often without economic stability) so their kids could have access to perceivably better educational opportunities. First generation American students and those who relocated to New York City from different countries around the world reflected extensively on their family members' thoughts about education. We heard this repeatedly in our interviews with immigrant students: "My parents struggled and moved here so that my siblings and I could get a high-quality education." School was the sole reason many came to the United States. Consequently, neither they nor their families took it for granted. While this was pronounced among immigrant students, it is important to acknowledge that parents, grandparents, and other family members that have been in this country for multiple generations were

also consistent in their messaging about the value of education.

## How high expectations affect them

While some participants were not always academically high performing, almost all remember being thought of as smart and capable when they were young boys. Even when their behaviors or school outcomes may have suggested otherwise, students said their family, church, and community members rarely failed to acknowledge their potential for greatness. Reflections such as this were commonplace: "Everybody is expecting me to be something big... this kid is going to be very successful – it's a possibility that you will see him in the newspapers one day." This same student went on to say that people in his community believed he could become president of the United States, and they routinely told him how proud they were and how important it was for him to earn good grades. Another participant noted, "Education is valued a lot because my parents and basically everyone else, all the adults in my family, they expect me to be successful in life. They have high expectations of me." Numerous others said expectations for them were always high and that people saw something in them at an early age that they had not yet come to realize for themselves.





High expectations for school success were conveyed in myriad ways. Most common was parents' dissatisfaction with grades they believed were unreflective of their children's full potential. In several interviews, young men recalled how they felt good about earning 90% on tests, but their parents' reaction was "why didn't you get a hundred?" Some had proven their academic aptitude in elementary school, but their grades declined in middle school. Their parents refused to excuse this change and instead nagged the teens, found ways to get them tutoring and other forms of academic support, and punished them by taking away privileges they had come to enjoy. One young man recalled a pivotal moment in his academic trajectory. He started getting 70s and 80s on report cards, instead of the 90s he had consistently earned prior to middle school. His dad took him on a long car ride outside of the city to express two things: (1) how he believed the young man was capable of doing better; and (2) why B's and C's were unacceptable. Concerning the second point, the father told his son that he expected him to be someone great in life, to go to college; accordingly, mediocre grades would not get him there. That car ride resonated with this young man from that point onward. Others remembered specific things family members and others said to them at various junctures in their educational trajectories that helped them realize how great they were destined to be.

### **How they avoid neighborhood danger**

A student from Central Park East High School was robbed in 2010. When asked to describe their neighborhoods, the first adjective many participants chose was "dangerous." They went on to paint a picture of trashy streets, frequent shootings, gang activity, drug trafficking, robberies, and other crimes. Unfortunately, we often heard reflections like this: "I really just wanna move away from Bed-Stuy. I'm glad that eventually I'll be going upstate for college because I'm tired of every time I come from school, all I smell as I enter my projects is weed. And the way people talk to each other is just horrible." Another student shared, "like, it could be 2am and there are people in front of the building screaming and drunk and

stuff. I've been woken up from gun shots and stuff like that." While not every participant in our study lived in this type of environment, a significant number had to figure out how to navigate conditions like these. Their approach was simple: they did not go outside.

Many participants said that for as long as they could remember, their parents did not allow them to spend recreational time outdoors. For some, their only time outside was the weekday commutes to and from school – anything more was deemed far too dangerous. Reportedly, the majority of male teens in their neighborhoods spent considerably more time outside. Participants were sure to note that not all these young men were engaged in bad activities. In fact, they asserted that most were playing basketball, talking with friends, or simply doing nothing. "Like they walk up and down the street and they could be outside until like 2:00 in the morning and their parents don't say nothing about it," one student added. Most young men we interviewed made clear that their parents did not allow them to hang out on their blocks after dark, if at all. The safest option was to keep them inside. Their playmates tended to be others who lived in their buildings, oftentimes relatives. For the most part, their playtime and social engagement was restricted to theirs and friends' apartments.

### **What they appreciate about their communities**

We acknowledged in the previous section that not every student lived in a dangerous community. Some declared the absence of crime was something they treasured most in their neighborhoods. Many of them had moved to the places where they presently lived from settings that were less safe. "We moved when I was seven because our garage got shot up by an Uzi [submachine gun]." This young man very much appreciated that senseless gun activity was uncommon in the neighborhood to which his family relocated. Being able to walk down the street and talk on his iPhone without worrying that someone would take it was something another participant appreciated about the safer community to which he had recently moved.

We were surprised that some teenage boys offered “it’s quiet” as an immediate response to our question about what they appreciated in their neighborhoods. Participants who had moved to suburban communities, as well as those who resided in places that were recently gentrified, reflected favorably on their newfound sense of peace and safety. “My neighborhood now? I feel safe, I don’t have to look and watch my back for anything. I feel as if I can walk down my street and look both ways and not be afraid that somebody’s gonna drive by my house and start shooting a gun. I feel safe. It’s cool.” Beyond feeling safer and being able to play outside, a few others mentioned trees, parks, supermarkets, and ethnic diversity as aspects of suburban (and sometimes gentrified) neighborhoods they had come to enjoy.

It is important to note that students who lived in high-crime areas were able to find something positive to say about their neighborhoods. Foremost was the sense of community. “It’s a family, so, like I know everybody there. Everybody knows my mom so I can’t really get in trouble... I found out a while ago that my mom knows everybody. They look out for me. That’s why I like it.” Other participants talked favorably about being surrounded by family members and numerous others from their particular ethnic groups – this was especially salient among Dominicans, Jamaicans, and other immigrant students. Many lived in the same apartment buildings with generations of family members. The close-knit sense of family, as well as deep immersion in culture and customs, was something they treasured in their communities. Proximity also afforded them easy access to cousins and other same-age kids in their families with whom they could play indoors. Moreover, for many of these young men, constantly being reminded to do well in school was a byproduct of living so close to relatives.

### **How reputations exempt them from gang recruitment**

Overwhelmingly, young men we interviewed said gang members had not attempted to recruit them. For sure there were gangs in many of their communities, and they

knew firsthand of peers from their blocks and schools who were affiliated. They often had to walk past neighbors who were engaged in gang-related activities during their commutes home from school. Despite this exposure, most were deemed unfit for membership. “I think it’s because they know I am a good student and I’m not about that life,” one participant theorized. Others explained that they had amassed for themselves reputations for being serious students and performing well in school. Therefore, gang members knew they were unlikely to respond favorably to invitations to join. Also, not spending much time outside provided some immunity from gang courtship. “Those guys know that I don’t even hang out, they don’t even see me outside.”

Additionally, some students offered a fascinating explanation of how their academic reputations actually protected them from the pressure to join gangs. Images have been created on television and in movies of nerds walking home from school in urban settings and being bullied and harassed by gang members. Participants in our study who resided in communities with high gang activity suggested that members recognized they were going to be the ones who grew up to be successful. Consequently, they did not attempt to ruin this by pressuring these particular young men to join. One student whose brother (a former gang member) had been shot and killed recalled the following: “one of them tried to get me to join, but someone who knew my brother told them to leave me alone, that I’m gonna be somebody successful. They told me that I should stay focused on school.” Others recalled gang members advising them to do well in school and avoid getting involved with drugs, guns, and other criminal activities.

### **What motivates them to do well in school**

Transcending poverty was the most cited factor that compelled these youth to

do well in school. The “school as a way out” narrative was pervasive in this study. Participants from low-income and working class families acknowledged and appreciated how hard their parents worked, but were not interested in laboring in the same ways in their adult lives. One student shared the following about his father: “he’s a janitor during the day and a delivery man at night. And many weekends he works with my uncle. He’s always so tired. I don’t wanna have to work two or three jobs to provide for my family, so I do the best I can in school right now and I’m going to college.” Few expressed a desire to be extraordinarily wealthy – most just wanted to be financially more stable than their families presently were. Having spacious apartments in the City that were not overcrowded was something else many participants said they wanted. Low levels of educational attainment in their families also seemed to inspire several participants. “I am motivated to be the first person in my family to go to college. That drives me,” one participant remarked.

The “I wanna be something” narrative was also repeated across several interviews. Students talked about the underrepresentation of college-educated Black and Latino men in their families and communities. “There aren’t many role models who went to





## HIS THREE BEST FRIENDS

When asked about his three best male friends, most high school participants named other college-bound students who were selected for this study. Similarly, undergraduate men we interviewed almost unanimously reported that their best male friends from high school are now enrolled in college.





college. But I do know a lot who dropped out of school.” This young man went on to use his older brother as an example. “He dropped out. And now he can’t even get a job. He isn’t doing anything with his life.” Like so many others in the study, this participant was inspired to do well in school because he wanted to ultimately create a more expansive set of career opportunities for his future self. Noteworthy is that some students were from middle class homes and some had college-educated family members. “My cousin went to college and now she’s a nurse. I want to be successful like her,” one student stated. Others talked about wanting to achieve levels of occupational success comparable to their parents’.

As previously noted, more than two-thirds of the participants in this study were sons of immigrants. They talked extensively about sacrifices their parents made to get to the United States and to create stable lives for them and their siblings. As such, they felt a profound sense of obligation to honor their parents by doing well in school. While this theme was pronounced among immigrant students, it is important to acknowledge that young men from families that have been in this country for multiple generations often felt a similar sense of responsibility to their parents. Several of their parents and caregivers also worked multiple jobs and long hours. “They provide me everything that’s needed – clothes, bags, books, lunch money – I don’t have any excuse except just get up and go to school.” Across the high school sample, students repeatedly said how doing well in school and enrolling in college would make their parents proud.

### **What differentiates them from lower performing peers**

Participants were well acquainted with the problematic educational status of young men of color in NYC high schools. Most did not perceive themselves as smarter or better than their peers – they just had stricter parents and made different choices, had clearer goals, and were more firmly committed to actualizing those goals. Their lower performing peers did not have the same kinds of structured home environments, many participants observed.

“One of my boys, his mom lets him miss school. Mine would never let me miss school unless I was dying.” Others noted that many of their peers skipped school. Despite this, teachers did not give up on them; they often tried to do what they could to motivate these young men and help them catch up when they were present. Apparently, their parents did not expect or require these low performing young men to go to college; hence, they were less motivated to strive for academic excellence. A student at Brooklyn Academy of Science and the Environment said the following about one of his friends: “He’s always been a mediocre student, so his parents don’t really push him to be better. Without that push, he has no incentive to be better. Teachers here try to push, but he has no one pushing outside of here.”

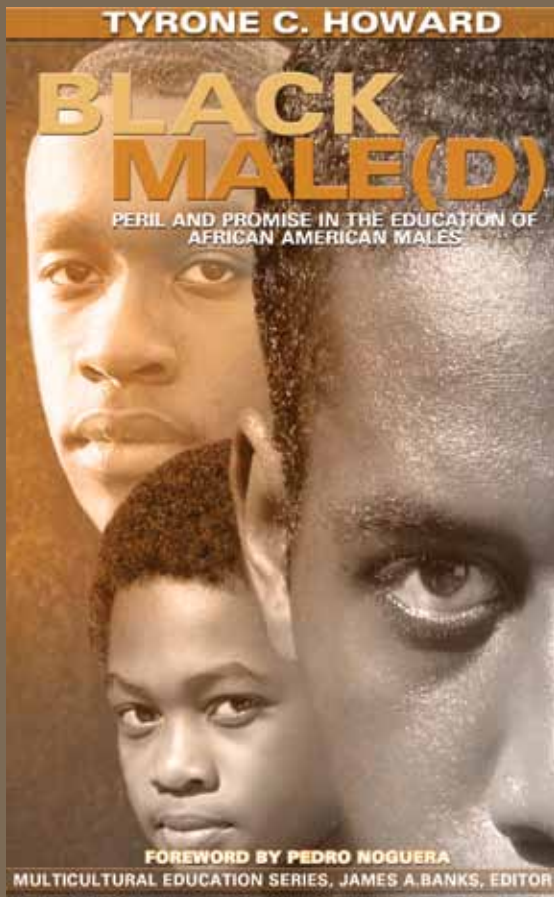
Peers who did less well in school also appeared to have unrealistic expectations for success, several participants thought. Some suggested that other young men of color in their schools were actually interested in doing well academically, but were unwilling to invest the effort required to earn good grades. “No one really wants to be a f-up, right,” one participant asked. Others believed their peers were interested in being rich, but were seemingly disillusioned about what it would take to accumulate wealth. “They don’t wanna work hard. They wanna get rich quick, which is what makes stuff like selling drugs seem like a good thing.” Parents, teachers, and others had convinced most young men we interviewed that educational attainment was the surest route to financial stability. Likewise, they knew that actually coming to school was the most basic prerequisite for academic success.

“Well, the difference is that some guys don’t have in their head what they really want to do in the future. They just think, ‘Oh, I will do whatever. This is easy. Let me just go to school.’” This student’s perspective reflects another way participants distinguished themselves from lower

performing men of color in their schools. The 325 students in our study were clear that college was next for them; they had a good sense of what they wanted to be when they grew up, and understood how possessing college degrees would increase their likelihood of career success. Consequently, they were driven by visions of their future selves. Conversely, they surmised that other young men in their schools drifted academically because they were either clueless about where their lives were headed or their commitments to becoming an engineer, politician, or whatever were flimsy.

### **How they study zero hours, yet earn good grades**

Prior to beginning each interview, we had participants complete a four-page profile form that included basic demographic information and other general questions (clubs in which they held membership, college campuses they visited, etc.). Half the students reported that they studied one hour or less each day; 52 indicated they spent zero hours doing homework and studying outside of school. Across the sample, students spent an average of 1.6 hours on schoolwork at home. Apparently, time was made available for them to do homework throughout the school day. Many also saw



afterschool hours as an extension of the school day, and therefore stayed on site to get their homework done. Students understood the difference between completing homework assignments and studying – many confessed that they rarely did the latter. Being engaged in the classroom (listening carefully to what teachers were saying, asking questions, and taking notes) enabled them to grasp content and concepts without having to study much in the evenings and on weekends. These students also met with teachers immediately after school for supplemental instruction. But many deemed studying at home unnecessary; some thought it impossible.

### Why they stay at school so late

“There’s too much chaos in my home; I cannot study there,” a participant contended. This is one of many reasons why so many of the young men we interviewed stayed at their schools until 5:00, 6:00, and 7:00 several evenings each week. Beyond the typical extracurricular activities that keep many teenagers on school grounds beyond 3pm (e.g., sports practices), it was clear that participants in our study found other reasons to stay in school buildings after normal hours. Foremost was the opportunity to avoid various problems at home. Staying at school seemed to offer an escape from arguments with parents and siblings, witnessing family members struggle with drug addictions, overcrowding and noisiness in their homes (which was not conducive to studying), and a range of other negative influences. Also, remaining in their school buildings provided some immunity from pressures to do drugs and join gangs. Those who chose to stay after hours were engaged in more productive activities.

School was a safe place where these young men could simply hang out with teachers (whom many considered to be friends) and academically focused peers. Reportedly, most teachers and other adults stayed at school after hours with students to provide tutoring and academic support, assistance with college essays and SAT prep, and personal counseling. Moreover, students found space to merely socialize with peers in the building; they were not

always there for club meetings or rehearsals, but were simply talking and joking, sometimes doing homework. Our research team members were occasionally at sites after the school day ended; in many instances, the buildings seemed as vibrant at 4:30 as they were several hours prior. Intriguing to us were the palpable cultures of trust. Adults clearly trusted students to hang out after school. Those who chose to remain in the school building (as opposed to being outside with other similarly-aged boys in their neighborhoods) were not the same students who routinely broke rules or performed poorly in their courses. Principals and teachers were there, but it was clear that students had enormous freedom to use the school buildings in assorted ways. It is worth noting here that no participant reported that peers were using after-hours access to the school buildings to do bad things.

### How they describe their school environments

Unlike the typical first response most offered to our question about their neighborhoods, students in this study did not characterize their schools as dangerous. Although some schools had metal detectors (the majority did not), what participants described (and what we saw firsthand) was nothing like the urban majority-minority high schools shown on television and in movies. Instead of “unsafe” and “rowdy,” they said the environments were small and family-oriented. Numerous participants asserted their schools were small enough to permit adults to know and meaningfully interact with every student. At New Design High School and a few other places, students call teachers by their first names. Several said their teachers were friends by whom they felt respected. Furthermore, young men in this study routinely acknowledged that there were some students (most often other boys) who sometimes behaved badly in school (fighting, smoking weed, etc.), but maintained there were not enough of them to contaminate the nonviolent ethos that had been cultivated.

### What they say about adults in their schools

Urban high schools that enroll large numbers of low-income students of color are often portrayed as high-stress settings where frustrated, unqualified teachers have no

control over rowdy classrooms, are unable to effectively reach and educate students, and are unlikely to stay beyond a year or two because the environments are so hopeless and unsafe. This was not at all characteristic of the 40 ESI schools. We asked the following in each interview: Tell me about two of your favorite high school teachers – what do they teach and what makes them good teachers? No student struggled to immediately name and reflect fondly on his favorite pair of teachers. One student had taken geometry, trigonometry, and AP calculus from the same person. “She’s confident in what she teaches and she actually takes time to pause her lessons and help the ones who are struggling; even if they don’t get it the first time, she explains it a second time.” Others appreciated the content expertise their teachers demonstrated, their availability for help with personal and academic matters after school, their genuine expression of care for students, and how they made learning fun.

Perhaps what participants valued most were the high expectations teachers and other adults in their schools expressed. For example, Mr. Jordan, an AP English Teacher at Frederick Douglass Academy VII, “is a good teacher because he’s kinda strict. When he gives you work, he expects it to be done... this is very good practice for college,” one student remarked. A participant from the Renaissance High School for Musical Theater and Technology attributed a large portion of his college readiness to his AP Government and Politics teacher. He thought Ms. Hill taught the course like an actual college professor – she created an unusually lengthy syllabus, did not accept excuses for late assignments, and emphasized independent thinking and learning. “I’m an independent learner right now because of her. Now, I don’t need a teacher to tell me how to learn. I’ll go home and learn the material and come back ready for the test because of her. She’s the most impactful teacher I’ve ever had in my life.” While courses like these seemed daunting when they took them, participants very much appreciated being challenged. Numerous others told stories of teachers pushing them to do better, work harder, and stop procrastinating. No one said a teacher was his favorite because she or he was easy.

“Teachers here really care,” was a common sentiment shared among young men across the 40 school sites. Expressions of care were multifaceted. We asked each participant to reflect on a time when an adult in his school was especially helpful. Here are five stories they told: (1) a teacher introduced one student who wants to be a physician to her own personal doctor; (2) a student who ran away from his abusive father received support and advice from a teacher at every juncture in the process; (3) a teacher permitted a sick student to nap at her desk during lunchtime and left the building to buy him hot chocolate from Dunkin’ Donuts; (4) one teacher offered marathon tutoring from 9am to 9pm on Saturdays for students who were at risk of failing algebra; and (5) a teacher visited one student’s mom in the hospital after she had a stroke. This is just a handful of a seemingly innumerable list of things teachers did to show students how much they cared. Calming students’ anxieties just before taking the SAT or Regents exam, encouraging them not to give up when they were struggling either academically or personally, offering them opportunities for extra credit to boost their grades, assisting them with college and scholarship applications, writing recommendation letters on their behalf, and giving them life-changing books to read are additional examples. Participants also recalled times when other adults (principals, assistant principals, guidance counselors, coaches, janitors, and security officers) were also helpful.

During our visits to their campuses, school leaders did not appear distressed or overwhelmed with student discipline problems – no principal was yelling down the hall on a megaphone. We observed many administrators engaging meaningfully with students. For instance, one principal, a former math teacher, told us she could not resist helping students with their math homework. Another example is from the day we visited Eagle Academy for Young Men. Jonathan Foy, the principal, insisted that one of our team members use his office for interviews. He spent the

entire day engaging with students and others around the school, which participants said was not at all unusual. At one point, Principal Foy apologized for having to interrupt one of our interviews; he needed to quickly enter his office to retrieve a book and folder. This former U.S. history and government teacher was on his way to tutor students in that subject, something he does multiple times each week. One participant’s mom dropped by Eagle Academy that day. The principal took time to introduce our research team members to her. We later inquired about the multicolored sheets of paper taped to a whiteboard in his office; each had a student’s name and some notes. Mr. Foy explained it was part of his method of checking in with students who were in jeopardy of not graduating on time. That an urban school leader has time to tutor and track the academic progress of individual students as well as introduce parents to researchers is remarkable. Like his counterparts at other ESI schools, Principal Foy told us he is usually at Eagle Academy until 7:00 most evenings.

### **How their schools foster college-going cultures**

“This is like a small college,” one young man said of his high school. Others described college-going cultures that had been fostered in their respective buildings. Our



MANHATTAN



## RECOMMENDED READING

### The Educational Experience of Young Men of Color A Review of Research, Pathways and Progress

John Whittall, Ed.D.  
Tahara Pinnock

Foreword by Ronald A. Williams

CollegiBoard  
Advocacy & Policy Center



team observed several aspects of this in the majority of places we visited. For example, there were poster-sized spreadsheets on a bulletin board in the guidance counselor's office at East Bronx Academy for the Future that listed each graduating senior's name in one column. Other columns were used to track whether students had taken the SAT; applied to CUNY, SUNY, and other postsecondary institutions; submitted the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), as well as applications for scholarships and other forms of financial aid (e.g., New York State's Tuition Assistance Program); and had been accepted to college. Students received big checkmarks in each column after one of these college-related activities had been completed. Fascinating to us was that almost every student listed on the spreadsheet had a near-complete row of checkmarks next to her or his name. We also thought compelling that the spreadsheet was so large and so public. The guidance counselor explained that teachers, parents, and peers often interact with the bulletin board; if they see that a student has not done something on the list, they would ask (and sometimes harass) her or him about it. In that same office was another bulletin board that included college-related terms and their definitions. Students who would be first in their families to attend college probably would not have otherwise known the meanings of certain terms on the bulletin board (i.e., early decision, AP course, FAFSA, TAP, EOP,

HBCU, and Bursar's Office), hence its importance.

Participants at the 40 high schools frequently noted how teachers doubled as college advisors who offered assistance with the college choice process, admissions and scholarship applications, SAT prep, and financial aid documents. "Did you see the signs above the classrooms?" one young man asked. "We are encouraged to talk to teachers about where they went to college; they help us apply there if we're interested." The signs he referenced was something we had seen in other ESI schools. Each included a teacher's name, as well as the logos and names of colleges and universities from which she or he earned degrees. Every classroom door had one of these signs taped on or above it. We instructed participants to list on their profile forms all the colleges and universities to which they had either applied (seniors) or planned to apply (juniors). Most often their interests in out-of-state institutions were attributed to recommendations from teachers who were alumni of those places.

Halls at Brooklyn High School for Law and Technology were fully lined with college pennants from several dozen institutions across and outside of New York (i.e., Indiana University, UCLA, Stanford University, and Princeton University). At that same school, participants described how the daily announcements on the intercom included



news of students' college acceptances – every day, every senior. One student reflected on what this did for his college aspirations the year prior: “I remember hearing these announcements and thinking, ‘I wanna try to get into that college; if he could do it then I could do it too,’ you know? It started building confidence inside me like ‘wow, he goes to my same school, so I can get into that college too; we have the same situation.’” Shown on Page 24 of this report is a wall from Central Park East High School – every time a student received an acceptance letter, she or he got a new dot on the wall with the name of the institution and the amount of scholarship money received. Next to the colored dots was a placard with the cumulative total of scholarship money awarded so far to graduating seniors. As of April 11, 2013, the total was \$1,890,724. Copies of college acceptance letters were stapled to bulletin boards and taped to walls in several other schools we visited.

### How they plan to pay for college

Despite their academic performance, few participants planned to finance their college education via scholarships and merit-based awards. Although some expected to receive Pell Grants and awards from the New York State Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), an alarming number of students planned to finance college through student loans and working off-campus jobs. We occasionally asked if they knew about the Gates Millennium Scholars Program, income threshold and no-loans financial aid policies at elite private colleges and universities, or the Posse Foundation's scholars program (financial aid initiatives for which their grade point averages and socioeconomic statuses would likely qualify them); their answers were almost always no. One young man planned to simultaneously work full-time and be a full-time college student. Although his socioeconomic status would surely qualify him, he had never heard of on-campus employment opportunities via the Federal Work Study Program. A senior with a 3.7 GPA at Queens Preparatory Academy expressed the following: “My biggest fear about going to college is not being able to pay for my classes... I know I'm going to be successful [academically], that's

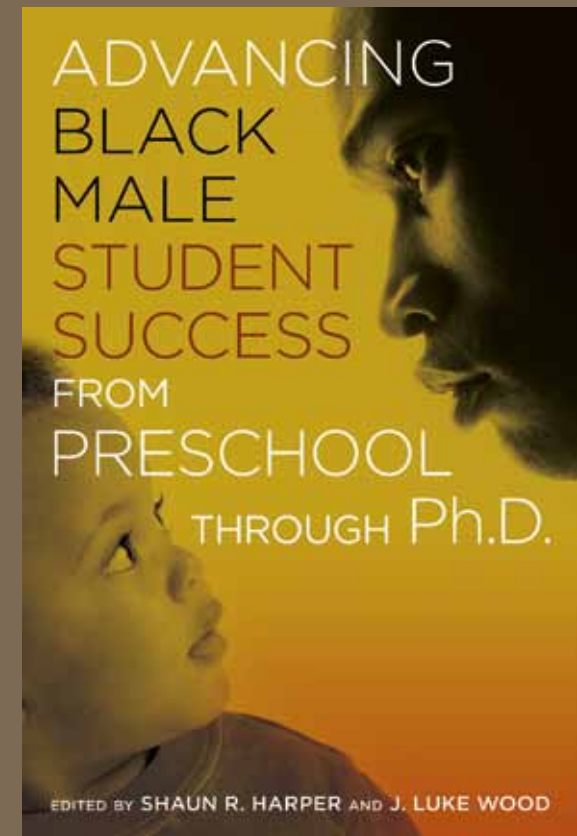
one thing. But I'm afraid I might not have the financial resources to stay.”

### Why some think they will succeed in college

“In college I believe I'm going to be able to succeed because some of my teachers have actually pushed me to college work standards, you know, 10-page essays with close due dates.” Not every student we interviewed felt as confident in his college preparedness as did this young man. Responses to our questions about their readiness were mixed. Visits to college campuses, taking actual college courses in high school (dual enrollment), and affirmation from teachers and guidance counselors engendered feelings of readiness among several participants. Yet, others made confessions similar to this: “I don't know if I'm ready to succeed in college because I don't know what college is like. Everyone tells me college is tough. And, in the courses that are college level – like the AP classes – they told me study, study, study, study. I'm not a studying guy. I study like one hour a day.” Despite uncertainty among some, each participant believed an unwavering commitment to his goals would ultimately be enough to succeed in college. “If I do what I've done in high school to stay focused, I should do okay in college.”

### Where they plan to live after college

The majority of participants intend to return to New York City (in some instances, their current neighborhoods) after graduating from college. Despite the high levels of crime and other problems noted in previous sections, these young men were proud of where they were from. Most were committed to using their college degrees to start mentoring programs for youth, political advocacy organizations, and businesses, as well as lead a range of other efforts that would improve the educational, health, and economic conditions of their current neighborhoods.





## THEY GO TO COLLEGE?

This study pushes against the hopeless, one-sided narrative about urban high schools that primarily enroll low-income students of color. They too send students to college. Numerous innovative practices are employed in the 40 high schools to facilitate the development of college aspirations and celebrate college admission.



# KEY FINDINGS FROM COLLEGE STUDENTS

Getting more young men of color into institutions of higher education is undeniably important, but so too is ensuring they are prepared to succeed in college and ultimately graduate. Hence, we chose to include in this study 90 Black and Latino male collegians who graduated from the 40 ESI high schools within the past four years. Two earned bachelor's degrees in May 2013; the rest were presently enrolled at 44 colleges and universities at the time of their interviews. Each started college immediately after graduating from high school. Similar to the other portion of this study, numerous findings (too many to furnish in a single research report) emerged from our face-to-face individual interviews with these undergraduate men. Here are seven:

## Recalling the college choice process

More than three-fourths (75.6%) of the undergraduates we interviewed were enrolled at City University of New York (CUNY) and State University of New York (SUNY) institutions. The college student profile form included lines on which participants were instructed to list all colleges and universities to which they applied and were offered admission. Many applied exclusively to CUNY and SUNY campuses. Perhaps this is unsurprising, given that attending a public college or university in one's home state is usually more affordable than matriculating at an out-of-state institution. As was the case with our high school participants, several of these undergraduates had GPAs and SAT scores that would have qualified them for merit-based scholarships at highly-selective private institutions and public universities outside their home states. Only one student applied to Columbia, the Ivy League university in New York City – he was denied admission. No participant was enrolled at SUNY Albany or Syracuse, other leading research universities in the state.

An unwillingness to leave New York was not the reason many students applied exclusively to CUNY and SUNY institutions. Instead, these were often the only schools to which they were introduced. "The guidance counselor pretty much just told us about CUNYs. I knew other colleges were out there, but I didn't know anything about

those," one student contended. Others indicated their counselors only promoted in-state public postsecondary options. Some even remembered counselors advising them against applying to certain institutions. "She told me that I probably wouldn't get into the University of Virginia, so I didn't even apply there." We heard similar stories in our interviews with high school seniors. Despite this, participants in this study repeatedly praised their counselors and acknowledged their helpful actions during the college application and choice processes. They recognized how deeply invested these professionals were in helping every student graduate from high school and continue onward to college. But the problem, they believed, was that their counselors were typically overwhelmed by having to serve too many students. "She was responsible for like every junior and senior in our school. She did the best that any one person could with trying to get so many students to college," one young man asserted. Numerous others commended their former high school guidance counselors and acknowledged their limited capacity to do more.

Some participants picked colleges because of their proximity to their homes. Continuing to reside with family members seemed the best way to make higher education affordable. Several commuters indicated they would have chosen residential colleges if they could have afforded to attend. One participant who was offered admission to multiple institutions said the following: "I chose Medgar Evers because it was – umm, it wasn't a better choice – but it was easier for me to go to school there and go to work because it was like just a bus stop away from where I live. So it was convenient." Others either chose or transferred to institutions that were closest to where they lived or were employed. Among commuters, rarely were the cultural distinctiveness of the campus environment and unique curricular offerings especially weighty in their college selection processes – affordability was foremost.

Twenty-two students were enrolled at colleges outside the CUNY and SUNY systems. Five chose Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Lincoln, Morehouse, and Howard) because they visited these campuses on tours their high schools and assorted community groups organized. For example, Gents at New Design High School (an ESI student club) visited Howard during its tour of colleges and universities in Washington, DC. Two students chose Trinity College and Wheaton College because they were selected to be Posse Scholars there. Pathways to particular colleges were serendipitous for some other students. For example, one young man was attending the Big Apple College Fair where he picked up a brochure in which a small liberal arts college in Pennsylvania was listed as one of 44 Colleges that Change Lives. He ultimately applied there, as well as NYU, UCLA, Hunter College, and the College of New Jersey. The range of institutions to which he applied represents an interesting phenomenon that we occasionally saw on other lists: students had applied to incredibly dissimilar (and at times, seemingly random) sets of institutions about which they knew very little.

## Perspectives on readiness for the rigors of college

Shown in the final column of tables on Pages 10 and 11 of this report is the New York



## COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES REPRESENTED

The 90 Black and Latino male college students who participated in this study were degree-seeking undergraduates at these 44 colleges and universities:

Bard College  
The College of Saint Rose  
Concordia College (NY)  
Fordham University  
University of Hartford  
Howard University  
Lincoln University (PA)  
Morehouse College  
New York University  
Siena College  
Southern Vermont College  
St. Bonaventure University  
St. Francis College  
St. John's University  
Trinity College (CT)  
Ursinus College  
Wheaton College (MA)

### City University of New York Campuses (n = 14)

Baruch College  
Borough of Manhattan Community College  
Bronx Community College  
Brooklyn College  
The City College of New York  
College of Staten Island  
Hostos Community College  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice  
LaGuardia Community College  
Lehman College  
Medgar Evers College  
New York City College of Technology  
Queensborough Community College  
Stella and Charles Guttman Community College

### State University of New York Campuses (n = 13)

Binghamton University  
University at Buffalo  
College at Cortland  
College of Technology at Canton  
Dutchess Community College  
Farmingdale State College  
Monroe Community College  
Morrisville State College  
Purchase College  
SUNY Delhi  
SUNY Oneonta  
SUNY Plattsburgh  
SUNY Potsdam

College Readiness Index score for each of the 40 ESI schools.

This score represents the percentage of students who entered a high school four years earlier and passed out of remedial coursework in accordance with CUNY standards. Additionally, students are deemed "college ready" if they meet all the following criteria:

- Graduate with a Regents diploma by August;
- Score 75+ on the English Regents, 480+ on the Critical Reading SAT, 20+ on the ACT, or 70+ on the CAT Reading and 56+ on the CAT Writing tests;
- And earn 80+ on one math Regents and complete coursework in Algebra II/Trigonometry (or higher level mathematics), or score 480+ on the Math SAT, 20+ on the ACT, or 35+ on the CAT Math 1 and 40+ on the CAT Math 2 tests.

For sure, this is a complicated (and very confusing) way to determine readiness for success in postsecondary education. Nonetheless, it is alarming that at 32 ESI high schools, less than one-fourth of students were deemed college ready via these standards. We therefore chose to pursue firsthand qualitative insights from students about their preparedness for college.

Without prompting, a surprising number of participants said early on in their interviews that they were not sufficiently prepared for the academic expectations of college. A student at John Jay College of Criminal Justice offered the following: "I thought I was ready because I had done so well in high school, but I was shocked by how difficult college was. My teachers told me college was going to be harder than high school, and I knew that. But still, I was surprised by how unprepared I was." Very few students deemed their former high schools easy. "I definitely didn't skate through high school, it felt tough at the time," one young man remarked. But several participants realized, retrospectively, that they could have been challenged

more. For example, intensive writing is emphasized over testing at one ESI school. We interviewed multiple undergraduate men who were alumni of that school; each believed he was unprepared for exams in college. "The school should give more tests," one recommended.

No student considered himself intellectually underprepared for higher education. That is, academic struggles in college were not often attributable to a perceived lack of rigor in one's high school curriculum. Instead, many undergraduates felt they were not prepared for the academic expectations of college. The content to which they had been exposed in high school was deemed appropriately rigorous, but they had not been taught how to effectively multitask, study, meet deadlines, and perform well on in-class exams. In making sense of his poor freshman year academic performance, one young man offered the following: "there's a phrase saying hard work beats talent when talent doesn't work hard. So even though I did have the talent, I wasn't necessarily working as hard as I could."

The juxtaposition of their average high school and college GPAs (3.10 and 2.89, respectively) might suggest these students were not performing as impressively in college as they had in high school, but were still doing reasonably well. Overall, this is true. However, exactly one-third had cumulative college GPAs below 2.89. Four had GPAs below 2.00; they and a handful of others had been placed on academic probation at their respective colleges and universities. One student who began at Brooklyn College (a public institution) was dismissed because his grades were so poor. He sat out of college for one semester, and then transferred to a private institution that costs nearly \$24,000 per year, which he was financing mostly through student loans. Thirteen other men we interviewed had taken time off from college, in many instances involuntarily.

Although an alarming number of students felt they were not adequately prepared for the demands of postsecondary education, 45.6% of undergraduates in this study managed to earn cumulative college GPAs above 3.00.



There are some quantifiable differences between these 41 men and the overall sample. For instance, 78.1% of them were Pell Grant recipients, compared to 67.8% overall. All but one was a full-time student. More of them lived on campus, and fewer were employed while attending college (only six worked more than 20 hours per week in off-campus jobs). Their average high school GPA was a bit higher than the overall sample – 3.30 vs. 3.10 [and 85.5 vs. 83.9]. Moreover, these students were less likely to report in interviews that the academic expectations of college surprised them. Many of them had come to know what was expected through AP courses, as well as in actual college classes they had taken as high school students. Even students whose college GPAs were high said they often had to adjust to a level of academic expectation that was noticeably more demanding than in high school. “The teachers at my high school pushed us; I just wished they had pushed us even more,” one collegian added.

### Surprises in the first college year

Like most college goers, study participants were surprised by their newfound sense of freedom, flexible class scheduling, the outrageous cost of textbooks, and the poor quality of food in campus dining halls. Many were surprised that their campuses were so large, both in acres and in enrollments. Furthermore, in comparison to their high schools, they were surprised that their colleges were either significantly more or considerably less diverse. The consistency of these perspectives was unsurprising to us; they seemed typical for 18-24 year old students encountering college for the first time. But there are some other surprises we thought worthy of acknowledging in this report.

“I think maybe the amount of time you have to put into the work. Not the actual class hours, but the amount of work and the amount of reading and writing, that’s what really surprised me,” one LaGuardia Community College student noted. Students expected college to be academically more demanding than high school, but did not anticipate having to study long hours, write long papers,

and concurrently juggle multiple assignments. Those who had done poorly in college courses largely attributed academic performance problems to underdeveloped study skills. This finding was unsurprising given what high school participants reported about the number of hours they devoted to studying and doing homework outside of school. A student who had just completed his first year at SUNY Potsdam recalled, “It surprised me how much work I had to do outside of class. I wasn’t used to that.” He and several others admitted they did not study much prior to college, and consequently did not know how to study in their new academic environments.

Many undergraduates were amazed that college was not academically tougher. “I kind of thought it was going to be extreme, like I can’t do it... I wasn’t sure if I was ready for it because I can’t do a 20-page essay in one night, like that’s ridiculous. And then I realized it wasn’t like that. That kind of surprised me in a good way.” Pre-college messages from teachers, guidance counselors, and parents shaped the expectations with which these young men entered college. But problems with time management and procrastination often shocked them. Some recalled waiting until the absolute last minute to start an assignment in high school. They were surprised this did not yield comparable results in college. A few mentioned how teachers in their high schools coordinated dates so that deliverables were not due at the same time. These students told stories about being overwhelmed during midterm and final exam periods in college when assignments were simultaneously due in all their courses. High school teachers occasionally allowed them to turn in late assignments without penalty, many noted. Their college professors were much less forgiving. “There’s a big leap between high school and college because there’s no more babying you, there’s no more spoon-feeding you like in high school.”

Another fascinating finding emerged among commuter

students, particularly those attending community colleges. One student at Bronx Community College suggested, “I kind of knew I wasn’t going to get the full college experience. It was surprising that you go there, you do your work, and you go home. It kind of was like high school for me and I didn’t get to know people and stuff like that because it was a community college... I was just surprised that I didn’t feel like I was in college.” Others alluded to the “13th grade,” a stereotype that community college is a mere continuation of high school. Several of these students indicated they were unpleasantly surprised by how much classroom environments at community colleges felt like high school environments they had just left. Explanations for this are twofold: (1) they had a narrow view of how “college” was supposed to look and feel, which was likely exacerbated by the urbanicity of their campuses; and (2) a troubling number of students had never visited the community colleges in which they ultimately enrolled.

Concerning the second point, college tours on which they had gone in high school rarely included community colleges, hence their understanding of differences between them and four-year institutions was limited. One community college student said this: “Before the first day of class, I had only been



## LOOKING AHEAD

The majority of undergraduate men in this study are looking forward to higher levels of educational attainment beyond degrees they are presently pursuing. Nearly three-fourths (73%) ultimately intend to earn master's degrees or doctorates. Also, 16 of the 18 community college students plan to transfer to four-year institutions.



to the campus once to drop off some financial aid papers." This young man erroneously presumed he was familiar with the campus because it is located in the neighborhood in which he grew up. "I then realized I actually knew nothing about this place and the students who go here." Other participants, at community colleges and four-year institutions alike, had visited their respective institutions only once prior to beginning their first semester; some had never been on campus until they showed up for new student orientation.

### **Most unlikely to succeed**

In their 2005 book, *How College Affects Students*, Ernest T. Pascarella and Patrick T. Terenzini synthesized a decade of published research on student outcomes. Accordingly, undergraduates who live on campus, participate actively in their classes, are engaged in a variety of clubs and structured activities, interact substantively with professors and administrators outside the classroom, study in groups and collaborate with peers on academic-related tasks, and attend college full-time are likeliest to persist from year to year, earn good grades, accrue a robust set of learning and developmental outcomes, graduate from college within four years, and compete most successfully for post-college jobs and admission to highly selective graduate schools. Moreover, undergraduates who are employed on campus 20 hours or less each week are more likely to persist through degree attainment than are their peers who work off-campus more than 20 hours. An alarming number of undergraduate men in our study did the exact opposite of what research has repeatedly shown to produce college student success.

More than one-quarter of the college men we interviewed were employed in off-campus jobs. Also, 58.4% were commuters who still lived at home with their families. They were not engaged in programming offered in residence halls or involved in living-learning communities with peers on their campuses. Most said they went to campus to take courses and immediately left once their last class ended. The profile form included lines for them to list clubs, organizations, and campus activities in which

they had been involved, as well as leadership positions they held in college. These lines were blank on more than half the forms. "I don't think my college has very many clubs for students," one participant from the Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC) surmised. According to its website, there are more than 60 registered clubs and student organizations at BMCC, plus the College has an Office of Student Activities. Some participants were aware of engagement opportunities at their institutions, but maintained they were too busy to join or pursue leadership roles. Across several interviews with commuter students, we repeatedly heard without much variation this explanation: "Between classes, working, and commuting back-and-forth to campus, I don't have time for much else." One participant worked an average of 60 hours each week at his off-campus job. He was engaged in nothing on campus; his cumulative grade point average at the time of our interview was below 2.00.

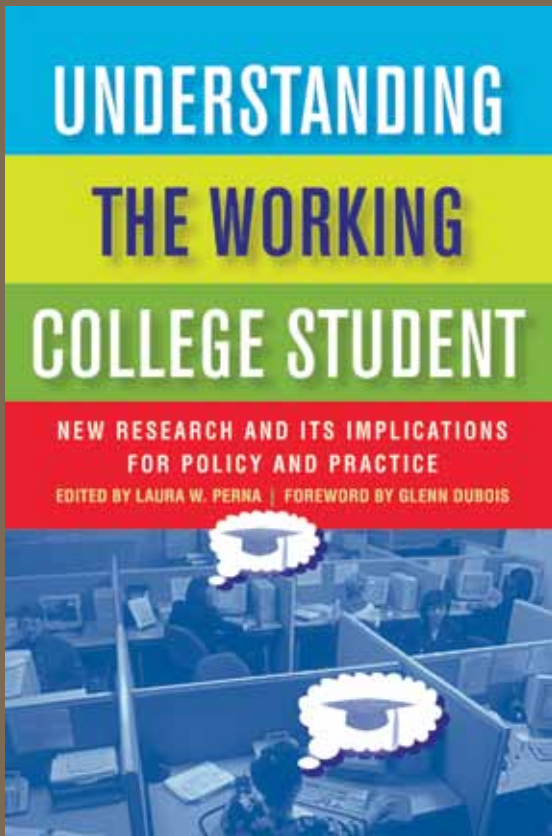
### **Relationships with professors and administrators**

Harper (2012) found that engagement in student organizations and participation in enriching educational experiences (e.g., study abroad and service learning programs) enabled the Black male achievers in his study to establish value-added relationships with professors and administrators. Unfortunately, few collegians we interviewed could speak with any level of depth about relationships they had established on campus. We explicitly asked these two questions in each interview: (1) Tell me a bit about your relationships with your professors, and (2) who on your college campus has been most supportive and helpful to you? Participants often appeared perplexed by the first question – some even asked, "what do you mean by relationship?" It was clear that deep connections had not been established and interactions were almost entirely confined to the classroom. "I honestly don't even remember any of the professors' names I took last semester," one student confessed.

Some participants were part of the SUNY Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) and the CUNY Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge (SEEK) Program. EOP and SEEK provide access, academic support, and financial assistance to students who show promise for succeeding in college, but may not have otherwise been admissible to a four-year institution in one of the two systems. The programs also serve lower-income students and populations that historically have been disadvantaged in schools. EOP and SEEK participants almost always had immediate responses to the question about who had been most helpful and supportive. They named directors, staff members, and peer mentors in these programs. The centralized resources, tutoring, academic and social programming, and personal and academic counseling offered via EOP and SEEK were deemed enormously helpful.

Beyond EOP and SEEK students, few others could recall as easily where they were likeliest to find support and academic assistance on their respective campuses. The majority said their friends had been most supportive. Some named professors, usually without substantive reasoning – "he was nice to me when I took his class" and "she helped me one time when I went to her office hours" are





examples. Most did not talk about faculty and staff providing life-changing advice on tough academic and personal matters, collaborating with professors on research, or campus professionals investing powerfully in their career development. This was especially salient among participants who were struggling academically – it seemed that they had no serious relationships beyond those with peers. Several people, high-achievers and low-performers alike, acknowledged that employees of their colleges and universities were unlike teachers, counselors, and other adults at their former high schools. “At Explorations Academy teachers could see if you were struggling and they would reach out to you to see what they could do to help. Nobody does that at college.” Others expressed similar sentiments.

### **Financing college and money matters**

Many students who drop out of college do so for financial reasons. As noted in the next section, the 90 young men we interviewed were determined to complete college. Similar to achievers in Harper’s (2012) study, undergraduates in the New York City Black and Latino Male High School Achievement Study seemed to have avoided significant financial hardships in college. Also like students in the National Black Male College Achievement Study (NBMCAS), our participants were disproportionately from low-income and working class families. But there are five notable dissimilarities between the two samples: not every student we interviewed performed as exceptionally in the college classroom, was as actively engaged in organizations and leadership positions, had cultivated sub-

stantive relationships with faculty and politically wealthy persons on campus (e.g., his college president, academic department chair, and dean of students), spent his summers doing paid internships or research programs related to his field of study, or earned nearly as many merit-based scholarships and financial rewards for his college achievements. These differences ultimately affected how students paid for college.

Harper (2012) reported the following: “participants financed their undergraduate education by applying for as many scholarships and fellowships as possible, working in paid summer internships away from their campuses, and by pursuing paid student leadership positions on campus (for example, being a resident assistant or a cabinet-level officer in student government). Common among the 219 participants was an aggressive habit of applying for as many opportunities as possible, including those that helped them alleviate financial stress during their college years” (p. 11). This was true of only a small handful of students in our study. Most financed college through Pell Grants, TAP, EOP and SEEK Program funds, and student loans. Forty percent received scholarships. However, most of those were one-time awards they received coming out of high school and were for small amounts (e.g., one person received a \$500 student leader scholarship at SUNY Delhi). Only one person in the study was a full scholarship student-athlete. Two were Posse Scholars, and two graduates of the Academy for Young Writers were Mountaineer Scholars at Southern Vermont College. Many others either worked to pay a fraction of

their tuition or relied on financial assistance from family members. Significantly fewer (in fact, hardly any) participants in the NBMCAS worked off-campus jobs.

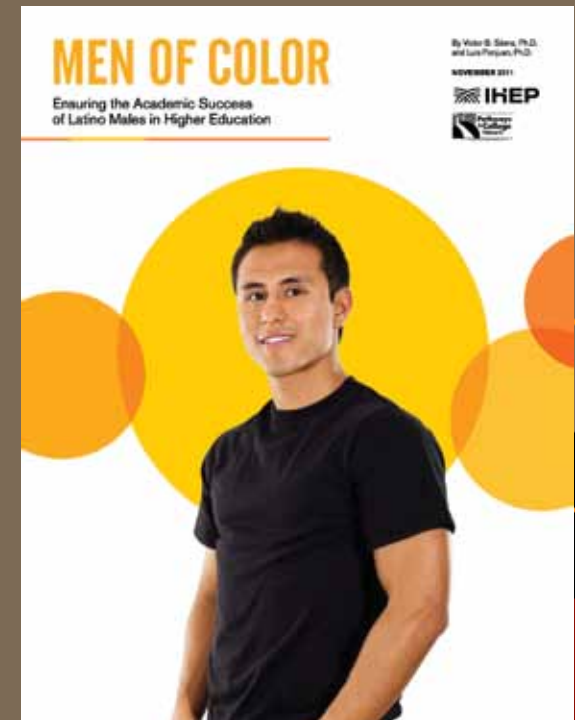
Financing college is another area in which one's exceptional academic performance in high school did not take him as far as it should have. No participant was a Gates Millennium Scholar, or a student at an elite private institution where the combination of his intellectual talent and household income would have enabled him to attend at no cost. While there was a pair of Posse Scholars in our sample, not many others mentioned having applied for Posse when they were in high school. Despite this, in most instances their aid packages were sufficient and strategies they had employed to pay for college seemed to work well. A few had experienced some paperwork and late processing problems, but professionals in their financial aid offices successfully resolved those issues. On the whole, these young men did not appear burdened by anxieties about paying for future semesters. This could be explained, at least in part, by the number of students in our sample who attended low-cost community colleges, worked jobs on and off campus, and still lived at home with family members. In sum, their finance strategies typically were not what we believe they could or should have been, but the aid they received was enough to alleviate worry and thoughts of discontinuing college.

### **Determined to complete college**

Despite occasional encounters with academic hardship, very few participants said they considered dropping out of college. Even those who had been placed on academic probation (including the one who was ultimately forced to leave Brooklyn College) were determined to persist through degree attainment. "Sometimes it's rough out here, but I can't quit. I'm not a quitter," one student at SUNY Canton maintained. Others said the same determination and goal commitment that enabled them to succeed in high school was compelling them to persist in college. A graduate of ACORN Community High School declared, "I decided a long time ago, in like middle school, that I was going to law school. Nothing is going

to stop me, no matter how hard it gets." The profile form included a 10-point scale on which students were instructed to indicate how certain they were that they would complete college at the institutions they presently attended (1 = not at all certain, 10 = absolutely certain). The average on this certainty scale was 8.7. Fascinating is that 16 students had cumulative college GPAs below 2.50; their average on the certainty scale was 8.6. One rising sophomore said, "I struggled last year, but there's no way I'm giving up; I'm 100% sure I'm going to graduate." Those who were not absolutely certain often articulated plans to transfer to a different college or university.

A student who had just completed his freshman year at Howard University said he thought seriously about dropping out. He earned a 2.10 GPA in his first year, was not actively engaged in campus activities or student organizations, and had no substantive relationships with faculty and staff in college. He had always performed exceptionally in school, thus this sudden encounter with academic struggle was both unfamiliar and unnerving. "I was upset about how my college life was going. I determined I wasn't ready, so I figured I would drop out and take this challenge on later," he stated. But this participant was afraid that if he left Howard there was a chance he would not immediately enroll elsewhere. He was not yet ready to abandon his dream of becoming an engineer. He circled 7 on the 10-point scale that asked about his certainty of graduating from Howard within the next five years. He made lots of friends during his freshman year; he talked with them about potentially not returning the next semester. "What kept me in? My peers. People really enjoy having me around, so I definitely stayed for my peers. They were telling me that if I don't at least finish my first year I'm not going to want to come back." In our June 2013 interview, this student said he was definitely returning to Howard at the end of summer for the start of his second year. Unfortunately, he did not.



## APPLYING THEMSELVES

Every high school senior in this study applied to college. On average, they applied to seven; one student submitted 15 applications. Juniors had elite universities like Penn, Columbia, and Harvard on their prospect lists, as well as community colleges, CUNY and SUNY campuses, and Historically Black Colleges.

ACADEMY FOR YOUNG MEN





# IMPROVING STUDENT SUCCESS IN URBAN EDUCATION

## Implications and Recommendations for Various Stakeholders

Educators, policymakers, and concerned others are desperately searching for solutions to vexing educational issues confronting young men of color in our nation's cities. For sure, no one thing will suddenly reverse longstanding inequities in urban schools. However, some important implications have emerged from our study of successful Black and Latino male students who attended 40 public high schools in the largest U.S. city. We offer in this section several recommendations for six different stakeholders. While suggestions are presented separately for each group, we believe efforts must be concurrently sustained across them and substantive partnerships among them are necessary. The ideas we present below are based on this study of Black and Latino young men, but are also largely applicable to other student populations in urban institutions across and beyond New York City. It is important to note that our recommendations are not crafted exclusively for New Yorkers or the NYC Department of Education, but instead for anyone who wishes to improve student success in urban schools.

### Parents and families

Perhaps nothing is more critical than the consistent articulation of high expectations at home. Attitudes about the value of schooling are greatly shaped by messages received from parents, caregivers, and other family members. Almost all the students we interviewed said attending school, performing well, and going to college were never optional. Families should repeatedly stress to young men how important education is and how much better their lives will be if they do well in high school and graduate from college. Citing examples in one's family seems to work well. Some parents who had not attained high levels of education told their sons how much they struggled and were honest about how different their lives would have been had they gone to college. Conversely, cousins, aunts, or parents who had earned college degrees inspired some participants to aim high. Even if one's family has no college-educated members, it is nonetheless critical to emphasize college as the most reliable pathway

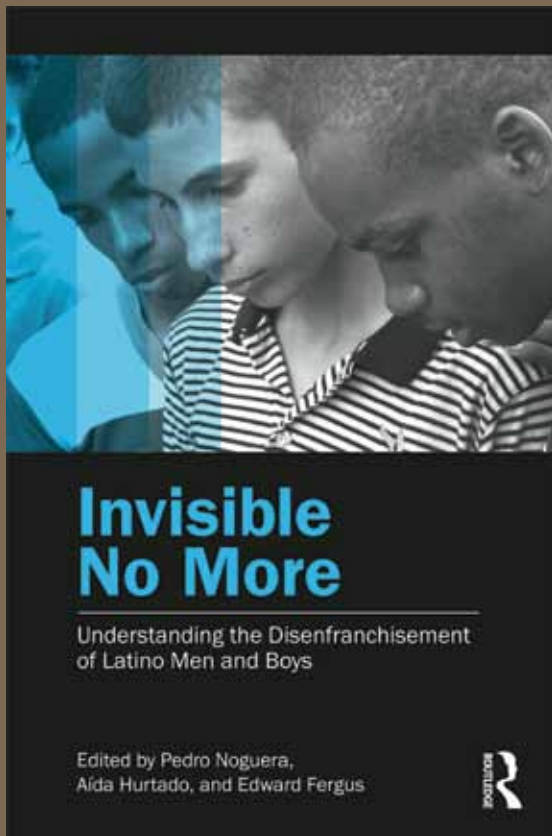
to occupational attainment and economic security.

Students in our study often characterized their parents as strict – not mean or abusive, but strict. Based on what we heard, it seems sensible to suggest that family members regulate the amount of time young boys (especially those in urban contexts) spend outdoors. This recommendation engenders much uneasiness among us, as we believe outdoor play is important. Perhaps getting boys involved in urban youth sports leagues that play organized games outside is one solution. Another could be supervised outdoor playtime in parks on weekends. But what we know does not work is allowing boys to hang out for several hours or after dark. Those who do so are unlikely to amass for themselves reputations for being serious students with bright futures, which is what protected many participants in our study from gang courtship.

Data from this study led us to two additional recommendations for parents about how young men spend their time outside of school. The first pertains to homework and studying. We still do not fully understand how so many students we interviewed managed to get their homework done during the school day. When this happens, parents should still emphasize the importance of spending afterschool hours studying. Homework is about assignment completion, whereas studying is about learning and mastering concepts. If students have no assignments to complete at home, parents could have them spend afterschool hours studying for the SAT, visiting websites to learn more about colleges, and searching for college scholarships. Our second recommendation is concerning the time students spend on school grounds after the school day has ended. This seems to be good, as it offers a safe environment for young men to socialize and do homework with peers who are similarly disinterested in gangs, drugs, etc.

It is of course important for parents to ensure their sons are actually spending these afterschool hours at school as opposed to elsewhere.

To better prepare urban youth for college, families should search for free SAT prep courses and pre-college preparation programs that include Saturday workshops, college tours, financial aid counseling, standardized test prep, and academic skills development. Many of these are available at no cost to students from low-income and working class families. Several colleges and universities across New York and other major cities offer these resources, so too do organizations such as iMentor and The Opportunity Network. Thousands of initiatives are listed in the National College Access Program Directory (see [www.collegeaccess.org/AccessProgramDirectory](http://www.collegeaccess.org/AccessProgramDirectory)), which is searchable by zip code. Some programs also include workshops and resources that help parents of first generation college goers better understand admission and financial aid processes. The College Board also offers BigFuture, a free online tool that aids students and their families with applying for college, selecting the right school, and financing higher education (see [www.BigFuture.org](http://www.BigFuture.org)).



Our final recommendation for families is to couple consistent messaging about going to college with an emphasis on completing college. Typically, the former is stressed much more than the latter. It is important for parents of Black undergraduate men to know that two-thirds who start college do not graduate within six years. And that Latino male students often drop out of college at rates higher than most other populations. Parents should therefore frequently ask their sons who are enrolled in college how they are performing academically, which student organizations they have joined, what leadership roles they intend to pursue, how many meaningful relationships they have developed with campus administrators and professors outside of class, and to which internships or summer research programs they have applied. These activities enhance academic success and increase one's chances of graduating.

#### **Urban high school teachers**

We recommend that urban high school teachers masterfully balance challenge and support. Participants in our study repeatedly praised their teachers for being so caring, nurturing, relatable, accessible, committed, and respectful. No one said teachers in his school, on the whole, cared little about students. Urban schools need more teachers to do what young men said educators do in the ESI high schools (for details, see the "What they say about adults in their schools" section of the high school findings). While they enjoyed the Dunkin' Donuts hot chocolate, being able to call teachers by their first names, getting help with college applications, and feeling a fun sense of friendship with educators, participants also appreciated being pushed by them. They found beneficial, especially once they got to college, high school teachers who embraced rigor in their courses. Thus, teachers should present students with challenging assignments, demand that they complete homework and study, and enforce consistent penalties for the submission of late assignments. This, we believe, can be done while cultures of support and mutual respect are sustained.

With the exception of those who took AP courses and the

few who completed classes on college campuses when they were in high school, many participants said they did not know what college was like. Teachers, beginning in ninth grade, need to frequently unmask for students how college works and what the academic expectations are for undergraduates. Occasionally simulating aspects of a college-level course could be helpful, so too would having college students and professors visit to describe what college is like. Bringing recent graduates back who are currently enrolled in local colleges and universities to talk with students about academic expectations and surprises they encountered would also be effective. Several college professors post syllabi for their courses online; perhaps these could be shared with students and various features from them could be adapted for high school classes. Likewise, teachers might consider co-enrolling with their students in free massive open online courses (MOOCs) – several hundred free courses are offered via Coursera and edX. If high school teachers better clarify what is expected in college classrooms, as well as differences between doing homework and studying, we are certain that fewer students will be shocked by the expectations that await them at the next level of education.

#### **High school guidance counselors**

Examples of extraordinary, no-cost practices that produce powerful college-going cultures can be easily found across the ESI high schools. We recommend that guidance counselors and educators elsewhere replicate the innovative approaches to promoting higher education and celebrating college admission that we have described herein. It would also be helpful for counselors across a school district, state, and/or region to start online communities of practice in which novel ideas are shared. An internet-based portal could be a virtual resource fair of sorts where pictures are posted, practices are described, questions for colleagues are posted, and advice from other guidance counselors is offered.

We recognize the impossibility of one guidance counselor being well acquainted with every postsecondary institution in the U.S. Moreover, we understand the limited

capacity of 1-2 counselors to help every single student in a senior class (or school) carefully construct a thoughtful list of college options. Despite this, we feel strongly that these professionals must introduce students to a wider set of choices beyond local community colleges and four-year public institutions in their city or state. It seems important to note that we are proponents of community colleges and we are not opposed to students attending colleges near their homes. However, some students with profiles and credentials comparable to those whom we interviewed would be admissible to lots of institutions, near and far. Their academic accomplishment, SAT scores, socioeconomic status, and race would likely qualify them for scholarships and other forms of aid that actually make attending an elite private college or out-of-state public university less expensive than an in-state public postsecondary institution. For example, the University of Pennsylvania covers 100% of costs for students whose annual household income is less than \$40,000; the University does this without having undergraduates and their families take out loans. The total cost of a Penn education exceeds \$200,000. It is possible for a low-income student to graduate from here with less debt than would someone attending a community college or public university in his state. Other elite private research universities and liberal arts colleges have income threshold and no-loans policies similar to Penn's. We are convinced that more young men like those we interviewed would apply to these institutions were they aware of these aid efforts. Likewise, we believe more high-achieving students would apply for the Gates Millennium Scholars and Posse Scholars programs if they knew about them – both help students attend institutions at no (or incredibly low) cost.

We note in the findings section of this report that one young man said his high school guidance counselor advised him not to apply to the University of Virginia. We heard similar stories elsewhere. At one school, we asked the counselor why she suggested that a young man not apply to one particular institution he mentioned in his interview. She explained that “a couple” students had applied there a few years prior and did not get in.

We responded by reminding her that admissions officers change, the dynamics of applicant pools evolve, and diversity priorities in the process tend to shift from year-to-year. On the one hand, we understand guidance counselors must determine how to efficiently allocate their limited time, while ensuring that every graduating senior is admitted to college. But on the other hand, the “no one from here goes there” mindset is both inappropriate and stifling – students should at least be encouraged to try.

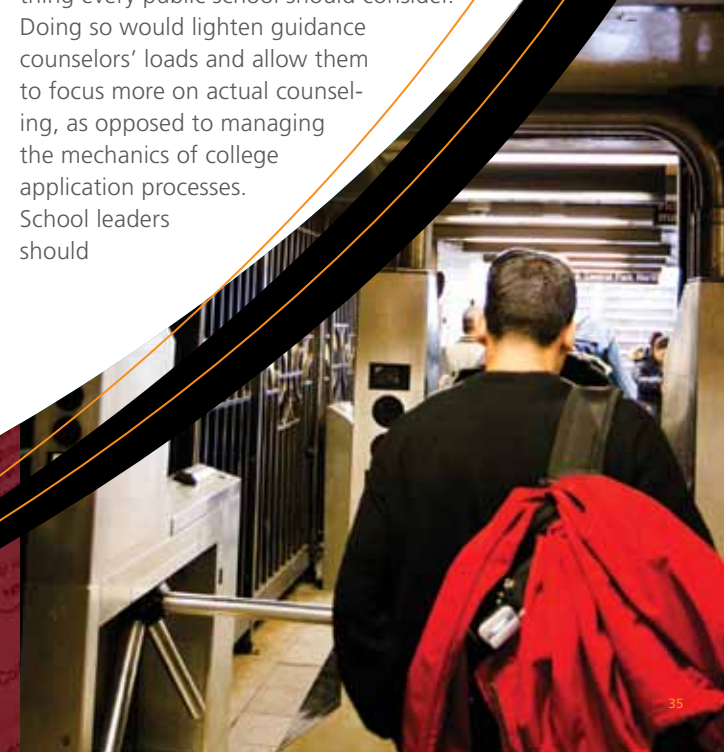
As previously stated, we believe community college to be an important sector in the landscape of postsecondary options in the U.S. They ought to be included on college tours so that students who ultimately choose them are not surprised by how culturally and structurally different they are from residential four-year institutions. It was apparent to us that students also needed advice on which schools to choose, during the application stage and after they had received multiple offers of admission. In too many instances, they did not offer substantive reasons for picking one college over another, and they knew too little about the institutions at which they ultimately enrolled. More guidance would have assisted these young men in picking places that were better matches. But again, counselors in urban high schools typically do not have time to provide this level of advisement to every graduating senior; we address this in subsequent sections.

### **Principals and other high school leaders**

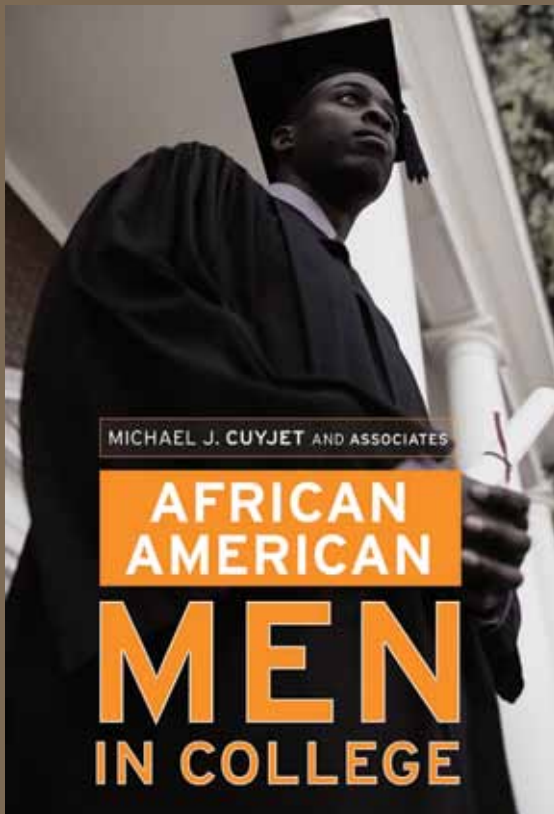
There has been much conversation, especially in recent years, about the need for highly qualified teachers in P-12 schools. While our study was not an evaluation of teacher effectiveness, what participants reported in the interviews suggested to us that their teachers were indeed highly qualified. It was obvious that principals and other leaders had carefully selected teachers who complemented cultural norms and embraced cultural practices that had

been adopted in the schools. The places we visited were not revolving doors with teachers staying for only a year or two. We saw on signs above classroom doors in many schools that most teachers had earned master's degrees. We are convinced that dedicated, caring content experts can be found if school leaders outright refuse to settle for quick fixes and hire people who have not demonstrated (or at least can articulate in believable ways) commitments to philosophies and practices known to produce student success. In ten or so instances we asked principals if they hired Teach for America teachers; each said no.

Guidance counselors are in serious need of relief – most are expected to serve too many students. Bronx Leadership Academy II offers a course on college that meets every year, starting in ninth grade. The course focuses on preparing for, applying to, and succeeding in college. Writing college essays, applying to a range of institutions, and searching for scholarships are required activities in the course. Making space in the curriculum for this is something every public school should consider. Doing so would lighten guidance counselors' loads and allow them to focus more on actual counseling, as opposed to managing the mechanics of college application processes. School leaders should







also cultivate stronger alliances with community organizations and college access programs to offer supplemental guidance counseling.

Partnering with select graduate programs in schools of education at nearby universities could also be effective. For example, in the Los Angeles metropolitan area, the University of Southern California, UCLA, Claremont Graduate University, and California State University Long Beach each offers a graduate program in higher education and college student development. Many graduate students in these programs are interested in college access and strengthening students' transitions from high school to college; some even have prior professional work experience in college admissions, and others have graduate assistantships in admissions offices on their respective campuses. We are fairly certain that students in these programs (and perhaps even their professors) would find much satisfaction in adopting high schools and assisting students with their college application and search processes. In New York City, Teachers College at Columbia University, CUNY Baruch College, and New York University offer higher education graduate programs.

An all-school approach to college counseling would also help solve the issue of overburdened guidance counselors. While educators often informally assist students with SAT prep and college applications, formalizing these activities seems both necessary and appropriate. Offering professional development sessions that focus on ways every adult in the school can play a role in helping students apply to college is one way this could be done. These workshops could include presentations from directors of admission and financial aid at a wide array of local postsecondary institutions, from community colleges to highly selective private research universities. Furthermore, higher education graduate programs usually have faculty experts who study college access and student success. They too could help school officials think about effective ways to prepare students for admission to and subsequent success in college.

Lastly, we think it is important for urban school leaders to recognize that school buildings are safe havens for youth in cities. We are reluctant to explicitly suggest that principals and teachers stay at school until 6:00 and 7:00 each night, as many students said adults at the ESI schools frequently do. Over time, this is likely to lead to burnout and unbalanced lives. However, we urge principals and other school leaders to think creatively about ways to keep school buildings open and safe for students for several hours beyond the end of the school day (and perhaps on Saturdays). Our participants benefited greatly from having after-hours access to spaces that afforded them protection from gangs, family problems, and pressures to do bad things.

### Postsecondary professionals and leaders

The implications for professionals who work at colleges and universities are wide-ranging and numerous. Here are ten things we think they should do to improve access, readiness, and success for Black and Latino male students:

1. Expand outreach initiatives. Postsecondary institutions are usually engaged to varying degrees with P-12 schools in their communities. Tutoring urban youth is the most common activity. Having more college students and institutional representatives visit high schools to assist with SAT prep, students' college search processes, and applications for admission and financial aid would be helpful.
2. Recruit more expansively. Colleges and universities frequently recruit students from the same high schools year after year. Visiting schools where only a handful of students are likely to qualify for admission is not usually viewed as a smart expenditure of fiscal and human resources. In light of this concern, college admissions officers should do more targeted recruitment by asking principals and guidance counselors to furnish lists of their most talented college-bound, college-ready students (like we did in this study). Moreover, religious institutions and community-based college preparation programs are other sites from which high-achieving

students from a range of public high schools could be recruited.

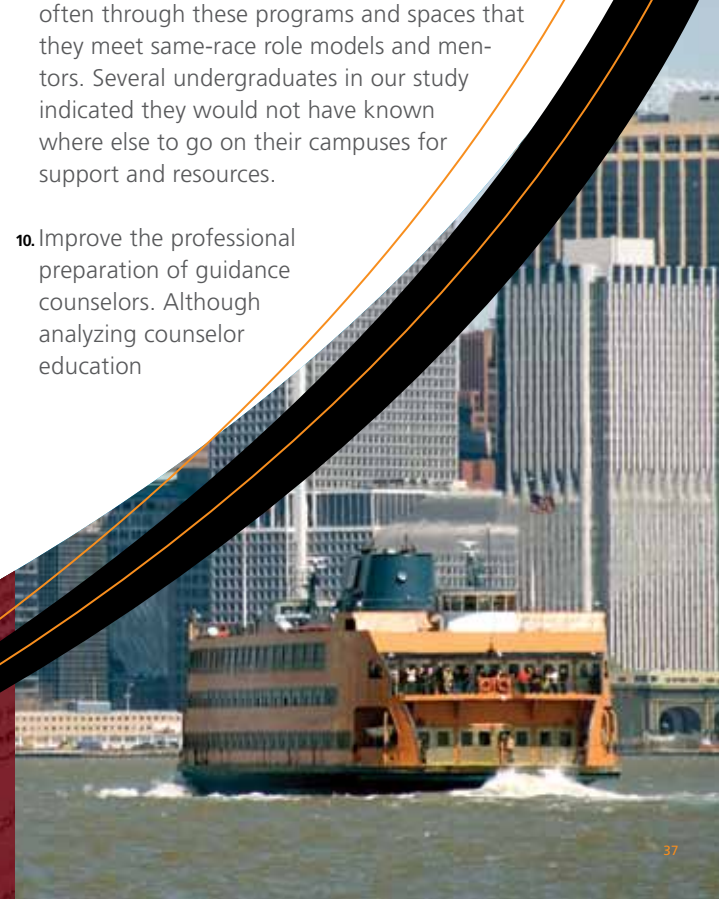
3. Offer admission to more college prep program participants. Many colleges and universities offer on-campus afterschool, weekend, and summer programs for high school students, a great number of which are targeted at students from low-income families. These initiatives often articulate commitments to preparing youth for admission to and success in college. One example of these is Upward Bound, a federally funded TRiO program offered at over 800 postsecondary institutions, including Columbia and Cornell. While preparing students for admission somewhere is commendable, offering more of them admission to institutions where Upward Bound and other college prep initiatives are hosted would be less paradoxical.
4. More aggressively market financial aid initiatives. It is both possible and likely that neither participants nor their guidance counselors were familiar with financial aid initiatives for low-income students at Ivy League universities and other elite institutions. This is surely one of many explanations for why only one participant in our sample applied to Columbia. Colleges and universities that offer income threshold and no-loans initiatives, as well as others with income-dependent and merit-based aid programs, must do a better job of ensuring that students and counselors in urban schools have access to information about them.
5. Couple academic and financial aid counseling. In addition to assisting students with selecting courses that satisfy requirements for their degrees, academic advisors should also provide guidance to students on financing future semesters of college. It is important for undergraduates to know about on-campus jobs, especially if they qualify for the Federal Work Study Program. Advisors should also introduce students to scholarships for which they may qualify. Additionally, encouraging academically stable students at residential institutions to become resident assistants (which nor-

mally comes with free room and board) is something academic advisors should do.

6. More effectively engage commuter students. An alarming number of commuter students in our study were either unaware of out-of-class engagement opportunities on their campuses or believed they had too little time to join clubs and pursue leadership opportunities. Jacoby (2014) offers numerous innovative strategies for engaging commuters and part-time students.
7. Initiate relationships with students beyond classrooms. Too often the onus for student-faculty relationships in college falls on the student. Undergraduates who are first in their families to attend college, those who commute, and those who may be the only person in a classroom from their racial group or socioeconomic background will likely find approaching a professor intimidating. Moreover, some may not know what questions to ask a faculty member or what to expect in a relationship beyond the classroom. Therefore, it is critical for college instructors to initiate contact with undergraduates, those who are struggling as well as those who show academic promise. Those students would benefit from engagement in collaborative research projects with faculty members, which could stimulate their interest in graduate study and research careers.
8. Confront the 13th grade stereotype. Addressing the perceived culture of anti-intellectualism is an important challenge for community college leaders and faculty. The overwhelming majority of students in our study said they did not apply to community colleges because they did not perceive them to be “real colleges.” And many who were presently students at community colleges said they were shocked by how classrooms on their campuses felt like high school. These

institutions provide tremendous access to students of color and students from low-income families. But our data suggest students are less likely to apply to, strive for academic excellence at, and be engaged on community college campuses if they do not view them as intellectually serious environments that differ culturally from their high schools.

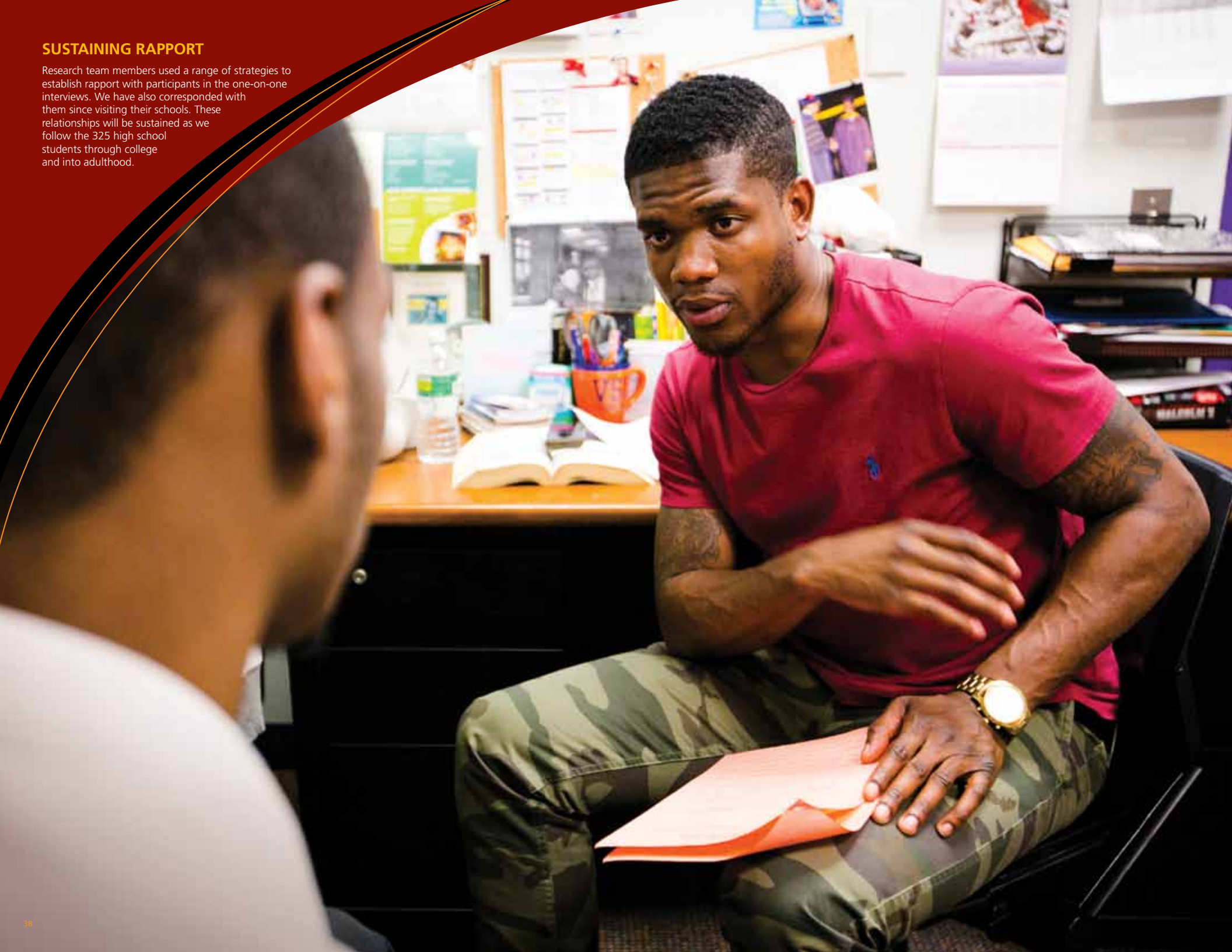
9. Sustain EOP, SEEK, and other student support services. Initiatives like EOP at SUNY institutions and SEEK at CUNY institutions – as well as TRiO Student Support Services, multicultural affairs offices, and ethnic cultural centers – play a crucial role in acclimating students to college environments and ensuring they are successful. These resources are especially important at institutions where Black and Latino males are severely underrepresented in the student population. It is often through these programs and spaces that they meet same-race role models and mentors. Several undergraduates in our study indicated they would not have known where else to go on their campuses for support and resources.
10. Improve the professional preparation of guidance counselors. Although analyzing counselor education





## SUSTAINING RAPPORT

Research team members used a range of strategies to establish rapport with participants in the one-on-one interviews. We have also corresponded with them since visiting their schools. These relationships will be sustained as we follow the 325 high school students through college and into adulthood.





program curricula was not part of this study, we could not help but wonder how much people learn in those programs about college application and search processes, creating college-going cultures in high schools, working with low-income students and their families, various forms of student financial aid, and matching students with postsecondary institutions at which they are likeliest to succeed.

### **Mayors, governors, and policymakers**

Mayor Michael Bloomberg launched the New York City Young Men's Initiative (YMI) in 2011; YMI continues to be a high priority for the mayor's office. The \$43 million annual investment is indeed extraordinary – it also happens to be the amount it costs taxpayers annually to incarcerate 715 people in the state of New York. Harper and Harris (2012) called for policymakers to match taxpayer incarceration dollars with investments in educational initiatives for young men of color. We offer the same recommendation here. Undoubtedly, what ESI (the education component of YMI) is presently doing will decrease the number of high school dropouts, increase the number of young men who pursue postsecondary education, and ultimately reduce the number of Black and Latino men who commit crimes. The beneficiaries of ESI are also unlikely to find themselves trapped in cycles of poverty and dependent on government assistance. This type of preemptive investment is not only logical, but also moral. More citywide (and perhaps statewide) initiatives similar to YMI ought to be created across the nation.

Comprehensive strategies to decrease crime and poverty in urban neighborhoods are also urgently needed. Schools are situated in communities; crime in those communities is an inescapable byproduct of poverty, job shortages, and inadequate municipal investments in particular urban infrastructures. We know for sure that police practices that racially profile and terrorize young men of color are not the most effective ways to reduce crime. Urban violence will unfortunately persist until policymakers at all levels get more serious about eradicating poverty and its outrageously disproportionate effects on

Black and Latino communities.

Size permits the sustainability of cultures that have been created in the ESI high schools. Our findings would have been different were our data collected in large, overcrowded urban schools. School boards and other entities that make policies governing school size and choice in a city should think seriously about replicating the best of what has emerged from the small schools movement in New York City. Several schools we visited were co-located, meaning multiple schools occupied different floors in a building that was once a single large school. The tragic school closures that have already occurred in Philadelphia, Chicago, and elsewhere now create opportunities to rethink use of large urban high school buildings. Noteworthy is that none of the 40 high schools in our study were charter schools.

State departments of education should set limits on student-to-guidance counselor ratios. Students who attend high schools where counseling resources are plentiful enroll in college at higher rates and make smarter college choices. In the absence of legislative mandates, we are afraid variations in ratios will continually reproduce inequities in high schools across a state. Also needed are stricter regulations for counselor education programs at universities and tougher standards in state certification/licensure procedures for professionals who will serve as high school guidance counselors. We suspect that current standards do not demand sufficient expertise on the complexities of U.S. higher education, college admission, and financial aid. Also, accreditation entities that evaluate counselor education programs should do so with greater scrutiny and introduce higher standards.

Our last three recommendations are for federal policymakers. Most of the undergraduates we interviewed were financing their undergraduate education via

student loans. Many of the high school students in our study anticipated doing the same. It is therefore imperative that interest rates remain low. Otherwise, students who grew up in poverty will graduate from college with debt that continues to engender financial stress for them and their families. Second, increasing the budget for the Federal Work Study Program would allow more students to work on-campus jobs. And third, more significant investments in TRiO Programs is warranted. Several high school participants benefited from EOP at SUNYs and SEEK at CUNYs. Elsewhere across the country, these types of programs are part of TRiO Student Support Services. For reasons too numerous to list here, Upward Bound and initiatives like it that expose low-income youth to college campuses and improve their readiness for postsecondary education are critical. In 2012-13, the federal government awarded a total of \$269,229,023 to Upward Bound programs that benefitted 62,576 youth across the nation – in our view, that was not enough.

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Dr. Harper is also author of more than 80 peer-reviewed journal articles and other academic publications. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *Review of Research in Education*, *Journal of College Student Development*, *Review of Higher Education*, and *Teachers College Record* are among the journals in which his research is published. He is editor-in-chief of the Routledge Book Series on Race and Racism in U.S. Higher Education and associate editor of *Educational Researcher*, a journal of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). Additionally, he has presented more than 130 research papers, workshops, and symposia at national education conferences and delivered over 100 keynote addresses at events for professional educators.

Several associations have praised Professor Harper's scholarly work, including the Association for the Study of Higher Education (2008 Early Career Award), AERA (2010 Early Career Award, Division G), and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (2012 Robert H. Shaffer Award for Faculty Excellence). He has received grants from Lumina Foundation, Open Society Foundations, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and numerous other sources to fund his research.

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## ABOUT THE CENTER

The Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education unites University of Pennsylvania scholars who do research on race and important topics pertaining to equity in education. Center staff and affiliates collaborate on funded research projects, environmental assessment activities, and the production of timely research reports. The Center's strength resides in its interdisciplinarity – professors from various departments in the School of Arts and Sciences (Sociology, Psychology, History, Political Science, Anthropology, English, and Asian American Studies), the Perelman School of Medicine, the School of Social Policy and Practice, the

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Wharton School of Business, Penn Law School, and the School of Nursing join Penn GSE faculty as affiliates. Principally, the Center aims to publish cutting-edge implications for education policy and practice, with an explicit focus on improving equity in P-12 schools, colleges and universities, and social contexts that influence educational outcomes.

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