The Expanded Success Initiative
Challenges and Progress in the Pursuit of College and Career Readiness for Black and Latino Young Men
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2012, New York City launched the Expanded Success Initiative (ESI) in an effort to improve educational opportunities and increase college and career readiness among Black and Latino male students. At the time, ESI was one of the largest investments ever dedicated to boosting the educational outcomes of Black and Latino males. It inspired many of the components of President Obama’s national My Brother’s Keeper (MBK) initiative and has served as a model for other MBK communities across the country.

ESI was motivated by large disparities in college readiness rates between Black and Latino males and other groups of students. When ESI began, only about 1 in 10 Black and Latino male students was graduating “college ready,” based on New York State’s measure. Educators, policymakers and advocates were concerned that while rising numbers of Black and Latino males were graduating from NYC high schools, very few of them seemed well prepared to attend and thrive in college.

The Research Alliance’s analysis in Moving the Needle: Exploring Key Levers to Boost College Readiness Among Black and Latino Males in New York City showed how low college readiness rates could be traced back to earlier educational disparities. Compared to their peers, Black and Latino male students had lower average test scores and attendance rates in elementary and middle school, were more likely to be over-age for their grade, and were less likely to be “on-track” after their 9th grade year (a critical antecedent to graduating college ready). Moreover, our work documented a variety of underlying opportunity gaps facing Black and Latino males. Specifically, we explored how poverty, gender expectations, language barriers, and discriminatory school practices (particularly around school discipline, special education services, and access to higher-level courses) may be shaping the educational experiences and outcomes of young men of color.

Acknowledging these opportunity gaps, ESI was designed to target various aspects of the high school experience for Black and Latino young men. While ESI’s primary goal was to improve college readiness, funders and district leaders were also focused on decreasing suspensions among Black males in particular, confronting teacher biases, elevating student voices, and nurturing professional communities of educators who were committed to better serving young men of color. As we discuss in greater depth below, the NYC Department of Education (NYCDOE) saw ESI as a “research and development” initiative, in which they encouraged participating high schools to
experiment with and hone strategies for their Black and Latino male students. Ultimately, the NYCDOE hoped lessons learned in ESI would help improve opportunities and outcomes for these students districtwide.

To that end, ESI provided a mix of funding, professional development, and ongoing support to 40 public high schools with relatively strong graduation rates for Black and Latino males, but college enrollments rates that were only on par with the rest of the City. ESI schools were charged with creating and expanding services and supports for male students of color in three broad domains—academics, youth development, and college-focused school culture—which the NYCDOE theorized as important for increasing college readiness. ESI also placed a heavy emphasis on the principles of culturally relevant education (CRE) as a cross-cutting approach undergirding all three domains. (See the textbox on the next page for more about ESI’s core domains.)

Over the last five years, the Research Alliance has published a series of reports from our ongoing study of ESI. This report is the culminating product in the series, synthesizing findings across all four years of the initiative, and the first to report comprehensive impact findings. The report draws on several rich sources of data, including nearly 500 interviews and focus groups with ESI school leaders, teachers, and students; annual questionnaires and rubrics to assess programming in ESI schools; a survey administered to over 5,000 students each year in both ESI schools and a set of matched comparison schools; and administrative records (e.g., attendance, suspensions, credit accumulation, high school graduation, and college enrollment) for students in ESI and comparison schools.

As the document of record evaluating an important, large-scale initiative, this report sets out to answer a number of key questions about ESI’s implementation and impact. Specifically, we examine ESI through the lens of the initiative’s theory of action (see Figure ES-1 below) by assessing: 1) the district-level “inputs” of the initiative, including funding, professional development, and the creation of cross-school learning communities; 2) school “actions,” including developing and expanding programs, supports, and services within ESI’s three core domains; 3) student and teacher participation in ESI-related activities; 4) ESI’s influence on school culture and relationships; and 5) its impact on students’ perceptions of their schools, their high school experiences, and other student outcomes, including graduation and college enrollment. Our findings in each of these areas provide valuable insights for future initiatives aimed at Black and Latino young men, here in NYC and in other cities across the country.
The Expanded Success Initiative’s Core Domains

ESI schools were charged with creating and expanding services and supports for male students of color in three core domains—academics, youth development, and college-focused school culture. ESI also placed a heavy emphasis on culturally relevant education, which was seen as a cross-cutting principle undergirding the initiative and infused into all three domains.

Academics

Strategies to increase academic rigor and expectations and to expand access to advanced coursework. Examples include:

- Increasing opportunities for students to take AP classes or other more rigorous courses
- Raising academic standards or benchmarks
- Providing academic supports, such as tutoring

Youth Development

Strategies that address students’ socio-emotional needs. Examples include:

- Mentoring programs
- Single-gender student advisory classes
- Student-led justice panels
- Enrichment opportunities (trips, sports, clubs)
- Restorative approaches to discipline

College-Focused School Culture

Strategies to create a school-wide culture that emphasizes preparing Black and Latino young men for college and careers. Examples include:

- Shifting the school mission to be explicitly focused on college
- Communicating with students and parents about the steps to get to college starting in the 9th grade
- Offering college trips and other college-focused supports as early as 9th grade

Culturally Relevant Education (CRE)

CRE attempts to engage and empower students by incorporating their cultural backgrounds and focusing on issues that are relevant to their lives. Examples include:

- Encouraging teachers to confront biases about Black and Latino males
- Representing and affirming students’ racial and cultural identities in curriculum and instruction
- Modifying curriculum with an eye toward addressing issues that matter to students
Figure ES-1: The Expanded Success Initiative Theory of Action

**Inputs**
- Funding: $250,000 went to each ESI school over the first three years of the four-year initiative
- Autonomy: Schools were encouraged to develop programming that fit their community’s needs
- Professional Development: PD included CRE, restorative justice, subject-specific trainings, etc.
- Learning Community: Regular meetings of 40 ESI liaisons (one per school) provide support from central ESI team and opportunities to share promising practices

**School Actions**
- Expand programming, services, and supports for students in three core domains that were undergirded by CRE:
  - College Relevance
  - Academic
  - Youth Development

**School Culture and Relationships**
- Reduce educators’ biases against Black and Latino male students
- Emphasize early and ongoing support for college goals
- Develop culturally relevant curriculum and instruction
- Reduce use of suspensions
- Improve relationships between students, and relationships between students and staff

**Perceptions of School and Self**
- Sense of fair treatment
- Perceptions of race/gender/cultural climate
- Sense of belonging in school
- Critical thinking
- Academic self-concept

**College Enrollment**

**Students’ High School Experiences and Outcomes**
- Antecedents to College
  - Attendance
  - On-track status and credits earned for graduation
  - NYS Aspirational Performance Measure (APM)
  - Graduation with Regents Diploma
- Future Planning
  - Conversations with adults about college and career
  - Applying for financial aid
  - Applying to college
  - SAT-taking

**Participation**
- Students: Participate in activities aligned with three domains and culturally relevant education
- School Staff: Participate in professional development opportunities
Major Findings About ESI’s Implementation and Impact

Inputs: How Was ESI Designed and Supported at the District Level?

- **ESI involved buy-in from many stakeholders and a significant investment of resources.** The NYCDOE cultivated buy-in and support for ESI from City Hall, the Open Society Foundation (OSF), and numerous City agencies and community organizations. OSF, Bloomberg Philanthropies, and other donors provided $24 million to support ESI’s central administration and provide funding directly to schools ($250,000 over three years for each participating school). Both the size of this investment and the effort required to create partnerships among multiple stakeholders represented a notable alignment of resources around the goal of improving outcomes for Black and Latino young men.

- **ESI was characterized by strong centralized support.** The ESI Central Team—the staff within the NYCDOE charged with leading and implementing ESI—created a robust infrastructure to support schools. This included coordinating the distribution of funding and building a network of external partners and collaborators. The team also provided individual guidance for schools during the planning phase of each year, ongoing professional development in culturally relevant education and other topics, and enrichment opportunities for male students of color. Finally, they created a professional learning community that met regularly in “ESI liaison meetings” to address cross-cutting issues that were relevant to all ESI schools.

- **ESI encouraged school-level autonomy and experimentation.** ESI provided participating schools with considerable flexibility to develop programming that complemented existing supports and was responsive to the needs and circumstances of their student body. Schools were instructed to provide activities in all three ESI domains and CRE, but these parameters left substantial room for each school to create what was essentially its own version of ESI. In keeping with the research and development approach to the initiative, the ESI Central Team encouraged school staff to try new strategies to support young men of color and to continue, modify or abandon these efforts based on their experience.

The absence of a single, standardized model for ESI had implications for the initiative’s implementation, as well as our evaluation. Because ESI looked
somewhat different in each school, it was difficult to design a standard way of measuring program quality. In interviews held in the final months of the initiative, members of the ESI Central Team speculated that ESI might have been more successful if there had been somewhat less flexibility and more accountability for implementing specific program elements. This was perhaps especially important in the context of other accountability pressures that schools were facing at the same time, including the introduction of Common Core standards and the launch of a new teacher evaluation system. The diversity of approaches across ESI schools also raised questions, from early on, about the kind of impacts we might see from the initiative. To what extent could such varied programs move the needle on any shared set of outcomes?

Actions: How Did Schools Implement ESI?

- **Implementation was strong in the second year, but diminished somewhat in Years 3 and 4, as funding levels declined.** Based on detailed annual questionnaires about training that schools participated in and programming they offered to students, we assessed each school’s alignment with the core tenets of ESI (e.g., Did they have programming across the three domains? Did they implement CRE? Did their programs target males of color? Did they participate in ESI professional development opportunities?). ESI was successful in getting schools to create or expand academic supports, youth development programs, college and career planning, and culturally relevant education. Most schools were able to implement activities that were at least moderately aligned with ESI’s theory of action, especially in the first two years of the initiative. However, as funding levels declined, so too did the alignment of programming activities with ESI’s core principles. Attendance at ESI liaison meetings and college- and career-focused programming saw the most notable declines during the last two years of the initiative.

- **Implementation varied across schools, as did levels of participation among Black and Latino male students.** Schools implemented a diverse array of programs within each of the domains, and levels of alignment with the tenets of ESI varied from school to school and year to year. There was also considerable variation in student participation rates. Based on our student survey, most Black and Latino young men in ESI schools participated in
activities within one of ESI’s three domains. And student participation generally increased from year to year, running somewhat counter to the finding that implementation levels declined over time. However, even in Year 4 (when participation was highest), only about half of the Black and Latino young men surveyed participated in activities in all three of ESI’s domains. Looking at measures of participation and data from our implementation rubric, we identified a group of nine schools that were consistently strong in both areas (i.e., well aligned with the ESI principles and average participation rates of 50 percent or higher across the four years of the initiative). At the other end of the spectrum, seven schools had consistently low implementation alignment and average participation rates below 30 percent. The remaining 21 schools had alignment and participation rates that fell somewhere in the middle.

Outcomes: What Changes Did Educators and Students Attribute to ESI?

- **Educators and students reported meaningful changes to school culture and relationships as a result of the initiative.** Drawing on more than 500 interviews with school leaders, teachers, and students, conducted over the life of the initiative, we found that ESI led to important changes in the culture of participating schools. Three areas of school change stood out because of their prominence across schools and years of the initiative: 1) the development of a culturally relevant orientation to teaching and learning, 2) improved school relationships, and 3) a stronger schoolwide commitment to supporting students’ post-secondary goals. Notably, these reported changes reflect fundamental shifts in educators’ mindsets and beliefs about their students, rather than just the addition of new programming. Taken together, these findings suggest that ESI changed the culture of schools in ways that may particularly benefit traditionally marginalized students, including Black and Latino young men.

“Schools have been perceived as this ‘neutral zone’ where there’s no politics; we just focus on academics…. [But] there’s now a language that people can use to talk about these things… now there’s at least some comfort level with people using a word like racism where usually you can’t even say that word…”

— ESI Teacher
Outcomes: What Impact Did ESI Have on Students’ Experiences and Outcomes?

- **ESI increased student participation in a range of activities.** Our annual survey revealed that Black and Latino young men in ESI schools were consistently more likely than their counterparts in non-ESI comparison schools to participate in activities associated with ESI’s three domains and CRE. The largest and most consistent differences occurred in students’ participation in college and career preparation activities (e.g., college trips, college advising, and work-based learning) and in youth development activities (e.g., mentoring programs, youth groups, and student advisory programs). Black and Latino young men in ESI schools were actually more likely to participate in academic support activities (e.g., tutoring programs, Regents prep services, and AP or IB classes) than in college preparation or youth development activities, but the differences between ESI and non-ESI schools were generally smaller (i.e., academic activities were common for both groups). Finally, in keeping with the findings from our interviews and focus groups, Black and Latino young men in ESI schools were more likely than their counterparts in non-ESI schools to report being exposed to culturally relevant materials in their classes.

- **ESI improved Black and Latino young men’s sense of fair treatment and sense of belonging.** Black and Latino young men in ESI schools were consistently more likely than similar students in non-ESI comparison schools to respond positively on measures of fair treatment and belonging in their schools, especially in 11th and 12th grade. This finding is particularly important, given past research showing that high schools are often alienating to young men of color (Ferguson, 2016; Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, 2014; Gordon, D. M., Iwamoto, D., Ward, N., Potts, R., & Boyd, E. 2009). The difference between ESI and non-ESI schools emerged despite the fact that fewer than

“I think that this program teaches you how to be compassionate for other people and to create something that you can’t get anywhere else…To have these guys [here] every day just made me want to come to school that much more because I got to be with my brothers in a sense. I got to [be with] my family.”

– ESI Student
half of the Black and Latino young men reported feeling positive about their sense of fair treatment and belonging, suggesting substantial room for improvement in this area for both ESI and comparison schools.

- **ESI increased students’ interaction with adults to discuss plans for their future.** Black and Latino young men in ESI schools were consistently more likely than their counterparts in non-ESI comparison schools to engage in discussions with adults in their lives about college and careers. ESI students were also more likely to take the SAT. Yet, ESI and comparison students applied for college, pursued financial aid options, or were accepted into college at similar rates. Students in both sets of schools applied to an average of about five colleges, and more than three quarters of both groups reported being accepted to at least one.

- **ESI had little or no impact on student attendance or suspension rates.** Despite evidence of improvements related to school culture and relationships, ESI had little or no systematic impact on Black and Latino male students’ attendance or suspension rates. ESI’s focus on school culture aimed, in part, at creating a positive school climate and minimizing the use of suspensions to address discipline problems. But this took place in the context of a larger district-wide effort to reduce school suspension rates. We found that both ESI and non-ESI schools experienced a slight drop in suspensions during the period of our study.

- **ESI had little or no impact on high school graduation, college readiness, or college enrollment rates.** Just over two thirds of the Black and Latino young men in both ESI and non-ESI schools graduated with a Regents diploma within four years of entering high school. However, less than 20 percent of these students met the New York State college readiness standard, suggesting that most of these high school graduates may require remediation if they enroll in college. About a quarter of Black and Latino male

“As a faculty...we definitely understand the importance of promoting a college-going culture, which was not the case three years ago. As much as we wanted kids to go to college, we didn’t understand how little they knew about college. Now I think as a faculty we’re very clear. Our kids need more college talk to get them ready to go.”

– ESI Teacher
students in both sets of schools enrolled in a four-year college immediately following high school graduation. It should be noted that graduation and college enrollment rates for Black and Latino young men in both ESI and non-ESI schools were higher than citywide averages for this demographic, but were still substantially lower than rates Black and Latino females and White and Asian males.

Discussion

Our efforts to document, understand, and evaluate ESI may be especially relevant and useful for other districts engaged in similar efforts focused on young men of color. Both the accomplishments and limitations of ESI provide an opportunity for other similar initiatives around the country to think strategically about how they are designing and implementing such efforts. What can the ESI team, the district, and other districts committed to better serving Black and Latino males take away from the story of ESI? Which elements of the initiative were successful or distinctive and may be worth replicating or building on in other districts? And which aspects seem to have limited ESI’s ability to positively impact students on a number of key outcomes?

**ESI produced powerful changes in school culture and relationships.**

ESI accomplished important goals by taking root in a majority of participating schools, changing school culture and relationships in meaningful ways, and leaving behind a legacy that continues to influence policies and practices aimed at Black and Latino young men, both at the district level and within schools. These efforts include an ongoing series of “Critical and Courageous Conversations” around issues of racial equity in schools, large-scale school and student showcases focused on CRE and peer mentoring, and a recent push by NYC’s City Council to expand the Critically Conscious Educators Rising Series, which offers professional development on CRE to teachers.

Considering ongoing conversations about bias in schools, the historical disenfranchisement of Black and Latino students, and longstanding and persistent inequities in school outcomes, these are notable achievements. How was ESI able to accomplish this important set of goals?

- **Changing teachers’ mindsets to provide stronger support for vulnerable students.** ESI went to great lengths to create a more welcoming environment for Black and Latino male students rather than solely trying to
address a particular aspect of their academic performance. Indeed, we found that ESI shifted teacher mindsets and beliefs, improved in-school relationships, and positively influenced students’ sense of belonging and fair treatment in their schools. Though previous research suggests that addressing teacher bias and improving relationships between teachers and students can be important factors in improving student motivation and achievement (Dee & Penner, 2017; Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011; Wells et al. 2011), our study did not show a link to increased academic performance. At the same time, ESI’s ability to improve school culture and relationships is both notable and meaningful on its own, especially considering the historical marginalization of boys of color in schools (Fergus 2010, Noguera, 2008; Mincy, 2006; Howard, 2013; Noguera, & Martin, 2014; Toldson, 2008). Other districts may consider building on the strategies ESI used to achieve this goal as an important first step to addressing students’ needs and serving them as whole individuals.

- **Providing schools with ongoing support.** The ESI central team invested considerable time, effort, and resources in developing an infrastructure to support schools’ planning and implementation of ESI. Rather than simply providing money to schools, the Central Team provided ongoing support in the form of feedback on schools’ yearly plans, professional development opportunities, help forming external partnerships, and the creation of a professional learning community via monthly meetings for ESI liaisons. Past research illustrates the important role professional learning communities can play in school improvement (Broadie, K, 2013; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005). Consistent with this, the ESI educators we interviewed attributed many positive changes at their school to insight from these meetings and collaboration with other school leaders. Other districts should consider how they can offer schools effective, ongoing support to execute these types of initiatives.

**ESI did not improve academic performance or college readiness.**

ESI aspired not only to improve relationships and perceptions of the school environment, but also to raise college readiness rates (and other academic outcomes) among Black and Latino males. However, the changes we documented among schools, educators, and students were not, by themselves, enough to increase Black and Latino young men’s academic outcomes, college readiness, or college enrollment. What might account for the lack of impacts in this area, and
how might other districts focused on college readiness design and implement efforts that stand the best chance of yielding the desired results?

- **Could stronger implementation have made a difference?** At the outset, the District and the ESI Central Team emphasized the importance of schools driving the improvement process by identifying gaps among students in their own schools and deciding how to use ESI resources to close those gaps. The rationale behind this strategy was that schools best know the needs of their students and how to enact change within their buildings. This decision also ensured a level of buy-in and engagement among schools that might not have existed with a more prescriptive approach. At the same time, this high level of autonomy meant there was wide variation among schools in terms of program design, dosage and quality, and there were no clear benchmarks for student participation. While we did not find evidence that the nine schools with stronger implementation and participation rates had a systematically larger impact on student experiences and outcomes, we recognize that there was room for improvement even among the strongest implementers. On average, fewer than half of the Black and Latino males in ESI schools reported having participated in activities in all three of the initiative’s domains. Schools may have needed to reach many more students, more consistently, to have an impact on outcomes like attendance, graduation rates, or college going. This aspect of the initiative should encourage policymakers to consider ways of both leveraging school-level expertise and providing more directive guidelines or standards for implementing high-quality programs, such as evidence-based rubrics for assessing and improving program quality and concrete goals around program dosage and student participation.

  Our data also show that levels of implementation declined after Year 2, as the funding for ESI decreased. Future initiatives might benefit from clearer guidance about how to create policies and structures that can outlast initiative resources, including setting stricter parameters about using funding to build staff capacity in targeted areas rather than relying on costly external partners to implement new programs.

- **Was the intervention too diffuse and not focused enough on academic supports?** ESI’s focus on school culture meant that schools were supporting Black and Latino male students on a number of different fronts
(some schools offered up to seven different ESI programs that changed from year to year). And, while ESI appeared to increase students’ exposure to activities in all three domains (and CRE), we found that the difference between ESI and comparison schools was smaller for activities in the academic domain (largely because of the high number of academic activities in the comparison schools). Broadly speaking, ESI did not seem to substantially change schools’ approach to teaching and learning, outside of the adoption of CRE. For example, most schools did not use ESI as an opportunity to fully revamp curriculum or improve teacher mastery in particular subjects. Previous research suggests that a diffuse set of interventions may not be as impactful as one that is more targeted (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2017; Boylan, 2009). Perhaps a clearer focus on supports tied directly to high school graduation, college readiness, and enrollment (e.g., supports focused on credit accumulation to remain on-track for graduation, SAT taking, college applications, and Regents passing) would have enhanced ESI’s ability to improve those outcomes. Indeed, improving students’ academic trajectories in the face of longstanding educational disparities will likely require a robust set of targeted supports to meet students’ academic needs.

It is also important to note that even though ESI students engaged in a range of positive activities, reported a stronger sense of fair treatment and belonging, and had more conversations with adults about college and careers than students in comparison schools, this was not enough to move the needle on college readiness or enrollment. These patterns suggest that we cannot assume, as ESI’s theory of action does, that greater participation in these activities, more college-focused support, and a greater sense of belonging in high school will promote college access and success—at least not on their own. While our study provides evidence that the early part of the ESI theory holds up, the route to improved college readiness is long and complex. There may be a number of mediating factors, both inside and outside of school, that the ESI theory of action overlooked.

ESI represented an unprecedented investment in the educational outcomes of males of color. It was thoughtfully designed, moderately well implemented (particularly in its early years), and positively impacted some important outcomes. While ESI did not increase college readiness and enrollment for Black and Latino male students, it was well suited to changing elements of school culture and students’ experiences in
school. If districts are interested in improving school culture for Black and Latino young men, an investment in the types of supports ESI provided makes sense. However, if districts want to focus on improving college readiness and enrollment rates, the evidence suggests there may be ways of improving upon this model, particularly by creating more targeted interventions that are closely aligned with the intended outcomes.

Moving Forward
Too often, education policies don’t outlive election cycles. And when results are mixed or slow to develop, policymakers and the public often lose interest and move on to the next big initiative. But we would argue that real change takes time. Past research indicates that whole-school models and programs often do not result in significant increases in student achievement and, when they do, may require more than four years to have an impact (Gottfredson, et al., 2010; Borman, Dynarski, et al., 2004). It is possible that some schools participating in ESI needed a few more years to strengthen their programs—and that a more mature version of ESI might have a larger impact on student outcomes. For this reason, the Research Alliance aspires to track outcomes for future cohorts of ESI students, as well as longer-term (college and employment) outcomes for the students who are the focus of this report.

More importantly, addressing some of the underlying “opportunity gaps” highlighted in our research (i.e., *Moving the Needle*) and others (Fergus, 2010; Howard, 2013; Miranda, Mokhtar, et al., 2014; Noguera, 2008; Noguera, Hurtado, & Fergus, 2012) may require investment earlier in students’ lives and involving systems beyond schools. Schools and districts alone may be unable to sufficiently counter some of the root causes and longstanding history of educational inequity—disadvantages not simply driven by poverty.

We hope this report raises valuable questions and provides useful insights for districts around the country—and their partners—as they work to address the systemic inequalities faced by young men of color and other marginalized students. Creating more equitable school districts is a complex, multifaceted challenge that will require equally complex, multifaceted responses.
In this report, “college readiness” is based on the New York State Education Department’s Aspirational Performance Measure (APM), which is defined as earning a New York State Regents Diploma and receiving a score of 80 or higher on a Mathematics Regents examination and a score of 75 or higher on an English Regents examination. However, we recognize that college success depends on a variety of other skills and knowledge not necessarily reflected in this measure.

In the years leading up to ESI, high school graduation rates for Black and Latino males increased by 14 percentage points—from 43 and 45 percent, respectively, among those who entered high school in 2002, to 57 and 59 percent, respectively, among those who entered in 2006. Yet, among the latter cohort (i.e., students scheduled to graduate in 2010), only 9 percent of Black males and approximately 11 percent of Latino males graduated “college ready,” based on the New York State APM.

The Research Alliance’s 9th grade “on-track” indicator defines students as on-track for graduating with a Regents diploma if, by the end of 9th grade, they have passed at least one Regents exam and accumulated at least 10 course credits (of the 44 required to graduate) (Kemple, Segeritz, & Stephenson, 2013).

CRE attempts to engage and empower students by incorporating their cultural backgrounds in classrooms and focusing on issues that are relevant to their lives (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2000; Howard, 2006).

Depending on school enrollment, ESI funds represented 3 to 10 percent of each school’s annual budget. Schools received funding for the first three years of ESI’s four-year initiative. They were expected to develop programs that would be sustainable beyond the funding period. More than half of the ESI funding ($14 million) went to central infrastructure for the initiative and not to schools directly; those resources were largely allocated toward professional development sessions for ESI staff, large-scale events for students in ESI schools, and mini grants for individual schools pursuing more intensive PD.

In recent years, the NYC DOE has implemented a number of reforms focused on improving school safety and reducing suspensions. See, for example, http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/sclt/downloads/pdf/SCLT_Report_7-21-16.pdf

It is important to note that our analysis of college enrollment rates focuses on the first group of students who experienced ESI—those who were in 9th grade the year ESI began (college enrollment data for more recent cohorts of ESI students were not available at the time this report was written). Please see the full report for more details.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

For far too long, educational institutions have failed to deliver on the promise of equitable learning opportunities for all students. Black and Latino males, in particular, face unique challenges in schools that present obstacles on their pathway to high school graduation and college. According to the Schott Foundation's 50 State Report (2015), only 52 percent of African American males and 58 percent of Latino males who started high school in 2009 graduated, compared with 78 percent of White non-Latino males. College enrollment rates show a particularly wide gender gap. Nationally, 34 percent of Black and Latino young men aged 18 to 24 are enrolled in college, compared with 62 and 57 percent for Black and Latina women (Musu-Gillette, et al., 2016). Moreover, recent data shows that gaps in college graduation rates between Black and Latino males and other groups of students actually widened between 2007 and 2015.¹

It is important to understand these outcomes—often described as “achievement gaps”—in the context of barriers that create deep opportunity gaps for male students of color.² For example, Black and Latino males are underrepresented in gifted and talented courses and overrepresented in special education (Ford, 2015; Roey, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011; Neal et. al, 2000; Noguera, Fergus, & Martin, 2014; Zamani-Gallaher & Polite, 2010). There is evidence that this is due at least in part to educators’ biases, with Black and Latino males often perceived as having lower ability or work ethic (Downey & Pribesh, 2004; Neal & Griffin, 2004). Males of color are also more likely to be suspended than White students who committed similar infractions (Skiba and Peterson, 2000; U.S. DOE Office for Civil Rights, 2014). While Black students represent 18 percent of students nationwide, they make up 35 percent of students suspended once, 46 percent of those suspended more than once, and 39 percent of students expelled (US Department of Education, 2012). Black and Latino students in general are also more likely to be concentrated in schools with fewer resources, less qualified teachers, and limited access to strong curricular materials (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2018).

These same disparities in outcomes and opportunities exist in New York City. The Research Alliance’s analysis in Moving the Needle: Exploring Key Levers to Boost College Readiness Among Black and Latino Males in New York City showed that while graduation rates for male students of color had been improving in NYC for some time, the needle on college readiness wasn’t moving to the same degree.³ Only about 1 in 10 Black
and Latino male students was graduating “college ready,” based on New York State’s measure. Educators, policymakers and advocates were concerned that while rising numbers of Black and Latino males were graduating from NYC high schools, very few of them seemed well prepared to attend and thrive in college. Our findings also painted a picture of a “leaky pipeline,” with students falling off track at various points along the way according to outcomes, such as attendance, retention, and on-track status. Moreover, our work documented a variety of underlying opportunity gaps facing Black and Latino males. Specifically, we explored how poverty, gender expectations, language barriers, and discriminatory school practices (particularly around school discipline, special education services, and access to higher-level courses) may be shaping the educational experiences and outcomes of young men of color.

As a response to some of these disparities and the college readiness gap in particular, NYC launched the Expanded Success Initiative (ESI) in 2012 to increase college and career readiness among male students of color. ESI was actually part of a larger citywide effort called the Young Men’s Initiative (YMI), which focused on improving a range of life outcomes for young men of color and building community partnerships across different sectors. While ESI’s primary goal was to improve college readiness, funders and district leaders also sought to reduce suspensions among Black males in particular, confront teacher biases, elevate student voices, and nurture professional communities of educators who were committed to better serving young men of color. As we discuss in more depth below, the NYC Department of Education (NYCDOE) saw ESI as a “research and development” initiative in which they encouraged participating high schools to experiment with and hone strategies for their Black and Latino male students. Ultimately, the NYCDOE hoped lessons learned in ESI could help improve opportunities and outcomes for these students districtwide.

To that end, ESI provided a combination of funding, professional development, and ongoing support to 40 public high schools with relatively strong graduation rates for Black and Latino males, but college enrollments rates that were only on par with the rest of the City. ESI schools were charged with creating and expanding services and supports for male students of color in three broad domains—academics, youth development, and college-focused school culture—which were all theorized as important for increasing college readiness. In addition, ESI placed a heavy emphasis on the principles of culturally relevant education (CRE) as a cross-cutting approach undergirding all three domains. (See the textbox on the next page for more on ESI’s core domains and Figure 1 on page 4 for more about ESI’s theory of action.)
The Expanded Success Initiative’s Core Domains

ESI schools were charged with creating and expanding services and supports for male students of color in three core domains—academics, youth development, and college-focused school culture. ESI also placed a heavy emphasis on culturally relevant education, which was seen as a cross-cutting principle undergirding the initiative and infused into all three domains.

**Academics**
Strategies to increase academic rigor and expectations and to expand access to advanced coursework. Examples include:

- Increasing opportunities for students to take AP classes or other more rigorous courses
- Raising academic standards or benchmarks
- Providing academic supports, such as tutoring

**Youth Development**
Strategies that address students’ socio-emotional needs. Examples include:

- Mentoring programs
- Single-gender student advisory classes
- Student-led justice panels
- Enrichment opportunities (trips, sports, clubs)
- Restorative approaches to discipline

**College-Focused School Culture**
Strategies to create a school-wide culture that emphasizes preparing Black and Latino young men for college and careers. Examples include:

- Shifting the school mission to be explicitly focused on college
- Communicating with students and parents about the steps to get to college starting in the 9th grade
- Offering college trips and other college-focused supports as early as 9th grade

**Culturally Relevant Education (CRE)**
CRE attempts to engage and empower students by incorporating their cultural backgrounds and focusing on issues that are relevant to their lives. Examples include:

- Encouraging teachers to confront biases about Black and Latino males
- Representing and affirming students’ racial and cultural identities in curriculum and instruction
- Modifying curriculum with an eye toward addressing issues that matter to students
Figure 1: The Expanded Success Initiative Theory of Action: Priorities

Inputs
- Funding: $250,000 went to each ESI school over the first three years of the four-year initiative
- Autonomy: Schools were encouraged to develop programming that fit their community’s needs
- Professional Development: PD included CRE, restorative justice, subject-specific trainings, etc.
- Learning Community: Regular meetings of 40 ESI liaisons (one per school) provide support from central ESI team and opportunities to share promising practices

School Actions
- Expand programming, services, and supports for students in three core domains
- College-focused School Culture
- Culturally Relevant Education (CRE)
- Youth Development

School Culture and Relationships
- Reduce educators’ biases against Black and Latino male students
- Emphasize early and ongoing support for college goals
- Develop culturally relevant curriculum and instruction
- Reduce use of suspensions
- Improve relationships between students, and relationships between students and staff

Perceptions of School and Self
- Sense of fair treatment
- Perception of racial/gender/cultural climate
- Sense of belonging in school
- Critical thinking
- Academic self-concept

Students’ High School Experiences and Outcomes
- Antecedents to College: Attendance, On-track status and credits earned for graduation, NYYS Aspirational Performance Measure (APM), Graduation with Regents Diploma
- Future Planning: Conversations with adults about college and career, Applying for financial aid, Applying to college, SAT-taking

College Enrollment

Problem
Opportunity gaps leading to a range of disparities in educational outcomes, especially low college readiness among Black and Latino young men

Initiative Priorities
- Improving college and career readiness
- Decreasing suspensions
- Confronting teacher biases
- Creating professional communities for educators committed to better serving young men of color

Participation
- Students: Participate in activities aligned with three domains and culturally relevant education
- School Staff: Participate in professional development opportunities
One early critique of the initiative was that locating the intervention at the high school level would be “too late” to make a difference, considering that disparities start so much earlier in students’ educational pathways. ESI’s designers responded that the initiative was not intended to close all educational gaps, but rather to close the very specific gap between high school graduation and college enrollment among young men of color. Furthermore, evidence suggested that at least for some students, high school is the time when they fall off track. For example, Black and Latino young men who entered high school in 2006 with relatively high 8th-grade test scores were still almost 20 percent less likely than their White and Asian male counterparts to graduate or graduate college ready. While sobering, these patterns indicated to the NYCDOE that some investment at the high school level could potentially help close the gap between Black and Latino young men’s high school graduation and college readiness rates.

Since ESI’s inception, the Research Alliance has been on the ground learning about this work from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders, evaluating the initiative through a robust data collection effort, and striving to understand how lessons from NYC can inform districts across the country engaged in similar efforts. ESI is also one of the few initiatives of its kind to be the subject of rigorous evaluation, examining both its implementation and its impact on students. This provides a unique opportunity to say something meaningful about ESI’s efficacy and to raise important considerations for other similar initiatives around the country.

Over the last five years, we have published a series of reports related to our ongoing study of ESI. The first, Moving the Needle, described the achievement and opportunity gaps facing young men of color both nationally and in NYC—to identify points along the pathway to college where districts and schools might intervene. The second, our ESI baseline report, documented the launch and rollout of ESI and presented baseline data about participating schools and comparison schools. Our Year 1 ESI report, Promising Opportunities for Black and Latino Young Men, was largely focused on implementation, highlighting ways the initiative had begun to change school practice. The Year 2 report extended and deepened the findings we reported in Year 1 and included a preliminary analysis of impact findings for 10th grade students. Our most recent report, Strategies for Improving School Culture, examined the approaches ESI schools had used in their efforts to improve school culture for Black and Latino young men. In addition, we have published six practice guides for educators, drawing on case studies we conducted in a handful of ESI schools.
This report is the culminating work of the series, synthesizing findings across all four years of the initiative, and the first to report comprehensive impact findings. The report draws on several rich sources of data, including nearly 500 interviews and focus groups with ESI school leaders, teachers, and students; detailed questionnaires and rubrics to annually assess programming in ESI schools; a survey administered to over 5,000 students each year in both ESI and a set of matched comparison schools; and student-level records (e.g., attendance, high school graduation, and college enrollment) for students in ESI and comparison schools.

As the document of record evaluating an important, large-scale initiative, this report sets out to answer a number of key questions about ESI’s implementation and impact. Specifically, we examine ESI through the lens of the initiative’s theory of action by assessing: 1) the district-level “inputs” of the initiative, including funding, professional development, and the creation of cross-school learning communities; 2) school “actions,” including developing and expanding programs, supports, and services within ESI’s three core domains; 3) participation among teachers and students in ESI-related activities; 4) ESI’s influence on school culture and relationships; and 5) its impact on students’ perceptions of their schools, their high school experiences, and a number of student outcomes, including graduation and college enrollment.

While this report is comprehensive, we hope that individual sections and chapters will be of interest to different stakeholders, including policymakers, district leaders, educators, and community organizations. And in addition to providing a summative set of findings about ESI, we also hope this report will provide a useful lens by which to examine and understand other initiatives focused on Black and Latino young men (and other underserved populations). Below is a brief description of the questions addressed by each chapter:

- **Chapter 2: Study Design.** How did we design the study? Which methods and data sources did we use to generate the findings reported in Chapters 3 through 6? What are the strengths and limitations of these methods? (Technical resources and more detailed findings can be found in a supplementary Appendix.)

- **Chapter 3: District-Level Implementation.** What was the theory of action driving ESI? How were schools and partners selected? What infrastructure and supports for schools did the district provide?
• **Chapter 4: School-Level Implementation.** How was ESI implemented within and across schools? To what extent did schools create or expand programming that was consistent with ESI’s theory of action? To what extent did students participate in ESI programs?

• **Chapter 5: Educator and Student Perspectives.** How did educators and students in ESI schools believe their schools had changed as a result of ESI?

• **Chapter 6: Impacts on Students’ Experiences and Outcomes.** How did ESI impact students’ experiences and outcomes in high school, including high school graduation, college readiness and enrollment?

• **Chapter 7: Discussion and Considerations for Districts.** What do we make of the range of findings presented in Chapters 3 through 6? What questions and answers emerge from this study that might be useful for NYC and other districts committed to improving the educational experiences and outcomes of young men of color and other underserved populations?

As initiatives like ESI develop and evolve around the country, we hope this report provides useful insights to inform the work of researchers, educators, and district leaders.
CHAPTER 2: DATA SOURCES AND ANALYTIC METHODS

The ESI evaluation was designed with two overlapping and interacting components: a study of the initiative’s implementation in the participating high schools and a study of its impact on student experiences and other outcomes. This chapter provides an overview of the data sources and analytic methods that were used to address the research questions for the implementation and impact studies. The appendices to the report provide more detailed information about the data and analytic methods.

School-Level Implementation Study: Data and Methods

Chapter 3 describes the NYCDOE’s design and district-level implementation and support of ESI. It draws on interviews we conducted with key members of the NYCDOE’s ESI Central Team, as well as our review of key documents, including the ESI Design Challenge, the rubric used for scoring schools’ applications to be part of ESI, and ESI’s yearly planning templates. The chapter also draws on interviews and focus groups that we conducted annually with administrators, educators, and students in ESI schools (described in more depth below).

Chapter 4 summarizes the assessment of ESI implementation in each of the participating schools through three related sets of research activities:

- Documenting programming activities and support schools provided,
- Assessing alignment with the ESI goals and theory of action, and
- Assessing student participation in ESI-related activities.

Chapter 5 deepens our assessment of ESI implementation by highlighting the perspective of students, teachers and administers. The chapter includes descriptions and direct quotations that capture their perceptions of the services and supports provided through ESI and the influence they believe ESI has had on their schools.

Table 1 on the next page provides a list of the key data sources related to each of these research efforts. It also shows the samples of respondents who provided the data and role of the data in the evaluation. Following the table is a discussion of the measures and analytic methods that we used to carry out each of the implementation study components.
### Table 1: Data Sources for the ESI Implementation Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structured program activity questionnaire</td>
<td>ESI Liaison or School Principal or Assistant Principal</td>
<td>Compile a list of ESI-related programming activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured 60-minute interview</td>
<td>ESI Liaison or School Principal or Assistant Principal</td>
<td>Capture the perspectives of school leaders about ESI’s implementation and its influence on the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-minute semi-structured focus group interview with teachers</td>
<td>Three to five teachers who volunteered for the interview after being selected by the ESI Liaison or Principal</td>
<td>Capture the perspectives of teachers about ESI’s implementation and its influence on the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-minute semi-structured focus group interview with students</td>
<td>Three to five 10th grade students who volunteered for the interview after being selected by the ESI Liaison or Principal (Spring 2014, Spring 2015 and Spring 2016)</td>
<td>Capture the perspectives of students on ESI’s implementation and its influence on the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-minute student survey</td>
<td>All 9th grade students (Spring 2013 and Spring 2014)</td>
<td>Measure student participation in ESI-related activities, capture their perspectives on self and school, and document involvement in future planning activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All 10th grade students (Spring 2014 and 2015)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All 11th grade students (Spring 2015 and 2016)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All 12th grade students (Spring 2016)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-90 minute semi-structured interview with ESI Central Team</td>
<td>Three members of the NYCDOE’s ESI Central Team (in 2012 and again in 2016)</td>
<td>Capture the Central Team’s perspectives on ESI’s design and implementation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document review</td>
<td>Select documents identified by research team.</td>
<td>Enhance our understanding of ESI’s goals and strategies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Research Alliance for New York City Schools.

### Documenting Programming Activities and Supports

The first component of the implementation study sought to document the activities and student supports that each school planned and implemented in accordance with ESI’s three core domains—academic supports, youth development, and college-going culture—as well as culturally-relevant education. Each year, members of the research team completed an in-person questionnaire by interviewing the principal or
ESI coordinator in each ESI school. The questionnaire began with an inventory of all programming activities in the areas of academic support, youth development, college readiness, and culturally relevant education. It is important to note that ESI was designed both to enhance existing activities and supports and to create new ones in these areas if the schools felt there were gaps. With this in mind, the research team attempted to compile a full inventory of all programming activities and supports in these areas, not just those that were funded or enhanced with ESI resources and technical support.

These activity inventories were used both as part of our effort to assess implementation alignment and in the design of the student surveys (which asked about participation in ESI-related activities, among other topics). Chapter 4 highlights the most prominent programming activities that schools were implementing and discusses key areas of variation across schools.

**Assessing Alignment with ESI Goals and Theory of Action**

The second component of the implementation study sought to assess the degree to which the implementation and overall support of these activities were aligned with ESI’s goals and theory of action over the four years for which ESI funding was available. The assessment of implementation alignment also surfaced information about the challenges that schools confronted throughout the funding period.

In addition to the questionnaire, the research team also conducted annual semi-structured interviews with the ESI Liaison or Principal in each school. The interview included a range of questions that aimed to generate information about the overall quality and intensity of ESI implementation. It is important to note that ESI was not designed as a “model” that each participating school was expected to replicate to the fullest extent possible. Rather, ESI provided schools with funding, a broad set of content area and technical support resources, and a mutually supportive professional learning community. Programmatically, the initiative required that schools enhance or create activities within each of the three domains and CRE. Beyond this very broad framework of supports and programming domains, ESI allowed schools a great deal of discretion over the specific use of their resources and encouraged schools to experiment with activities and experiences that they believe would best meet the needs and circumstances of their students and staff. With this in mind, the evaluation’s assessment of alignment was necessarily broad and attempted to capture the extent to which schools utilized their resources and developed activities in ways
that were consistent with ESI’s key programming domains and with the expectations of the DOE’s ESI Central Team. Researchers worked closely with the Central Team to develop a five-dimensional rubric. Appendix B provides a copy of the rubric; its elements are summarized in Table 2 below.

Based on their scores on each element of the rubric, ESI schools were given a total alignment score of up to 15. Chapter 4 shows the average alignment scores for each element and the total for Years 2 through 4. It also identifies three categories of schools based on their average scores: High (scores of 13 or higher); Moderate (scores of 10-12), and Low (scores of 9 or lower).

**Table 2: Assessment of ESI Programming Alignment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Scoring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Representation of three programming domains** - Captures the number of programs that were aligned with academic supports, youth development or college-focused school culture. | Activity questionnaire administered to principals and ESI liaisons | 1. Reported at least one activity in only one domain.  
2. Reported at least one activity in two domains.  
3. Reported at least one activity in all three domains. |
| **Evidence of culturally relevant education** - Captures teachers’ exposure to professional development sessions focused on culturally relevant education. | Interviews with teachers, principals and ESI liaisons | 1. Neither teachers nor principal reported availability of CRE-related PD.  
2. Either teachers or principal reported availability of CRE-related PD.  
3. Both teachers and principal reported availability of CRE-related PD. |
| **Population served** - Identifies the number of programs explicitly serving Black and Latino male students. | Activity questionnaire administered to principals and ESI liaisons | 1. No programs designed explicitly for Black and Latino males students.  
2. One program designed explicitly for Black and Latino males students.  
3. Two or more programs designed explicitly for Black and Latino males students. |
| **Early college and career supports** - Captures the availability college or career activities for 9th or 10th graders. | Activity questionnaire administered to principals and ESI liaisons | 1. No college or career activities in grades 9 or 10.  
2. One college or career activities in grades 9 or 10.  
3. Two or more college or career activities in grades 9 or 10. |
| **Attendance at liaison meetings** - Indicates whether ESI school liaison and other staff attended the citywide ESI liaison meetings and events. | Attendance logs from ESI meetings and convenings | 1. School was represented at two or fewer ESI liaison meetings.  
2. School was represented at three or four ESI liaison meetings.  
3. School was represented at five or more ESI liaison meetings. |

*Source: The Research Alliance for New York City Schools’ ESI Implementation Rubric.*
Assessing Student Participation

The third component of the implementation study assessed students’ participation in the programming activities that were provided in the ESI schools. As noted above, some of these activities were either created or enhanced through ESI funding and supports, while others were already being offered at the time schools were selected for ESI. Regardless of the source of support, this aspect of the study utilized surveys to capture students’ self-reported exposure to experiences that were both consistent with the ESI theory of action and likely to be associated with improvements in their developmental, engagement and school performance outcomes.

The surveys were administered to students in ESI and comparison schools in April and May each year from the 2012-2013 through 2015-2016 school years (see below for more information about the comparison schools). These years correspond to Grades 9 through 12 for students who were in 9th grade in Fall 2012 (the first year of ESI implementation). These students are referred to as the 2012 Cohort. The years also correspond to Grades 9 through 11 for students who were in 9th grade in Fall 2013 (the second year of ESI implementation). These students are referred to as the 2013 Cohort.

With the exception of the 2013 version, the surveys asked students a series of questions about whether they participated in a variety of activities during the current school year. Chapter 4 focuses on the following activities, which were included on the survey each year:

Table 3: Participation Activities by ESI-Aligned Programming Domain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Support Activities</th>
<th>Youth Development Activities</th>
<th>College and Career Planning Activities*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tutoring Programs</td>
<td>Student Advisory Programs</td>
<td>College Advising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regents Exam Preparation Programs</td>
<td>Mentoring/Peer Mentoring Programs</td>
<td>College Trips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Placement/IB Classes</td>
<td>Youth Groups</td>
<td>Internships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Research Alliance for New York City Schools.

Note: * Given the college and career focus of ESI’s “school culture” domain, we refer to the activities associated with this domain as “college and career planning activities” throughout this report.
The measures presented in Chapter 4 include the percentage of students who indicated that they participated in at least one activity within a given programming domain and the percentage of students who indicated that they participated in at least one activity in all three programming domains.

Finally, in an effort to capture a general sense of students’ exposure to culturally relevant materials and curricula, the surveys also included a question asking students whether their teachers “provide reading material that reflects my race, ethnicity and/or culture.”

There are two important issues that readers should keep in mind when interpreting the activity participation information from the surveys.

1. The findings reflect information provided by students who completed a survey on the one or two days during the spring semester when it was administered in a given school in a given year. Thus, differences in the composition of the respondent samples may account for some of the differences in participation rates from grade to grade.

2. The surveys were not able to capture every activity that might have been aligned with the ESI programming domains, nor even all of the activities that might have been supported with ESI resources. At the same time, the survey questions were generally framed in broad terms in an effort to capture a range of activities that fall under an overarching category like tutoring programs, college advising, student advisories, and so on.

Despite these limitations the surveys provide a reasonably accurate picture of the ESI-related activities that students in the ESI schools utilized from grade to grade.

**Capturing Educator and Student Perspectives on ESI**

Chapter 5 adds to our assessment of ESI implementation by capturing students’ and teachers’ perspectives about key elements of ESI and their influence on the overall culture of the schools. This included student and teachers reflections on the challenges that young men of color face as they navigate the transition to and through high school and the ways in which ESI attempted to address those challenges.

Over the course of the four-year implementation period, the research team compiled more than 500 hours of individual and focus group interviews with administrators, teachers, and students. We used an iterative, five-step process to code and analyze transcripts from every interview and focus group. This method was developed to lead
researchers from initial reflections about how ESI operated in individual schools to the identification and fine-grained analysis of major themes across schools. This allowed us to closely analyze the responses of educators and identify broader patterns (in particular, those that might help explain impact findings). Descriptions of these five steps are provided in Appendix C.

**Impact Study: Data and Methods**

The ESI impact study was designed to assess the degree to which implementation of ESI led to more productive experiences and better outcomes for the students enrolled in the ESI schools. At the heart of the impact study is a comparison between the experiences and outcomes of students in the ESI schools with those of similar students in similar schools that did not have access to ESI’s resources and supports. Before moving on to an overview of the data sources and analytic methods that underlie the assessment of ESI impacts, therefore, this section of the chapter first describes the process used to select schools that were as similar as possible to the ESI schools during the years leading up to the start of the initiative. Appendix A includes a more complete discussion of the process we used to select comparison schools and provides a more detailed assessment of the similarities and differences between the two groups of schools.

**ESI and Non-ESI Comparison Schools**

For each ESI school, we identified two comparison schools that were statistically most similar in terms of the demographic characteristics and middle school academic performance of 9th grade students who started high school during the four years prior to the 2012-2013 school year (the start of ESI). Comparison schools were also identified based on the trajectory of academic outcomes for the four prior cohorts of 9th grade students. Appendix A provides a list of 14 school characteristics that were used in the matching process. The pool of potential comparison schools included those meeting one of the following requirements:

- Schools that were invited to and applied for ESI, but were not selected;
- Schools that were invited to ESI but did not apply, with 15 or more Black and Latino male students in 2009-2010, 2010-2011, and 2011-2012; or
- Schools that had more than 25 Black and Latino male students and more than 25 percent Black and Latino male students in the 2011-2012 school year.
- Schools that used the same admissions criteria as a given ESI school.
Table 4: Pre-ESI Characteristics and Outcomes for Black and Latino Young Men in ESI and Non-ESI Comparison Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Characteristics and Outcomes</th>
<th>ESI Schools</th>
<th>Comparison Schools</th>
<th>Estimated Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Background Characteristics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>68.3</td>
<td>63.1</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not English</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>-5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (at start of Grade 9)</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overage for Grade 9</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>-2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8th Grade Outcomes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled in a NYC Public School</td>
<td>92.1</td>
<td>90.8</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance Rate</td>
<td>90.6</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELA Test Scores</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z-Score</td>
<td>-0.374</td>
<td>-0.404</td>
<td>0.030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>-0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math Test Scores</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z-Score</td>
<td>-0.345</td>
<td>-0.385</td>
<td>0.039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>-1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free/Reduced Price Lunch</td>
<td>66.0</td>
<td>64.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Services</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Services</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cumulative High School Outcomes (Grades 9-12)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance Rate</td>
<td>85.6</td>
<td>84.7</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credits Earned</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspensions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Suspensions (%)</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>-0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Level 1 Suspensions (%)</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>-0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Level 2 Suspensions (%)</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Diploma</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>67.9</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regents Diploma</td>
<td>64.5</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Diploma</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYS APM</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Enrollment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any College</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-Year College</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-Year College</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Schools</strong></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Research Alliance calculations based on data obtained from the NYC Department of Education.

Note: "Missing" represents the percentage of students for whom data for a given variable or outcome are not available. See Additional Table and Figure Notes on page 91.
Table 4 on the previous page provides a direct comparison between the participating ESI schools and the resulting non-ESI comparison schools. For the purposes of this report, the comparison focuses on Black and Latino young men in the two groups of schools. The measures presented in the table reflect averages for incoming Black and Latino 9th graders over the four years prior to the start of ESI implementation in the 2012-2013 school year. The table shows these students’ demographic characteristic and Grade 8 outcomes. It also shows the cumulative outcomes that these students’ achieved over their four years of high school.

Overall, Table 4 exhibits a high degree of similarity between the ESI and non-ESI schools. Differences between the two groups of schools are generally small and very few are statistically significant. The similarity in the population of Black and Latino young men in the two groups of schools over the four year prior to ESI implementation provides confidence that subsequent differences that may emerge are likely to be due to the supports and services provided by ESI. Similarly, they also provide confidence that a lack of subsequent differences are unlikely to be due to pre-existing differences between the two groups of schools.

**Assessing Differences between ESI and Non-ESI Schools in Activity Participation, Perceptions of School and Self, and Preparation for Post-Secondary Transitions**

Chapter 6 first examines students’ experiences along three dimensions of ESI’s theory of action that are associated with the initiative’s services and supports and students’ subsequent experiences. First, it examines the degree to which students in ESI schools were more likely than those in non-ESI schools to participate in a range of activities that were aligned with the ESI programming domains. Second, it assesses the extent to which students’ perceptions of ESI schools and school culture differed from those of students in non-ESI schools in ways that are aligned with ESI goals. This also includes indicators of students’ assessment of their own academic self-concept and critical thinking skills. Third, the analysis focuses on students’ goals for post-secondary education and work and the steps they took toward those goals.

**Student Survey Samples.** The evaluation’s assessment in these three areas utilizes data from the surveys that were administered to students in the ESI schools and to students in up to 40 of the non-ESI comparison schools. As noted above, these data are available for two cohorts of incoming 9th grade students (those entering in Fall 2012 and Fall 2013, respectively) for each year through the Spring of 2016. This
provides four full years of survey data (expected Grades 9 through 12) for the 2012 cohort and three full years (expected Grades 9-11) for the 2013 cohort.

Survey data are available for all 40 of the participating ESI schools.9 The number of non-ESI schools that administered student surveys differed from year to year. We were able to gain agreement for participation from 15 comparison schools in 2013, 22 in 2014, 20 in 2015, and 27 in 2016. The analyses of survey data presented in Chapter 6 focus only on the ESI schools for which survey data were also available for the accompanying non-ESI comparison school. In all, by combining samples across cohorts, survey data are available for students in Grades 9-12 for the following samples of ESI comparison schools:

- Grade 9: 25 ESI schools and 26 non-ESI comparison schools
- Grade 10: 27 ESI schools and 27 non-ESI comparison schools
- Grade 11: 29 ESI schools and 30 non-ESI comparison schools
- Grade 12: 27 ESI schools and 27 non-ESI comparison schools

Survey response rates differed somewhat between ESI and comparison schools. Response rates also declined as students moved from Grade 9 through Grade 12, particularly in the ESI schools. In Grade 9, approximately 83 percent of the Black and Latino young men who were enrolled in the ESI schools responded to the survey, compared to 76 percent of those enrolled in the comparison schools. By Grade 12, 52 percent of the Black and Latino young men who were enrolled in the ESI schools responded to the survey, compared to 65 percent of those enrolled in the comparison schools. Because not all Black and Latino young men responded to the survey each year, the results may not be representative of the full population of those students. However, among those who did respond, the characteristics of respondents in the ESI schools are very similar to those of students in the comparison schools (see Appendix A). This high degree of similarity bolsters confidence that differences in self-reported participation and students’ perceptions are likely to be due to ESI rather than stemming from background characteristics and prior experiences.

The focus on these samples enabled a rigorous assessment of differences and similarities in survey-based measures for the subset of ESI schools and those of a directly comparable group of non-ESI schools. In doing so, the analyses attempted to shed light on ESI influence on important aspects of students’ experiences during high
school. Below we offer several important cautions about the degree to which differences that may emerge between ESI and non-ESI comparison schools based on the student survey data can in fact be attributed to the influence of ESI resources and supports.

**Measures from the Student Surveys.** In addition to questions about student participation in ESI-aligned activities, the surveys included a wide range of items that aimed to capture important aspects of students’ assessments of themselves and their school environment. Table 5 provides a list of the constructs that were developed from the student responses and the list of the survey items that were combined to create the measures. The surveys asked students to indicate their level of agreement, or assess the degree of the truth, (on a scale from 1 to 4) for each of these items. The student ratings for each cluster of items were then averaged to create the measures used in the analysis. Additional measures were constructed that reflect the percentage of students who, on average, affirmed or strongly affirmed a majority of the items include in the construct. Each of these items and the accompanying constructs and measures are available for ESI and non-ESI schools for Grades 9 through 12. Appendix D provides further detail on the measures and their statistical properties.

The student surveys also included batteries of items that asked students about their educational goals, their plans following high school graduation, and the steps that have taken to pursue those plans. Most of these items were direct responses about specific goals, plans, and activities (e.g., plans to attend college, earn a BA, or get a job; completing a college application or financial aid forms). In addition, the survey included an eight-item list of questions about conversations that students had with adults (both in and outside of schools) regarding their future (see Appendix D). These items were used to construct an overall measure of “engagement with adults about future planning” focusing especially on college and careers. This measure was scored on a scale from one to four, and an additional metric was created to capture the percentage who had an overall positive level of engagement with adults about future planning.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Self-Concept</strong></td>
<td>I am confident in my academic abilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I do well in school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I learn new concepts quickly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am successful in school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am confident in my ability to succeed in school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critical Thinking</strong></td>
<td>I can easily express my thoughts on a problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I usually use multiple source of information before making a decision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I compare ideas when thinking about a topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I keep my mind open to different ideas when planning to make a decision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am able to tell the best way of handling a problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sense of Fair Treatment</strong></td>
<td>The punishment for breaking school rules is the same no matter who you are.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If a rule is broken, students know what kind of punishment will follow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All students are treated fairly when they break school rules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The rules are strictly enforced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The rules are fair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Everyone knows the rules for student conduct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perceptions of Racial/Gender/ Cultural Climate</strong></td>
<td>I have been disrespected or mistreated by an adult because of my race, ethnicity, or nationality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have been disrespected or mistreated by an adult at this school because of my gender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is a lot of tension between different races, ethnicities, and nationalities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sense of Belonging in School</strong></td>
<td>I feel comfortable at this school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am a part of this school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am committed to this school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am supported at this school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am accepted at this school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: ESI evaluation student survey, developed by the Research Alliance for New York City Schools.*
Assessing Differences between ESI and Comparison Schools. The analyses used statistical regression models in which the average of a given survey measure for the sample of ESI schools was compared with the average for the accompanying non-ESI comparison schools. The models included variables that controlled for ancillary differences among the groups of schools based on student demographic characteristics, 8th grade test scores in math and English Language Arts, 8th grade attendance, and eligibility for services including free or reduced priced lunch, English language learning supports, and special education services. Analyses were conducted separately for the Grade 9 through 12 samples.

There are two important factors that readers should keep in mind when interpreting differences and similarities between ESI and comparison schools based on the student survey data.

1. As noted above, survey data were available only for a subset of the comparisons schools. In addition, within ESI and comparison schools, survey data are only available for a subset of students who were enrolled at the time of survey administration. This means that differences between ESI and comparison schools that may emerge from analyses of the survey data could reflect differences in the characteristics of the respondents rather than to the influence of ESI services and supports.

2. The analyses do not account for pre-existing differences and similarities between the ESI and comparison schools on the measures captured by the student surveys. Thus, it is possible that differences, and similarities, that may be observed after ESI implementation may actually reflect differences or similarities on the measures even before the ESI schools began implementation.

These important limitations are mitigated somewhat by the study design and analysis strategies used to produce the findings. In addition to the school-level similarities that stem from the matching process, additional analyses show a high degree of similarity between the background characteristics and middle school outcomes of survey respondents from the ESI and comparison schools (see Appendix A). The analyses of the survey data also rely on multiple regression models that account for differences between ESI and non-ESI schools that may be due to student demographic characteristics, family background, and prior levels achievement and school engagement. Supplemental tables in the appendices also provide survey results for the full sample of ESI schools as well as those for the subset of ESI and comparison schools.
These too show a high degree of similarity. These similarities and the analytic framework provide a moderate level of confidence that differences that emerge between the two groups of schools are due to the subsequent resources and supports provided by ESI rather than other pre-existing student and school conditions and characteristics.

In short, while alternative interpretations of differences in the survey-based measures of ESI and non-ESI student experiences and perceptions cannot be ruled out, the analyses do provide useful insights into ESI’s likely contribution, or lack of contribution, to changes in those experiences and perceptions.

**Assessing ESI Impacts on Key Antecedents to College, High School Graduation, and College Readiness and Enrollment**

The final set of analyses in Chapter 6 examine ESI’s impact on a range of outcomes that are important indicators of student engagement and performance during high school as well as critical antecedents to preparing for and enrolling in college. They draw on data from school district administrative records which are available for all ESI schools and for 80 non-ESI schools comparison schools. The administrative records are available for the 2012-2013 school year, the first year of ESI implementation, through the 2015-2016 school year. These years correspond to Grades 9-12 for students who were in the 2012 Cohort and to Grades 9-11 for students in the 2013 Cohort. College enrollment data are also available for Fall 2016 for students in the 2012 Cohort.

In addition to data for the years of ESI implementation, the administrative records also include data for up to four years prior to the start of ESI for each of the ESI schools and each of the non-ESI comparison schools. These pre-ESI data enable the analyses to account for differences in student outcomes or trends in those outcomes that might otherwise appear as subsequent differences that emerged after ESI began implementation. (See Appendix A for an analysis of differences between ESI and comparison schools prior to ESI implementation.)

These administrative records data capture student attendance, credit accumulation, Regents examination scores, suspensions, mobility, high school graduation and diploma status, and college enrollment status. Following is a more detailed description of the methodology used to analyze ESI impacts on these outcomes.
Impact Analysis Methodology. The impact analyses are based on strong methods designed to maximize confidence in an assessment of ESI’s added value or causal influence on student outcomes. They utilize what is known as Comparative Interrupted Time Series (CITS) analysis. CITS analysis accounts both for school characteristics that remain consistent over time (e.g., feeder patterns, location, and school culture) and for system-wide effects that could be occurring as ESI is implemented (e.g., district-wide improvements to curriculum or increased district funding). This is important because an improvement in participating schools’ academic performance after the introduction of ESI might be due to ESI, but it also might be due to system-wide reforms, budget increases, or other external events. CITS allows us to distinguish between these possible causes by comparing ESI schools with others that did not have the benefit of ESI resources and supports during this period, but which are part of the NYC school system, and thus would be affected by any systemic influences.

The CITS analyses focuses on changes over time in outcomes for students in the ESI schools and compares those changes with changes for the same outcomes for similar students in similar comparison schools. Specifically, the analytic models estimate trends in student outcomes during the years leading up to the start of ESI, as well as deviations from those trends for students enrolled in the schools during the period when ESI was being implemented. The models also estimate trends and deviations for comparison schools, which reflect the influence of other factors on similar high schools during the same period. The differences in deviations from historical trends between ESI schools and comparison schools represent the impact of ESI over and above other potential influences.

Finally, the CITS methodology used in this report has additional features that account for other factors that may mask or exaggerate the impact of ESI on student outcomes. These include statistical adjustments that account for changes over time and differences across schools in student characteristics. The analytic models account for the modest differences between ESI and comparison schools in the respective trajectories of student outcomes from the pre-ESI period. Appendix G provides a more technical specification of the ESI analytic models.

While CITS is a strong method for estimating ESI’s impacts on student outcomes, it does have limitations for inferences about ESI’s causal influence on those outcomes. Most notably are influences that may derive from unmeasured pre-existing differences between the ESI and comparison schools. These may derive from the fact
that the ESI schools were targeted specifically as potential beneficiaries of the initiative’s resources and supports. Further, among the 65 or so high schools that were sufficiently motivated to apply for ESI, only 40 were selected to participate. The identification of comparison schools and the CITS analyses attempt to account for many of the factors that went into the selection of schools for ESI and that may also have influenced subsequent student outcomes. However, there may be some unaccounted factors that led schools to apply and be selected and that also influenced subsequent student outcomes. The research team does not have compelling hypotheses about what these factors are likely to be. However, we recognize that the analyses may not fully account for them, if they exist.
In this chapter, we describe the district’s design and implementation of the initiative, including the extensive infrastructure and support system provided to participating schools. This is a critical piece of the ESI story, not only because it represents some of the more unique aspects of the initiative, but also because a large amount of ESI funding was allocated toward these centralized supports. While about $10 million was distributed to ESI schools for their individual use, approximately $14 million was allocated for use by the NYCDOE’s ESI Central Team, the staff members at the DOE responsible for all district-level aspects of ESI’s implementation. These funds supported the creation of a robust infrastructure for ESI, including the development of an underlying theory of action to guide the work, the creation and management of an in-depth application and planning process, and a wide range of ongoing supports provided to schools throughout the four years of the initiative (e.g., professional development opportunities for educators in ESI schools and events for ESI students).

ESI’s Theory of Action

The central concepts of ESI’s theory of action were developed by the ESI Central Team, though the refined version that we present in this report is a result of our collaboration with the Team over the course of the evaluation (see Figure 2 on the next page). This more detailed version of the theory of action is helpful as we aim to understand whether ESI was implemented as designed and the extent to which it improved the outcomes it was intended to improve. The theory of action that we present here illustrates the DOE’s vision for how the ESI investment was expected to change schools and benefit Black and Latino young men. In chapters 4-6, we refer back to the theory of action, focusing on different parts of the theory, as we examine ESI’s implementation and impact on various outcomes.
Figure 2: The Expanded Success Initiative Theory of Action: Inputs

**Problem**
Opportunity gaps leading to a range of disparities in educational outcomes, especially low college readiness among Black and Latino young men.

**Initiative Priorities**
- Improving college and career readiness
- Decreasing suspensions
- Confronting teacher biases
- Creating professional communities for educators committed to better serving young men of color

**Inputs**
- Funding
  - $250,000 went to each ESI school over the first three years of the four-year initiative
- Autonomy
  - Schools were encouraged to develop programming that fit their community’s needs
- Professional Development
  - PD included CRE, restorative justice, subject-specific trainings, etc.
- Learning Community
  - Regular meetings of 40 ESI teachers (one per school) provide support from central ESI team and opportunities to share promising practices

**School Actions**
- Expand programming, services, and supports for students in three core domains that were undergirded by CRE:
  - Community
  - Academics
  - Youth development
- College-focused School culture

**School Culture and Relationships**
- Reduce educators’ biases against Black and Latino male students
- Emphasize early and ongoing support for college goals
- Develop culturally relevant curriculum and instruction
- Reduce use of suspensions
- Improve relationships between students, and relationships between students and staff

**Perceptions of School and Self**
- Sense of fair treatment
- Perception of racial/ethnic/cultural climate
- Sense of belonging in school
- Critical thinking
- Academic self-concept

**College Enrollment**

**Students’ High School Experiences and Outcomes**

**Antecedents to College**
- Attendance
- On-track status and credits earned for graduation
- NYS Projected Performance Measure (APM)
- Graduation with Regents Diploma

**Future Planning**
- Conversations with adults about college and career
- Applying for financial aid
- Applying to college
- SAT/ACT
The DOE’s theory of action proposed three broad domains that were seen as essential to increasing college and career readiness—academics, youth development, and college-focused school culture. (Please see our 2012 ESI report for more on the Design Challenge and the research the DOE drew on when establishing the three domains.) The academic domain centered on increasing academic rigor and opportunities for students to take more advanced coursework. Youth development focused on supporting students’ socio-emotional needs and improving school discipline policies. Finally, the school culture domain targeted schoolwide efforts to prepare students for college and careers. The DOE theorized that by strengthening schools’ practices in all three domains, it would be possible to increase the number of Black and Latino males graduating from high school ready for college and a career.

During the first year of the initiative, culturally relevant education (CRE) also emerged as a central focus for ESI schools and for the initiative as a whole. The ESI Central Team saw CRE as an important, overarching approach that undergirded the three domains.

While ESI schools were required to design programming that aligned with these core tenets, it is important to note that there was no “model” or standardized set of programs they were expected to implement. Schools were given autonomy to choose the programs and supports that were most needed by their students and communities. As a result, ESI took a variety of forms across the 40 participating schools. We describe the variation of programming in greater detail in Chapter 4.

As shown in Figure 2, ESI was designed to address a range of opportunity gaps and related educational disparities, with a particular focus on low college readiness rates for Black and Latino young men. Other “initiative priorities” included decreasing suspensions, confronting teacher biases, and creating professional communities for educators committed to better serving young men of color. To promote college and career readiness and advance these other priorities, ESI provided participating schools with a set of “inputs,” which included funding, professional development opportunities and learning community meetings. According to the theory of action, schools would draw upon these resources to create and expand supports for Black and Latino male students within each of ESI’s core domains. Students and staff were expected to participate in the various programs, supports, and professional development offerings that schools and the ESI Central Team provided. This participation, in turn, was expected to lead to a web of interconnected outcomes, including improvements in overall school culture and relationships, improved student
perceptions of school and self, increased participation in future planning activities, and improved “antecedents to college” (e.g., credit accumulation, attendance, and high school graduation). The final part of the theory of action focuses on college readiness, enrollment and success, the ultimate target outcomes of ESI.

Design Principles and Tradeoffs

In addition to the theory of action described above, several additional components of ESI’s design are important to highlight. These components include a focus on relatively high-performing high schools, flexibility for schools to design their own programming, the NYCDOE’s vision of ESI as “research and development” initiative, and ESI’s timeframe and funding structure. Each of these aspects of ESI’s design were carefully considered during the initiative’s planning phase, and, as we discuss in this section, each one involved notable tradeoffs.

Criteria for Participating Schools

ESI did not involve the random selection of schools; instead, the DOE established firm criteria for participation and used an application process (described in the next section) to select schools that would be part of the initiative. In order to apply for ESI, schools had to have student enrollment that included at least 35 percent Black and Latino males, with at least 60 percent of students qualifying for free and/or reduced-price lunch; a four-year graduation rate above 65 percent; and an “A” or “B” on the latest high school Progress Report. Many other district-led reform efforts during this period were focused on the lowest-performing schools, but the DOE believed that ESI would have more success in schools that displayed some level of stability and existing capacity. In other words, ESI’s Central Team viewed the application criteria as a readiness measure. From their point of view, schools that met the application criteria would have the necessary infrastructure in place to accomplish the central goals of ESI. While it is prudent to select schools that appear to have the capacity and infrastructure to successfully implement new programming, there are also tradeoffs associated with this aspect of ESI’s design. Schools that met the eligibility criteria set forth by the ESI Central Team arguably had less room to grow on outcomes targeted by the initiative, making it more challenging to document the impact of ESI. It also meant that Black and Latino young men in the lowest performing educational environments were not reached by the initiative as their schools were not eligible to apply.
Flexibility

Another signature aspect of ESI’s design was that it was intended to be flexible enough to meet the specific needs of individual schools. While ESI was guided by an overall theory of action and some general parameters for programming, there was no standardized version of ESI that was expected to be implemented across schools. Rather, schools were provided with various supports and given the autonomy to design a version of ESI that was appropriate for their staff and students. One of the members of the ESI Central Team describes the rationale for this flexibility as follows.

The message that was sent from the beginning, which I honored and I appreciated, was: You know your school and school communities best. You know your neighborhoods. You should know your parents best. You should know your students. You know where you need to focus and where you need to push harder and where you can pull back…The idea was we will give you research and supports of what best practices are out there…. We’ll create spaces for you to come together, for you to learn with and from each other, but we’re not going to tell you what it is that you need to do by being prescriptive, saying this curriculum, this number of times.

This aspect of ESI’s design was perhaps the one that incurred the steepest trade-offs. The high level of autonomy made it difficult for the ESI Central Team to put accountability mechanisms in place. Because each school essentially designed their own version of ESI, there was no obvious standard by which the ESI Central Team could measure schools’ participation or the quality of their programs. In fact, in interviews held during the final months of the initiative, multiple members of the ESI Central Team said they thought ESI might have been more successful had they incorporated stronger accountability mechanisms for schools. (Not surprisingly, this issue also complicated our efforts to evaluate schools’ implementation of ESI, as discussed in the next chapter.) One member of the ESI Central Team shared the following reflections about the need for more school accountability:

I would build in some more accountability…It could’ve been something as simple as…for you to get your funding, you need to show four lesson plans [that incorporate CRE], like pre/post CRE training….I think a little more creativity about how to keep people accountable would be good.
A “Research and Development” Orientation

A related aspect of ESI’s design is that it was positioned as a “research and development” initiative by the ESI Central Team. They encouraged participating schools to try new things and to refine their ideas over time as they learned about which approaches were successful and which needed to be tweaked. ESI’s designers were attempting to balance the use of evidence-based strategies with the freedom to take some informed risks. Not everything schools tried was expected to succeed, but the hope was that even the initiative’s less impactful strategies and programs would produce valuable lessons about how to help more of NYC’s young men of color graduate ready for college and careers. Below, one of the ESI Central Team members explains this orientation to the work and how it was conveyed to ESI schools:

That was one of the first messages that I put out there. The chancellor, at that time, Chancellor Walcott, affirmed (it) by saying we don’t expect you to know everything. We don’t expect you to succeed in everything. We understand, and… we welcome you failing. Because failing is failing upward—that whole idea that we learn from that failure.

Of course, there are inherent trade-offs in this “R and D” approach. Schools were encouraged to think outside of the box and to learn from their mistakes, which was important to the vision of ESI and in keeping with the idea that schools should fit the initiative to their particular needs. At the same time, it can take substantial time to try new programming, learn from mistakes, and then redesign programming based on what was learned. In other words, “failing upward” takes time; encouraging schools to try innovative approaches that might need to be abandoned or reworked along the way could have resulted in schools making slower progress toward measurable outcomes.

Timeframe and Funding

Another key component of ESI was its timeframe and funding structure. ESI was designed to begin with the 9th grade cohort in 2012 and extend for four years through these students’ scheduled graduation year. As the original cohort progressed through high school, each incoming class of 9th graders was incorporated into ESI, such that all students in the school were being served by ESI by the end of the fourth year. Underlying this decision was a belief that postsecondary planning that starts early on in a student’s high school career will have more of an impact on students’ access to higher education and work when they complete high school. While ESI was designed
to last for four years, the $250,000 that each ESI school received was distributed over the first two and a half years of the initiative. Below, a member of ESI’s Central Team describes how the need for sustainable programming was emphasized to participating schools.

*ESI was always explicit. We are here for a certain number of years, that’s it. There’s a direct financial investment. That investment will go away, and so I think from the beginning, all the conversations with schools… were very explicit about that. Even when we started talking about things in year one, I remember [the ESI Director] getting up front and saying, ‘And don’t forget, this stuff will go away, so what are the structural changes you need to make at your school to make this intervention lasting?’”*

By not providing funding for the length of the initiative, the funders and the DOE were challenging schools to develop programs that were sustainable beyond the funding period. However, by frontloading the funding, the initiative ran the risk of programming and supports for students dropping off after the funding period. Our evaluation of ESI’s implementation suggests that this was, in fact, the case. We discuss this finding in greater detail in chapter 4.

**The ESI Application Process**

Prior to the first year of the initiative, the DOE’s ESI Central Team launched the ESI Design Challenge, a competitive application process in which schools submitted detailed plans for how they would utilize ESI funding.¹² The challenge was open to high schools that fit the participation criteria described above (i.e., enrollment of at least 35 percent Black and Latino males and 60 percent qualifying for free and/or reduced price lunch, plus a graduation rate above 65 percent, and an “A” or “B” on the latest Progress Report). A total of 81 schools met these criteria and were invited to apply, and 57 schools ultimately submitted applications.

During the application process, the DOE provided schools with specific research-based strategies for each of the three domains described above (academics, youth development, and college-focused school culture). The application then charged schools with creating detailed plans covering each domain, as well as descriptions of the data they would rely on to assess the implementation and impact of their programs. Schools also had to submit a budget worksheet showing how they would
use ESI funds to implement the services and supports they described. In addition, the application required schools to provide multiple points of data on the performance of their Black and Latino males, including GPA, credit accumulation, Regents scores, and college readiness rates.

The Design Challenge stipulated that the 40 schools with the highest-scoring applications would receive ESI funding. In addition to a few members of the DOE’s Office of Postsecondary Readiness and representatives from several school networks, faculty from the City University of New York (CUNY), Harvard University, Howard University, New York University, and Columbia University’s Teachers College scored the schools’ applications based on a rubric. The rubric contained 19 items across four large “challenges”: (1) expanding success for Black and Latino young men, (2) aligning success with postsecondary readiness indicators, (3) building sustainable practices as part of the school organization, and (4) capacity for implementation (see Appendix B for the full rubric). Most of the 40 schools that were selected to receive ESI funding scored among the top 40. A few schools were selected based on other criteria, namely the representation of Black and Latino students from the City’s most high-poverty neighborhoods—specifically, Harlem, East New York, South Bronx, Jamaica, and Brownsville. When two schools subsequently dropped out of the initiative, two schools with scores immediately below the top 40 were invited to participate.

How Do ESI Schools Compare to the Broader Population of NYC High Schools?

We compared the 40 schools participating in ESI (see Appendix A) with non-ESI schools in the City to determine how ESI schools differed from the broader population of New York City high schools. We looked at key student outcomes (e.g., graduation and college readiness rates) and student characteristics (e.g., English language learner and special education status, being overage for one’s grade, and eligibility for free or reduced price lunch) for both the full populations of schools and Black and Latino males, in particular. We also examined important school characteristics, such as size, configuration, and location.

Our analysis (presented in detail in Preparing Black and Latino Young Men for College and Careers) found that while ESI schools differed from other high schools in the city in ways that would be expected given the criteria for participation in the initiative, ESI
schools were generally comparable to other New York City high schools. (Relevant tables are available in Appendix A.) The group of ESI schools, with a few exceptions, looked very similar to the non-ESI schools on student demographics and school-level characteristics. When looking at the percentage of students on-track for graduation and four-year graduation rates, we saw that ESI schools slightly outperformed non-ESI schools. However, ESI schools did not outperform non-ESI schools in terms of the percentage of students meeting the New York State Aspirational Performance Measure. Thus, while ESI schools graduated students at higher rates than non-ESI schools, they did not necessarily better prepare students for college and career.

School Support

As previously mentioned, each ESI school received $250,000 distributed over the first three years of the initiative. In addition to this financial support, the ESI Central Team created a comprehensive infrastructure for the Initiative, which provided robust, ongoing support to ESI schools. The Central Team managed all of the district-level implementation of ESI, including selecting schools, assisting schools as they developed their ESI workplans, and providing a range of ongoing resources and supports throughout the initiative. We provide a brief summary of these resources and supports below. For more detail, please see our previous report, *Promising Opportunities for Black and Latino Young Men*.

After schools were selected to participate in ESI, at least two people from each school (usually the principal and a member of the “design team” that prepared the application) met with the ESI Central Team to have a detailed discussion of their ESI work plan and budget for the first year of the initiative. Though there was wide variability in proposed programming across the schools, these work plans consolidated and standardized how each school described their ESI programs (see our 2012 ESI report for more information on Year 1 planning). These planning meetings took place in June and July of 2012. During the meetings, the ESI Central Team would walk through the school’s work plan, suggesting modifications and asking for clarifications as needed. Though school personnel generally reported positive feedback about the planning support they received from the ESI Central Team, a handful of schools expressed frustrations with restrictions that were placed upon use of ESI funding, particularly in Year 1 as schools were still familiarizing themselves with the initiative and how ESI funding could be used. The ESI Central Team
facilitated a similar process to assist ESI schools in their planning for Years 2 and 3 of the initiative.

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 who had also completed a rigorous application process. 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. While many schools reported positive partnerships with external vendors, the restrictions that were placed upon the selection of vendors were an aspect of school support that some schools reported as a challenge, particularly in Year 1 of the initiative. For these schools, they would have preferred to use external vendors of their choice or vendors that they had worked with prior to ESI.

In addition to assisting schools with planning, the ESI Central Team offered numerous ongoing supports, including wide-ranging professional development opportunities for school staff. Over the course of ESI, the Central Team arranged professional development on such topics as culturally relevant education, subject-specific pedagogical training, unpacking the COSEBOC (Coalition of Schools Education Boys of Color) standards, and using PSAT/ NMSQT reports to improve teaching and learning. Attendance at professional development sessions was highest during Year 2, though all of the ESI schools sent staff to ESI professional development sessions at some point in the initiative, and many attended multiple trainings.

Additionally, beginning in Year 2, the ESI Central Team held monthly meetings for ESI liaisons from each participating school. These meetings were designed to build a professional learning community that was focused on improving outcomes for Black and Latino young men and to provide a space for ESI liaisons to troubleshoot and share ideas and approaches with one another. Overall, school liaisons appreciated the opportunity to meet liaisons from other schools and found it useful to hear about implementation challenges and successes in other ESI schools. However, attendance at ESI liaison meetings decreased in Years 3 and 4 of the initiative, as the funding period of the initiative ended.
The ESI Central Team maintained regular contact with schools through site visits, emails, and phone calls. In fact, this type of personal support and level of personal relationship was something many of the school staff we spoke to saw as a benefit of the program. In addition, the Central Team sent a regular newsletter highlighting programming at particular ESI schools as well as upcoming events and opportunities. Lastly, the team provided enrichment opportunities for ESI students, including gatherings for young men across the schools, movie outings, and other field trips.

Throughout the initiative, school personnel reported high levels of satisfaction with the support and guidance that they received from the ESI Central Team. There were, however, sticking points and adjustments that needed to be made. In the first year of the initiative, funding was delayed at some schools until October or November, which made it difficult to get ESI programs up and running. Also, ESI schools did not initially have an assigned liaison, which made it challenging to maintain open lines of communication between the ESI Central Team and the schools. By Year 2, however, the ESI Central Team required that schools elect an ESI liaison and that these liaisons attend monthly ESI meetings (described above).

Summary

This chapter describes ESI’s theory of action and other notable design principles that guided the initiative. It also highlights the considerable role that the ESI Central Team had in selecting ESI schools and developing and maintaining an infrastructure to support schools in their planning and program implementation. Rather than simply providing funding, ESI provided ongoing support to schools in the form of feedback on annual plans, professional development opportunities, facilitation of partnering with external vendors, and the creation of a professional learning community via monthly meetings for ESI liaisons. In the next chapter, we describe the programs and services that ESI schools implemented thanks to the funding and support that they received from the ESI Central Team.
CHAPTER 4: SCHOOL-LEVEL IMPLEMENTATION

As discussed in Chapter 3, ESI was designed, supported, and managed by a team of administrators in the NYCDOE central office. This provided the initiative with a common set of goals and an underlying theory of action. Importantly, however, ESI’s implementation plan provided considerable discretion and flexibility for school-based leaders, staff, and ESI liaisons to use the initiative’s resources and supports in ways that best fit their local needs and circumstances. In fact, the schools were encouraged by the central office to experiment with programming activities, professional development and other services in the search for effective supports for young men of color. Thus, it is necessary to understand ESI not as a prescriptive program or model, but rather as a general framework and set of guiding principles for creating or enhancing opportunities for students and staff in ways that were responsive to each individual school’s context.

With this in mind, our study of ESI implementation was designed to assess each school’s programming and support system through the lens of their alignment with the ESI theory of action and primary goals outlined in Chapter 3. At the same time, it was important to account for local adaptation by identifying prominent areas of variation across the schools and to assess potential differences in ESI’s capacity to improve the experiences and outcomes of the Black and Latino young men in the participating schools.

As discussed in Chapter 3, ESI supports and activities were intended to be designed and implemented across three interacting domains of student experience, growth, and preparation for the future. These domains were: academic supports, youth development and college-focused school culture. In addition, ESI developed a framework for culturally relevant education as a crosscutting experience for students and adults. This chapter examines each school’s ESI programming and supports in these domains by assessing three dimensions of implementation. First, we focus on cataloging the activities and engagement opportunities that each school either created or enhanced for Black and Latino young men with their ESI funding and support from the ESI Central Team. Second, we assess the degree to which the activities that schools developed or enhanced were aligned with ESI’s core programming domains.
Figure 3: The Expanded Success Initiative Theory of Action: School Actions

Problem
Opportunity gaps leading to a range of disparities in educational outcomes, especially low college readiness among Black and Latino young men.

Initiative Priorities
- Improving college and career readiness
- Decreasing suspensions
- Confronting teacher biases
- Creating professional communities for educators committed to better serving young men of color

Inputs
- Funding
  $250,000 went to each ESI school over the first three years of the four-year initiative
- Autonomy
  Schools were encouraged to develop programming that fit their community’s needs
- Professional Development
  PD included CRE, restorative justice, subject-specific trainings, etc.
- Learning Community
  Regular meetings of 40 ESI liaisons (one per school) provide support from central ESI team and opportunities to share promising practices

School Actions
- Expand programming, services, and supports for students in three core domains that were undermined by CRE:
  - Academics
  - Youth Development
  - College-Focused School Culture

School Culture and Relationships
- Reduce educators’ biases against Black and Latino male students
- Emphasize early and ongoing support for college goals
- Develop culturally relevant curriculum and instruction
- Reduce use of suspensions
- Improve relationships between students, and relationships between students and staff

Perceptions of School and Self
- Sense of fair treatment
- Perception of race/gender/cultural climate
- Sense of belonging in school
- Critical thinking
- Academic self-concept

Students’ High School Experiences and Outcomes
- Antecedents to College
  - Attendance
  - On-track status and credits earned for graduation
  - NYS Aspirational Performance Measure (APM)
  - Graduation with Regents Diploma
- Future Planning
  - Conversations with adults about college and career
  - Applying for financial aid
  - Applying to college
  - SAT-taking

Participation
- Students
  Participate in activities aligned with three domains and culturally relevant education
- School Staff
  Participate in professional development opportunities

College Enrollment
Finally, we examine student participation in ESI-aligned activities in order to gauge the extent to which Black and Latino young men actually engaged in the opportunities that ESI created or enhanced. In addition to assessing the overall quality of implementation, we also highlight areas where implementation varied across the participating ESI schools. Together, the findings across these dimensions of implementation provide a context for interpreting the results of the impact analysis discussed in Chapter 6.

We should note that our assessments of ESI programming alignment levels and students’ participation reflect only part of the ESI implementation story. In an effort to better understand the roles ESI may have played in changing the participating schools and improving the experiences of young men of color, we also conducted open-ended interviews with ESI teachers, administrators, and students. Their perspectives are discussed in Chapter 5 of this report and are the basis for the practice guides that were developed throughout the evaluation period.

**ESI Programming**

As discussed in Chapter 2, the ESI implementation study drew first on information provided by school-based personnel about specific activities that were developed or enhanced with ESI funding and supports in the participating schools. These data helped document how the schools invested their ESI resources and professional learning opportunities to create or expand services and supports for Black and Latino male students.\(^\text{18}\) Each year, we coded ESI programs and activities within each of the three core domains of student support. (As noted above, CRE cut across all three domains as indicated in ESI’s theory of action.) Based on these codes, we compiled lists of the activities that were made available across ESI schools from year to year. While ESI programming varied greatly across schools, certain programs emerged prominently across schools and years. Below is a description of the most common programming elements within each of three domains, as well as some of the services and supports that were implemented in a more limited subset of ESI schools. In addition to informing our assessment of ESI implementation, these data were used to construct survey questions about students’ participation in ESI-related activities.
Table 6: Common Activities Within Each ESI Domain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academics</th>
<th>Youth Development</th>
<th>College-Focused School Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tutoring</td>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>College workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curricular changes</td>
<td>Student advisory</td>
<td>Internships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer bridge</td>
<td>Alternative approaches to discipline</td>
<td>Family outreach related to college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP courses</td>
<td>Hiring guidance counselors</td>
<td>Hiring college advisors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Annual workplans created by ESI schools.
Note: “Common activities” are the top four most frequently reported activities within each domain, across years, based on the school workplans.

Academics

The ESI theory of action outlined several types of academic strategies that schools are encouraged to implement, including adding curricular enhancements, increasing academic rigor (both in terms of higher level courses and more challenging coursework in existing classes), and offering more academic supports, such as tutoring. The most common academic strategies schools employed were tutoring and adding or modifying curriculum (much of which focused on more culturally relevant instruction). A smaller number of schools created summer bridge programs and increased access to advanced courses as a result of ESI.

- **Tutoring.** Tutoring in ESI schools ranged from general after-school help to targeted tutoring for certain students in specific subjects during the school day. In the first two years, it also included the use of outside vendors to help support students in core subjects or in developing strong study habits that could be applied across courses. While tutoring is a relatively common support across all NYC schools, it often occurs during the out-of-school-time hours. ESI encouraged schools to offer tutoring during the school day as opposed to after school exclusively.

- **Curricular changes.** Modifications to curriculum and instruction included selecting texts written by people of color or featuring protagonists of color, incorporating topics/issues that are relevant to students into curricula, and utilizing more engaging forms of instruction (e.g., project-based learning).
Educators also reported that ESI had pushed them to make changes to their pedagogy or modes of teaching, including modeling, co-teaching, cooperative learning, and exploratory projects—in the hopes of better serving their students, especially males of color.

- **Summer bridge.** Summer bridge programs were designed to engage incoming 9th graders and help them acclimate to their new school community by combining an academic component (often a math course) with youth development elements (e.g., leadership training or sports). The relatively high number of summer bridge programs is perhaps a result of the ESI Central Team providing specific support and an additional mini grant for schools implementing summer bridge. Many educators thought summer bridge provided strong support for the students who attended, but admitted that attendance was low, since it can be difficult to attract students to school in the summer. Without extra funding, many schools struggled to justify a practice that would only reach a handful of students.

- **Access to advanced coursework.** One of the approaches most emphasized in ESI’s original application was increasing academic rigor. This was in response to a documented lack of access to higher-level math and science classes among Black and Latino male students (U.S. DOE Office for Civil Rights, 2012). The most common strategy ESI schools employed to meet this goal was the introduction of AP courses or the expansion of AP opportunities to male students in particular (e.g., by encouraging them to enroll or by ensuring each AP class served a certain percentage of male students). ESI also encouraged schools to restructure students’ programming (the series of classes they are expected to take within a given year) to allow for a greater number of math and science classes within the four years of high school, but fewer schools utilized this strategy. We believe this was a missed opportunity to address the lack of access to higher-level math we see among this population, especially considering its relationship to college access (Toldson, 2011).

**Youth Development**

The youth development domain, as conceptualized by ESI, primarily focused on supporting students’ socio-emotional development and improving school discipline
policies. ESI schools offered an array of youth development programming, which created structures to build relationships and address students’ social emotional needs. Mentoring emerged as particularly popular and was, in fact, one of the most prevalent supports offered under any of the ESI domains.

- **Mentoring.** Mentoring programs emerged as the most common youth development strategy. Approaches to mentoring varied, with differences in terms of the program’s content focus, the age and gender of mentors, the frequency of mentor-mentee meetings, and the use of group versus on-on-one mentoring models. Some schools implemented peer mentoring by pairing older male students (11th and 12th graders or recent alumni) with younger students (9th and 10th grade). These peer mentors provided a support system within the building to help address issues ranging from problems at home to academic struggles.

- **Student advisory.** Somewhat related to mentoring were advisory programs, which were also popular across ESI schools. Advisory classes were typically single-gender and consisted of 10-15 students and one or two adults. Some advisories focused primarily on college and career readiness and included a structured curriculum. Many provided spaces for groups of students to discuss a variety of topics, including goal setting, communication skills and conflict resolution, bullying, and transcript review/graduation requirements. With or without this kind of substantive focus, advisories were designed to provide a safe space for students to speak openly about personal and academic challenges.

- **Alternative approaches to discipline.** Many ESI schools implemented alternative-to-suspension programs or other new approaches to discipline. These included restorative justice programs, peer mediation, and conflict resolution training. Schools reported using a variety of practices designed to build and repair relationships within school communities. Many of these practices appeared to represent a new mindset among teachers that challenged them to critically assess their own responses to student infractions.

- **Other holistic services.** Smaller numbers of schools experimented with other types of programming intended to improve youth development outcomes for their male students, including home visits, incorporating health and nutrition classes, service learning opportunities, and hiring social workers.
or guidance counselors (though using ESI funding to add personnel was discouraged). These types of strategies address some of the opportunity gaps we described in *Moving the Needle*, but require more financial resources than other types of support that ESI schools developed.

**College-Focused School Culture**

The third domain of the ESI theory of action was school culture. In the context of ESI, school culture referred to creating an environment in which college and career readiness is the norm and is infused through all aspects of a school’s programming. While most participating 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 for students starting in the 9th grade—a direct response to the ESI theory of action. It is notable, however, that few schools provided explicit career readiness supports.

- **College supports.** A majority of ESI schools provided college trips, which included not only visiting City University of New York (CUNY) and other local NYC schools, but also trips to colleges outside of the City, and in a few cases, outside of the state, including historically Black colleges. ESI schools also allowed students to take college-level classes (mostly through College Now, an organization that offers classes at community college campuses and in high schools). Many schools provided workshops about colleges to students (sometimes during advisory periods) as well as workshops for families that raised issues related to applications, financial aid, and living on campus. Finally, a large number of ESI schools offered preparation courses for the PSAT, SAT, and/or ACT—such courses can be prohibitively expensive for students to take on their own. Many of these college-focused options were created by (and sometimes implemented by) external partners, such as College Now and College Access: Research and Action (CARA).

- **Career supports.** It is noteworthy that while a majority of schools increased college supports and programming, fewer than 10 schools each year provided any kind of career programming. The most commonly reported career support was the coordination of internship opportunities and holding career days and career workshops. Less frequently reported career supports included career and technical education, visits to workplaces/job shadowing, and the
presence of a career office. The Research Alliance has noted in other work (Kemple, 2013) that the growing emphasis on “college and career readiness” has 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—might help students develop capacities that are important for succeeding in various postsecondary contexts. The Research Alliance recently initiated a large-scale study of career-technical education in New York City, which we expect to produce important lessons about preparing students for work and about the intersection of college and career readiness.

**Alignment with ESI Theory of Action and Goals**

In addition to documenting the number and types of activities being provided through ESI, we also assessed the extent to which these activities and support were aligned with ESI’s core goals and principles. To that end, as discussed in Chapter 2, we worked with the ESI Central Team to co-create a rubric that scored schools’ ESI programming and activities against the core principles of ESI and expectations of the ESI team. The alignment rubric included five indicators that were assessed on a three point scale for a total of 15 possible points each year. The measures on this rubric thus reflect the ESI teams’ aspirations for how educators would implement ESI in their schools. From the alignment assessments, we identified three groups of ESI schools: *high alignment* (13-15 on the rubric); *moderate alignment* (10-12 on the rubric), and *low alignment* (less than 10 on the rubric).¹⁹

Figure 4 on the next page shows average alignment scores and subscores across all schools for the second, third and fourth year of the initiative—as well as the average scores for all three years.²⁰ Table 7, also on the next page, displays the number of schools that fell into each alignment category.
The ESI schools achieved the highest levels of alignment in the second year of the initiative, averaging 13 out of 15 on the alignment rubric. Nearly three quarters of schools implemented ESI with high levels of alignment in Year 2. That year, nearly all schools offered programs in all three domains and reported having some type of CRE training. In addition, 35 schools offered at least two or more early college supports, 30 schools offered programming that was aimed specifically at Black and Latino young men, and 29 attended all or nearly all of the liaison meetings. Overall, we found that the implementation of ESI in this year was generally strong across schools and was well aligned with the ESI theory of action.

Table 7: ESI Implementation Alignment Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alignment Level</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 4</th>
<th>Years 2-4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High (13-15)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate (10-12)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low (6-9)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Research Alliance calculations based on data obtained through annual questionnaires and interviews with educators in ESI schools.
Note: The Years 2-4 column reflects each school’s average score over the last three years of the initiative.
After Year 2, however, ESI schools showed a clear decrease in alignment, which coincided with the reduction in funding to participating schools. Figure 4 indicates that the largest declines occurred in attendance at liaison meetings and programming for college and career planning activities. Table 7 shows that the number of schools achieving high alignment dropped from 28 in Year 2 to 9 in Year 3, while many more schools scored at the low alignment level. Moreover, schools received lower scores in all measures of alignment except for one (i.e., population served).

In Year 3, 26 of 39 schools represented all three domains in their programming, and 23 reported having some type of CRE training. However, only 14 schools offered at least two or more early college supports (it is plausible that the reduction in funding in Year 3 led directly to the decreased number of college trips). Attendance at liaison meetings also showed a precipitous drop with only 6 schools attending 5 or more of the liaison meetings, compared to 29 in Year 2.

In Year 4, the overall alignment levels continued to decline (although not as sharply as the drop between Year 2 and Year 3), and only five schools achieved a high level of alignment. While there was a modest increase in culturally relevant education in Year 4, attendance at liaison meetings and ESI-initiated college and career programming continued to decrease.

Overall, Table 7 indicates that eight schools achieved an average high level of alignment with the underlying ESI theory of action across the years for which adequate data were available. Although these schools achieved a high level of alignment on average over Year 2 through 4, only three schools consistently scored at this high level in all three years. The remaining schools scored on the border between high and moderate. Table 7 shows that six schools averaged a low level of alignment with ESI goals and principles, although each of these started off with at least a moderate level of alignment in Year 2. After that point, however, their ESI-related programming fell off.

In the next section, we examine the extent to which students participated in the programs and supports that ESI made available.
Student Participation in ESI Programming

While the data above provides an indication of the types of activities and supports that schools developed in keeping with the ESI framework, they do not include measures of whether students actually took advantage of these activities and supports. This section of the chapter examines ESI’s implementation through the lens of students’ participation in a wide range of activities that were aligned with ESI’s three core programming domains. An underlying assumption of ESI’s theory of action was that increasing student exposure to experiences and activities in these areas would in turn improve key student outcomes. The analysis presented here relies on the annual ESI student survey to describe students’ self-reported participation in at least one activity within each ESI programming domain. The goal was to capture participation both in programs that were newly introduced under ESI and in those that were pre-existing but aligned with ESI’s theory of action. Figure 5 presents a summary of activity participation among Black and Latino young men in the ESI schools, by grade level and programming domain.

**Figure 5: Activity Participation Rates Among Black and Latino Young Men in ESI Schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Grade 9</th>
<th>Grade 10</th>
<th>Grade 11</th>
<th>Grade 12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Support</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>77.2</td>
<td>81.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College/Career Support</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>62.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Development</td>
<td>60.1</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>62.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to Culturally</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>39.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant Materials</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>39.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Domains</td>
<td>80.6</td>
<td>81.6</td>
<td>85.5</td>
<td>85.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Research Alliance calculations using data from annual surveys administered to students in ESI schools, Spring 2013 through Spring 2017.

Note: Each bar shows the average percentage of Black and Latino male students who reported participating in at least one activity in each domain each year. See Additional Table and Figure Notes on page 91.
Figure 5 shows a prominent interaction between grade level and activity domain. Participation rates in academic support activities were higher in Grades 9 and 10 than participation rates in college and career preparation activities and youth development activities in these grades. This is likely to be due, in part, to the existing availability of advanced courses, Regents exam preparation, and perhaps tutoring prior to the start of ESI. In fact, however, even modest levels of participation in college planning activities, particularly college advising and trips, in Grades 9 and 10, may be noteworthy since these are typically more likely to occur later in high school.

In general, participation rates across all three domains were higher in Grades 11 and 12 compared to Grades 9 and 10. As one might expect, participation in college and career planning activities was especially high in Grades 11 and 12 as students approached the transition to post-secondary opportunities. The overall increase in participation rates in Grades 11 and 12 runs somewhat counter to the decline in funding and in the alignment indicators during the third and fourth years of implementation.

The last set of bars in Figure 5 suggests that ESI fell short of its aspirational goal of exposing all Black and Latino young men to activities that were aligned with all three of its core programming domains. It shows that less than a third of Black and Latino young men were exposed to activities in all three domains in Grades 9 and 10, and only about half were in Grades 11 and 12. While these levels are below the ambitious targets that might signal the ideal level of implementation of ESI, the essential question is whether they are sufficiently different from what similar schools may be able to achieve without the funding and other supports from ESI. This is a central question that we turn to in Chapter 6, where we use data from comparison high schools to determine whether ESI increased students’ exposure key activities.

Finally, like the indicators on implementation alignment, the participation indicators varied widely across participating schools. While none of the schools achieved optimal participation rates, some schools were able to achieve relatively high participation rates across grades and domains. Using the average rates of participation among Black and Latino young men in activities across all three ESI programming domains and across Grade 9 through 12, we identified three groups of schools: low participation (schools with average participation rates of below 30 percent); moderate participation (schools with average participation rates between 30 and 50 percent); and high participation (schools with average participation rates above 50 percent). The results are summarized in Table 8 on the next page.
Table 8: ESI Participation Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation Rate</th>
<th>Grade 9</th>
<th>Grade 10</th>
<th>Grade 11</th>
<th>Grade 12</th>
<th>Average Grade 9-12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High (More than 50%)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate (30-50%)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low (Less than 30%)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Research Alliance calculations using data from annual surveys administered to students in ESI schools, Spring 2013 through Spring 2017.

Note: See Additional Table and Figure Notes on page 91.

The patterns in Table 8 parallel those in Figure 5: Fewer schools had high participation rates in Grades 9 and 10, and more schools had high participation rates in Grades 11 and 12. Averaging participation rates across all four grade levels, 14 schools had participation rates above 50 percent, and 9 fell below an average of 30 percent.

Looking at Alignment and Participation Together

In an effort to capture a more complete and rigorous assessment of ESI implementation, we developed an index that reflects a combination of the alignment indicators and the average student participation rates across programming domains and grades. Using the composite index, we identified a group of nine ESI schools that we characterize as “Promising” implementers. While reflecting optimal implementation, these schools exhibited relatively strong and consistent alignment with the ESI principles (i.e., high or moderate alignment in Table 7) and average participation rates of 50 percent or higher across Grade 9 through 12 (i.e., high participation in Table 8).

We also identified a group of seven schools that we characterize as “Struggling” Implementers. All of these schools fell into low or moderate alignment categories in Table 7 and had average participation rates below 30 percent across Grades 9 through 12 (i.e., the low category in Table 8). The contrast between these groups of ESI schools provides an opportunity to explore quite disparate experiences with ESI implementation and how they relate to differences in ESI’s impact on key student outcomes (see Chapter 6).
Summary

Overall, our assessment of ESI’s implementation is mixed. ESI was successful in getting schools to create or expand programming in academic supports, youth development, college-focused school culture, and culturally relevant education. Most schools were able to implement programming activities that were at least moderately aligned with ESI’s theory of action, especially in the first two years of the initiative. In addition, most of the Black and Latino young men who completed the surveys indicated that they participated in activities in one or more of the ESI domains. Also, student participation generally increased from year to year.

However, as funding levels declined, so too did the alignment of programming activities with ESI’s core principles. Only a handful of schools were able to sustain a high level of programming alignment during the three year measurement period. In addition, ESI appears to have fallen short of its ambitious goal of consistently exposing all Black and Latino young men to activities in all three domains. Based on our survey, only about one quarter of the schools were able to engage 50 percent or more of their Black and Latino male students in activities in all three domains over Grades 9 through 12.

In addition, we found considerable variation across the ESI schools in both programming alignment and student participation. Some schools achieved high and consistent levels of alignment with ESI’s core principles, along with relatively high and consistent levels of participation among Black and Latino young men. Other schools achieved either low or inconsistent levels of alignment or participation. In chapter 6, we will consider how variation in program implementation and students’ participation in ESI aligned activities, relates to impacts on key students outcomes.
CHAPTER 5: EDUCATOR AND STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

Changes in school culture are a crucial aspect of the ESI’s theory of action (see Figure 5 on page 50), which suggests that participation in ESI supports and programs will result in improvements in school culture that, in turn, will lead to positive impacts on high school experiences and college readiness outcomes for Black and Latino young men. In this chapter, we draw upon data collected in semi-structured interviews and focus groups with ESI school leaders, teachers, and students. Focus groups and interviews with school leaders and teachers were conducted during field visits that took place in each year of the study. Student focus groups were conducted in all schools during Year 2 and in a sample of 10 schools during the initiative’s fourth year.

These sources of data allowed us to go beyond the structured rubrics and surveys that provided the basis for the findings presented in Chapter 4. Open-ended interviews with teachers, administrators, and students provide richer and more nuanced information about their perceptions of ESI and life in ESI schools. Although these are by no means representative of the full range of insights on ESI and its strengths and limitations, they do offer valuable perspectives from informed participants about how they felt that ESI had influenced their school community. These perspectives are discussed in detail in this chapter (and also informed the practice guides the Research Alliance developed throughout the evaluation).

Based on interviews and focus groups with school actors, we learned that ESI changed the day-to-day experience of ESI schools in substantial ways. Three areas of school change stood out because of their prominence across schools and years of the initiative: 1) the development of a culturally relevant orientation to teaching and learning, 2) improved school relationships, and 3) a stronger schoolwide commitment to supporting students’ post-secondary goals. Importantly, these findings do not just reflect the addition of new programming. Rather our interviews suggested there had been deep changes in the mindsets and beliefs of educators and the culture of ESI schools.
Figure 6: The Expanded Success Initiative Theory of Action: School Culture and Relationships
As described in Chapter 4, ESI placed a substantial emphasis on working with teachers to develop a culturally relevant approach to teaching and learning. All 40 ESI schools participated in a three-hour CRE symposium offered in the initiative’s first year. In addition, 36 of the 40 schools participated in additional CRE training in subsequent years of the initiative. Trainings in CRE were provided by a wide range of organizations and experts and covered numerous topics. Many of the trainings had a strong focus on academic expectations, including creating opportunities for students to succeed (e.g., by attending to multiple learning styles and using varied assessments) and promoting a growth mindset (i.e., the belief that intelligence can be developed through practice and effort) among students. Trainings also provided teachers with strategies for making curriculum and instruction more relevant to students’ cultures, backgrounds, and prior experiences. A few trainings focused on helping students to develop their “critical consciousness” by exploring inequitable systems, studying examples of social action, and participating in change movements. Finally, some of the trainings challenged teachers to acknowledge their own privilege, confront their biases against male students of color, and more deeply examine data about Black and Latino male performance in their school.

Though the primary way in which the ESI Central Team introduced CRE was through professional development opportunities, it is important to note that CRE was perceived by ESI Central Team members as an overall approach and mindset, rather than a particular program or metric. Many of the educators we spoke with in ESI schools shared this understanding. For example, below an ESI liaison explains her school’s approach to CRE.

… we made [CRE] a centerpiece and involved everybody in the movement. It’s a movement. It’s not a program…We asked an [ESI Central Team member] to do a presentation on the data relating to…the achievement gap, because we really felt like there was a lack of awareness. What we’d hear from staff all the time was that we don’t treat our students differently depending on gender, race, background, anything. Everybody’s equal. Everybody’s the same. What we knew, in fact, was that the data was not showing that the boys were doing as well as the girls, for example. That needed to be clear to everybody. It couldn’t just be clear to the small group of people creating the plan design. We asked him to do the presentation, which I think had an impact because now there’s an awareness. This is not just nationwide, citywide. This is in our actual school. We have this happening here.
Many educators in ESI schools reported changes in their mindsets and beliefs as a result of CRE training as well as changes in their school practices. In all four years, interviewees in approximately half of ESI schools reported that exposure to CRE had changed teachers’ mindsets about the challenges facing Black and Latino males and produced a greater awareness of their particular students. They described learning about their students’ backgrounds, cultural and religious differences, struggles at home, challenges around gender issues, and specific interests as individuals. Some of the educators we spoke to talked about CRE in terms of its capacity to help teachers better meet students’ social and emotional needs. Examples included building boys’ self-esteem, helping students feel valued, providing more leadership opportunities, encouraging public speaking, and teaching young men to advocate for themselves.

Developing a culturally relevant orientation also challenged staff to confront their own biases and critically examine how teachers perceive Black and Latino males. The evidence suggests that CRE training allowed educators to address stigmas often attached to young men of color, helped develop more racial consciousness among school staff, and made it more acceptable to talk about race with students and colleagues. Explained one principal,

> Just exposing a great deal of the staff to those issues, and also some preconceived notions that they have with Black and Latino males that they might not be quite aware of. That was brought out a lot in the CRE training, because the discussions revolved around…people sharing personal beliefs that they had. People were very open, and it was teachers that were not…just Black and Latino teachers. There were other teachers from other cultures, and [they] felt comfortable sharing beliefs and practices…

Many teachers we interviewed shared the perspective that CRE had created a space for staff to speak about race and identity in new ways:

> Schools have been perceived as this ‘neutral zone’ where there’s no politics; we just focus on academics. [But this initiative] has allowed the political dimension to be acknowledged…There’s now a language that people can use to talk about these things…now there’s at least some comfort level with people using a word like racism where usually you can’t even say that word…It’s part of a proactive way that we can include all our students and fight for them in this world that is not so friendly to African-American and Latino students.
CRE training led staff to examine how their own backgrounds and identities impacted the way that they approached teaching and their way of relating to students. As one principal described it, this was an important reason to prioritize CRE training:

*Helping staff… [through CRE trainings] to better think about who we are. Stepping to the table in terms of our background and our experiences and the impact that has and how we relate to the kids.*

Principals and teachers in ESI schools also reported that training in CRE had influenced their curricular and instructional practices. One of the ways many schools initially responded to CRE training was to modify their curriculum with an eye toward affirming students’ race, ethnicity, and cultural backgrounds. Many interviewees described new curricular materials as a result of ESI, for example:

*We have a certain amount in the budget for getting more books each year. Having us shift away from Walt Whitman to Ernesto Quiñonez…. The variety in our bookroom here is something I’ve not seen before. I’m used to the dead White men. I mean, I was brought up on the canon. I studied the canon, I know the canon. It’s refreshing to see authors that reflect people who look like me.*

Additionally, teachers and principals incorporated current events that were relevant to their students’ lives, especially events affecting male students of color. Staff reported focusing curricula and lesson plans on race, poverty, and events such as the “Central Park Five” case, in which five young men of color were convicted of a crime they didn’t commit. Several schools reported incorporating discussions about the Eric Garner case—in which police killed an unarmed Black man on Staten Island in 2014—into classrooms and lessons. One principal said, “If you know that the Eric Garner issue is burning in the community, how can we take a current and relevant event into the classroom and apply it [to] what we’re doing?” A teacher in another school made a similar point when she described the way in which CRE training impacted her instruction and curriculum.

*I think that when opportunities present themselves through the law classes and through the history classes, we seize those moments. They’re teachable moments. You can’t get them back. For example, when the indictment—well, lack of indictment—[in Ferguson] came back, I set aside whatever I had planned because the idea was whatever I taught them that day, in 20 years they’ll forget. If I took the time to talk about what had happened and actually let them talk about what had happened and ask questions that they didn’t know who to ask or where to get the answers, that’s*
something that they were going to walk away with and that was going be something meaningful to them that they were going to carry much further than the causes of the Civil War.

In addition to incorporating relevant content, teachers and principals also described changing their instructional approaches. They described moving away from traditional lectures and presentations to more collaborative and creative student work and assessments, including hands-on activities, experiential learning, storytelling, group-based projects, and public speaking opportunities.

Improved School Relationships

Another central focus of ESI was creating opportunities for students to spend time with each other and with their teachers, so they could get to know each other better—both inside and outside of the classroom. In line with this emphasis, the most commonly reported change that administrators and teachers attributed to ESI was an improvement in in-school relationships.

Mentoring programs were the most frequently cited strategy for nurturing relationships. Over half of the ESI schools offered mentoring programs in all four years of the initiative. This includes both adult-student mentoring and peer mentoring programs that often paired upperclassmen with 9th and 10th grade students. Many schools also offered advisory classes, which were designed to build connections between teachers and students, as well as among the students themselves. A variety of enrichment activities also allowed students and teachers in ESI schools to spend time together outside of class. Below, a teacher describes a mentoring program created for young men as a result of ESI. Many of the staff members who we spoke to in ESI schools framed their mentoring and advisory programs similarly; these programs created opportunities for the development of strong relationships between students and staff as well as between students and their peers.

The boys’ group that happens—it’s a nice dynamic because it allows the boys an opportunity to speak to someone who grew up in the same environment, who actually attended the same high school as them, who is very honest with them and giving them real conversations about real-world things that are going on—college being a big one
of them, as well as just outside issues and making them… more aware, especially as they transition into 12th grade and beyond…

When we asked educators, administrators, and students about changes that had taken place in their schools as a result of ESI, they consistently reported improved one-on-one relationships and, by extension, a more supportive school community. Many schools attributed these improvements to new opportunities for individuals to learn about each other’s lives and concerns outside the classroom. Below, a teacher discusses the impact of having the opportunity to spend more time with the males at her school.

I would just say from my personal experience, having the ability to have a class with 10th grade boys or young men, it’s affected the way I view them. I just joined the school back in September, and I think through meeting with them twice a week I get to connect and communicate with them on a more candid level. It’s not just simply academic. We actually get to talk about a lot of things that they probably wouldn’t talk to a teacher about on a normal basis. I think it’s affected how quickly I’ve been able to immerse myself and to feel comfortable with the students.

In focus groups with students, Black and Latino young men also told us how important their relationships with both their teachers and their peers were. One student shared,

…sophomore year I had to get surgery on my back, and all three of those staff members always called me and rooted for me. I was out for a month of school. They would constantly check up on me and see how I was doing. It just goes to show that these guys cared about me because of what this program did for us…I think that’s what I loved. I think that this program teaches you how to be compassionate for other people and to create something that you can’t get anywhere else…To have these guys [here] every day that I came to school just made me want to come to school much more because I got to be with my brothers in a sense. I got to [be with] my family.

Educators spoke similarly about the improvements in relationships amongst male students and their peers as a result of ESI programming. Below, a teacher describes how students formed relationships with one another through an ESI-initiated advisory.

The advisory—that was the first big change that came about through the grant. I feel that it went from there being some resistance [among students], “Why are we doing
these workbooks, these success goals,” and whatnot, to a real conversation, not just with their peers, but really having a real conversation, asking questions, wanting to learn more about themselves, their peers. I feel that there was interest, and I feel that the lines of communication were definitely open… It’s really building a relationship. I feel that we had more of that than we had before.

Many of the young men that we spoke with described the relationships that they developed with one another as hugely impactful. Reflecting on his participation in a peer mentorship program, one student shared:

…meeting different people that turned out to be like family, turned out to be really close relationships. I recommend this program to all of my friends... I feel like when you join, you meet people, and you learn about people from their experiences, and you use it as yours. Your grow as a person with this program... I think we grew as a brotherhood. I think it goes for everybody that we grew a friendship that can last for a lifetime.

Improved relationships amongst students and between students and school staff was a ubiquitous theme across all four years of the initiative. The student quote below is illustrative of how powerful these in-school relationships can be for young men.

When things like that [mentoring] happen, you feel comfortable actually coming to school... You actually want to come to school, because you feel comfortable around the people. You’ll be like, “Oh, I’m just gonna go today because I wanna see my friends”. Some days I be waking up, I be like, I don’t wanna go to school today. I be like, let me just go, cause I know it’s gonna be fun, so let me just go today.

For this student, the relationships that he developed through his mentoring program were what made him want to go to school when he woke up in the morning.

**Early College Preparation**

Across all four years of the initiative, ESI schools reported an increase in the levels of support that they provided to students around post-secondary planning, with a particular emphasis on the 9th and 10th grade. Early college preparation included a wide range of programming and supports such as college tours, advisories focused on college readiness, SAT/PSAT preparation, and college workshops for students and families. The new emphasis on early college support reflected a shift in understandings, mindsets, and beliefs about students that resulted in a stronger
schoolwide commitment to supporting students’ post-secondary goals. Below, a principal describes the importance of emphasizing college readiness in the early years of high school.

_I think getting everybody to realize that if we start planting those seeds early, that then it becomes part of the whole school culture, rather than just suddenly 11th and 12th [grades], now you start working on it. So many of us have worked with 11th graders who, in the second semester, are like, “Oh, I want to go to this school,” and they think that they’re going to pull their GPA up by 12th grade, and it’s heartbreaking to have those conversations. I think when we all, as a staff, talk about everything like that, it helped everybody realize that we’d have to start at an earlier grade._

Educators in ESI schools reported that as they increased the level of college supports for students, their was an explicit change in mindset from one that focused on high school graduation to one that focused on college. Here, a teacher explains this change:

_As a faculty, we’re more on the same page. We definitely understand the importance of promoting a college-going culture, which was not the case three years ago. As much as we wanted kids to go to college, we didn’t understand how little they knew about college. Now I think as a faculty we’re very clear. Our kids need more college talk to get them ready to go._

A guidance counselor discussed how changes as a result of ESI impacted her conversations with students about future planning.

_I would…add to that that even though it is more intensive with the upper grades because they’re closer to the process, I find…we’re more conscious of when you have a discussion with a 9th grader…we no longer just speak to what the requirements are. We continually now address [being] college ready. "Yes, you can graduate from high school with a 65 in math. Oh, but if you really want to be prepared for college, 65’s not going to cut it. You need to get that 80." That discussion is now constant with the 9th and the 10th grades._

In our focus groups with students, they confirmed that their schools were placing a strong emphasis on college readiness, beginning in the early grades. Here, a sophomore student shares how his teachers framed Regents exams as an important antecedent to college acceptance:
They stress the importance of going to college. They start off from saying, "If you don’t get a high score on your Regents, colleges won’t really look at you." They stress everything that will lead up to you getting accepted to a college.

In focus groups, students shared that college trips offered through ESI were particularly influential in increasing their sense that college was a realistic destination for them. Below, a 12th grader reflects on the ways in which the college trips he took through ESI in his freshman and sophomore years of high school motivated him to pursue college.

[It] was a visual aid, how college life would be from the early-on stage…. My first college trip was… to upstate New York, when we visited SUNY Cortland…and Mercy College. We visited a bunch of different schools, and it was really interesting just to see lecture halls, and to see dorms and all of that…That’s where it made me start thinking about where I wanted to go.

ESI schools placed a substantial emphasis on college preparation in the early grades through various types of programming and supports. Findings from our interviews and focus groups suggests that ESI shifted teachers’ mindsets and helped them become more focused on preparing students for college, rather than simply high school graduation. Furthermore, we heard from the educators and students we spoke with that these efforts increased students’ motivation and sense of belonging in college.

Summary

In this chapter, we explored the ways in which educators and students described changes in their day-to-day experiences in school due to ESI. These changes are notable, in part, because they reflect a profound shift in teachers’ mindsets about teaching, learning, and connecting with students. There is also evidence that ESI programs may have influenced students’ beliefs about themselves as well as their relationships with teachers and schooling more generally.

These strike us as important accomplishments to highlight. Shifting mindsets is a key aspect of the theory of change that guides ESI. Additionally, these reported changes to mindsets and attitudes are striking because changes such as these are often the most challenging type of change to effect in schools and potentially one of the most long-lasting (Guskey, 2002). Furthermore, research suggests that positive school culture
and strong in-school relationships are important precursors to improved academic outcomes (Kraft, Marinell, & Yee, 2016; Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, 2014; Bryk, et al., 2010; Thapa et al. 2013; Riegle-Crumb, C. 2010). Evidence indicates that students of color in particular—perhaps most notably Black and Latino young men—often struggle with in-school relationships and feel alienated by their school culture (DiPrete & Buchmann, 2013; Delpit, L. D. 1995). In this sense, what we learned from administrators and educators suggests that ESI schools gained traction in areas that have historically been challenging for Black and Latino male students. That being said, the ultimate target outcomes of ESI were to improve college and career readiness for Black and Latino males. We examine the initiative’s impact on those outcomes in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 6: WHAT IMPACT DID ESI HAVE ON STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES AND OUTCOMES?

As discussed in Chapter 3, the ESI theory of action proposes that participation in ESI activities and supports will improve high school outcomes for Black and Latino males, including their perceptions of school and themselves, their planning for college and careers, and key antecedents to college (such as attendance, credit accumulation, and staying in track for high school graduation). These improvements were theorized to happen both directly, as a result of participation in ESI activities, and indirectly, as a result of enhancing school culture and relationships in ways that support better outcomes for young men of color. Ultimately, improved high school experiences and outcomes were expected to lead to higher rates of college readiness and enrollment for ESI students.

This chapter examines the high school experiences and outcomes of Black and Latino young men who were enrolled in the ESI schools between 2012-2013 and 2015-2016, and compares them with similar students in similar schools that did not have access to ESI. The chapter is organized around five sets of questions directly related to ESI’s effort to change students’ school experience and prepare them for post-secondary education and a career:

- To what extent did ESI increase Black and Latino young men’s participation in activities that are aligned with the initiative’s core domains?
- To what extent did ESI change Black and Latino young men’s experiences and perceptions of their schools and their own abilities?
- To what extent did ESI change Black and Latino young men’s goals and planning for post-secondary education and work?
- What impact did ESI have on Black and Latino young men’s attendance, credit accumulation, high school graduation, and other antecedents to college?
- What impact did ESI have on the rates at which Black and Latino young men enrolled in college immediately following high school graduation?
Figure 7: The Expanded Success Initiative Theory of Action: Outcomes

**Inputs**
- Funding: $250,000 went to each ESI school over the first three years of the four-year initiative
- Autonomy: Schools were encouraged to develop programming that fit their community's needs
- Professional Development: PD included CRE, restorative justice, subject-specific trainings, etc.
- Learning Community: Regular meetings of 40 ESI liaisons (one per school) provide support from central ESI team and opportunities to share promising practices

**School Actions**
- Expand programming, services, and supports for students in these core domains that were underscored by CRE:
  - College and career readiness
  - Restorative justice

**School Culture and Relationships**
- Reduce educators' biases against Black and Latino male students
- Emphasize early and ongoing support for college goals
- Develop culturally relevant curriculum and instruction
- Reduce use of suspensions
- Improve relationships between students, and relationships between students and staff

**Students' High School Experiences and Outcomes**
- Antecedents to College
  - Attendance
  - On-track status and credits earned for graduation
  - NYS Aspirational Performance Measure (APM)
  - Graduation with Regents Diploma
- Future Planning
  - Conversations with adults about college and career
  - Applying for financial aid
  - Applying to college
  - SAT-taking

**Perceptions of School and Self**
- Sense of fair treatment
- Perception of race/gender/cultural climate
- Sense of belonging in school
- Critical thinking
- Academic self-concept

**College Enrollment**

**Problem**
Opportunity gaps leading to a range of disparities in educational outcomes, especially low college readiness among Black and Latino young men
Chapter 2 provides information about the data sources and analytic framework that were used to address each of these questions. The findings presented in this chapter focus primarily on the experiences and outcomes of the Black and Latino young men who began high school in an ESI or a non-ESI comparison school in either the fall of 2012 or the fall of 2013. We were able to follow students in each cohort through the 2015-2016 school year—when they were scheduled to be in 11th or 12th grade. We focus on these students to learn how several years of exposure to ESI influenced their academic trajectories.

The chapter’s main findings examine the experiences and outcomes of Black and Latino male students, on average, in ESI and comparison schools. However, we also look specifically at ESI schools that we characterized as “Promising” and “Struggling,” based on the alignment of their implementation with key ESI tenets, as well as student participation rates—to learn if ESI produced different kinds of impacts in these two sets of schools. The final section presents findings for subgroups of Black and Latino young men identified by their attendance and achievement levels prior to the start of high school.

To What Extent Did ESI Increase Black and Latino Young Men’s Participation in Activities in the Initiative’s Core Domains?

From students’ perspectives, the first stage in the ESI theory of action is their participation and engagement in activities associated with the initiative’s three programming domains—academic support, youth development and college-focused school culture—as well as their exposure to culturally relevant education. Chapter 4 presented findings showing that while most Black and Latino male students in ESI schools reported participating in at least one activity associated with one of these domains, only between a third and half of them reported participating in activities across all of the domains. This suggests that ESI fell short of its aspiration of engaging all Black and Latino young men in the full range of ESI activities.

It is important to emphasize, however, that these findings do not tell us about ESI’s impact on student participation in these kinds of activities. Even relatively low participation rates among students in ESI schools may reflect a significant increase over and above what would have occurred without the initiative’s resources and supports. This section of the chapter tackles the question of whether ESI in fact enhanced students’ exposure to these activities.
Figure 8 summarizes self-reported activity participation rates for Black and Latino young men in ESI schools and the non-ESI comparison schools. Each bar in the figure indicates the percentage of students who participated in at least one activity in each of the three core ESI programming domains (academic supports, youth development and college culture) during the respective grade level. The stars in the figure indicate that the difference between the participation rates in the ESI and non-ESI schools are statistically significant. In general, findings from our analysis of participation in ESI-aligned activities indicate that:

- Black and Latino young men in ESI schools were consistently more likely to participate in activities that the initiative was designed to promote compared to those in non-ESI schools.

Figure 8 indicates that, overall, Black and Latino young men in the ESI schools were more likely than their counterparts in non-ESI comparison schools to report participating in at least one activity associated with all three of the core domains in Grades 9 through 12. More detailed findings presented in Appendix F indicate that, with few exceptions, participation rates in ESI schools outpaced those of non-ESI across the full range of individual activities and activity domains that were included in the surveys.

Figure 8: Participation in Activities in All Three of ESI’s Core Domains, by Grade Level, Among Black and Latino Young Men

![Bar chart showing participation rates](chart.png)

Source: Research Alliance calculations using data from annual surveys administered to students in ESI and comparison schools, Spring 2013 through Spring 2017.

Note: * indicates difference was statistically significant at p < .05. See additional Table and Figure Notes on page 91.
The largest and most consistent differences occurred in students’ participation in college and career preparation activities (including college trips, college advising, and work-based learning) and in youth development activities (including mentoring programs, youth groups, and student advisory programs).

Notably, ESI schools were more likely to provide Black and Latino young men with exposure to college campuses as early as 9th grade and continued to build that exposure through Grade 11.

Figure 8 shows that, while the difference in participation in ESI-aligned activities persisted through Grade 12, the non-ESI schools had started to catch up, closing the gap somewhat between their participation rates and those seen in ESI schools. The more detailed analysis shows that this was particularly true with college advising and college trips, which typically occur later in high school.

The more detailed analysis also indicates that the differences between ESI and non-ESI schools were generally smaller in activities within the academic domain, compared to activities associated with youth development and college culture domains. This occurred despite the fact that Black and Latino young men in ESI schools were more likely to participate in academic support activities (including tutoring programs, Regents exam preparation services, and AP or IB classes) than in activities associated with the other two domains. It may be that most high schools across New York City provide these types of academic supports, and ESI schools may already have been providing access to them, before the initiative began. As a result, perhaps ESI’s investment in this area did not make as substantial a difference, over and above what was already available or could have been made available through other resources. This is consistent with findings presented in the Research Alliance’s report on Year 2 of the initiative, which recommended that ESI schools develop a more explicit focus on academic supports.

Finally, the more detailed analysis shows that Black and Latino young men in ESI schools were more likely to report being exposed to culturally relevant materials in their classes than their counterparts in non-ESI schools, although this difference was statistically significant only in Grades 9 and 11. Somewhat surprisingly given what we heard in interviews about the importance of CRE, less than half of the students in the ESI schools reported being exposed to such materials.
To What Extent Did ESI Change Black and Latino Young Men’s Experiences and Perceptions of Their Schools and Their Own Abilities?

The ESI theory of action suggests that enhanced participation in activities like those discussed above can improve students’ perceptions of the school climate, as well as their perceptions of their own ability to succeed academically. Table 9 on the next page presents self-reported measures of Black and Latino young men’s perceptions of their schools for Grades 9-12.26

In general, the findings indicate that:

- Black and Latino young men in ESI schools reported a stronger sense of fair treatment and belonging than their peers in non-ESI schools, particularly in Grades 11 and 12.

- However, Black and Latino young men’s perceptions of the “racial, gender, and cultural climate” were similar in ESI and comparison schools; a high percentage of Black and Latino young men in both sets of schools rated the cultural climate positively.

While ESI students were more likely to report positive perceptions of fair treatment in all grades, these differences were statistically significant only in Grades 11 and 12. ESI students consistently reported a stronger sense of belonging than comparison students; this was true in 10th, 11th and 12th grade (we did not measure this outcome for 9th graders).

The differences between ESI and non-ESI schools emerged despite the fact that fewer than half of the Black and Latino young men reported feeling positive about their sense of fair treatment and belonging. ESI students being more likely to report positive perceptions of their schools relative to students in comparison schools provides further evidence (in addition to our interview findings) that ESI was able to improve the school climate for Black and Latino young men. Finally, although there were no systematic differences in perceptions of race, gender, and cultural climate between ESI and comparison schools, Black and Latino young men felt generally positive about these aspects of their schools.
Table 9: Perceptions of the School Environment, By Grade Level, Among Black and Latino Young Men

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Outcomes</th>
<th>ESI Schools</th>
<th>Comparison Schools</th>
<th>Estimated Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Sense of Fair Treatment (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th Grade</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th Grade</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th Grade</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>8.6 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th Grade</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>5.3 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Sense of Belonging in School (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th Grade</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>7.8 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th Grade</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>8.6 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th Grade</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>7.5 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Perception of Race/Gender/Cultural Climate (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th Grade</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>81.0</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th Grade</td>
<td>83.2</td>
<td>82.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th Grade</td>
<td>89.4</td>
<td>89.8</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th Grade</td>
<td>88.5</td>
<td>87.1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Schools</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Research Alliance calculations using data from annual surveys administered to students in ESI and comparison schools, Spring 2013 through Spring 2017.

Note: * indicates difference was statistically significant at \( p \leq .05 \). See Additional Table and Figure Notes on page 91.

Our analysis also examined students’ perceptions of their own abilities. We found that:

- Measures of critical thinking and academic self-concept were generally similar for ESI and comparison students, until 12\(^{th}\) grade.

As shown in Appendix F, for self-reported measures of critical thinking and academic self-concept, there was no clear pattern of differences between ESI and non-ESI schools in Grades 9-11. However, in Grade 12, it appears that ESI began to gain traction on students’ academic self-concept and use of critical thinking skills. Black and Latino young men in ESI schools were about 7 percentage points more likely to report positively on these measures than their counterparts in non-ESI schools.
To What Extent Did ESI Change Black and Latino Young Men’s Goals and Planning for Post-Secondary Education and Work?

With its primary goal of preparing Black and Latino young men for college and a career, ESI was designed explicitly to enhance students’ aspirations for the future and to provide exposure to a wide range of future planning activities. The central goals were to both build knowledge about the key steps on the pathway to college and a career and to ensure that students followed through on those steps. Table 10 on the next page presents information about Black and Latino young men’s self-reported educational goals and plans following high school graduation and the steps they took by the end of Grade 12 to realize those plans.27

In general, the findings from these analyses indicate that:

- Black and Latino young men in ESI schools were more likely to report discussing their plans for the future with an adult.

- Nearly 90 percent of Black and Latino young men in both ESI and non-ESI schools planned to earn either a BA or AA degree, and more than two thirds planned to attend college immediately after high school.

- Black and Latino young men in both sets of schools were equally likely to report taking key steps on route to college (e.g., applying for college and being accepted, filling out financial aid paperwork); those in ESI schools were somewhat more likely to report taking SATs.

Table 10 first shows a consistent difference in the frequency with which Black and Latino young men in the ESI schools engaged with adults in their lives about college and careers, compared with students in non-ESI schools. Tables in Appendix F shows that for Grades 9 through 11, the differences between ESI and non-ESI students on separate measures of engagement in college planning and engagement in career planning are both positive and statistically significant.

There are two additional patterns in the findings on college and career planning that should be noted. First, while positive, the difference in engagement with adults in future planning between Black and Latino young men in ESI schools and those in non-ESI schools was not statistically significant in Grade 12. A more detailed indicator presented in Appendix F shows the same muted difference toward the end of high school. This measure, which was only available for the Grade 12 sample, includes
questions about how much support (on a four point scale from “none” to “a lot”) students felt that they received from up to six sources (family, friends, teachers, guidance, counselors, mentors and others). Just over half of both ESI and non-ESI students indicated that they received “a lot” of support from two or more of these sources among students in Grade 12. A close look at these findings shows that there

Table 10: Planning and Preparation for the Future Among Black and Latino Young Men

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Outcomes</th>
<th>ESI Schools</th>
<th>Comparison Schools</th>
<th>Estimated Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Engagement with Adults in Future Planning (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th Grade</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>5.9 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th Grade</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>8.2 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th Grade</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>11.3 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th Grade</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Goals (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree or Higher</td>
<td>78.9</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plans after HS Graduation (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Only</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College and Work</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>50.3</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Only</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>-0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military or Other</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>-2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steps to College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took SAT (%)</td>
<td>84.8</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>8.0 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of College Applications (0-15)</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Financial Aid Exploration (0-3)</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT, Application, and Financial Aid (%)</td>
<td>67.1</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepted to College (%)</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>75.2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Research Alliance calculations using data from annual surveys administered to students in ESI and comparison schools, Spring 2013 through Spring 2017.

Note: * indicates difference was statistically significant at p ≤ .05. See Additional Table and Figure Notes on page 91.
was a slight decline in future planning between Grade 11 and Grade 12 in the ESI schools. At the same time, students in non-ESI schools began to “catch up” to students in ESI schools during Grade 12, which is when the most intensive college and career counseling typically occurs.

A second important pattern in these findings is that in spite of the positive differences, less than half of Black and Latino young men in the ESI schools indicated that they were able to engage with adults in college and career planning at each grade level. This suggests that ESI fell well short of its aspiration to provide all students with a strong college-going culture throughout high school. This is particularly disappointing given that nearly 80 percent of Black and Latino Young men in the ESI schools indicated that they had a goal of completing a four-year college degree; similarly, nearly 80 percent indicated that they planned to start college right after high school.

Table 10 also provides a summary of the key steps toward college that students took during their 12th grade year. It indicates that students in ESI schools were more like to have taken the SATs, a crucial step on the road to college. Yet ESI did not have a systematic effect on the rate at which Black and Latino young men applied for college, pursued financial aid options, or were accepted into college. Students in both ESI and non-ESI schools applied to an average of about five colleges, and more than three quarters of both groups reported being accepted into at least one college.

Finally, although 78 percent of Black and Latino young men in the ESI schools reported being accepted into college, only 63 percent actually enrolled in college the fall after high school graduation, according to the administrative records available for this study. There was a similar fall off among students in the non-ESI schools: 77 percent of Black and Latino young men in non-ESI schools reported that they were accepted but only 59 percent actually enrolled according to administrative records. If the self-reported acceptances are accurate, this represents a sizable rate of attrition for students in both the ESI and non-ESI schools. This suggests the need to learn more about how and why students decide whether or not to enroll in college after having been accepted.
What Impact Did ESI Have on Black and Latino Young Men’s Attendance, Credit Accumulation, and Other Antecedents to College?

In addition to helping Black and Latino young men proceed through the steps necessary to apply for college, ESI aspired to better prepare students for this important transition by keeping them on track for high school graduation and reinforcing the academic credentials that increase the likelihood of being accepted and enrolling in a post-secondary institution. This section focuses on outcomes that serve as important antecedents to college entry, including attendance, credit accumulation, and staying on track for high school graduation and a Regents diploma. Table 11 on the next page summarizes findings from analyses that assess ESI’s impact on these outcomes for Black and Latino young men.

Overall, the key findings from these analyses indicate the following.

- ESI had little or no impact, positive or negative, on student attendance, credit accumulation, staying on track for graduation, suspensions, or mobility.

- Black and Latino young men from both ESI and non-ESI schools had considerable room for improvement, particularly, in average daily attendance and staying on track for a Regents diploma.

Table 11 focuses on rates at which students were on track for graduation during Grades 9, 10 and 11 and on cumulative outcomes (i.e., across Grades 9 through 12) for attendance, credit accumulation, and suspensions. The more detailed analyses presented in the tables in Appendix F also indicates that ESI had little or no systematic impact on these outcomes in each grade. The more detailed analyses show that these outcomes remained relatively flat in the ESI schools over time. And, even when there were improvements for the ESI schools, these improvements were not systematically different from those seen in the non-ESI schools.
Table 11: ESI Impacts on Key Antecedents to College, Among Black and Latino Young Men

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Outcomes</th>
<th>ESI Schools</th>
<th>Comparison Schools</th>
<th>Estimated Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>On Track for Regents Diploma</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 9</td>
<td>55.2</td>
<td>54.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 10</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>-1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 11</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>-1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cumulative Outcomes (Grades 9-12)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Attendance Rate</td>
<td>86.6</td>
<td>86.8</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credits Earned</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>-0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Level 1 Suspensions</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Level 2 Suspensions</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>-0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Schools</strong></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Research Alliance calculations based on data obtained from the NYC Department of Education.
Note: See Additional Table and Figure Notes on page 91.

In addition to ESI’s lack of impact on these outcomes, it is important to note the generally low outcome levels for Black and Latino young men in both the ESI and non-ESI schools. For example, as shown in Appendix H, average attendance rates declined from about 90 percent in Grade 9 to under 83 percent in Grade 12 for both groups of schools. This means that the average Black and Latino young man missed more than a month of school each year. In addition, only 51 percent of students were on track for graduation at the end of Grade 11 (indicated by having earned a minimum of 33 course credits and passed three or more Regents examinations with a score of 65 or higher). These relatively low outcome levels suggest that the ESI schools identified for the project did have substantial room for improvement.

ESI’s focus on school culture and exposing students to culturally relevant education aimed, in part, at creating a positive school climate and minimizing the use of suspensions to address discipline problems. Table 11 indicates that suspension rates for Black and Latino young men ranged between 10 and 15 percent over grade 9 through 12 in both ESI and non-ESI schools. Both groups of schools experienced a slight decline in suspensions during this period, although these decreases were not statistically significant. Table 11 shows slightly lower rates of suspensions for more serious “Level 2” infractions (including fighting and violent behavior) in ESI schools, but again, the difference was not statistically significant.
What Impact Did ESI Have on Black and Latino Young Men’s High School Graduation, College Readiness and Enrollment?

The ultimate payoff to the investments of ESI resources and supports was hypothesized to be higher rates of college enrollment for Black and Latino young men, particularly in four-year colleges. With this in mind, the ESI schools were selected, in part, based on the fact that they had already achieved relatively high graduation rates for Black and Latino male students (60 percent or higher) but still left a substantial share of these students with limited access to college. Table 12 presents the results of analyses that assess ESI’s impact on high school graduation, college readiness, and initial college enrollment rates of Black and Latino young men. In general, we found that:

- ESI had little or no impact, positive or negative, on high school graduation or college enrollment rates.

- Graduation and college enrollment rates for Black and Latino young men in both ESI and non-ESI schools were higher than citywide averages, but these schools still had substantial gaps in outcomes associated with race and gender.

Table 12 on the next page shows that just over two thirds of the Black and Latino young men in both the ESI and non-ESI schools graduated with a Regents diploma within four years of entering high school. However, less than 20 percent of these students met New York State’s college readiness standard (based on Regents exam scores), suggesting that most of these high school graduates will require remediation if they enroll in college. About a quarter of students in both sets of schools enrolled in a four-year college immediately following high school graduation.

Overall, Black and Latino young men in ESI schools had high school graduation, college readiness and college enrollment rates that were very similar to students in comparison schools—and very similar to students who were enrolled in ESI schools prior to the implementation of ESI. For college enrollment, ESI students’ rates were slightly higher than those seen for Black and Latino young men in comparison schools. However, these differences were not statistically significant, and they were driven by small declines in enrollment rates in the non-ESI schools, rather than increases in the ESI schools.
# Table 12: ESI Impacts on High School Graduation, College Readiness and Initial College Enrollment Among Black and Latino Young Men

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Outcomes</th>
<th>ESI Schools</th>
<th>Comparison Schools</th>
<th>Estimated Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High School Graduation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Diploma</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>75.5</td>
<td>-1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regents Diploma</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>67.5</td>
<td>-0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Diploma</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>-0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>College Readiness (NYS APM)</strong></td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>-2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>College Enrollment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any College</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-Year College</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-Year College</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Schools</strong></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Research Alliance calculations based on data obtained from the NYC Department of Education.

**Note:** See Additional Table and Figure Notes on page 91.

On the next page, Table 13 provides some additional context for interpreting the findings presented in Table 12. Table 13 indicates that graduation and college enrollment rates for Black and Latino young men in ESI schools are higher than the citywide average for Black and Latino young men (among those who started 9th grade in 2012). Nonetheless, these rates lag well behind those of Black and Latino young women and White and Asian young men and women.
Table 13: High School Graduation and College Enrollment Rates in All NYC Schools and ESI Schools, By Race and Gender, 2012 9th Grade Cohort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Students</th>
<th>Black and Latino Young Men</th>
<th>Black and Latino Young Women</th>
<th>White and Asian Young Men and Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>All NYC Students</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Diploma</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>66.8</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>88.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regents Diploma</td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>59.7</td>
<td>71.0</td>
<td>85.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Diploma</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Readiness (NYS APM)</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>61.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Enrollment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any College</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>61.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-Year College</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>52.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-Year College</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ESI Students</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Diploma</td>
<td>76.1</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>83.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regents Diploma</td>
<td>69.5</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>74.0</td>
<td>79.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Diploma</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Readiness (NYS APM)</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>38.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Enrollment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any College</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>54.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-Year College</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-Year College</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Research Alliance calculations based on data obtained from the NYC Department of Education.

**Note:** Averages are calculated for students citywide and in ESI schools and are not regression adjusted to account for differences in characteristics or prior achievement. As a result, averages may differ from results that are calculated at the school level and are regression adjusted.

**Exploring the Relationship Between ESI Implementation and ESI Impacts**

The findings presented so far in this chapter reflect averages across the participating ESI schools. As noted at several points in the report, however, ESI was designed as a “research and development” initiative that provided schools with considerable flexibility to develop their own priorities for programming, based on the needs of their students. Chapter 4 noted that there was substantial variation in the specific programs and activities that schools developed or expanded within the ESI framework. Chapter 4 also highlighted a great deal of variation in student participation rates across ESI schools.
With this variation in mind, we extended our assessment of ESI’s impacts by exploring the extent to which prominent differences in implementation were associated with accompanying differences in ESI’s impact on student experiences and outcomes. As discussed in Chapter 4, for the purposes of this supplementary analysis, we identified two groups of ESI schools:

- **Promising Implementation Schools**: Schools that had consistently high or moderate alignment with ESI principles and exhibited relatively high rates of student participation in the core ESI domains (9 ESI schools).

- **Struggling Implementation Schools**: Schools that had low levels of ESI alignment and exhibited the lowest rates of student participation (7 ESI schools).

Our main hypothesis for these analyses was that ESI should have a larger and more positive impact on student outcomes in the “Promising Implementation Schools” compared, at least, to the “Struggling Implementation Schools.” Based on the ESI theory of action, one would expect that higher levels of alignment with ESI principles and higher levels of participation would be associated stronger and more positive impacts on students’ school experiences, on their preparation for college, and ultimately on their transition to post-secondary education. If so, these analyses could suggest specific strategies that district and school leaders might use to maximize the effectiveness of efforts like ESI.

On the other hand, it is possible that higher levels of alignment and participation may simply signal a generally strong and supportive school environment that was available in both ESI and in similar non-ESI schools. In other words, strong implementation of ESI may simply be an artifact of relatively well-functioning schools that were able to provide reasonably strong supports for students with or without ESI resources.

Figure 9 on the next page shows the rates at which Black and Latino young men participated in at least one activity in all three of the key ESI domains. The left side of the figure shows these participation rates for the “Promising Implementation” ESI schools and their non-ESI comparison schools. The right side of the figure shows these participation rates for the “Struggling Implementation” ESI schools and their non-ESI comparison schools. The figure shows that participation rates were considerably higher in the “Promising Implementation Schools” than in the “Struggling Implementation Schools.” More importantly, the ESI programs in the “Promising Implementation Schools” reflected a much larger increase in participation in relation
to their comparison schools. This is consistent with the first stage of our hypothesis—that is, higher levels of alignment and rates of participation were associated with a substantial and much larger increase in exposure to ESI experiences and supports among young men of color.

However, the additional exploratory analysis does not provide evidence that these increases in exposure in turn produced higher impacts on other student outcomes. On the next page, Table 14 presents findings for selected outcomes related to students’ perceptions of their school climate, their future planning, and steps taken toward college. The left section of the table shows the results for the “Promising Implementation” ESI schools and their non-ESI comparison schools. The right section shows results for the “Struggling Implementation” ESI schools and their non-ESI comparison schools.
Table 14: ESI Impacts on Perceptions of the School Environment and Planning for the Future Among Black and Latino Young Men in “Promising Implementation” and “Struggling Implementation” Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Outcomes</th>
<th>Promising Implementation Schools</th>
<th>Struggling Implementation Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ESI Schools</td>
<td>Comparison Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Sense of Fair Treatment (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th Grade</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>33.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th Grade</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>39.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th Grade</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th Grade</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Sense of Belonging in School (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th Grade</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>47.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th Grade</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>43.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th Grade</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>44.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Engagement with Adults in Future Planning (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th Grade</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>32.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th Grade</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th Grade</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>37.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th Grade</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>45.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Goals (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's Degree or Higher</td>
<td>77.5</td>
<td>76.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plans after HS Graduation (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Only</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College and Work</td>
<td>53.2</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Only</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steps to College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took SAT (%)</td>
<td>86.9</td>
<td>75.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. Number of College Applications (0-15)</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Financial Aid Exploration (0-3)</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT, Application, and Financial Aid (%)</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>64.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepted to College (%)</td>
<td>73.1</td>
<td>85.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Research Alliance calculations based on data from the ESI implementation rubric and the annual student survey conducted in ESI and comparison schools, Spring 2013 through Spring 2017.

Note: * indicates difference was statistically significant at p ≤ .05. See Additional Table and Figure Notes on page 91.
On the one hand, the findings presented in Table 14 indicate that some of the differences between “Promising” and “Struggling” ESI implementation schools are the opposite of what one would expect if higher levels of alignment and student participation were more likely to result in stronger impacts on students’ outcomes. For example, the first two sections of Table 14 indicate that ESI in the “Promising Implementation” schools made smaller (and in some cases even a negative) difference in Black and Latino young men’s sense of fair treatment and sense belonging compared to ESI’s impact in the “Struggling Implementation” schools.

On the other hand, it appears that ESI in the “Promising Implementation” schools had a somewhat stronger impact on students’ engagement in future planning than it did in the “Struggling Implementation” ESI Schools. The bottom section of Table 14, while inconclusive, also illustrates a pattern that may be somewhat consistent with the hypothesis connecting stronger implementation with more promising impacts on college access. It shows that Black and Latino young men the “Promising Implementation” ESI schools had a slightly higher likelihood of completing all three steps to college (taking the SAT, completing college applications, and pursuing financial aid) compared to their non-ESI counterparts. Conversely, Black and Latino young men in the “Struggling Implementation” ESI schools had a much lower likelihood of completing these steps, in relation to the comparison group. Nonetheless, Black and Latino young men in both groups of schools were less likely to be accepted into college compared to their non-ESI counterparts.

Finally, Table 15 on the next page presents impacts on cumulative measures of attendance, credit accumulation, and suspensions, as well as on high school graduation and college enrollment rates for each of the two groups of ESI schools. Overall, only one of the estimates was statistically significant, and there is no consistent pattern of impacts across the two groups of ESI schools. The one statistically significant difference occurred in two-year college enrollment for ESI students in the “Struggling Implementation” schools. This stands in contrast to the slight decrease in four-year college enrollment for students in these schools and a modest increase in four-year college enrollment among students in the “Promising Implementation” schools. This may suggest that in the “Promising Implementation” schools, ESI has started to shift college-going patterns away from two-year schools and toward four-year institutions.
Table 15: ESI Impacts on Cumulative Outcomes, Graduation and Initial College Enrollment Among Black and Latino Young Men in “Promising Implementation” and “Struggling Implementation” Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Outcomes</th>
<th>Promising Implementation Schools</th>
<th>Struggling Implementation Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ESI Schools</td>
<td>Comparison Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumulative Outcomes (Grade 9-12)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance (%)</td>
<td>85.5</td>
<td>85.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credits Earned</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Level 1 Suspensions (%)</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Level 2 Suspensions (%)</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduation (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Diploma Regents</td>
<td>71.6</td>
<td>72.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma Local Diploma</td>
<td>63.3</td>
<td>67.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Readiness (NYS APM)</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Enrollment (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any College 4-Year College</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-Year College</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Research Alliance calculations based on data obtained from the NYC Department of Education.
Note: * indicates difference was statistically significant at p < .05. See Additional Table and Figure Notes on page 91.

All of these results should be interpreted with caution. First, very few of the differences between ESI and comparison schools within the two groups of schools were statistically significant. This means that many of the estimated differences, even those that appear to be large, could be due to chance. Second, even in cases where
differences for the “Promising Implementation” schools appear to be larger and more positive than the differences for the “Struggling Implementation” schools, most of these contrasts themselves are not statistically significant. This means that even large differences in impacts between the two groups of schools could be due to chance.

With these cautions in mind, however, the inconsistent pattern of differences provides little overall support for the main hypotheses that motivated this exploratory analysis. In short, the exploratory analysis here does not offer evidence that stronger ESI implementation and activity participation is associated with stronger impacts on student outcomes. This raises important questions about the potential for ESI to produce positive impacts on student experiences and outcomes, even under the most promising conditions. It would be very useful to continue following these schools to see if stronger and more consistent patterns of difference emerge as more students move into and through college.

**Exploring the Relationship between Students’ Prior Achievement and ESI Impacts**

The findings discussed so far focus on average outcomes for all Black and Latino young men in the participating ESI and comparison schools. However, students arrive in high school with a wide range of prior experiences and levels of engagement and performance. Thus, even within schools, there may be a fair amount of variation in the types of supports and services that Black and Latino young men need and receive through ESI, based on their background characteristics and prior educational engagement and performance.

With this in mind, we extended our assessment of ESI impacts to focus on subgroups of Black and Latino young men that were defined by their middle school attendance rates and achievement test scores. Here, we have identified two groups of students:

- **Struggling students**: Those who entered high school with 8th grade ELA and math test scores in the bottom 20 percent for the district or who were chronic absentees in 8th grade (i.e., they had attendance rates below 89 percent).

- **Moderate- to higher-achieving students**: Those who entered high school with 8th grade ELA and math test scores above the 20th percentile and who were not chronic absentees.\(^\text{32}\)
Any differences that emerge from these analyses could point to groups of students who are most likely to benefit from the types of resources and supports offered by ESI. In theory, they could also point to subgroups who could be harmed by the introduction of ESI in ways that take them off track from their current trajectory.

We examined ESI’s impacts for students within these two subgroups. As with the previous analysis, we found no clear pattern of differences across the groups. ESI significantly increased participation in a wide range of ESI-related activities for both struggling students and those in the moderate- to higher-achieving group. However, ESI had little or no consistent or systematic impact on other outcomes for either subgroup, even though the outcome levels were dramatically different for each group. For example, nearly 85 percent of moderate- to higher-achieving ESI students graduated with a Regents diploma, compared with approximately 45 percent of ESI students who were struggling as they entered high school. Similarly, those in the moderate- to higher-achieving group were more than twice as likely to enroll in college, compared with struggling students. Despite these large differences, ESI was not able to move the needle on these or most other outcomes for either group of students.

**Summary**

The findings presented in this chapter point to some important uncertainties about the ESI theory of action and its implementation. On the one hand, ESI increased student participation in a wide range of activities aligned with the initiative’s core domains. ESI also improved students’ perceptions of their schools, particularly in the later grades, and increased their interaction with adults regarding college and career planning. These findings all appear to be consistent with the theory driving ESI.

Yet, on average, ESI did not increase the likelihood of ultimately graduating from high school and enrolling in college. Further, although Black and Latino young men in the ESI schools had graduation and college enrollment rates that were higher than the citywide average for those groups, there was still substantial room for improvement, particularly in regard to closing the substantial differences with their White and Asian peers.

Finally, it is important to note that we found little evidence to suggest that stronger implementation of ESI was associated with higher impacts on key student outcomes. Despite the larger impact on student engagement in ESI-aligned activities, these
schools did not substantially improve the rate at which Black and Latino young men progressed through high school and toward college. This raises challenging questions about the potential for ESI to produce positive impacts on these outcomes, even under the most promising circumstances. Nonetheless, it would be extremely useful to continue following the young men who were exposed to the activities and supports provided through ESI to determine if there are longer-term effects on their transition to college and adulthood. It is possible that gains in Black and Latino male students’ sense of belonging, fair treatment, and (in 12th grade) critical thinking and academic self-concept—while not producing stronger academic outcomes in high school—could yield other benefits for these students in the future.
Our efforts to document, understand, and evaluate ESI may be especially relevant and useful for other districts engaged in similar efforts focused on young men of color. Both the accomplishments and limitations of ESI provide an opportunity for other similar initiatives around the country to think strategically about how they are designing and implementing such efforts. What can the ESI team, the district, and other districts committed to better serving Black and Latino males take away from the story of ESI? Which elements of the initiative were successful or distinctive and may be worth replicating or building on in other districts? And which aspects seem to have limited ESI’s ability to positively impact students on a number of key outcomes?

Key Findings

**ESI produced powerful changes in school culture and relationships.**

ESI accomplished important goals by taking root in a majority of participating schools, changing school culture and relationships in meaningful ways, and leaving behind a legacy that continues to influence policies and practices aimed at Black and Latino young men, both at the district level and within schools. These efforts include an ongoing series of “Critical and Courageous Conversations” around issues of racial equity in schools, large-scale school and student showcases focused on CRE and peer mentoring, and a recent push by NYC’s City Council to expand the Critically Conscious Educators Rising Series, which offers professional development on CRE to teachers.

Considering ongoing conversations about bias in schools, the historical disenfranchisement of Black and Latino students, and longstanding and persistent inequities in school outcomes, these are notable achievements. How was ESI able to accomplish this important set of goals?

- **Changing teachers’ mindsets to provide stronger support for vulnerable students.** ESI went to great lengths to create a more welcoming environment for Black and Latino male students rather than solely trying to address a particular aspect of their academic performance. Indeed, we found that ESI shifted teacher mindsets and beliefs, improved in-school relationships, and positively influenced students’ sense of belonging and fair treatment in their schools. Though previous research suggests that addressing
teacher bias and improving relationships between teachers and students can be important factors in improving student motivation and achievement (Dee & Penner, 2017; Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011; Wells et al. 2011), our study did not show a link to increased academic performance. At the same time, ESI’s ability to improve school culture and relationships is both notable and meaningful on its own, especially considering the historical marginalization of boys of color in schools (Fergus 2010, Noguera, 2008; Mincy, 2006; Howard, 2013; Noguera, & Martin, 2014; Toldson, 2008). Other districts may consider building on the strategies ESI used to achieve this goal as an important first step to addressing students’ needs and serving them as whole individuals.

- **Providing schools with ongoing support.** The ESI Central Team invested considerable time, effort, and resources in developing an infrastructure to support schools’ planning and implementation of ESI. Rather than simply providing money to schools, the Central Team provided ongoing support in the form of feedback on schools’ yearly plans, professional development opportunities, help forming external partnerships, and the creation of a professional learning community via monthly meetings for ESI liaisons. Past research illustrates the important role professional learning communities can play in school improvement (Broadie, K, 2013; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005). Consistent with this, the ESI educators we interviewed attributed many positive changes at their school to insight from these meetings and collaboration with other school leaders. Other districts should consider how they can offer schools effective, ongoing support to execute these types of initiatives.

**ESI did not improve academic performance or college readiness.**

ESI aspired not only to improve relationships and perceptions of the school environment, but also to raise college readiness rates (and other academic outcomes) among Black and Latino males. However, the changes we documented among schools, educators, and students were not, by themselves, enough to increase Black and Latino young men’s academic outcomes, college readiness, or college enrollment. What might account for the lack of impacts in this area, and how might other districts focused on college readiness design and implement efforts that stand the best chance of yielding the desired results?
Could stronger implementation have made a difference? At the outset, the District and the ESI Central Team emphasized the importance of schools driving the improvement process by identifying gaps among students in their own schools and deciding how to use ESI resources to close those gaps. The rationale behind this strategy was that schools best know the needs of their students and how to enact change within their buildings. This decision also ensured a level of buy-in and engagement among schools that might not have existed with a more prescriptive approach. At the same time, this high level of autonomy meant there was wide variation among schools in terms of program design, dosage and quality, and there were no clear benchmarks for student participation. While we did not find evidence that the nine schools with stronger implementation and participation rates had a systematically larger impact on student experiences and outcomes, we recognize that there was room for improvement even among the strongest implementers. On average, fewer than half of the Black and Latino males in ESI schools reported having participated in activities in all three of the initiative’s domains. Schools may have needed to reach many more students, more consistently, to have an impact on outcomes like attendance, graduation rates, or college going. This aspect of the initiative should encourage policymakers to consider ways of both leveraging school-level expertise and providing more directive guidelines or standards for implementing high-quality programs, such as evidence-based rubrics for assessing and improving program quality and concrete goals around program dosage and student participation.

Our data also show that levels of implementation declined after Year 2, as the funding for ESI decreased. Future initiatives might benefit from clearer guidance about how to create policies and structures that can outlast initiative resources, including setting stricter parameters about using funding to build staff capacity in targeted areas rather than relying on costly external partners to implement new programs.

Was the intervention too diffuse and not focused enough on academic supports? ESI’s focus on school culture meant that schools were supporting Black and Latino male students on a number of different fronts (some schools offered up to seven different ESI programs that changed from year to year). And, while ESI appeared to increase students’ exposure to activities in all three domains (and CRE), we found that the difference
between ESI and comparison schools was smaller for activities in the academic domain (largely because of the high number of academic activities in the comparison schools). Broadly speaking, ESI did not seem to substantially change schools’ approach to teaching and learning, outside of the adoption of CRE. For example, most schools did not use ESI as an opportunity to fully revamp curriculum or improve teacher mastery in particular subjects. Previous research suggests that a diffuse set of interventions may not be as impactful as one that is more targeted (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2017; Boylan, 2009). Perhaps a clearer focus on supports tied directly to high school graduation, college readiness, and enrollment (e.g., supports focused on credit accumulation to remain on-track for graduation, SAT taking, college applications, and Regents passing) would have enhanced ESI’s ability to improve those outcomes. Indeed, improving students’ academic trajectories in the face of longstanding educational disparities will likely require a robust set of targeted supports to meet students’ academic needs.

It is also important to note that even though ESI students’ engaged in a range of positive activities, reported a stronger sense of fair treatment and belonging, and had more conversations with adults about college and careers than students in comparison schools, this was not enough to move the needle on college readiness or enrollment. These patterns suggest that we cannot assume, as ESI’s theory of action does, that greater participation in these activities, more college-focused support, and a greater sense of belonging in high school will promote college access and success—at least not on their own. While our study provides evidence that the early part of the ESI theory holds up, the route to improved college readiness is long and complex. There may be a number of mediating factors, both inside and outside of school, that the ESI theory of action overlooked.

ESI represented an unprecedented investment in the educational outcomes of males of color. It was thoughtfully designed, moderately well implemented (particularly in its early years), and positively impacted some important outcomes. While ESI did not increase college readiness and enrollment for Black and Latino male students, it was well suited to changing elements of school culture and students’ experiences in school. If districts are interested in improving school culture for Black and Latino young men, an investment in the types of supports ESI provided makes sense. However, if districts want to focus on improving college readiness and enrollment
rates, the evidence suggests there may be ways of improving upon this model, particularly by creating more targeted interventions that are closely aligned with the intended outcomes.

**Moving Forward**

Too often, education policies don’t outlive election cycles. And when results are mixed or slow to develop, policymakers and the public often lose interest and move on to the next big initiative. But we would argue that real change takes time. Past research indicates that whole-school models and programs often do not result in significant increases in student achievement and, when they do, may require more than four years to have an impact (Gottfredson, et al., 2010; Borman, Dynarski, et al., 2004). It is possible that some schools participating in ESI needed a few more years to strengthen their programs—and that a more mature version of ESI might have a larger impact on student outcomes. For this reason, the Research Alliance aspires to track outcomes for future cohorts of ESI students, as well as longer-term (college and employment) outcomes for the students who were the focus of this report.

More importantly, addressing some of the underlying “opportunity gaps” highlighted in our research (i.e., *Moving the Needle*) and others (Fergus, 2010; Howard, 2013; Miranda, Mokhtar, et al., 2014; Noguera, 2008; Noguera, Hurtado, & Fergus, 2012) may require investment earlier in students’ lives and involving systems beyond schools. Schools and districts alone may be unable to sufficiently counter some of the root causes and longstanding history of educational inequity—disadvantages not simply driven by poverty.³³

We hope this report raises valuable questions and provides useful insights for districts around the country—and their partners—as they work to address the systemic inequalities faced by young men of color and other marginalized students. Creating more equitable school districts is a complex, multifaceted challenge that will require equally complex, multifaceted responses.
Endnotes

1 See State Report Cards, 2016. College enrollment rates here refer to percentage of 18- to 24-year-olds enrolled in 2- or 4-year colleges and universities.

2 It is also important to note that the racial and ethnic designations used in this report—Black and Latino—do not reflect the great diversity that exists within these groups, including differences in income and neighborhood, country of origin, English learner status, and many other characteristics that may influence a students’ outcomes and opportunities. In addition, the statistical averages we report here obscure the fact that many Black and Latino young men are succeeding in high school, college, and beyond.

3 In the years leading up to ESI, high school graduation rates for Black and Latino males increased by 14 percentage points—from 43 and 45 percent, respectively, among those who entered high school in 2002, to 57 and 59 percent, respectively, among those who entered in 2006. Yet, among the latter cohort (i.e., students scheduled to graduate in 2010), only 9 percent of Black males and approximately 11 percent of Latino males graduated “college ready,” based on the New York State Education Department’s Aspirational Performance Measure, which was defined as earning a New York State Regents Diploma and receiving a score of 80 or higher on a Mathematics Regents examination and a score of 75 or higher on an English Regents examination.

4 “On-track status” is an indicator developed by the Research Alliance that defines students as “on-track for graduating with a Regents diploma” if, by the end of 9th grade, they have passed at least one Regents exam and accumulated at least 10 course credits (of the 44 required to graduate) (Kemple, Segeritz, & Stephenson, 2013).

5 CRE attempts to engage and empower students by incorporating their cultural backgrounds in classrooms and focusing on issues that are relevant to their lives (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2000; Howard, 2006).

6 See for example ESI in Context.

7 In addition to the implementation and impact studies, the Research Alliance conducted in-depth case studies in five ESI schools in order to learn about the specific practices they have adopted as a result of ESI. Findings from the case studies are presented in other reports and practice guides.

8 The data collection instruments used for the implementation study are available upon request from the Research Alliance for New York City Schools.


10 Schools applied in Spring 2012; the eligibility criteria applied to the 2010-2011 school year.

11 Progress Report grades were assigned to schools by the NYCDOE and intended to provide a snapshot of the school’s performance during the previous year in five areas: (1) student progress, (2) student performance, (3) school environment, (4) college and career readiness, and (5) closing the achievement gap (New York City Department of Education, 2013b). Progress Report
Grades have since been replaced School Quality Snapshots.

12 Eligible schools that submitted an “intent to apply” letter were awarded a planning grant of $3,000 to prepare their applications in “design teams” at their school.

13 Network representatives were barred from scoring applications from schools in their own network.

14 The group of non-ESI schools includes all other NYC schools serving 9th graders with the exception of the nine specialized high schools, district 79, district 75, and schools serving fewer than 25 students. District 79 is comprised of alternative high schools, and District 75 is made up of schools designed to meet the needs of special education students.

15 Please note that when we compare Black and Latino populations across the two groups of schools, we limit the non-ESI group to schools with at least 25 Black and Latino male students or those whose student populations are at least 25 percent Black and Latino male. The sample size for this group of schools is 256.

16 ESI design teams at each school were typically comprised of the principal, an assistant principal, several teachers, other non-instructional staff members, and a few students.

17 The ESI Central Team also created an online platform (the ESI Wiki), which 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. However, few schools utilized this resource, opting instead for the newsletters and liaison meetings.

18 As discussed in Chapter 2, our instruments were designed purposefully to capture new programming as well as enhancements to existing activities spurred by ESI. We did not focus on existing programming that was not influenced by ESI. In some cases, however, it was difficult to pinpoint the timing of a program’s development and the level of ESI’s level of influence, depending on the interviewee and their knowledge of the school.

19 Previous reports described implementation “fidelity” and “intensity.” However, because ESI was not a prescriptive model, the term “alignment” with ESI’s broader goals seemed more appropriate than “fidelity,” which suggests a set of specific dosage benchmarks. We also exclude intensity from our discussion because it provided less information about the variation between schools and over time.

20 We changed our implementation rubric after Year 1, preventing us from including those scores in our year-to-year comparisons.

21 The higher participation rates in the later grades may also reflect changes in the sample of students responding to the surveys. Some student respondents from earlier grades may have dropped out of high school or failed to complete a survey in later grades. These students are more likely to have relatively low participation rates.

22 These are changes that were consistently reported across years and across at least a quarter of ESI schools, though not all schools reported changes in all four areas during each year.

23 Advisory classes were typically single-gender and consisted of 10-15 students and one or two adults. Some advisories focused primarily on college and career
readiness and included a structured curriculum. Many provided spaces for groups of students to discuss a variety of topics, including goal setting, communication skills and conflict resolution, bullying, and transcript review/graduation requirements. With or without this kind of substantive focus, advisories were designed to provide a safe space for students to speak openly about personal and academic challenges.

Appendix F provides more detailed findings from the analysis, including rates of participation in individual activities and programming domains. These tables also provide information on the percentage of students who reported that their teachers provided culturally relevant content and materials in their classes.

These reflect students’ scheduled grade levels based on when they first entered high school. This means, for example, that any students who were retained in Grade 10 would be counted in the Grade 11 sample, representing their third year of high school.

Chapter 2 and Appendix D provide more detailed information about the components of these measures. Table A-3 in Appendix A provides more detailed findings from the analysis, including self-reported indicators of critical thinking and academic self-concept.

Appendix F provide more detailed findings from our analysis of students’ plans and goals following high school and their efforts to reach those goals.

Because data were only available through the Fall of 2016, these results are limited to the students who entered high school in 2012 (the first year of ESI). Although we cannot report findings about ESI’s impact on high school graduation or college enrollment for the 2013 cohort, it should be noted that the pattern of results for key antecedents to graduation (e.g., attendance, credit accumulation, on-track status, shown in Table 11) are similar for both the 2012 and 2013 cohorts of students.

College readiness is represented by the NYS Aspirational Performance Measure—having earned a Regents diploma and passed a math Regents exam with a score of 80 or higher and an English Regents exam with a score of 75 or higher.

The remaining 21 ESI schools were classified as “developing” indicating that they exhibited a mix alignment and participation levels.

Five of the nine “Promising Implementation” schools and five of the seven “Struggling Implementation” schools had survey data for these analyses.

We attempted to identify a subgroup of students with 8th grade ELA and math test scores in the top 20th percentile. However, this subgroup was too small to produce reliable impact estimates.

See The Equality of Opportunity Project
Additional Table and Figure Notes

**Variable Definitions and Notes**

**Level 1 and Level 2 Suspensions**: Level 1 Suspensions are suspensions for infractions classified as disruptive, disorderly, or non-compliance. Level 2 Suspensions are suspensions for infractions classified as aggressive or violent.

**New York State Aspirational Performance Measure (APM)**: Students meet the APM if they earn a New York State Regents Diploma and receive a score of 80 or higher on a Mathematics Regents examination and a score of 75 or higher on an English Regents examination.

**Regents and Local Diploma**: See Graduation Requirements

**Z-scores**: Z-scores are calculated as the difference between a student’s scaled score and the citywide average scaled score, divided by the citywide standard deviation of scaled scores. They are calculated by grade level and school year.

**Notes for Figure 5 and Table 8**

Annual survey data are available for two cohorts of first-time 9th graders: those who began high school in 2012 and those who began high school in 2013. Grade 9 participation data are only available for the 2013 cohort, and Grade 12 participation data are only available to the 2012 cohort. Grade 10 and 11 participation data are available for both the 2012 and 2013 cohorts. Measures reflect self-reported participation in one or more activities in each domain and in all three domains. See Table 3 for a list of activities that comprised each of the three programming domains. Participation rates are calculated at the school level and then averaged across schools.

**Notes for Figure 8**

See information about survey data and participation measures in notes for Figure 5 and Table 8. Differences in participation rates between ESI and comparison schools are regression adjusted to account for differences associated with student demographic characteristics and middle school attendance and performance reflected in English language arts and math test scores. The analysis also accounts for the clustering of students within schools and cohorts. A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between the ESI and comparison schools. Statistical significance of differences in participation rates between ESI and comparison schools is indicated as * = p ≤ 0.05.

**Notes for Table 9**

Annual survey data are available for two cohorts of first-time 9th graders: those who began high school in 2012 and those who began high school in 2013. Grade 12 measures are only available for the 2012 cohort. With the exception of the Grade 9 measure of “Sense of Belonging in School,” Grade 9, 10 and 11 measures are available for both the 2012 and 2013 cohorts. See Appendix D for a list of survey items that comprise each measure. Differences for each measure between ESI and comparison schools are regression adjusted to account for differences associated with student demographic characteristics and middle school attendance and performance reflected in English language arts and math test scores. The analysis also accounts for the clustering of students within schools and cohorts. A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between the ESI and comparison schools. Statistical significance of differences for each measure between ESI and comparison schools is indicated as * = p ≤ 0.05.

**Notes for Table 10**

Annual survey data are available for two cohorts of first-time 9th graders: those who began high school in 2012, and those who began high school in 2013. Unless otherwise indicated, the measures presented reflect self-reported information from Grade 12, which are only available for the 2012
cohort. Grade 9, 10 and 11 measures are available for both the 2012 and 2013 cohorts. See Appendix D for the survey items that comprise the measure of “Positive Engagement with Adults in Future Planning.”

Differences for each measure between ESI and comparison schools are regression adjusted to account for differences associated with student demographic characteristics and middle school attendance and performance reflected in English language arts and math test scores. The analysis also accounts for the clustering of students within schools and cohorts. A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between the ESI and comparison schools. Statistical significance of differences for each measure between ESI and comparison schools is indicated as * = p ≤ 0.05.

Notes for Table 11 and Table 12
See Appendix G for information on the statistical models used to generate the impact estimates. A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between the ESI and comparison schools. Statistical significance of differences for each measure between ESI and comparison schools is indicated as * = p ≤ 0.05.

Notes for Figure 9
Annual survey data are available for two cohorts of first-time 9th graders: those who began high school in 2012, and those who began high school in 2013. Grade 9 participation data are only available for the 2013 cohort, and Grade 12 participation data are only available to the 2012 cohort. Grade 10 and 11 participation data are available for both the 2012 and 2013 cohorts. Measures reflect self-reported participation in one or more activities in each domain and in all three domains. See Table 3 for a list of activities that comprised each of the three programming domains. Differences between ESI and comparison schools are regression adjusted to account for differences associated with student demographic characteristics and middle school attendance and performance reflected in English language arts and math test scores. The analysis also accounts for the clustering of students within schools and cohorts. A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between the ESI and comparison schools. Statistical significance of differences for each measure between ESI and comparison schools is indicated as * = p ≤ 0.05.

Notes for Table 14
Annual survey data are available for two cohorts of first-time 9th graders: those who began high school in 2012, and those who began high school in 2013. Unless otherwise indicated, the measures presented in the table reflect self-reported information from Grade 12, which are only available for the 2012 cohort. Grade 9, 10 and 11 measures are available for both the 2012 and 2013 cohorts. See Appendix D for a list of survey items that comprise the measures. Differences for each measure between ESI and comparison schools are regression adjusted to account for differences associated with student demographic characteristics and middle school attendance and performance reflected in English language arts and math test scores. The analysis also accounts for the clustering of students within schools and cohorts. A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between the ESI and comparison schools. Statistical significance of differences for each measure between ESI and comparison schools is indicated as * = p ≤ 0.05.

Notes for Table 15
See Appendix G for information on the statistical models used to generate the impact estimates. A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between the ESI and comparison schools. Statistical significance of differences for each measure between ESI and comparison schools is indicated as * = p ≤ 0.05.
References


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The Research Alliance for New York City Schools conducts rigorous studies on topics that matter to the City’s public schools. We strive to advance equity and excellence in education by providing nonpartisan evidence about policies and practices that promote students’ development and academic success.