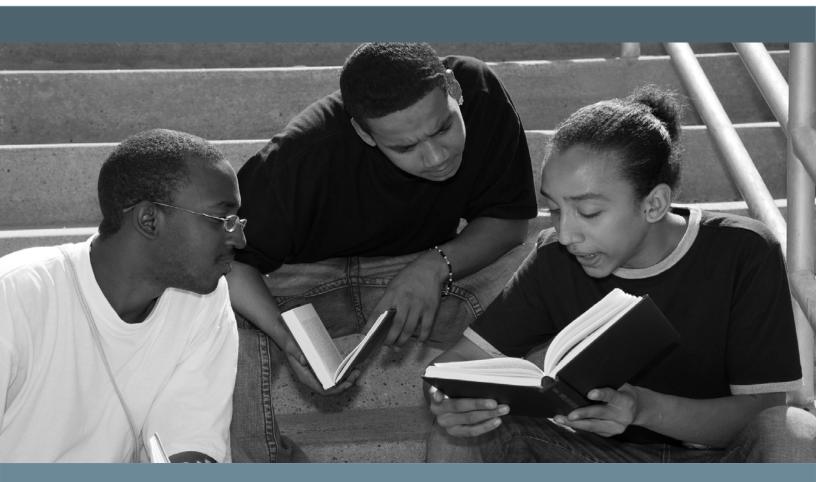**The Research Alliance for New York City Schools**

Promising Opportunities for Black and Latino Young Men
Findings from the Early Implementation of the Expanded Success Initiative

Adriana Villavicencio
Sarah Klevan
Brandon Guidry
Suzanne Wulach

April 2014

NYUSteinhardt
Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2011, the New York City Mayor's Office, the Open Society Foundations, Bloomberg Philanthropies, and over 20 local agencies launched the Young Men's Initiative (YMI), a citywide effort to improve outcomes for Black and Latino young men in the areas of education, health, employment, and criminal justice. YMI is one of the single largest initiatives focused on Black and Latino males in the country, and it is at the forefront of a growing national movement to address the challenges these young men face in a more concerted way. This was exemplified by President Obama's recent launch of My Brother's Keeper, an initiative backed by government, businesses, and more than a dozen foundations that have committed $350 million toward identifying and expanding effective programs for young boys and men of color.[i] Like others in this new generation of initiatives, YMI is attempting to tackle problems that have commonly been perceived as too large to fix.

The core education component of YMI—the Expanded Success Initiative (ESI)—is designed to meet two related goals: 1) to increase college and career readiness among Black and Latino male students in participating high schools,[ii, iii] and 2) to identify and disseminate effective strategies that might be replicated in other NYC schools and possibly other districts. In this way, ESI is a "research and development" initiative, encouraging schools to experiment with new approaches and documenting lessons from their experience, with the intention of eventually effecting change throughout the city by scaling up practices that prove successful.

Supported by a multi-year, $24 million commitment by the Open Society Foundations,[iv] ESI has invested funding and other resources in 40 NYC public high schools, to help them create and expand programs in the areas of academics, youth development, and school culture. These programs begin with the schools' 9th graders and will follow them through their scheduled 12th grade year. As part of the initiative, each ESI school receives $250,000 as well as regular opportunities for professional development, particularly in the areas of college readiness and culturally relevant education.[v]

ESI has been lauded both for the attention it brings to the challenges confronting young men of color and the substantial investment it makes in students and schools (Associated Press 2011; Peltz 2012; Zelon 2013). But understanding how these

resources are actually being used, how they change participating schools, and whether they make a difference for students is also a critical part of the initiative. To answer these questions, the Research Alliance for New York City Schools is conducting an independent multi-year evaluation—funded by the Open Society Foundations—to assess ESI's implementation and impact. This executive summary presents highlights from our report, *Promising Opportunities for Black and Latino Young Men: Findings from the Early Implementation of the Expanded Success Initiative*. While it is too soon to know if ESI is having an impact on student outcomes, the report provides a rich description of the first year of implementation (i.e., the 2012-2013 school year) at 38 of the 40 ESI schools.[vi] It focuses on elements that are integral to ESI's theory of action and were reported by school staff as having been the most promising for improving student outcomes and school culture. This information is intended to help ESI schools and the NYC Department of Education (DOE) as they refine programming and district-level support through the remainder of the initiative. More broadly, these findings and recommendations can inform efforts in other schools and districts working to better engage young men of color.

Findings on ESI's Early Implementation

Data collection on ESI implementation began in the summer before the 2012-2013 school year, but primarily entailed visits to 38 ESI schools in the spring of 2013. During each visit, we conducted interviews with the principal and ESI design team members,[vii] as well as a focus group with three to five 9th-grade teachers. We also used a structured questionnaire for principals or design team members about the details of ESI programming in their school. Our analyses of the data we gathered yielded a number of notable insights about ESI's rollout and early implementation:

- **The DOE provided a wide array of resources to ESI schools.** Given the size and scope of the initiative, district-level funding, workshops, planning meetings, partner information, and other resources were generally made available quickly and efficiently. While a majority of schools spoke positively about the support they had received from the ESI central team, some schools raised concerns about delays in funding, which largely stemmed from having to revise and resubmit their workplans.[viii] Others expressed dissatisfaction over not being able to work with existing external partners who were not on ESI's approved vendor list. Among the supports provided by the ESI Central team were an online community for participating schools and partners, various professional development (PD)

opportunities, and meetings with schools through the year to provide individualized support. Attendance at PD events and workshops ranged widely from school to school and seemed to depend on the topic.

- **The majority of participating schools received high ratings for implementation fidelity and service or program intensity.** We developed quantitative measures of *fidelity*, to assess how well schools' implementation in Year 1 matched their workplans, and *intensity*, to capture the robustness of programming (e.g., the number of students served and the frequency and duration of their participation). We found that a majority of schools implemented their plans with high fidelity and intensity in Year 1, receiving ratings of 13 or 14 out of a possible 16. Some schools found it challenging to implement all of the specific programs they had proposed in their workplans, to implement these programs as often as they originally envisioned, or to implement programming evenly across ESI's three domains—academics, youth development and school culture.

- **Schools enhanced programming in the three domains specified in the ESI design and theory of action.**

    Academics. Educators reported both raising academic standards or benchmarks and increasing opportunities for students to take more rigorous coursework. Overall, these changes are aligned with ESI's theory of action, which proposes that raising expectations and increasing rigor will better prepare students not only to apply to college but also to succeed at college-level work.

    Youth Development. Staff at more than half of ESI schools reported improvements in relationships between students and their peers as well as between students and teachers. A substantial body of social science research has demonstrated that positive relationships can help boost academic achievement and promote better behavior and college enrollment (Wells et al. 2011; Riegle-Crumb 2010; Haynie and Osgood 2005). Thus, enhancing these kinds of relationships may represent a key lever for improving outcomes for young men of color.

    College and Career Culture. ESI's third domain, school culture, refers to school-wide efforts to prepare students for college and careers. The educators we spoke to reported a substantial expansion of college supports, not only in

terms of adding programs, but also in terms of shifting the school culture to be more explicitly college focused, beginning in the 9th grade. Past research suggests a link between explicit college support and students' levels of college knowledge and college readiness (Conley 2007; Scramm 2008).

- **Culturally relevant education (CRE) emerged as a central focus and organizing principle for ESI schools and for the initiative as a whole.** Staff in more than half of ESI schools reported that exposure to CRE had changed school-wide practices (particularly around discipline), as well as teacher mindsets and beliefs about their instruction and their students—important elements in being able to effectively support young men of color (Cummins 1986; Ladson-Billings 1994).

- **The level of programmatic cohesion varied among ESI schools.** School administrators and teachers identified cohesion across program elements—and with the school as a whole—as essential for successfully implementing ESI. The level of cohesion among ESI schools was more varied than fidelity or intensity; while some schools largely operated as if ESI were an add-on program, others made great efforts to weave ESI into existing school norms, programs, and structures. Educators described various barriers to achieving cohesive implementation, as well as strategies they used (or should have used) to overcome these barriers.

Recommendations for Schools and Districts

These early implementation findings point to strategies that may be used to strengthen ESI as it continues to evolve. They also provide preliminary hints about factors that are likely to influence long-term sustainability and efforts to scale up ESI. To this end, we offer the following reflections on our findings.

Focus on Programmatic Cohesion

Recommendations for schools: Schools with the strongest overall ESI programming were those that put a good deal of energy into ensuring that ESI was well integrated into the school's culture and everyday school practice. Evidence from these schools suggests that to increase cohesion, multiple staff members should be involved in ESI meetings and professional development, ESI-related activities should be built into in the school day, and there should be opportunities to inform

teachers and administrators about the rationale behind ESI and how its programming is connected to the school mission.

Recommendations for centralized support systems: In Year 2 (the 2013-2014 school year), the ESI central team created an important structure for increasing programmatic cohesion by having every school designate an ESI point person and organizing regular meetings for these point people (in addition to regular ESI principal meetings). These meetings are designed to share important ESI information and training, which point people can then disseminate to their staff. Some schools suggested that the ESI team should also provide explicit training around programmatic cohesion. It might be useful to highlight the work of schools that are excelling in this area. Increasing programmatic cohesion is likely to be especially important as schools begin to think about how to sustain ESI in the face of less funding, staff turnover, and other district-wide changes, such as the implementation of the Common Core.

Expand Career Supports

Recommendations for schools: While a majority of schools reported an expansion of college supports, very few reported changes in their career-focused programming. Given that career readiness is one central goal for ESI, school staff should begin thinking about how career supports both overlap with and are distinct from college readiness (Symonds et al. 2011). It should be noted that career programming is not merely about helping students gain employment, but about developing the skills and competencies they will need to succeed in the world of work (including full-time employment or work-study opportunities in college).

Recommendations for centralized support systems: The DOE may be able to help schools develop programming that is explicitly geared toward career readiness. To support the work of schools in this area, the DOE could provide more information about the benefits of this type of programming, as well as examples of specific career-related strategies that have garnered some evidence of effectiveness. The team could also ensure that the approved ample external partners list includes ample options who can assist with this type of programming.

Bolster Culturally Relevant Education Across Domains

Recommendations for schools. While educators in many schools reported a shift in mindsets, culture, or practice as a response to their work with CRE, others were still wondering how to translate CRE principles into specific instructional practices. In schools where CRE has been embraced, we heard about the profound differences it is making in how teachers think about their work and the ways in which they relate to their students. Schools should continue to take advantage of the unique opportunity to receive (or increase their presence in) the CRE training provided by the ESI central team and should strategically send staff who will be able to successfully share this training with other members of the school community.

Recommendations for centralized support systems. The work around CRE is related to issues of cohesion and sustainability, because of CRE's potential to affect teacher mindsets, school practice, and school culture at deeper levels that cut across individual programs. We encourage the team to continue developing schools' expertise in CRE, particularly helping them identify more practical ways to incorporate a culturally relevant perspective into school policies and everyday school practice. This might be another area in which the ESI central team can structure time for principals to learn best practices from other schools.

Managing External Partnerships

Recommendations for schools: Partners were central to the creation and expansion of programming in ESI schools. The most successful partnerships were those in which the vendor added a unique expertise not present or fully developed in the building, while also fitting in well with the culture of the school. In schools that were particularly focused on sustainability beyond the ESI funding period, staff reported actively learning from an outside partner during this first year (e.g., about how to run a successful advisory or peer mentoring program), so that the school would be in a position to provide that program or service on its own in subsequent years.

Recommendations for centralized support systems. Half of the ESI schools reported problems or challenges related to external partnerships. The DOE's ESI team might consider either making special allowances for vendors with whom schools have worked successfully in the past or amending the application process for these vendors so it is not overly cumbersome. To ensure that these partnerships are

fruitful, it might also be useful to provide some kind of anonymous survey or rating system on external vendors, which would allow educators to give feedback and possibly help other schools make more informed decisions about which partners to select.

Launching and rolling out a complex new initiative in 40 NYC high schools is a massive undertaking. Our findings suggest that, for the most part, ESI's first year of implementation has been successful. While participating schools and the DOE's ESI team both encountered challenges, our fieldwork showed many encouraging signs. It is clear that schools have made a number of important changes that hold promise for improving college readiness among Black and Latino young men. We hope that by providing a broad picture of how ESI is being implemented on the ground, this report is useful to ESI schools and the NYC DOE, as well as other stakeholders around the country who are working to improve outcomes for young men of color.

Executive Summary Notes

[i] This includes $150 million in current investments and at least $200 million in new funding over the next five years. See White House, Office of the Press Secretary 2014.

[ii] There are many questions about how to measure "college readiness." One commonly used benchmark for NYC schools is theNew York State Education Department's Aspirational Performance Measure: earning a Regents diploma or an Advanced Regents diploma within four years, passing at least one Math Regents with a score of 80 or higher, and passing the English Regents with a score of 75 or higher. The Research Alliance is currently engaged in work to help create better measures of college readiness.

[iii] A competitive "Design Challenge" was used to select schools to participate in ESI. The initiative targets schools that have relatively high graduation rates, but are only on par with other schools in terms of college readiness, in an effort to leverage the capacities and best practices of these schools to close the gap between high school graduation and college readiness.

[iv] The $24 million also funds other components of ESI, including efforts to scale up college advising training citywide and the ESI School Design Fellowship, which is dedicated to designing and launching eight new high schools focused on preparing Black and Latino students for college and careers. Fellows will become school leaders in these eight new schools, slated to open in September 2014. These other components of ESI are not a part of the Research Alliance evaluation.

[v] Culturally relevant education is "a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes." See Ladson-Billings 1994.

[vi] Two of the 40 ESI schools were not included in our Year 1 analysis because they were relocated or closed for a length of time due to Hurricane Sandy.

[vii] Design team members are individuals who were responsible for crafting each school's ESI application and workplan and for helping implement ESI programming throughout the year.

[viii] Before receiving funding, each ESI school was required to develop a workplan that described the programs they would be expanding or developing with ESI funding.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In 2011, the New York City Mayor's Office, the Open Society Foundations, Bloomberg Philanthropies, and over 20 local agencies launched the Young Men's Initiative (YMI), a citywide effort to improve outcomes for Black and Latino young men in the areas of education, health, employment, and criminal justice. The core education component of YMI—the Expanded Success Initiative (ESI)—is designed to meet two goals: 1) to increase college and career readiness among Black and Latino male students in participating high schools,[1] and 2) to identify and disseminate effective strategies that might be replicated in other schools and possibly other districts. In this way, ESI is a "research and development" initiative, encouraging schools to experiment with new approaches and documenting lessons from their experience, with the intention of eventually scaling up practices that prove successful, to effect change throughout the City.

Supported by a multi-year, \$24 million commitment by the Open Society Foundations,[2] ESI has invested funding and resources in 40 NYC public high schools to help them create and expand programs in the areas of academics, youth development, and school culture.[3] These programs begin with the schools' 9th graders and will follow them through their scheduled 12th grade year. As part of this initiative, each ESI school receives \$250,000 as well as regular opportunities for professional development, particularly in the areas of college readiness and culturally relevant education.[4]

As one of the country's single largest initiatives focused on Black and Latino males, YMI is an unprecedented citywide effort to tackle problems that are commonly perceived as too large to fix. Its education component, ESI, has been lauded for the both the attention it brings to the challenges confronting young men of color and the substantial investment it makes in students and schools (Associated Press 2011; Peltz 2012; Zelon 2013). Understanding how these resources are actually being used, how they change participating schools and whether they make a difference for students is a critical part of the initiative. To answer these questions, the Research Alliance for NYC Schools is conducting an independent multi-year evaluation of ESI's implementation and impact.

As part of this evaluation, the Research Alliance published two early reports exploring ESI's design and potential. *Moving the Needle: Exploring Key Levers to Boost*

College Readiness Among Black and Latino Males in NYC (Villavicencio et al. 2013) examined the academic trajectories of Black and Latino young men in NYC as well as past research on the factors that influence outcomes for this population of students; this work highlighted promising features and likely limitations of ESI's theory of action. *Preparing Black and Latino Young Men for College and Careers: A Description of the Schools and Strategies in NYC's Expanded Success Initiative* (Klevan et al. 2013) went one step further by analyzing the Year 1 workplans of ESI schools, concluding that these plans were strongly aligned with ESI's design and goals. Moreover, this baseline report found that while ESI schools were selected for being relatively high performing,[5] they were in many ways comparable to other City schools, for example, in terms of size, grade configuration, and the number of special education and overage students enrolled. This overall resemblance between ESI schools and other City schools has positive implications for the potential to apply lessons learned through ESI to the district at large.

Despite these encouraging signs, we do not yet have any evidence about the efficacy of ESI and its capacity to advance college and career readiness for students. To that end, the Research Alliance's mixed-method, longitudinal evaluation—funded by the Open Society Foundations—has been designed to answer two broad questions:

1. What services and programs did ESI schools provide their staff and students as a result of this initiative? And,
2. Did ESI impact students' *academic* outcomes (such as credit accumulation, graduation rates, and college going rates) and/or *non-academic* outcomes (such as internal resilience, self-efficacy, and post-secondary aspirations)?

Our evaluation also seeks to draw connections between the first and second questions, to understand if the initiative's effects (or lack thereof) are related to the quality of implementation. By painting a picture of what ESI looks like on the ground, the implementation study will enable us to make sense of the impact findings—so we can begin to answer not only whether the initiative has made a difference for students, but how and why (or why not). In addition, by assessing and reporting on implementation while ESI is ongoing, we hope to help schools refine and strengthen their programs.

It is too early to answer the questions about impact, for several reasons. First, the DOE encouraged schools to use Year 1 of ESI (the 2012-2013 school year) to try fresh strategies and develop new partnerships. In many ways, the first year of the

initiative was designed as a pilot, with the assumption that schools would learn from the experience and modify their plans as needed for the remaining years of the initiative. Second, while the ESI team created a strong infrastructure for the initiative and provided staff in ESI schools with a good deal of support, the first year was not without challenges (as might be expected with any effort of this scale). In particular, not all schools' workplans—documentation that listed how schools would be using the funding—were approved at the same time, because some required multiple revisions. Consequently, these schools received funding later than expected. Even with funding, it took some schools longer than others to get certain programs off the ground, due to logistical challenges and other constraints. Because of the emphasis on trying new things in the first year and on-the-ground realities that made early implementation challenging, we believe it is not appropriate to assess impacts at this stage of the initiative. We will report on ESI's impacts after the second year of implementation.

What we do provide extensively here, however, is a rich description of implementation efforts across 38 of the 40 ESI schools,[6] with particular focus on elements that are integral to the theory of action and that were reported by school staff as having been the most promising for improving student outcomes and school culture. We begin by describing our data collection methods and analytic process. Next, we describe the DOE's rollout of ESI, the challenges that schools faced during the startup process (including the planning phase), and the ongoing supports provided to schools by the DOE's ESI team. Chapter 4 presents our key findings beginning with an analysis of *fidelity*, that is, how well schools' implementation in Year 1 matched their workplans, and of *intensity*, which attempts to capture the robustness of programming (e.g., how often programs met, number of student served) across the 38 schools. This chapter then takes a more in-depth look at what educators say has changed most substantially in their schools as a result of ESI, in each of ESI's three domains—academics, youth development, and school culture. It also documents schools' efforts to implement culturally relevant education, which emerged as the main thrust of the professional development provided to schools and a critical factor in an initiative about better supporting young men of color. Finally, Chapter 4 examines program *cohesiveness*—an element that many educators described as essential for strong implementation.

We end the report with a discussion of the implications of our findings for the efficacy of ESI and its potential impact on schools and students. By providing a broad

picture of how ESI is being implemented on the ground—including its successes and challenges to date—the report is meant to be useful to both the DOE and the 40 schools participating in ESI as they refine their programming in Year 2. Furthermore, by documenting the multi-faceted effort to implement ESI at both the district and the school level, this report also provides insight about how the initiative might be replicated in other schools and districts, if later years of the evaluation reveal that it is indeed having a positive impact on students. Ultimately, we believe that NYC's experience with ESI will be instructive for other cities that are implementing or developing similar programs designed to improve educational outcomes for young men of color.

Key Elements of ESI's Theory of Action

- ESI is being implemented in schools that have relatively high graduation rates, but are only on par with other NYC high schools in terms of college readiness. This reflects a desire to build on and leverage the capacities and best practices of these schools—to close the gap between their high school graduation and college readiness rates, to identify strategies that are most impactful in the preparation of students for college and careers, and ultimately to effect long-term change across the district.
- ESI supports the creation or expansion of programs in three domains—academics (increasing academic rigor and access to advanced coursework), youth development (supporting students' socio-emotional needs and improving school discipline policies), and school culture (school-wide efforts to prepare students for college and careers).
- ESI programming begins with the 9th grade, because postsecondary planning that starts in early high school is expected to have more of an impact on students' access to higher education and work.
- Each ESI school is awarded $250,000 over the first three years of the four-year initiative. The funding structure challenges schools to develop programs that are sustainable beyond the funding period.
- In addition to funding, ESI provides schools with a range of supports, including professional development sessions related to culturally relevant education, data snapshots about their Black and Latino male students, and an online forum.
- The DOE has positioned ESI as a "research and development initiative," in which schools are expected to try new things and refine their ideas over time. The initiative attempts to balance the use of evidence-based strategies with the freedom to take informed risks and design programs that meet the distinct needs of each ESI school and community.

The Research Alliance's Evaluation of ESI

- *Longitudinal*: Beginning in the summer of 2012 and extending though the spring of 2016, our evaluation is examining ESI over four school years, following one cohort of 9th graders through their scheduled graduation (and three additional cohorts through the 2015-2016 school year).
- *Mixed-method*: We are using quantitative and qualitative data to answer questions about the efficacy of ESI and to learn more about successful approaches to boosting college and career readiness for young men of color.
- *Implementation study*: The implementation study is examining the services and supports that are planned and implemented under ESI, the challenges schools confront along the way, and the strategies they use to address those challenges. We are conducting interviews and focus groups with educators in ESI schools and a set of comparison schools, at four points in time.
- *Impact study*: The impact study is determining whether students who are exposed to ESI-related interventions and supports achieve better outcomes than they would have if their school had not been involved in ESI. We will compare ESI students' academic outcomes (e.g., credit accumulation, grades, Regents examination scores) and non-academic outcomes (e.g., academic self-perception, post-secondary goals) with those of students in similar high schools that did not participate in this initiative. Data sources for the impact study include academic student records and student responses on Research Alliance-created surveys.

CHAPTER 2: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This chapter provides a brief summary of the data collection and analytic processes used to develop the findings in this report. A central challenge was creating an analytic framework that could be uniformly applied to all schools, despite the individualized nature of their ESI workplans.[7] Thus, we selected methods that would illuminate educators' perspectives on the initiative overall and highlight broad themes from the first year of implementation across ESI schools. Below, we describe the steps we took to collect and code data, identify prominent themes, and connect these themes to the larger goals of the initiative. More information about these methods is available in Appendix A.

Our data collection started in the summer before the 2012-2013 school year, but primarily entailed visits to 38 ESI schools in the spring of 2013. Researchers conducted the following four data collection activities at all 38 schools (see Appendices B, C, and D for related materials):

1. A 60-minute one-on-one interview with the principal;
2. A 60-minute interview with one or two members of the design team responsible for crafting each school's ESI application and workplan;
3. A 45-minute focus group with three to five 9th-grade teachers; and
4. A structured questionnaire for principals or design team members about the details of ESI programming at his or her school (discussed in fidelity/intensity section below).

We should note that each stakeholder type we focused on had a different role to play in ESI. Principals maintained budgetary oversight and often provided the last word on high-level decisions related to ESI in their school; design team members developed ESI workplans and worked to ensure that all the pieces fit together; and teachers implemented specific programs. Our interviews and focus groups were designed to elicit a range of perspectives on ESI's roll out and early implementation from individuals who were engaged in the work on a day-to-day basis. (We will begin student focus groups in the second year of implementation, when programming is expected to be more fully integrated in schools.) Interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded and later transcribed. Researchers also took notes as subjects spoke. The conversations were semi-structured, in that researchers were

expected to cover a defined set of questions but were also encouraged to depart from the protocol if they felt it would yield valuable data.

We used a highly iterative, six-step process to analyze the data. This process was designed to lead researchers from initial reflections about how ESI operated in individual schools to the identification and fine-grained analysis of major themes emerging from ESI's implementation across schools. Descriptions of these six steps are provided below.

1. *Reflection memos.* Each researcher completed a reflection memo for each interview or focus group he or she conducted to summarize educators' responses to our questions (see Appendices E and F).

2. *Analytic memos.* After all of the interviews were complete, the lead researchers developed a list of six analytic themes (e.g., "startup") to analyze further, based on questions from the interview and focus group protocols. Each researcher then wrote analytic memos for one or two of those themes by reviewing reflection memos from all 38 schools and tallying subthemes related to the broader topic (e.g., "startup challenges").

3. *Transcript coding.* The lead researchers developed a list of codes with which to analyze the transcript data, based on 1) protocol questions, 2) the ESI theory of action, and 3) the subthemes identified by the analytic memos (for example, interviewees in 12 schools identified "teacher buy-in" as a challenge, and we thus included "teacher buy-in" in our codebook). The initial list was revised twice and then used to code all 114 interviews and focus groups (see Appendix G).

4. *Coding memos.* After all transcripts were coded, each researcher wrote a coding memo, noting and recommending codes to be further analyzed based on frequency (e.g., "student engagement") or salience to the ESI theory of action (e.g. "academics," "college supports," "DOE support," and "external partnerships."), or both (e.g., "race and gender" and "relationships").[8]

5. *Thematic outlines.* Based on the coding memos, the team collectively decided on a list of codes to further analyze. Each researcher then conducted a closer reading of the transcript data related to a particular code and wrote a thematic outline about that code (e.g., "college supports").

6. *Synthesis memos.* Each researcher wrote a one-page synthesis memo highlighting the most salient analytic insights from Year 1 based on the thematic outlines. Finally, one of the lead researchers combined the synthesis memos into an annotated outline, upon which this report is based.

This systematic and multi-step process allowed us to focus on important themes, closely analyze the responses of educators, and identify patterns across the 38 schools we visited.

Strengths and Limitations of Interview Methods

As with all research methodologies, the approach outlined above has both strengths and limitations. Our intention was to obtain a rich understanding of how ESI implementation worked on the ground. Thus, it was essential to speak to the educators who were responsible for implementing ESI in each school. The questionnaires we administered to principals and design team members were used to assess how closely district- and school-level ESI implementation was aligned with ESI's theory of action. Interview and focus group data were collected to illuminate the struggles and successes educators experienced when implementing ESI. Dense, descriptive data collected systematically from actors at multiple levels of ESI's implementation and across nearly all ESI schools are well suited to answering the complex questions at the heart of our implementation study. Carefully collecting and analyzing such data ensured that our findings were based on a balanced array of perspectives both within and across schools and allowed us to identify patterns and unearth complexities in school-level ESI implementation.

Another strength of our method was that our analysis began concurrently with our data collection. This decision allowed us to hone in on themes and patterns from early on and pushed us to probe more deeply for specific aspects of implementation throughout our data collection. Our data collection methods and analysis provided ample room for reliability checks when there was a lack of clarity or agreement about what we were finding. The careful step-by-step process and collaborative effort ensured that no one individual's interpretation could dictate the direction of the analysis, while also highlighting alternative perspectives we might not have considered.

Of course, there are inherent limitations to collecting and analyzing this type of data. The logistical complexities, for example, of gathering data from 38 schools presented a number of challenges. At two ESI schools, technical difficulties prevented two interviews from being audio recorded. However, even in these instances, researchers wrote a detailed reflection memo immediately following the interview. As a result, all interviews at all schools yielded reflection memos, and all

but four interviews (two principals and two teachers) were audio recorded and transcribed for coding. Any additional data collection problems resulted from time constraints—in a few cases, principals, design team members, or teachers hit a scheduling snag and were unable to participate in the full interview, meaning researchers were not able to ask all the questions on the protocol. Overall, we conducted a robust set of 114 interviews covering a broad and in-depth protocol.

Another common challenge with qualitative research stems from the fact that interview subjects are not always neutral observers. When people are asked about an effort they are invested in, for instance, they may downplay challenges. Early on in this study, a few researchers reported the impression that research subjects were skewing answers to present their schools in a positive light. In response to this issue, the lead researchers coached their colleagues on reminding research subjects that this was not an evaluation of any particular school and, where appropriate, probing for challenges. In addition, our efforts to triangulate data by interviewing multiple actors across different schools, as well as individuals from the ESI central team, mitigated any individual cases in which respondents were hesitant to offer critiques or speak about challenges they faced.

Finally, it is worth noting that the qualitative data presented and analyzed in this report is intended to provide a rich picture of how ESI is being implemented on the ground, not a summary judgment of ESI's success (or lack thereof). Teachers were sometimes unclear about which programs were and were not part of ESI—or whether the changes they were observing stemmed from ESI or another major school event (e.g., changes in leadership). Our implementation findings are thus not themselves intended to answer questions about ESI's effects, but rather to provide detailed information about how principals and teachers actually implemented this type of programming in schools and what they viewed as the byproducts of that programming. Learning from educators on the ground is a valuable way to understand the processes and complexities of a school-wide initiative.

Overall, data collection problems due to logistical and other constraints were rare and carefully mitigated. This yielded a nearly complete and very reliable set of data. Our analytic process was multi-layered, methodical, iterative, and focused on gleaning insights from the 38 schools as a whole rather than from any one school. As a result, we are confident that the analytic insights presented in this paper are robust and will contribute to a better understanding of ESI's implementation.

Measuring Fidelity and Intensity

As noted above, in addition to interviews and focus group, we also used a structured questionnaire to assess the fidelity and intensity of implementation at each school. Each questionnaire was designed to gather the following information: a basic description of program activities; the number of students served (and the adult-student ratio); the frequency and duration of the program; and any partners involved. We used this information to develop the findings on fidelity and intensity that are reported in Chapter 4. For fidelity, we compared schools' responses to the questionnaire to information from the school's workplan (submitted to the DOE before implementation) and assigned each school a score on four dimensions of fidelity. For intensity, we compared questionnaire responses to quantitative benchmarks and, similarly, assigned each school a score on four dimensions of intensity. (More details about the fidelity and intensity measures are described in Appendix A and the complete scoring rubrics are in Appendix H.)

Because this information was collected during the first year of ESI, the design teams, external partners,[9] and other staff were learning and planning while implementing. This presented the teams with challenges typical of early implementation efforts and may have resulted in some unevenness in the data we collected. For example, some plans evolved throughout the year and may not have been fully fleshed out at the time of our data collection (January-February 2013). In addition, the individuals who filled out the questionnaire had varying levels of knowledge about their school's ESI plans and about specific implementation activities. As a result, although we believe we obtained a generally accurate picture of implementation fidelity and intensity, some of our information may be incomplete given the timing of our visits and the particular respondents participating in our interviews. We also recognize that the concept of fidelity has limitations as it pertains to this project. Failing to implement a list of programs as conceived is not necessarily a sign of negligence or poor planning; some schools had good reasons for deciding to implement different programs than they had originally proposed. We should note that schools did not lose any points in fidelity if they replaced a program or partner with another program or partner that fulfilled the same needs.

For more details about our methods, please see Appendix A.

CHAPTER 3: DISTRICT-LEVEL IMPLEMENTATION

The Department of Education's central ESI team managed district-level implementation of ESI, including selecting schools, assisting schools as they developed their ESI workplans, and providing a range of ongoing supports throughout Year 1 of the initiative. In our previous report, *Preparing Black and Latino Young Men for College and Careers: A Description of the Schools and Strategies in NYC's Expanded Success Initiative*, we described the ESI school selection process at length. Now, we shift our focus to the supports that were offered after schools were selected for ESI and how educators involved in the initiative perceived these supports.

Educators at most ESI schools—28 of the 38 we visited—spoke positively about the support they received from the ESI central team. Said one principal, "I think they are really supportive. I mean they even send emails about financial support for the young men…We are getting ongoing information from them. I don't know how much more supportive they could be." School staff repeatedly expressed these types of sentiments in interviews and focus groups. They also discussed challenges they encountered with district-level implementation, during both the planning phase and Year 1 of ESI. In this chapter, we describe the central ESI team's approach to supporting ESI schools and the schools' experiences with this support, with the aim of informing the DOE's work in future years of the initiative and providing lessons for other school districts that are developing or implementing efforts similar to ESI.

The Planning Phase

Prior to the start of Year 1, the central ESI team worked with ESI schools in three primary ways: First they provided each school with a template for their workplan and budget, as well as a "data snapshot" focused on their school's Black and Latino male students. They also provided a DOE-approved vendor list from which ESI schools could choose partners to assist with the implementation of various programs and services. Finally, they held one-on-one meetings with representatives from each ESI school to discuss the school's Year 1 workplan and budget. Looked at broadly, about a quarter of ESI schools reported positive experiences during the planning phase of ESI. Smaller numbers of schools expressed frustrations with various elements of the planning phase, such as the specifications placed upon uses of ESI funding. (Many schools reported neither positive nor negative experiences during

the planning phase.) These issues are discussed in more detail in the pages that follow.

During the application period, each applying school formed an ESI design team that collaborated to develop their schools' ESI plans. Typically, these teams included the principal, a group of teachers, other school staff members (deans, parent liaisons, etc.), and, in some cases, student representatives. The central ESI team provided a range of resources and support to each school's design team throughout the planning process. This included a workplan template (see Appendix I), which asked for the following information about each program or service that would be funded by the initiative: the ESI domain addressed by the program (academics, youth development, or school culture), activity type and description, target audience and frequency of the program, program deliverables, and data indicators that would be used to measure the program's success. The workplan template was accompanied by a budget template that required schools to provide detailed information about how ESI funding would be spent in the first year of implementation. The ESI central team also gave each design team a "data snapshot" to facilitate their thinking around the types of ESI supports and programs that might be most valuable for their Black and Latino male students. During interviews, staff from three schools specifically mentioned that the data provided by the central ESI team was helpful.

Once ESI design teams had developed Year 1 plans, they sat down with the central ESI team for a one-hour planning meeting. During these meetings, individuals from the ESI design team (usually the principal and design team leader) would describe each proposed program or strategy and explain how the program would be funded. The central ESI team would ask clarifying questions about the plan and budget documents and suggest improvements. This was also an opportunity for the central ESI team to ensure that schools were aiming to use ESI funds within the initiative's parameters. For example, schools were strongly discouraged from using ESI funds to hire personnel or purchase technological resources, such as laptops or SMART Boards (interactive whiteboards). The DOE viewed these kinds of expenditures as incompatible with ESI's focus on sustaining programming beyond the three-year funding period. While the central ESI team had a clear rationale for its limitations on how ESI funding could be used, staff at five schools expressed frustration about these conditions. For example, one principal described allocating funds for a guidance counselor in their initial Year 1 workplan, which the central ESI team did

not approve. The principal felt that the school's programming suffered as a result. As the principal explained,

> *In our school's case, we…wanted to use the bulk of our ESI money to fund the majority of a position of a guidance counselor…Because of changes that were made to the rules[10] around how the money could be spent, we had to shift money to other aspects of ESI-related programming…but it means that person [the guidance counselor] can't do as much of the work as we had initially hoped, and it means that…some of the quality of…[programming] wasn't able to be actualized in the way we had initially thought.*

After the school planning meeting, all schools were required to make at least one set of revisions to their plan. Some needed multiple rounds of revisions before approval.

This process of revising and approving workplans had implications for when funding reached schools. As part of the initiative, each ESI school receives $250,000 over the course of the initiative's first three years, but the central ESI team had to approve workplans before schools could receive their Year 1 funds. While many schools expressed appreciation for ESI funding and explained that it allowed them to pursue programming and support strategies that they otherwise would not have been able to implement, seven schools reported that they experienced substantial funding delays. Explained one principal,

> *Well, part of the problem with ESI is that the funding only came in, I think, last month. We were forced to do things without funding. For example we started a program in the summer, but we had to eat the cost…we brought the boys in. We had to feed them. We had to tutor them. We had classes for them. That was on our cost, so we had to pay two teachers to do that…We were doing all these things without funds. I guess I think we're going to be reimbursed…With the budget cuts we're currently experiencing, it was a stretch. It was a strain on our own budget to do these things.*

Some schools did not receive funding until October or November. At least one school reported that they did not receive ESI funding until December. Certainly, delays such as these made it difficult to get ESI programs up and running in the early part of Year 1.

Another central aspect of the planning phase revolved around the development of external partnerships. The ESI central team provided schools with a list of 80 vetted and approved vendors.[11] If schools planned to work with external partners, they were required to choose vendors from this list. If schools wanted to use a vendor that was not on the approved list (whether they had worked with the vendor previously or this was a new partnership), that vendor had to apply to be added to the list. The ESI central team encouraged schools to use approved vendors specifically because they wanted to avoid "business as usual" and instead use ESI funding to support new and innovative strategies. At the same time, ESI asked schools to build upon existing strengths. As written in the ESI Design Challenge (the document that described how schools could apply to be part of the initiative):

> *It is expected that eligible schools bring considerable strengths in some of the aforementioned areas of school operation and that they will use the ESI challenge to build capacity and achieve coherence across all facets that impact postsecondary outcomes for Black and Latino young men. Schools taking part in the Design Challenge will receive resources and participate in professional opportunities to re-examine their current practices and expand or develop new ones in each of the three areas (NYC DOE 2012).*

The process of selecting external vendors was the aspect of the planning phase that was most heavily critiqued by participating schools. Educators at five schools felt that limiting the use of vendors impeded their ability to build on programs and strategies that were already successful. At nine schools, educators voiced frustrations about the vendor selection process. At two of these, concerns centered around the cost of the external vendors on the list. However, most of the critical feedback on the vender selection process focused on the list being too limiting, and lack of time to learn about and select the right partner. One design team member explained, "It would be really great if there was a forum where you could go and check out [the vendors]. You could read about them on this list on the Internet, but it was very—'I don't know what this means. I don't know how good this is.'" A design team member from another school expressed frustration about the logistics that would have been involved in order to continue working with existing partners:

> *The only thing that kind of took me back with the ESI grant was, we were looking at bringing people in that may not have been vendors, so we had to find a way to get people in here who we already worked with, so we had partnerships that limited us*

because we knew these people, and they knew us. They knew our population. They've been in our building. All of a sudden, it's, like, "Oh, you can only use these people."

Taken together, these findings suggest that it may be worthwhile for the central ESI team to consider changes to the vendor selection process. This could include efforts to provide more information about vendors as well as greater flexibility for schools to choose vendors that best meet their needs.

Ongoing Support in Year 1

The central ESI team provided ongoing supports for ESI schools, including professional development, visits to schools, and virtual communication through weekly emails and an online professional learning community. In this section of the report, we describe these supports and how they were experienced by schools.

A main source of support offered to ESI schools throughout the first year of implementation was professional development (PD) and networking events. These sessions covered a wide range of topics, summarized in Table 1 on the next page. As shown, participation varied by event type, with a majority of schools attending the initial ESI Kick-Off, CRE Training, and ESI Symposiums. It is possible that the other events had lower attendance rates because particular workshops were not applicable or relevant to all schools.

While two schools mentioned that it was difficult to send staff out of the building for ESI-related professional development, several schools provided positive feedback about these opportunities. Said one design team member,

They've been great about setting up PD opportunities…we're doing a lot of professional development of math, and that's great, and ESI has been championing it…The one that we're going to next week, the CRE, the culturally relevant education—I'm interested. I'm hopeful. Everything that they've made us do has been worth it, so I'm hoping this will be as well.

Table 1: ESI Professional Development and Networking Opportunities in Year 1

Workshop/Event	Number of Schools in Attendance	Percent of Total Schools in Attendance	Workshop/Event Description
First ESI Symposium	40	100%	An opportunity for the ESI Schools to initiate long-term planning, generate ideas, and become familiar with the collective ESI community. Speakers included Dennis Walcott, then the Chancellor of the NYC DOE, and Dr. Shaun Harper from the Center for Race and Equity at the University of Pennsylvania.
ESI Professional Learning Kick-Off	37	93%	ESI schools gathered to learn more about external partner organizations, including The Brotherhood/Sister Sol, The Efficacy Institute, The Metropolitan Center, and Professor Michelle Knight (Teachers College).
Unpacking the COSEBOC Standards	12	30%	In partnership with the Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, the Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color introduced Standards and Promising Practices for Schools Educating Boys of Color, a self-assessment tool for schools.
CRE Training	34	85%	ESI schools partnered with The Brotherhood/Sister Sol, The Efficacy Institute, The Metropolitan Center, or Professor Michelle Knight (Teacher College) for school-based CRE training throughout the year.
Using PSAT/NMSQT Reports to Improve Learning	11	28%	This workshop provided hands-on training in the use of reports based on the annual PSAT/NMSQT results for math and English teachers, curriculum coordinators, school counselors, and administrators.
ESI Federal Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) Pilot	19	48%	This pilot program aimed at providing FAFSA completion data to counselors so that their schools could focus resources on students who had not completed the FAFSA, with the aim of making FAFSA completion one component of a comprehensive college and career-readiness strategy.
Spring Leadership Meeting	19	48%	An opportunity for ESI school principals and assistant principals to share lessons learned and to reflect upon the first year of ESI implementation, and a chance for school leaders to give feedback to the ESI central team about the supports they provided during the first year of ESI implementation.
Metamorphosis-Geometry	10	25%	Provided teachers with mathematics activities and pedagogical approaches that are designed to improve the success of high school students—particularly Black and Latino young men—in regaining confidence and developing skills and conceptual understanding of algebra and geometry.
Metamorphosis-Algebra	21	53%	
Youth Summit: "Which Path Will You Take?"	25	63%	An opportunity for educators to learn from students and to foster collaboration around increasing college and career planning at every level. Included student-led workshops related to gender identity, economic power, relation to law enforcement, community service, culture, and college readiness. The Summit was designed to be an annual event.
Second ESI Symposium	33	83%	An opportunity for the ESI Schools to continue long-term planning, generate ideas, and become familiar with the collective ESI community. Geoffrey Canada of the Harlem Children's Zone gave the keynote address.

Source: Attendance data reported to the Research Alliance by the DOE ESI team, based on event registration lists.

Four schools mentioned that they appreciated that the events and professional development offered by ESI created a space to learn from each other about their experiences with the initiative. Six schools, however, reported that they would have liked more opportunities to speak with other participating schools. Said one design team member,

…I think there's 40 schools in ESI, and I think they've been saying that we're all trying stuff, and they're sort of saying there might be some discussion about what's going on and what's going well. I personally would like to try to engage in some of that, because understanding our microcosm, we think we're doing what's best for [school name] this year with these kids…but maybe somebody else down the street is rocking out—and we could flip something and spin it to teachers [with] one PD and just start doing and adding that. I don't know. I think it'd be helpful.

The DOE's central ESI team also provided support in the form of visits to participating schools. Each ESI school was visited at least once during the school year. The goals were to get a sense of how programs were progressing at the school, to offer feedback to the principal and members of the design team, and to connect them with relevant resources. These school visits were not discussed frequently in our focus groups and interviews, but at the three schools where they were mentioned, educators spoke of them in positive terms. As one principal put it,

[The ESI team member] was very helpful…I don't know if he went to every school, but we were one of the schools he actually came out to visit and spoke with my kids and things like that. I think that was really helpful.

The central team also maintained contact with schools via phone and email. Staff at seven schools specifically described these communications as consistent and supportive. Notably, not one school had any negative feedback about the ESI central team, and at many schools, educators reported feeling very supported by them. A few of those we spoke with described instances in which central ESI staff went "above and beyond" their responsibilities to help ESI schools with their programming. For example, at one ESI school, we heard about an ESI central team member offering to put transportation expenses on his personal credit card when an ESI trip was in danger of being canceled due to an unexpected delay in transportation funding. As the school's design team member explained, "[The trip]

wouldn't have happened had he not intervened…he really stepped in and took care of that." Along similar lines, a principal from another school shared:

> *The support of the ESI personnel…beautiful…magnificent. He [the central team representative] is here. He comes here on a regular basis, checks in with us. He came one day last week and found out one of my students was—we were having a little reception for him because he got a full scholarship to UConn on signing day for football…He came back the next day to come to the reception. That so impressed me about him. I thought, oh my god, this guy loves kids.*

During our interviews with central ESI team members, they each expressed a deep, personal commitment to ESI's work (for more on this, see Chapter 4). It is unsurprising, therefore, that schools found them so supportive and helpful, even beyond what was required by their job descriptions.

In addition to school visits, phone calls, and emails, the central ESI team provided an online professional learning community and a weekly ESI newsletter. The online professional learning community (the ESI Wiki) allowed participating schools to interact with one another and access information about upcoming events and deadlines, information about external vendors, relevant literature, outside funding opportunities, and meeting minutes. The weekly ESI newsletter highlighted programs at particular schools as well as upcoming events and opportunities for school staff and students (e.g., professional development opportunities or financial aid workshops). Generally, school staff did not discuss these particular supports during our interviews and focus groups. However, at the schools where they were mentioned, educators provided mixed reviews. For example, interviewees at two schools had positive feedback about the online professional learning community, while at two other schools, educators said they never used the ESI Wiki because it required a login and was not accessible from mobile devices. Educators at these schools felt that emails would have been a better format. Despite a lack of specific feedback on these communication platforms, it is possible that they contributed to schools' generally strong sense of support from the central ESI team.

As noted in our discussion of the planning phase, educators reported that the process for selecting external vendors was one of the more challenging aspects of ESI's planning phase, and for some, this extended into program implementation. External vendors provided a wide range of services to ESI schools, including the

provision of curricular enhancements, mentoring and enrichment programs for students, professional development for teachers, and programs to support college readiness, among others. In some schools, external vendors simply provided curriculum or software that was used by school staff and students, whereas in other schools external vendors were much more hands-on—conducting professional development for teachers or teaching enrichment courses for students. The quality of schools' experiences with external vendors varied. The role of external partners in implementation came up in our visits to 14 schools. Five reported negative experiences, three reported positive experiences, and six reported mixed experiences. Interestingly, in some cases, different schools reported very different experiences with the same vendors.

Challenges that schools encountered with external partners included scheduling and limited time, perceived poor quality of programming, and cost. Educators at four schools discussed challenges around finding the necessary time to collaborate and oversee work by external vendors, and some worried that external programs were reducing instructional time with students. Explained one teacher, "I have three different programs come in each week, and when you think about that, that takes away from what I actually have to do. It took away from my teaching time with them and what they needed to learn." In addition, educators at five schools expressed disappointment in the quality of external vendors' work. In one, where the partner was running a writing program as part of the school's English classes, a design team member explained, "The English teachers have been really unimpressed with what they've been seeing. That's probably something that we're just going to say, you know what, this is not really worth our time." Lastly, staff at three schools expressed concerns about the high cost of vendors, which could make it difficult to sustain programming after ESI's funding period.

While there were frustrations, educators at eight schools also expressed appreciation for the work of external vendors. Schools valued external vendors' expertise with particular topics (e.g., cultural relevance and subject area knowledge), and staff at some schools reported that their external vendors were skilled at connecting with their students. Said a design team member,

> The…guy that comes in is pretty good. The way he interacts with them, they get to see that. At the end of the day, it's a bit relaxed, but they talk about issues that are related to them. It's all male. It's their language. That helps.

The most common positive feedback about external vendors was that school staff saw positive changes in their students due to external providers' services. As one design team member explained, "I believe that last I checked it was above 90 percent of the students are emailing their mentors weekly which, again, speaks to the tremendous support that happened within the school…and the partnership of [the vendor]." Educators at these schools also discussed students' high levels of enjoyment of these programs and overall increases in student engagement.

Summary

Two areas stood out as sticking points during the first year of district-level implementation. First, seven ESI schools reported delays in receiving funding. It is unclear whether this was a result of schools failing to submit complete workplans and budgets or of lags in the central ESI team's approval process. Either way, the DOE may be able to provide leadership in streamlining this aspect of the planning phase in subsequent years of the initiative. The second set of issues related to external vendors. Interviewees expressed the most concern about the vendor selection process, which prevented some from building on successful existing partnerships. Building on existing partnerships may have been less costly than investing in new ones, since schools were funding these partnerships independently of ESI in prior years. If this is the case, building stronger partnerships with vendors that were already largely financed through schools' pre-ESI budgets may have been a more sustainable choice. Moreover, it is also possible that expanding programming and services with existing partners might have been more effective, since these vendors already had relationships with teachers and students in the school and a familiarity with the school culture. In the long run, how schools work with external vendors may affect their ability to sustain the work of ESI, particularly after the funding period. We will examine this issue more closely in later years of the evaluation.

What is striking about district-level implementation is the high level of support ESI schools received, starting in the planning phase and extending through the first year of implementation. The support structure that we have described in this chapter—including templates for workplans and budgets, individual school planning meetings, professional development, visits to schools, and virtual communication platforms—is one that requires significant planning, coordination, time, and personnel. As a result of the investment in this infrastructure, nearly three quarters

of schools spoke positively about the support offered by the central ESI team—and, quite remarkably, not one school reported feeling unsupported by the ESI central team or unclear about the goals and requirements of the initiative. In the next chapter, we look at the ways educators built on this support to implement ESI programs in their schools.

CHAPTER 4: KEY FINDINGS

This chapter presents three sets of key findings from our evaluation of ESI's first year of implementation. First, we provide a quantitative look at implementation *fidelity* and *intensity* across ESI schools. In this context, *fidelity* means the degree to which the programs implemented under ESI matched the plans schools submitted to the DOE prior to Year 1. *Intensity* is a measure that attempts to capture the robustness of programming, especially in terms of frequency, duration, and number of students served. The second section uses interview data to describe changes to school practice related to each of the three domains as well as culturally relevant education. Finally, we present an analysis of *programmatic cohesion*. Though not a measure we set out to systemically analyze, interview data suggested that cohesion was an essential component of strong school-level implementation. It should be noted that while this chapter describes a range of programming provided by ESI schools, it does not attempt to analyze associations between schools' efforts and other characteristics (e.g., school size) or participation in different kinds of support (e.g., participation in ESI's PD opportunities). Later years of the evaluation may include this type of systematic analysis.

What Was the Fidelity and Intensity of School Programming in Year 1?

ESI is an ambitious effort designed and led by the DOE, but ultimately carried out by schools. Often there is a gap between district-level policies and school-level implementation, which has implications for whether these policies will be successful. When strong ideas are not well executed, they are unlikely to have the desired effect; likewise, even strong execution may not make a difference, if the theory of action driving a policy is flawed. Understanding the implementation of ESI programs and services on the ground is thus essential for building evidence about the initiative's impact on schools and students. While not the only indicators of successful implementation, program fidelity and intensity measures help paint a picture of how well ESI schools are executing programs that serve their Black and Latino male students—and the extent to which these programs are aligned with ESI's theory of action.

The majority of schools evaluated received scores of 13 or higher out of a possible 16 on the fidelity rubric we developed (see rubric in Appendix H), meaning their

work was deemed satisfactory in all four fidelity categories and excelled in at least one. All ESI schools scored a 4 ("high fidelity") for *target audience*, as all of them directed their programs toward the intended populations of 9th grade Black and Latino male students or their teachers. Most schools also maintained their proposed *partnerships* and, when they did not, either continued programs on their own or found a new partner. Schools lost the most points in the categories of *overall programming* and *frequency and duration*. Schools scored a level 3 ("achieving fidelity") or lower in *overall programming* if they were not implementing one or more of the programs listed in their workplans (regardless of the reason). Most schools that lost points for *frequency and duration* lost points for frequency—that is, how often the program was meeting—rather than the duration of meetings.

The majority of schools evaluated received scores of 14 or higher on the intensity rubric we designed (see Appendix H), meaning that they received satisfactory ratings in all four intensity categories and were outstanding in at least two. Nearly every school received a "high intensity" score for *frequency and duration*, suggesting that ESI programs met often and for long enough to address the goals of those programs (though not always as often as they specified in the workplans). Another category in which virtually every school received "high intensity" was *number of students served*. While not every program was able to engage every Black or Latino male student, schools made a clear and consistent effort to target these populations through a variety of activities. Schools that received particularly low intensity scores tended to lose points in *program diversity*, meaning they were missing programming in one of the three domains that were central to the initiative's theory of action. The category where the majority of schools lost points, however, was *documentation*. Schools received a 3 ("achieving intensity") in this category if they provided clear descriptions of programming in their interviews, but they could only receive a 4 ("high intensity") if they submitted the requested programmatic materials to the Research Alliance. Many schools did not submit these materials because they didn't have them prepared at the time of our visits. These schools received a note explaining this as part of the written feedback we provided with their intensity scores.

While every school is different, the fidelity and intensity patterns we saw provide useful insights about program implementation across ESI schools. Our analysis suggests fidelity and intensity were generally high, but that some schools found it challenging to implement the specific programs they had proposed in their

workplans or to implement these programs as often as they originally envisioned. In subsequent years, the DOE might find ways to help schools think through the feasibility of proposed programming and program frequency. The schools that lost points in *program diversity* on the intensity measure generally favored academic programs over youth development programs. Looking ahead, schools should try to better balance their programming across all three of the ESI domains, since this was an important component of the theory of action.

How Did Schools Change Their Practices?

While the quantitative measures of fidelity and intensity described above tell us something useful about schools' programming, it was only through interviews and focus groups that we were able to learn what educators perceive as most important or potentially transformational about ESI. The educators in our study reported several notable changes to school practice in each of ESI's three domains— academics, youth development, and school culture. In addition, they described changes in response to their engagement with culturally relevant education.

Interestingly, staff spoke less often about changes pertaining to the academic domain, even though academic programming was slightly overrepresented based on our intensity rubric. This may have been a function of both the questions we asked (none were explicitly about academic changes) and the limited number of staff we spoke with (e.g., English teachers would know little about math re-sequencing).

Table 2: Sample Strategies in the Three ESI Domains

Academics	Youth Development	College and Career Culture
Offering more Advanced Placement classes	Adult-student mentoring	College trips
	Peer mentoring	College fairs
Requiring more math and science classes	Restorative justice programs	Internships
	Student advisories	Job fairs
New curriculum aligned with the Common Core Learning Standards	Student leadership opportunities	Career days
Programs focused on learning strategies and/or study habits		Partnerships with higher education institutions
	Enrichment opportunities (e.g., trips, sports, clubs)	
Tutoring		

Note: Some ESI programs are designed to address two or three domains at the same time. For example, a student advisory might be focused on academic habits as well as college preparation.

We know from our workplan analysis—and the fact that workplan fidelity was high in most schools—that each school did add or enhance academic programming. Thus, the description below may not capture the full breadth of academic supports provided by schools; yet it does present the most salient changes in this area of practice, as described by respondents. Educators spoke at much greater length about youth development than about the other two areas. In particular, staff in over half of the ESI schools described what they saw as important byproducts of their increased attention to youth development—specifically, improved relationships between teachers and students and among students themselves. In the area of school culture, the majority of ESI schools (more than 30) reported an expansion of their college-focused programs (e.g., college workshops, trips, and classes), but very few reported changes to career-focused programs (e.g., internships, resume workshops). The increased focus on college not only showed up as programming, but more importantly, as a shift in the larger school culture.

Increasing Academic Rigor

According to the Design Challenge, the academic domain includes curricular enhancements, particularly efforts to align curricula with the Common Core Learning Standards, as well as academic supports and strategies aimed at clarifying and elevating academic expectations. Of the three domains, academic programming came up the least in interviews and focus groups with educators in ESI schools. As noted above, this could have been a function of either the interview questions or the individuals being interviewed. In our analysis of educators' reflections on the academic domain, we found three broad areas of change: (1) increasing opportunities for students to take a more rigorous course load, (2) raising academic standards or benchmarks, and (3) providing academic support via external partners. Overall, these changes are aligned with ESI's theory of action, which proposes that raising expectations and improving access to rigorous courses will better prepare students to apply to college and succeed at college-level work.

Design team members and teachers talked about both increasing the rigor of available classes and helping more students take four years of math and science. In particular, interviewees noted the importance of offering Advanced Placement (AP) courses as an essential piece of creating a college-ready student body. One principal explained that while his school had offered one or two AP classes before ESI, they

were now in the process of developing four or five. A design team member at another school said:

> The school is moving in the direction of making sure all of our kids have four years of math and science, making sure that all of our students have a wide variety of courses by the time that they leave. ESI affirmed what we were doing and really pushed us further to make that happen.

Another strategy schools used to increase opportunities to take more advanced coursework was to restructure students' programming (the series of classes they are expected to take within a given year) to allow for a great number of math and science classes within the four years of high school. In some cases, this meant being creative with students' schedules. For example, one principal explained:

> Our freshmen now have to stay until 4:36. They receive additional supports in terms of two math [courses]. They take two math courses during the day, two English courses during the day. Then after school, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, they have extended day where they will be in a STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics] class where they do the robotics, heavy emphasis on math and science.

To make sure students would have the opportunity to take rigorous math classes, some schools prioritized getting all 9th graders through algebra and passing the algebra Regents exam.

With regard to raising standards, staff in six schools provided examples of how ESI had prompted them to raise certain cut-off scores to ensure that students would be adequately prepared for college-level work. For instance, one principal noted:

> We're not going to accept a 65 as a passing or whatever in moving students on to geometry. We made a concerted effort in saying, 'No, you have to repeat the exam. You have to continue the course. Yes, you took algebra in middle school. Yes, you got a passing grade, but if it wasn't a college and career benchmark, then you're going to repeat the course until you can get that grade and 80 or better.' In the past, we would not have done this.

Another school described a program that stressed to students the type of GPAs and SAT scores they would need to enter certain colleges. A teacher noted that students

were now aware that while earning high grades, getting an Advanced Regents Diploma, or doing well on standardized tests might not be vital to graduate, these higher standards are a requirement for certain colleges. Other schools reported similar efforts to clarify academic expectations and encourage students to begin tackling requirements for graduation and college early on.

In addition to academic restructuring and raising benchmarks, schools also introduced a wealth of outside resources and partners to provide further academic support to students. This included additional instruction for students and the use of outside vendors to help redesign curricula or support students in core subjects. Over half the ESI schools provided students with additional learning supports such as tutoring and, in some cases, engaged external partners to supply another teacher or coach in the room. Teachers in other schools described external partners who provided their students with training on study habits or, even more broadly, changing student mindsets to recognize that academic ability isn't static or pre-determined, but rather can be improved through practice.

While the academic domain was not mentioned as frequently as the other two, our findings suggest that schools did make changes in this area. Overall, the schools appear to have increased academic rigor in ways that are promising for keeping more students are on track to graduate and enroll in college.

Improving Relationships through Youth Development

Youth development, as conceptualized by ESI, is a broad domain, ranging from strategies that support students emotionally and socially to strategies that improve school discipline. ESI schools planned and implemented programming that incorporated a wide array of youth development approaches. As such, it might be expected that our field data would yield findings related to a range of youth development topics (e.g., leadership development, resiliency). Instead, our analysis underscored the importance of one central theme—improved relationships between school actors—which cut across many youth development strategies and supports. More than half of the ESI schools (23) reported improvements in relationships between students and their peers as well as between students and teachers.

A substantial body of social science research has demonstrated that positive relationships can help boost academic achievement and the length of time that students stay in school (Wells et al. 2011; Riegle-Crumb 2010). Prior research has

also demonstrated that positive peer relationships can improve student behavior and promote college-going (Haynie and Osgood 2005; Riegle-Crumb 2010). Notably, the literature has generally suggested that girls, in comparison with boys, have closer relationships with their teachers, as well as relationships with peers that are more academically oriented (Buchmann and DiPrete 2013; Giordano 2003; Riegle-Crumb 2010; Wells et al. 2011; Hughes 2001). Thus, enhancing these kinds of relationships may represent a key lever for improving outcomes for young men of color.

Teacher-Student Relationships

School staff members described notable improvements in relationships between teachers and students. A quarter of the schools discussed how ESI has increased opportunities for teachers and students to build relationships with one another outside of the classroom. According to one teacher:

> I think that the opportunities that we're getting through ESI will allow students to see their teachers in a different way that's hopefully going to be really productive…we're able to…go on college trips. They're going to see their teachers in a different light …if they see their teachers at their alma mater, or they're just going to learn the life experiences…that their teachers have had.

Perhaps because teachers and students had more opportunities to interact outside of classroom settings, teachers at six different schools reported paying greater attention to students' social and emotional needs, or what was often referred to by school staff members as taking on a "whole-child perspective." As one teacher put it,

> I might not have handled something appropriately when a student came in late [in the past]. Now I'm more receptive that they may have some challenges happening at home, or I may be more receptive to that student who's tapping because in their world, music is their life.

These relationships enabled teachers to become more supportive of their students' success and to hold their students accountable for meeting school expectations. One teacher, for example, described taking a new approach with students who are falling behind: "'Okay, we notice that you're failing this class. We want you to tell me'— so it wasn't like, 'It's your fault, you're not doing something.' It's like, 'Okay, what do you need?…What do you need from me to support you?'" Other teachers

described a similar shift from a punitive approach to a supportive one that aims to engage and provide assistance to students who are falling behind.

Educators also expressed that strong relationships with teachers helped motivate students. As one said:

> Kids at all schools don't complete all the work, but there's a certain kind of love or some kind of energy in this building that is pushing them. They know that we are not giving up on them. They know that they are supported. It makes them work a little bit harder.

Because of students' improved relationships with teachers, some educators told us that students are receiving fewer suspensions, thereby increasing their time in school. It seems that as teachers have embraced a "whole-child" approach, they also have begun to think more critically about school punishment and, as a result, deployed fewer suspensions. Some educators we spoke with also attributed an increase in student attendance to improved relationships between teachers and students. One teacher even argued that improved relationships were encouraging students to stay enrolled in their school:

> This year, the number of students that applied to transfer to another school for 10th grade was dramatically less than in the past…That says a lot. Our students come here and they feel comfortable. They feel happy. They feel safe and supported, and they want to stay.

Many of the educators we interviewed agreed that the development of positive teacher-student relationships had resulted in both social/emotional and academic benefits for students.

Student-Student Relationships

Educators in more than a quarter of ESI schools (13) also reported improvements in relationships between students, generally characterized by students supporting one another and holding one another accountable for completing their schoolwork. Educators also felt that improved relationships between students led to other positive outcomes, such as better student behavior and fewer discipline problems.

A substantial number of educators described seeing students support one another socially and emotionally. Said one teacher:

> *I definitely see a level of bonding between the boys that I didn't see last year. I think that's definitely because of the 8th period class. I mean, they're all together for the last hour of every day; sometimes that's study hall, but sometimes it's talking about issues that are important to them. I think a lot of them feel comfortable and are opening up and they're learning from their peers…I feel like there's definitely a lot more empathy, which I think is very hard to develop.*

A substantial number of ESI schools incorporated mentoring programs in which upper classmen were trained to mentor incoming freshman. Because of this structure, social and emotional benefits appeared to have ripple effects—accruing not just for 9th graders, but also for the older students who were incorporated into ESI.

In addition to describing emotional support, the educators in our study also discussed ESI students holding each other accountable for their school work and pushing one another academically. One teacher shared an anecdote about high-achieving students offering to tutor their classmates in exchange for the school offering an accelerated math class:

> *The students who were in the accelerated math class during the 9th grade, they wanted to continue having another accelerated class…so what they did is they spoke to the teacher…The top 20, they are tutoring the kids and they brokered a deal with the teacher. 'We're going to tutor the kids, we're going to help them get the 80 and above on the Regents exam, as long as you give us the accelerated class.'*

Another teacher described students holding one other accountable to the academic goals they had set for themselves.

> *Another thing that I've seen… is that students are motivating one another… they formed a bond; if one student isn't doing so well in a specific class, then another student will be there in that next class. Let's say it's English class, and he'll be sitting next to him and saying, 'Remember what we spoke about…you need to follow through on that promise you made to the class and that promise to yourself.'*

School staff members remarked that as a result of stronger relationships, students were more respectful of one another and exhibited fewer disciplinary problems. Said one teacher, "If they develop respect for each other, then they progress in everything. When you have groups in the class, they're willing to hear somebody else's opinion and not criticize, but correct or add to. All of that's about respect."

Given past research on the importance of relationships, it is highly encouraging that educators in ESI schools are already observing stronger relationships between students and between students and teachers. In the remaining years of the ESI evaluation, we will explore *if* and *how* improvements in relationships are connected to measureable gains in academic and non-academic outcomes.

Expanding College Supports

The third domain of the ESI theory of action is school culture. In the context of ESI, school culture refers to the capacity to create an environment in which college and career readiness is the norm, and is infused throughout all aspects of a school's programming. Educators in 30 of the 38 schools we visited reported an expansion of college supports. While most of these schools were already providing a number of college-related programs prior to ESI, especially to 11th and 12th graders, staff described providing more college workshops, classes, and trips to students starting in the 9th grade—a direct response to the ESI theory of action. Perhaps more importantly, educators also spoke of shifting elements of school culture to better align with college and career goals. These shifts included focusing the school's mission on college, regularly communicating with students about the steps to become college ready, and raising standards to better prepare students to actually succeed in college. While schools have greatly increased supports around college readiness, some interviewees raised critical questions about these efforts, which we describe below. Relatedly, it is clear that, at least at this point, schools have devoted more energy to expanding college supports than to adding career-centered programs. We also touch on the experiences of the few schools that have begun to address career readiness, which suggest some important insights about this component of ESI.

Building College-Focused Programs and Culture

Principals, design team members, and teachers described notable school-wide culture shifts, brought about by three interrelated approaches to better preparing

students for college. First, staff in 10 schools reported changing the school's mission to be explicitly college focused. They said that while college had always been an implicit goal, in Year 1 of ESI, they had begun to frame college readiness and enrollment—not just high school graduation—as an explicit objective for staff and students. To that end, schools have made college a centerpiece of the overall school environment by posting college banners, encouraging regular informal conversations about college, and infusing college readiness goals into academic courses. According to one design team member, the job of getting students ready for college used to belong to the school's guidance counselors; now it's the job of everyone on staff.

Second (and related to the college-focused mission), educators in 11 schools reported that because of ESI, they are now communicating with students about specific benchmarks they need to reach leading up to applying to college. Staff reported that before putting these benchmarks in place, college seemed like a distant goal that students weren't certain how to meet. Students would eventually find out, sometimes too late, which credits or exams they were missing, with very little time to make up for the loss. By creating clear benchmarks early on, staff could empower students to track their own progress and seek help when they were falling behind. One school, for example, created a set of college goals for each grade, so students would feel well informed about how to work toward college throughout their high school career. The school's design team member said:

> *We identified a theme for each grade, so then it's really clear as to what they should be doing, and no one is in the dark. I think that was a big piece, because previously kids knew it was just college. It was a big deal. 'How do I fund this? How do I go about applying?' They were kind of lost, but I think that we've created this culture where the students feel comfortable that they have some guidance in that area.*

Another school created a database that illustrated the college readiness levels of individual students. Accessible to students and displayed in the school, this color-coded tracker allowed students to readily view whether they are "green" (college ready), "red" (not college ready), or an in-between level, based on course credit and exam scores.

Of course, specific college programming had a role to play as well: About half of the ESI schools added activities, such as ongoing college workshops, opportunities to

earn college credit through partnerships with higher education institutions, and a greater number of college trips, particularly to schools outside of New York City (which were impossible or difficult prior to ESI funding). Staff noted that having multiple opportunities and venues for students to learn and talk about higher education reinforced their developing knowledge about college and made enrolling a more tangible goal. For example, one design member said:

> *When we're teaching College and Career [class], it's like. 'I need you to look at two public and two private universities, and I want you to tell me how you're going to get there, and what are the steps that you need.' Then, when they go to iMentor,[12] they talk to them about the same thing, 'Let's talk about college.' [Students] are like—whoa, we're talking about college so much that eventually it's already something that they expect to do. It's not something that is out there that I might not be able to do. It is something that's very reachable.*

Staff in 21 schools described an expansion of college supports to 9th grade students. While many of these schools had always provided college supports to juniors and seniors, they were now specifically targeting 9th graders because of ESI. Staff in 12 schools reported that they now offer college workshops to 9th graders, while staff in 15 schools reported that they made college trips available to 9th grade students.

As a result of these efforts, staff noted that this cohort of students showed a lot more awareness and curiosity about college than 9th graders from previous years and even more than some older students. One design team member said, "This group, I have to say, is the most aware of college. We started talking with them about it from, like, day one." A principal from another school echoed:

> *I love that all of our freshmen are getting the college advisory through the leadership program and a second day of the week through our own 9th grade English teacher, and I feel like that's going to have a good long-term impact, because as 9th graders, they're going to already be thinking about college. I think that a piece that's been missing is that kids haven't started thinking about college until junior or senior year. I'm pleased with that.*

These educators felt strongly about the importance—and potential impact—of expanding college supports to earlier grades. In conjunction with efforts to create a college-going culture overall, this expansion of programming is consistent with ESI's theory of action.

Interestingly, some educators indicated that college preparation should also involve social and emotional supports. One staff member explained that students wouldn't be college-ready "if [they] don't have the social/emotional aspect of that," adding, "that's the piece that we're trying to focus on in [our college program]—those implicit, less tangible aspects of college prep and college success." He and other staff spoke about likely challenges students may face when entering college, such as fitting into an environment that is very different from their high school settings, finding the right sources of support on campus, and feeling isolated from friends, family, or the larger community. These educators argued that providing college support is not merely about adding supplementary programming, but rather involves a more holistic approach that infuses college preparation throughout the school environment.

Challenges Related to the College Focus

While the majority of ESI schools reported expanding college supports and spoke highly about the potential of these efforts, staff in a handful of schools voiced important concerns about the feasibility and appropriateness of pushing college for all students. For example, a few educators pointed out that many of their incoming freshmen were already several years behind grade level. Getting these students to reach grade level—much less to graduate college ready—seemed like a challenge that perhaps neither more college programming nor a college culture could adequately address. As a result of these obstacles, and because some staff thought students should be made aware of alternative pathways to success, a few staff members said that college should not be the only postsecondary goal schools help prepare students for. One teacher explained:

> You know, there are some males who are on 3rd and 4th grade reading level who may not go to a four-year college. They may not even go to a two-year college. That doesn't mean they're not going to be successful. They might get a trade in culinary arts and become a sous chef and still be able to provide for a family and to contribute to society. It's just in terms of how we look at what success really means for young Black and Latino young men.

According to these staff members, expanding the definition of success after high school to include trades, careers, and other alternatives to four-year colleges is a more holistic way of preparing students for life after high school—by meeting students where they are and providing them more options. Related to this point,

staff at five different schools raised hard questions about the difficulty of preparing students to actually succeed in college. While these staff believed they were doing all they could to help students apply and enroll in higher education, they had serious doubts about some students' study habits and skills (as writers especially) and wondered if they would be able to keep up with the academic standards and daily expectations of four-year institutions. One design member explained that college "takes an understanding of the challenges that are out there, not just the academics, but the social challenges. That you're going to be away from home, that you are going to have to work on your own….You have to be able to manage your own time; you have to priorities your own time. That is taught in schools but not very explicitly." Beyond these behavioral expectations, staff members wondered if students would have the capacity or know how to obtain the resources and supports they needed, especially if they were reluctant to ask for help.

It is noteworthy that while a majority of schools increased college supports and programming in Year 1, far fewer schools spoke explicitly about career programming. Staff in four schools described efforts around career readiness, such as internship programs, career days, and career assessments. However, even these schools reported challenges around getting these programs off the ground, saying they would need more staff and resources to implement them more robustly (i.e., more frequently and with more students). The Research Alliance has noted in other work (Kemple 2013) that the growing emphasis on "college and career readiness" has in actuality focused very much on college and very little on the skills and supports needed to make a successful transition to the world of work. Training in "soft skills," resume building, and workplace experiences—in addition to industry-specific training or experiences—can help students develop capacities that are important for succeeding in various postsecondary contexts. To be fair, in ESI, this area of support may have been underrepresented in Year 1 because the target population was in the 9th grade. It is possible that we will see an expansion of career-related programming as students progress through high school and move closer to graduation.

Culturally Relevant Education

Educators also reported changes in the area of culturally relevant education (CRE). While the theory of action driving ESI centers on academics, youth development, and school culture, our field data suggest that a cross-cutting domain—culturally

relevant education—was also central to the way that the initiative was envisioned, communicated to schools, and implemented at the school level. CRE is a widely researched and discussed topic across education literature and has been assigned a range of definitions in education research. Here, we define CRE broadly, as any practice that is intended to strengthen a connection between students' home culture and their experience in schools. A substantial body of research has suggested that failing to bridge students' home and school experiences inhibits school achievement (Cummins 1986; Ladson-Billings 1994). Furthermore, research has documented that teachers' perceptions of students may be an important contributor to disproportionately high rates of suspension and expulsion for Black and Latino males in comparison with other segments of the student population (Skiba et al. 2002). In the following section, we discuss the ways in which ESI has shifted educators' perceptions of the lives and experiences of their students and produced concrete changes to school practices as a result of this awareness.

The salience of culturally relevant education across the three ESI domains is not surprising, given that the initiative foregrounds race and gender as central to students' educational experiences. Indeed, we observed a conscious grappling with issues of race and gender at various levels of ESI's implementation. In our interviews, members of the DOE's ESI team expressed a profound personal commitment to the initiative's focus on race and gender. As one said in describing what drew him to ESI, "For me this is such a reality, it's my DNA, literally and figuratively. I am that young man. I take them all on as my own kids. In my mind, they are mine." Similarly, many principals and school staff discussed their deep, personal investment in the work of improving outcomes for minority males. In keeping with this perspective, representatives from 36 ESI schools took time to attend CRE-related professional development that was offered as part of the initiative. These sessions covered, for example, how to effectively interpret data for different demographic groups, pedagogical approaches to improve the confidence of Black and Latino males in math, and the ways in which stereotypes of Black and Latino young men interfere with academic progress, among other topics.

This section describes some of the challenges that schools confronted as they attempted to implement CRE. It then describes two stages of development for schools' CRE activities. Our data suggest that, in the first stage, schools worked to contextualize the Black and Latino male experience by helping staff become more aware of the obstacles and day-to-day struggles of Black and Latino young men,

inside and outside of schools. The second stage of development involved using these new understandings to adapt school-based structures and practices to better serve Black and Latino male students.

Challenges to Implementing CRE

The educators we spoke with cited a number of challenges in planning and implementing CRE strategies and programs. Interestingly, the specific challenges they described varied considerably across schools. This suggests that educators encountered challenges unique to their school context, rather than ubiquitous circumstances. The challenges that schools reported ranged from issues of cultivating student leaders to a lack of diversity among school staff to a need for more knowledge about CRE-based pedagogical techniques. For example, educators at one school said they had difficulty engaging the leadership of Black and Latino males who they felt could set a positive example for other students. Explained one teacher:

> *In our graduating class, there is a pocket of boys who are just very good, well-behaved. They're going to college…They're really influential and they're very popular, but they don't see themselves that way…so they isolate themselves. They don't participate in anything. They're not interested in reaching out to other boys.*

At another school, educators described a mismatch between staff and student demographics as a challenge to implementing CRE. The principal of this school indicated that reaching Black and Latino male students was more difficult because the staff was not very diverse. At yet another ESI school, educators expressed a lack of knowledge about pedagogical techniques designed specifically for Black and Latino young men. Explained one teacher:

> *I guess we don't know…[about] special strategies for Black and Latino boys…I'm really not sure, like, what strategies are separate and apart from other kids. I'm still not clear about that…I really don't understand…what special strategy is there just for Latino and Black males.*

These types of challenges indicate areas where schools might benefit from continued support with respect to CRE.

Contextualizing the Black and Latino Male Experience

Many interviewees described and demonstrated a growing awareness of the myriad obstacles and structural inequalities faced by minority males, including challenges both in and out of school. For instance, educators at 12 schools discussed unmet instructional needs, such as a lack of organizational skills, a need for kinesthetic learning, a lack of exposure to cultural activities, language barriers, and low academic skills upon entering high school. Said one teacher:

> *I think that even last year our stronger students who were boys struggled a lot with being successful in school because of organizational skills. Even if they were very with it, in terms of understanding the material, they struggled to do well because they struggled with keeping their papers in order…I think the work with the group Organized for Life is really aiming at helping boys learn these things that I think somehow, girls are just naturally a little bit better at, at that age, so they're kind of able to be more successful in school.*

Comments such as these showed that educators and administrators were thinking carefully about specific instructional challenges that were impeding success for many young men of color. In addition to recognizing instructional needs, educators were also thinking in new ways about the social and emotional needs of their Black and Latino male students. For example, educators at several schools mentioned a lack of role models for Black and Latino boys, referring to both an in-school problem of fewer male teachers and an out-of-school problem of few father figures.

Staff members at three schools talked about school-level bias as a potential source of the disparity in outcomes between Black and Latino boys and other segments of the student population. In particular, they mentioned both inequities in school discipline and testing bias. For example, one principal explained:

> *We, like the city…and the nation, have had a disproportionate number of suspensions that impact Black and Latino boys and a disproportionate number of the students who are suspended frequently being Black and Latino boys. Now, a lot these boys are engaging in some really problematic behaviors. We haven't necessarily had a set of practices to help us shift behaviors, right? Ultimately, suspension doesn't change behavior for most kids, and the sort of great tragedy of it is the kids that suspension does shift behavior are usually the kids that you don't actually need the suspension to shift the behavior, because their parents will shift their behavior for you, kind of*

independently, without lots of extra external supports and intervention. We recognize that as an issue, and it's something that both we had to do something structurally about, but also we needed to start, as the adults in the building, having different conversations among ourselves and with kids and families about what is happening, how we fix it, and how we come to a place of respect in the school and in the classroom.

Like this principal, others educators we spoke with expressed an awareness of the ways in which institutional bias within schools may contribute to the struggles faced by the target population of ESI. Educators discussed testing bias in a similar way, suggesting that school tests may favor affluent White students.

We also heard administrators and educators discuss structural inequalities, such as unemployment, poverty, neighborhood crime, and involvement in the justice system, as contributors to minority male underachievement. As one principal said:

The problem of Black young men is a socioeconomic problem, which is deeper than the few dollars ESI has given us. I'm not dismissing ESI at the front end. I think it's helpful. I think what has to happen is that they have to address the wider problem. The reason these boys are having a difficult time is because there is no employment or low employment in the communities. I believe [they are] constantly being harassed by the police. That people looking at them as a no good—won't amount to nothing— has to change. There has to be more opportunities for these boys, and the communities.

As a result of their involvement in ESI, many educators began to recognize a wide range of factors—from instructional needs to school-level bias to larger structural inequalities outside the realm of schools—as significant influences on the academic trajectories of young men of color. Importantly, this awareness seemed to help many teachers and administrators reframe their understanding of how to educate Black and Latino males by thinking about students' behaviors and needs through a new lens. Educators at 14 ESI schools explicitly discussed this shift. In response to a question about ESI-funded professional development, one teacher explained,

I think that [professional development about disciplinary practice] has contributed to the staff thinking more creatively about how we do discipline; not just suspending kids without them fully understanding what's going on or having conversations [and] figuring [out] how best to repair the harm that was done.

While educators at many schools described a similar type of reframing, a smaller number discussed their approach to working with Black and Latino young men in what we characterized as a "color-blind"/"gender-blind" perspective, meaning a reluctance to acknowledge the specific needs of minority males. The principal at one school reported:

> *When we approached our design proposal, we made a decision to implement programs that would not be targeted exclusively to boys. We just felt like it was a wiser and more comprehensive approach to spread things across the entire 9th grade, and not just to boys.*

(It should be noted that schools that used ESI programming to serve the entire 9th grade received points on the fidelity and intensity rubrics for serving the target population even if they did not *exclusively* serve them.) Staff at six schools reported similar color- or gender-blind approaches. A few educators, while acknowledging that the initiative was designed for young men of color, maintained that students should not be treated differently based on race/ethnicity. More often, though, educators said that because all or most of their students are Black and Latino, they did not believe it was necessary to discuss them as a separate group. Interestingly, at two schools, different educators at the same school reported *both* reframing their understanding of educating Black and Latino males *and* a color-blind/gender-blind approach, demonstrating that even within schools, there is a range of understanding with respect to CRE.

Adopting (or Adapting) School Practices

The second CRE phase involved implementing new practices—or adapting existing practices—to increase the cultural relevancy of school programming. Educators at more than half of ESI schools described such changes. They talked about a wide variety of new and revised practices within three broad areas: support for teachers, instructional practices, and culturally relevant approaches to ESI's youth development component.

Four schools introduced or retooled supports aimed at helping teachers better understand their Black and Latino male students. In one school, this included professional development sessions in which staff analyzed academic data. One school also reported sharing data on long-term outcomes for Black and Latino males (incarceration rates, employment, etc.), as a way of highlighting the challenges that

Black and Latino males typically face over the course of a lifetime. Two schools conducted home visits, which they described as powerful in terms of improving their understanding of students' backgrounds, families, and neighborhoods. As one ESI design team member explained:

The home visits made… our school think a lot more than we had thought in the past about where our kids are coming from, what is the culture of the South Bronx—of the Bronx in general. Just from my personal experience, I'd never really walked the Bronx, but in the morning, I got together with two other people who were on my team— cause we had teams of three—and we just kind of took public transportation, took buses, took trains, and walked the Bronx—looked at the surroundings that we have. For the home visits, we also brought in a few of our upperclassmen—our juniors and seniors—and had them talk to our new staff about…[their] neighborhood. 'Let's just talk about what is it like to come to school here, and what is it like to live in this neighborhood? What is it like to come to school in this neighborhood if you don't live here?' Just overwhelmingly positive—and I'd never been in my students' homes before. Going in there was great.

Educators also reported a number of new and revised in-school practices that were incorporated with the aim of better reaching and engaging Black and Latino young men, including instructional topics, pedagogical techniques, single gender classes, and the reassignment of teachers. Two schools reported sharing data with students about Black and Latino males' performance in school and using that data as an entry point to discuss the importance of high school achievement. Similarly, educators described incorporating issues that Black and Latino males face both inside and outside of school into their curriculum. For example, one school organized a student conference around topics relevant to Black and Latino males, such as criminal justice and stop and frisk. Other schools discussed incorporating hip hop into their curriculum or introducing new curricular materials that they thought would be particularly engaging for minority boys. Additionally, a number of school staff members mentioned that their schools were experimenting with either single-gender classes or advisories or reassigning teachers to ensure that 9th graders were taught primarily by males.

ESI schools also incorporated a number of culturally relevant youth development supports. Staff spoke, for example, about adult and peer mentoring programs as an important aspect of CRE. They said male mentors were particularly important for

Black and Latino male students, who may not have male role models in their lives. Explained one teacher:

> It's been really great for them to have access to these mature, older role models, who are the same race and ethnicity. We took that into account when we were pairing some of the big sibs and little sibs [in a peer mentoring program]…I think that we're getting some students to see, like, 'I am a 9th grade Black male, and I see a 12th grade Black male who is succeeding in all his classes and is like me, and loves to do the same activities that I do. I can really connect with him, but I see him being successful, and I see where I can be, three years from now, applying to college.' I think that that's a really powerful example that the big sib sets for the little sib.

In addition, educators mentioned the introduction of advisories (classes where students are able to address non-school issues in their lives), as well as peer mediation and conflict resolution training for students.

To summarize, in response to the professional development opportunities in CRE, educators reported a greater awareness of the challenges facing young men of color, including unmet instructional needs, school-level biases, and structural inequalities. Some educators also reported adopting new practices or adapting existing ones to increase cultural relevance in their schools. These efforts included looking strategically at data, creating single-gender classes, providing male mentors of color, and giving students opportunities to discuss topics that are relevant to their lives.

How Did Schools Create Cohesion Among Their ESI Programs?

An explicit part of the ESI theory of action was that programming across the three domains (and CRE) be well integrated, so that ESI would not merely be an addition of disconnected programs, but rather a cohesive set of strategies aimed at achieving the same goal. Indeed, interviews with school staff highlighted the importance of cohesively implementing different ESI programs and incorporating ESI into everyday school practice and overall school culture. Multi-component school-based initiatives like ESI involve many stakeholders and moving parts. As evaluators of other multi-component programs have noted, for these programs to become "transformative in nature," schools should make sure that the various components "move from operating as separate entities with separate goals and outcomes to working in conjunction with one another" (Harvard Family Research Project 2010).[13] Our interviews with principals, design team leaders, and teachers echo this

point and suggest that integrating ESI into a school's existing culture and structure—which we have termed "cohesive implementation"—may be one precondition for success.

Based on these conversations, which touched on both the benefits of strong cohesion and the obstacles to achieving it, we defined cohesive implementation as a combination of the following features:

1. Staff see ESI as central to the school's mission rather than as an extra program,
2. Different parts of ESI are connected to and complement one another, and
3. ESI is connected to and complements other school practices and programs.

At nine schools, educators noted that they and their colleagues saw ESI not as a separate program but as part and parcel of their school's everyday work and mission. As one design team member explained, "ESI is not just external to the building… it is a very big part of what we do here." Similarly, a principal stated that ESI is "not viewed as… an appendage program" at his school.

Many educators specifically mentioned alignment between ESI and their school culture. One teacher noted that ESI "filters in with their thought process" because that school is already focused on college readiness. At a school that had made investments in culturally relevant education prior to ESI, a design team member likewise maintained that ESI "jives with the culture." As a principal of another school explained:

> *Because we already have a staff aware of [our school's] mission… we can come in with… the ESI grant and say, 'Look, this is how we're going to further the mission.' We're going to better meet the needs of our kids through this grant… and [teachers have] kind of taken it and run with it.*

As these quotations suggest, educators who saw alignment between ESI and their school's culture not only had a clear understanding of their school's mission and the mission of ESI, but a fair amount of buy-in for both.

In at least four schools, cohesive implementation was also marked by an array of ESI programs that were connected to and complemented one another. One teacher illustrated this in her description of the ESI-funded college-readiness class she was leading:

We talk a lot about college in the classroom, which helps to strengthen the culture and gets kids to understand that, 'Yes, I am not just learning this because I have to get a grade, but this is critical to my future.' Then [there are] the connections between the curriculum, what they're studying, and… the college trips. Going to visit the different college campuses just brings it all together for the students.

Strong connections between discrete ESI programs may create a more unified experience for students. This is suggested by the comments of a teacher from a different school, who attributed the marked improvement of one of her students to ESI:

I think that it has a lot to do with working with his advisory and working with [the ESI mentor] and also all of the teachers working together, and so closely. Being able to have time to talk about the student and his needs.

In this case, the connections between different ESI programs and services resulted in more and better collaboration between teachers and partners, which in turn created a stronger safety net for a struggling student.

Finally, at schools with cohesive implementation, ESI programs not only complemented each other, but also built on and complemented existing school practices and programs. A teacher at one school talked at length about how ESI programming would touch other parts of the school community:

It's great that so many different groups can benefit from this. Although we're targeting the 9th graders—the 9th graders are—not just the boys, but every 9th grader—is getting these services—it's [also] bringing in the juniors. Having all these programs is bringing in the whole school community. With [the peer mentoring program], which is really the only thing I'm involved in, it's really trying to target everyone, like when we were doing the family night and stuff, getting the parents involved. The service learning will be going even beyond that into the school community.

At schools that exemplified cohesive implementation, respondents reported that ESI led them to rethink and more clearly articulate the cornerstones of their school culture and to adopt new school-wide practices.

Obstacles to Cohesive Programming

Implementation was not equally cohesive across schools. Principals, teachers and design team members reported a complex set of challenges to successfully integrating ESI programming into their schools. These included challenges incorporating external partners into the school culture, problems fitting ESI programs into student and teacher schedules, and threats to teacher buy-in, such as burnout and poor messaging about ESI.

First, it is worth briefly returning to the subject of external partners, discussed in Chapter 3. Working with external partners posed some inherent challenges to cohesive programming. Even at schools where ESI implementation seemed relatively cohesive, many interviewees communicated the extra burden of working with outside partners. A design team member from one school reported making the tough decision to cut back on external partners:

> *We didn't have the capacity, and we had to sort of make a choice somewhere…. He's great, the teachers adored him, but again, capacity wise…he was really good, but it would take a lot, since he's not local, to make him really part of the fabric.*

As this educator went on to explain, even when a school pays careful attention to bringing partners into the school community and the partner is eager to become part of that 'fabric,' the logistical complexities—such as coordinating schedules, arranging for payment, and making sure that the services the vendor provides match school expectations—can at times prove prohibitive.

Scheduling was a major logistical hurdle not only with regard to partners, but within schools. Many schools were already implementing a number of programs and had a full schedule of regular classes before ESI. These schools often scheduled ESI programs to take place before or after school. However, as will be discussed further below, many respondents found that ESI programs scheduled before or after school (as opposed to during the school day) elicited lower levels of attendance and student engagement. An additional scheduling challenge was presented by struggling students, who were identified as especially likely to benefit from ESI programming, but were at the same time most burdened by inflexible academic requirements (e.g., credit recovery) that made ESI's college-readiness and youth development programming hard to fit in. On the other side of this scheduling conundrum were teachers. As one principal put it:

It was going to be hard to get teachers to either give up a free period, or do a professional assignment. It got very complicated assigning the teachers. It would have been much easier to get the teachers to do after school, but of course after school it's much harder to get the students to stay.

As this suggests, scheduling teachers was complicated by their numerous competing responsibilities. Many teachers reported juggling a variety of responsibilities, both in and out of school, and the addition of ESI felt overwhelming. As one teacher shared, "The joke was always like: 'It's great. We have all this stuff to do, we just don't have time to do it.'" Another teacher explained,

I think it's been really hard because the people who are involved have so many other roles in the school. It makes it difficult to be everywhere at once, and to be the [behavioral intervention] person, and then go teach your class and then do this.

We found that even in schools where buy-in was strong, teachers struggled to find time to supervise or take ownership of additional ESI programs.

At schools where staff reported that cohesive implementation was more of an uphill battle, burnout was not the main issue; instead, teachers struggled to understand ESI and often didn't fully buy into its theory of action. At these schools, teachers communicated a lack of awareness of the program's components and intent. A principal at one school reported that some staff shared "a lack of clarity or some confusion about what ESI is, who is involved, who is responsible, [and] what the outcome should be." At a few schools, this kind of confusion was palpable. One teacher explained: "As for me, I'm in my room from morning until afternoon, and I usually stay late with my kids, so I just know when we got the grant, and I don't know what we're doing with the grant—no information." It may have been that communication about ESI was not as clear, widespread, or well-planned as it had been in other schools. Some teachers without a firm understanding of ESI and how it connected to their school's mission expressed skepticism about the program's potential. One teacher explained:

I'm sure there's been tons of research done already, so why was this the best decision, I guess, for them to sit there and say, 'Okay, here's some money'? Like [my colleague] already said, there's people in the school that are already advocating for the kids on a daily basis. How does just giving money to a school help things change?"

This quote suggests that basic information—about ESI's theory of action and the evidence upon which strategies have been selected—had not been widely shared at this school. As the teacher's feedback demonstrates, neglecting to communicate that kind of information to school staff can take a toll on buy-in, creating obstacles to cohesive implementation.

Strategies for Stronger Cohesion

Educators reported a number of strategies that facilitated successful integration of ESI supports and services. Based on interview data, we identified four strategies that school-based ESI leaders adopted (or said they *should* have adopted) to improve the cohesion of their programs—namely, finding alignment between ESI and the school's mission, involving a range of staff in ESI's professional development activities, designating an ESI point person, and building ESI into the school day.

- *Identifying areas of alignment between ESI and the school's mission.* As described above, cohesive implementation was marked in part by a recognition of ESI as relevant to the school's mission and connected to non-ESI practices and programs. It should come as no surprise, then, that at schools with especially cohesive implementation, educators reported intentionally identifying linkages between school and ESI goals, early on in the design process. They also purposely selected partners with a shared vision of how to arrive at these goals. As one principal explained:

   One lesson we learned is that we need to find connections. With any new initiative, we need to find connections to what we are already doing. Part of the needs assessment that we did was, 'What are we doing already and how does… [ESI] work to supplement, [complement], or supplant anything that we're already doing here?"

School-level ESI leaders also reported that it was helpful to explicitly frame ESI as integral to the school's mission. As one design team member said, ESI "is not adding something else, it's just incorporating it into your curriculum, incorporating it into what you're supposed to do anyway. Once it's looked at as that, not so much more added onto your plate, it was pretty much embraced." A respondent at another school agreed:

   [Advisory] is part of our school. I think that's the way we have to continue to talk— to think about it and also to talk about it, like this is a program. It's not just an ESI program, right? This is a program that's part of this school.

- *Involving multiple staff members in ESI-related professional development.* Beyond framing ESI as integral to the school's mission, school-based ESI leaders expressed the importance of involving multiple staff members in ESI-related trainings and other professional development activities. As one design team member observed, "to have a cultural shift you have to involve everybody on some level." This was also seen as a way to share the load of ESI responsibilities. As one teacher noted, the challenge of balancing multiple responsibilities "can only get better the more people are trained with it and the more people are involved, because there will be more ability to implement it in all aspects of the school."

- *Designating an ESI point person.* Training multiple staff was not the only recommendation for handling the sometimes overwhelming logistics of ESI. Many educators emphasized the importance of creating a centralized infrastructure for ESI from the outset, managed either by a school-based ESI point person or, in one case, an external partner. As a principal opined, "I think there's no substitute for having… a school leader really in charge of something." Similarly, a design team member from a different school reflected, "I think we were very clear in what we wanted to happen, but I don't know that we were clear in how and who was going to make sure that it always happened." Schools that started the year with a point person in place reported satisfaction with the arrangement.

- *Building ESI into the school day.* School-based ESI leaders also reported that incorporating ESI into the school day was a key strategy for maximizing its impact. One principal, for example, reported that embedding the largest component of their ESI programming—single-gender advisories—into the school day was critical to success:

  > …while there are lots of other parts of the grant that touch some or all of the young men, this is one thing that they experience every single day. I just think it was a really smart way to design the implementation in Year 1, because we know that every single [student] is being hit, being impacted or being exposed to whatever it is that we're trying to do at a very constant rate. Four days a week, 40 minutes per day. I think that was really smart instead of investing a ton into after school where you might get some percentage and not others. I think it was really smart to do it this way, and it is by far the most successful aspect of the plan so far.

From the perspective of some educators we spoke with, scheduling ESI into the school day not only enhanced its impact, but also encouraged students to take the program more seriously. As one design team member put it:

You have to really look at the structure of the school and even the conception of students when they walk into the school. So everything, most everything, is scheduled into the schedule… their concept of in-school programming is that it fits into a particular schedule they get. Then also that they are getting some kind of acknowledgement for participation in that program, either a letter grade or a numerical grade or a pass/fail in that regard. I think with the mindset of students in the school setting, we have to consider that as we design programs and not design programs outside of that concept or outside of that box.

Several respondents also noted there were aspects of ESI as an initiative that encouraged cohesive school-level implementation. The design process, the emphasis on building on existing strengths, the promise of consecutive years of funding, and the support provided for working with external partners each garnered several mentions. These features were nicely summarized by one design team member:

What we loved about when we were applying for the ESI grant is that it was the next evolution of programs that we offered. Just now with more supports and more of a financial backing, so that we can bring on more. It was now tweaking the programs that we have… and then us having the projected budget to keep that for the following years. That is something that we really appreciated. It wasn't that you have to start from scratch or just bringing this other or alien form of something. It's something that says, 'Look at what you already have, and then how do you envision the growth of it?' That was very appreciated.

The design process in particular proved critical for many schools. At one school, interviewees agreed that the debates generated by the design process improved the quality of a key plank of their ESI program:

It was healthy debate. It was good debate. It made [the outreach program] more focused. It made us understand what we had to do with the staff in order to ready them to be able to [carry out the outreach program]. We had a much more robust training process because there was so much debate about "is this the right thing to do?" If we don't know if it's the right thing to do, then we need to do everything in our power to make sure that when we go in there, we're doing the right thing, and that

everyone's prepared and that everyone …[understands that] this is how we want to present ourselves, this is how we want to present our school, this is what we're doing here. That was really important.

At other schools, respondents reported that the design process crystallized previously nebulous school values (e.g., "the grant helped us clarify our focus" around academic rigor) and enhanced teacher community and buy-in (e.g., "it put a lot of ownership on the staff members who had to step up and really see this through to the [application] deadline").

Overall, while there were obstacles to achieving cohesive implementation, there were also strategies that schools employed, as well as features of ESI as a whole, that facilitated integration of ESI at the school-level. The ESI roll-out was a challenge at all of the schools we visited, but at schools with cohesive implementation, teachers, design team members, and principals embraced the challenge and were pleased with the results. Our fieldwork in Year 1 highlighted cohesion as an important piece of strong program implementation. As such, we will continue to examine the cohesiveness of ESI services and supports in our ongoing research.

Summary

This chapter described three different sets of findings. First, in our efforts to quantitatively measure *fidelity* and *intensity*, we found that a majority of schools had programming that reflected their workplans, and that programs outlined in workplans were generally being implemented with sufficient intensity.

The chapter also described the most salient changes staff described as a result of implementing ESI in their schools. In the academic domain, staff reported enhancing the rigor of their classes and increasing opportunities for students to take more advanced coursework. This is an important strategy to prepare students to enter college without remediation (Adelman 1999; Oakes 2008). In the area of youth development, both one-on-one and peer mentoring played a prominent role, in addition to student advisories and enrichment opportunities. Staff reported that, as a result of these programs, student-student and student-teacher relationships had improved markedly. Research suggests that improved school relationships are an essential element of school improvement, helping to increase attendance and keep students engaged with school (Wells et al. 2011; Riegle-Crumb 2010; Haynie and Osgood 2005). In the school culture domain, educators reported an increase in

college supports, particularly in the 9th grade, which many schools had not provided previously. Again, the literature suggests a relationship between these kinds of college supports and students' levels of college knowledge and college readiness (Conley 2007; Scramm 2008). The other clear change that staff attributed to ESI was the incorporation of culturally relevant education, which helped increase awareness of the unique challenges facing young men of color and led to the adoption of new practices that could better serve these students. This shift is potentially important for educating young men of color effectively (Cummins 1986; Ladson-Billings 1994). While all of these changes may be ends in and of themselves, prior research suggests that they also represent key leverage points by which to improve student outcomes. For this reason, the developments seen in ESI schools during Year 1 are promising.

Finally, this chapter reported on levels of *programmatic cohesion*—or the integration of ESI within a school's culture. While we didn't set out to systematically measure cohesion, the school staff we interviewed identified this element as essential for successfully implementing ESI. The levels of cohesion seen in ESI schools varied considerably; while some schools largely operated as if ESI were an add-on program, others made great efforts to weave ESI into existing school norms, programs, and structures. Paying close attention to cohesion may help schools implement ESI successfully—and may make it more feasible to sustain their programs beyond the life of the initiative (Harvard Family Research Project 2010). By infusing ESI into their culture and everyday practice, schools will be more likely to continue implementing ESI programming even without the allocated funding.

We hope the information in this chapter proves useful for ESI schools, as well as for policymakers and funders, as they think about how to support and expand on these promising efforts.

CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

These early implementation findings offer important insights into strategies that may strengthen ESI as it evolves over the next two years. They may also provide preliminary perspectives on factors that are likely to influence long-term sustainability and scale-up efforts.

To this end, we offer reflections on the findings, aimed at informing future planning and program development for ESI schools and the DOE.

Focus on Programmatic Cohesion

Recommendations for schools. According to our findings, the schools that reported the most success with implementing ESI were those that put a great deal of energy into ensuring that the initiative was well integrated into everyday school practice and overall culture. Programmatic cohesion may also help schools sustain ESI programming beyond the period of the initiative. When programs are connected to one another and infused into existing school programming, they are more likely to persist, even in the face of staff turnover and the loss of dedicated funding. Evidence from these schools suggests that, to increase cohesion, multiple staff members should be involved in ESI meetings and professional development, ESI should be built into the regular school day, and efforts should be made so that teachers understand the rationale behind ESI and how ESI programming is connected to the school mission.

Recommendations for centralized support systems. In Year 2, the ESI central team developed an important structure for increasing programmatic cohesion by having every school designate an ESI point person and organizing regular meetings for these point people (in addition to regular ESI principal meetings). These meetings are designed to share important ESI information and training, which point people can then disseminate to their staff. In addition, some schools suggested that the ESI team should provide explicit training around programmatic cohesion. Specifically, it might be useful to highlight the work of schools that are excelling in this area. Learning best practices from other schools in a structured format is something principals in our study said they wanted, though it might be difficult to take advantage of, given the many demands on principals' time.

Increasing programmatic cohesion is likely to be especially important as schools begin to think about how to sustain ESI in the face of less funding, staff turnover, and other district-wide changes, such as the implementation of the Common Core.

Expand Career Supports

Recommendations for schools. While a majority of schools reported an expansion of college supports, very few reported any changes in the career supports they provided for 9th graders. As we noted, it may be that, as ESI students get closer to graduation, more schools will implement career-related programming. Given that career readiness is a central goal for ESI, school staff should begin thinking about how career supports both overlap with and are also distinct from college readiness (Symonds et al. 2011). Career programming is not merely about helping students gain employment, but about developing the skills and competencies they will need to succeed in the world of work (including full-time employment or work-study opportunities in college). Partnerships with employers are one way to provide students with a fuller sense of the norms and expectations of various work environments. Some educators in our study reflected that college is not necessarily a good fit for every one of their students. This suggests that, while college readiness is one explicit goal of ESI, career supports or programming that offers alternative pathways to success may also be important.

Recommendations for centralized support systems. The DOE may be able to help schools develop programming explicitly geared toward career readiness. To support schools in this area, the DOE could provide more information about the benefits of this type of programming, as well as examples of specific career-related strategies that have garnered some evidence of effectiveness. The team could also ensure that there are ample external partners on the approved list who can assist with this type of programming.

Bolster CRE Across Domains

Recommendations for schools. While educators in many schools reported a shift in mindsets, culture, or practice as a response to their work with CRE, others were still wondering how to translate CRE principles into specific instructional practices (and some described a more "color-blind" perspective). We know from existing research that, for CRE to affect student outcomes, schools need to holistically apply its core principles across the curriculum, instruction, and school-

wide practices, such as suspension or discipline policies. In schools where CRE has been embraced, we heard about the profound differences it is making in how teachers think about their work and the ways in which they relate to their students. Schools should continue to take advantage of the unique opportunity to receive (or increase their presence in) the CRE training provided by the ESI central team and should strategically send staff who will be able to successfully share this training with other members of the school community.

Recommendations for centralized support systems. The work around CRE is related to issues of cohesion and sustainability, because of CRE's potential to affect teacher mindsets, school practice, and school culture at deeper levels that cut across individual programs. Making CRE an explicit part of ESI and helping to develop school knowledge of and capacity in CRE have been important, useful aspects of the support provided by the ESI central team. We encourage the team to continue developing schools' expertise around CRE, particularly helping them identify more practical ways to incorporate a culturally relevant perspective into school policies and everyday school practice. Even in the schools committed to this work, some staff reported some confusion about how to utilize their training, described challenges around executing it well (particularly in the absence of any men of color on staff), and wanted guidance on specific pedagogical practices. This might be another area in which the ESI central team can structure time for principals to learn best practices from other schools. It is important to note that staff in some schools seemed unaware of CRE or still communicated a "deficit" point of view toward their students—that is, the perception that low achievement is primarily a result of negative student attitudes or lack of skills. If possible, we suggest expanding CRE to schools where it is missing or not as prevalent among staff members.

Managing External Partnerships

Recommendations for schools. Partners were central to the creation and expansion of programming in ESI schools. The most successful partnerships were those in which the vendor added a unique expertise not present or fully developed in the building, while also fitting in well with the culture of the school. In schools that were particularly focused on sustainability, staff reported actively learning from an outside partner during this first year (e.g., about how to run a successful advisory

or peer mentoring program), so that the school would be in a position to provide that program or service on its own in subsequent years.

Recommendations for centralized support systems. Half the ESI schools reported problems or challenges related to external partnerships, including not being able to work with desired partners and not being satisfied with the services provided. The DOE's parameters for approving external vendors were intended to encourage schools to try new strategies with different partners, but having to seek additional approval for the partners of their choice was perceived as a large constraint by some schools. The DOE's ESI team might consider either making special allowances for vendors that schools have worked with successfully in the past or amending the application process for these vendors so it is not overly cumbersome. To ensure that these partnerships are then fruitful, it might also be useful to provide some kind of anonymous survey or rating system on external vendors, which would allow educators to give feedback and possibly help other schools make more informed decisions about which partners to select.

Closing Thoughts

Our evaluation of the first year of ESI raises other questions about the tensions that may arise in implementing this kind of initiative. For example, what is the optimal level of school autonomy? The ESI central team encouraged schools to take ownership of ESI and design their own programming, but many schools struggled with this degree of autonomy and wanted more guidance. There is also the question of how to engage a range of stakeholders at a school, so that the vision and commitment to the work lives beyond a given principal and one or two school leaders. In many schools in our study, we found that teachers had limited knowledge of ESI. But it is unclear whether it matters that school staff know an initiative by name. After all, we found that infusing ESI into a school's mission was a likely strength. And, even though some teachers didn't know much about ESI overall, they were more likely to be familiar with particular ESI programs. Finally, what is the balance between leveraging schools' existing successful practices and encouraging them to try new strategies? Some ESI schools wanted to use initiative funding to support or expand the work of existing partners, but ESI's design encouraged schools to seek new partners they had never used. We will see how some of these questions play out in future years of the initiative.

In addition to informing the work of schools, the DOE, and potentially other districts, this report also carries implications for our own evaluation. In the same way that schools have learned and modified plans after the first year of implementation, we have similarly learned from the first year of our evaluation, specifically about which components of ESI we should focus on more deeply in Year 2. Looking ahead, we will look more systematically at the use of CRE and levels of programmatic cohesion, given their importance in ESI's first year. We will examine how ESI's various components are associated with impacts on academic outcomes (e.g., attendance, credit accumulation, Regents scores) and non-academic outcomes that we are measuring through student surveys (e.g., academic self concept, persistence, college knowledge). We plan to do more cataloguing of specific strategies and programs during future years of implementation, so that we can identify the ones that have the most traction. We may also be able to illuminate how various school characteristics (e.g., school size, school type, or length of principal tenure) and other ESI elements (e.g., external partnerships, levels of cohesion, and strength of relationships)are related to impacts on student outcomes. Finally, we will look carefully at the sustainability of ESI's programs and services and the potential to expand the most effective approaches to other schools and districts.

Overall, our Year 1 findings suggest that ESI has been successful in terms of launching and rolling out a complex initiative in 40 NYC high schools. While these schools and the DOE's ESI team have both encountered challenges, there are many encouraging signs from our fieldwork. It is clear that schools have made a number of important changes that hold promise for improving college readiness—and, indeed, "expanding success"—among Black and Latino young men.

Notes

[1] There are many questions about how to measure "college readiness." One commonly used benchmark for NYC schools is the New York State Education Department's Aspirational Performance Measure: earning a Regents diploma or an Advanced Regents diploma within four years, passing at least one Math Regents with a score of 80 or higher, and passing the English Regents with a score of 75 or higher. The Research Alliance is currently engaged in work to help create better measures of college readiness.

[2] The $24 million also funds other components of ESI, including efforts to scale up college advising training citywide and the ESI School Design Fellowship, which is dedicated to designing and launching eight new high schools focused on preparing Black and Latino students for college and careers. Fellows will become school leaders in these eight new schools, slated to open in September 2014. These other components of ESI are not a part of the Research Alliance evaluation.

[3] Academics is defined as "strategies that relate to Common Core standards and expectations for what students must know and demonstrate to be on track for college success." Youth Development is defined as "strategies that emphasize building student resilience, commitment to life beyond high school, and restorative approaches to school discipline that prevent negative outcomes, such as suspension." School Culture is defined as "strategies that promote a college and career focus among 9th grade Black and Latino young men, influencing the ethos, mission, and explicit (and implicit) communications in the entire school building, even outside the classroom." (NYC DOE nd).

[4] Culturally relevant education is "a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes." See Ladson-Billings 1994.

[5] ESI schools fit three criteria: (1) student enrollment that includes at least 35 percent Black and Latino males, with at least 60 percent of students qualifying for free or reduced price lunch, (2) a four-year graduation rate above 65 percent, and (3) an "A" or "B" on the latest high school Progress Report.

[6] Two of the 40 ESI schools were not included in our Year 1 analysis because they were relocated or closed for a length of time due to Hurricane Sandy.

[7] Workplans are documents in which ESI schools describe each program they planned to expand or develop with ESI funding.

[8] Two very frequent codes, "challenges" and "changes," were not selected for further analysis because these codes were almost always used in conjunction with another frequently occurring code (e.g., if a teacher noted that peer relationships seemed to be improving as a result of ESI, the researcher would code this both as "changes" and "relationships").

[9] ESI schools were given the option to work with vendors on a list of 80 external partners that had shown previous success in serving young men of color. Other providers may apply to be included on this list at any time.

[10] The original budget template in schools' ESI applications had a line for Personnel/Salary and a note that read, "Budgets will be reviewed annually and may be subject to change on the part of the school and/or the ESI grant." The ESI central team decided that they would not use ESI funds for hardware, software or staff positions unless schools had a compelling explanation for how these could create sustainable change that would increase college readiness rates for Black and Latino young men. Thus, while there was not a formal rule change, the parameters of the funding were further clarified in the process of approving workplans.

[11] The Fund for Public Schools issued a request for proposals to thousands of external vendors. Several individuals at the central level reviewed the applications with a rubric. They also built in an appeals process for vendors that were not initially approved.

[12] iMentor is a school-based mentoring program that matches high school students in New York City in one-to-one relationships with college-educated mentors. Mentor-mentee pairs are matched for three to four years and exchange emails weekly and meet monthly in person.

[13] See also Baker and Rich 2011; Grossman and Vang 2009.

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The Research Alliance for New York City Schools

285 Mercer Street, 3rd Floor | New York, New York 10003-9502
212 992 7697 | 212 995 4910 fax
research.alliance@nyu.edu | www.steinhardt.nyu.edu/research_alliance

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