Preparing Black and Latino Young Men for College and Careers:
A Description of the Schools and Strategies in NYC’s Expanded Success Initiative

Sarah Klevan
Adriana Villavicencio
Suzanne Wulach
November 2013
Preparing Black and Latino Young Men for College and Careers:
A Description of the Schools and Strategies in NYC’s Expanded Success Initiative

Sarah Klevan
Adriana Villavicencio
Suzanne Wulach

November 2013
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank Micha D. Segeritz and Dyuti Bhattacharya for their technical assistance and support on the analytic work involved in this report. In addition, we would like to thank E. Christine Baker-Smith, Brandon Guidry, and Lori Nathanson, who participated in reviews of this work. Our colleagues contributed insights that led to substantial improvements at different stages in the development of this report. Our Executive Director, James Kemple, provided critical guiding questions, advice, and commentary throughout the development and production of the report. We would also like to thank Paul Forbes, Hector Calderon, Jevon Williams, and Lillian Dunn at the NYC DOE for promptly providing all of the materials needed to produce this report and for their helpful feedback.

We would like to acknowledge our communications team, Chelsea Farley and Shifra Goldenberg. Their editing and formatting contributions have made the report more coherent and accessible. We thank them for patiently reviewing many iterations, with a keen attention to detail.

Finally, we would like to thank The Fund for Public Schools for generously supporting the Research Alliance evaluation of the Expanded Success Initiative.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In August 2011, New York City launched the Young Men’s Initiative (YMI)—a three-year, $127 million effort to improve outcomes for Black and Latino males. Funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies, the Open Society Foundations, and a number of city agencies, YMI is the largest effort of its kind in the country. It supports programming in four areas—health, employment, the justice system, and education—with the overarching goal of helping Black and Latino young men “build stronger futures for themselves and their families.”

The bulk of YMI’s education effort is the Expanded Success Initiative (ESI), which provides funding and technical support to 40 high schools to help them improve college and career readiness among their Black and Latino male students. In NYC, while graduation rates have steadily increased across all racial and ethnic groups, gaps remain between the graduation rates of Black and Latino males and their White and Asian counterparts. There are even larger gaps when it comes to college readiness. Among young men of color who entered as freshman in 2006, only about one in ten graduated ready for college-level work, based on the New York State Aspirational Performance Measure. The hope is that ESI will boost college and career readiness, as well as other outcomes, at the 40 participating schools—and that it will point to successful approaches that could be expanded across the district.

The Research Alliance for New York City Schools, in collaboration with MDRC, is conducting a mixed-method, longitudinal evaluation of ESI’s implementation as well as its impact on a range of academic and non-academic outcomes. The evaluation extends to December of 2016, allowing us to observe the development and refinement of ESI over four school years and to follow and assess its impacts for at least one cohort of 9th-grade students through their scheduled high school graduation (we will follow three additional cohorts of 9th graders through the 2015-2016 school year).

This executive summary presents highlights from our first report on the ESI evaluation, Preparing Black and Latino Young Men for College and Careers: A Description of the Schools and Strategies in NYC’s Expanded Success Initiative (see textbox on the next page for other publications in the series). The report describes the key components of ESI, the 40 schools that were selected to receive funding, the supports that were already available in these schools, and the strategies that they planned to implement.
in the initiative’s first year. We hope this baseline analysis informs the NYC Department of Education (DOE) as it manages ESI in the 2013-2014 school year, and that it may serve as a guidepost for schools trying to improve or build upon ESI programming.

What Is ESI?

ESI is an investment in 40 high schools that have already demonstrated relative success in graduating Black and Latino young men, but have not achieved the same level of success with college readiness rates for the same population. Schools were selected through a competitive application process—the ESI Design Challenge. To be eligible to apply, schools had to meet three criteria: (1) student enrollment that includes at least 35 percent Black and Latino males, with at least 60 percent of students qualifying for free or reduced price lunch, (2) a four-year graduation rate above 65 percent, and (3) an “A” or “B” on the latest high school Progress Report. A total of 81 schools in the district met these criteria and were invited to apply; 57 schools ultimately submitted applications; and 40 schools were selected to participate.

Other Reports Related to the Research Alliance Evaluation of the Expanded Success Initiative (ESI)

Moving the Needle: Exploring Key Levers to Boost College Readiness Among Black and Latino Males in New York City (July 2013)

- While not part of the evaluation, this report was developed to inform the initiative by examining the trajectory of NYC’s Black and Latino young men on their path to college, particularly the points along that path where schools might provide more effective support. It describes college-related outcomes and other indicators that help predict college readiness, as well as key contextual factors—or “opportunity gaps”—that influence the educational outcomes and experiences of young men of color.

Year 1 summary report on ESI implementation and impact (Winter 2013)

- Findings from ESI’s first year, with a focus on initial challenges implementing intervention components across 40 sites. We will explore opportunities and challenges that schools faced during program rollout, as well as the initiative’s cost in its first year.

Year 2 summary report (Winter 2014)
Year 3 summary report (Winter 2015)
Year 4 summary report (Winter 2016)

- These annual reports will track ESI’s progress, focusing on the challenges of continued implementation, further cost analysis, results from student survey, and an analysis of ESI’s ongoing impact on student outcomes.
These schools can use initiative funding to enhance or expand existing efforts or to develop new strategies aimed at better engaging Black and Latino young men and preparing them for a successful transition to post-secondary education and work. ESI supports programming in three broad domains: academics, youth development, and school culture. By strengthening schools’ practices in these three areas, ESI’s designers hope to increase the number of Black and Latino young men who graduate at college- and career-ready levels, while identifying successful practices that can be adopted by other schools throughout the City.

Do ESI Schools’ Plans Align With the Design and Goals of the Initiative?

The short answer is yes. Our analysis of ESI schools’ applications and Year 1 work plans showed that, with a few important exceptions, schools’ planned work matches up with the goals of the initiative:

- **School plans are well aligned with ESI’s theory of action:** The theory of action driving ESI centers on integrating three different domains—academics, youth development, and school culture—to increase college readiness. In all but two schools, strategies from all three domains were well represented in the work plans. ESI’s Design Challenge also encouraged schools to create a balance between expanding existing programs and creating new ones, which a majority of schools did. On average, ESI schools were slightly more apt to propose enhancing academic and school culture strategies (rather than launching new ones), whereas they were more likely to propose creating new programs in youth development. Some of the most common strategies (either enhanced or new) center on curriculum, professional development, mentoring, and college and career supports. (See Figure ES-1 on the next page.)

- **School plans are driven by individual school’s needs and resources:** While the DOE provided schools with an overarching framework and suggested practices in each of the three domains, it refrained from being overly prescriptive, allowing schools to come up with their own plans to fit the needs of their particular school community. Consequently, we saw wide variability across the 40 schools in the specific strategies they plan to employ.
Figure ES-1: Strategies Planned in ESI Schools

Source: Research Alliance analyses of ESI work plans and applications.
Note: See textbox on page 17 and Appendix C for detailed explanations of how we defined and identified strategies, and a full list of ESI strategies.
Some key strategies were underrepresented: Several strategies that were featured in the ESI Design Challenge—and highlighted as potentially important in our recent report, *Moving the Needle: Exploring Key Levers to Boost College Readiness Among Black and Latino Males in New York City*—were not evident in most schools’ work plans. These included wraparound services, attendance, behavior supports, and family outreach. Providing ESI schools with more information, resources, or partnering organizations that specifically address these underrepresented strategies could boost the initiative’s odds of success.

**Is There Potential to Apply ESI More Broadly?**

By focusing ESI on relatively high-performing schools, the initiative’s designers hoped to “reach a new bar” in terms of postsecondary outcomes and leverage the capacities and best practices developed in relatively successful schools to effect change across the district. To understand the potential for scaling up strategies developed in ESI, it is important to know how ESI schools compare to other high schools in NYC. Thus, the report provides detailed comparisons of ESI schools and non-ESI 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. We found that:

- **ESI schools are generally comparable to other schools**: ESI and non-ESI schools differed in expected ways, given the criteria for participation in the initiative. ESI schools enrolled a higher proportion of Black and Latino male students, had a higher percentage of students who receive free or reduced price lunch, and slightly outperformed non-ESI schools in terms of graduation rates. But, overall, with a few exceptions, ESI schools looked very similar to non-ESI schools on school-level characteristics and student demographics. For instance, they enroll comparable numbers of special education students and students who are overage for their grade, and they are similar in size and configuration. This overall resemblance has positive implications for the potential to scale up successful programs and apply strategies developed in ESI to a larger body of schools.
Other aspects of ESI’s design should also inform opportunities for broader application:

- **The initiative has been characterized by strong support and infrastructure:** ESI is not solely a funding source enabling schools to add programs; rather, it is a mechanism by which schools can critically assess the needs of their Black and Latino male students, implement strategies that are well integrated into their existing programs, and reevaluate new strategies and programs from year to year. In the start-up of ESI, the DOE provided every school with support in the development and multiple revisions of their plans for using ESI funding. They also provided an online platform and regular email communication with information about deadlines, trainings and workshops, and vendors. In addition, members of the ESI team visited schools and offered targeted professional development, in areas like culturally relevant pedagogy, throughout Year 1 (which we will describe in our next report). Successfully launching a program like ESI requires more than funding. A strong infrastructure of personnel and support are critical to ensure that school staff have the resources they need to expand existing strategies and get promising new ones off the ground.

- **It may take time to see results:** Ultimately, the question of whether it is advisable to scale up ESI’s approach will depend on its ability to produce positive impacts for students. A strong part of ESI’s design is that it extends through the scheduled graduation year of the first set of 9th grade students receiving ESI-funded supports and services. Examining students’ experiences and outcomes over four years and providing feedback to schools along the way will create opportunities to refine programming and should increase the likelihood that ESI achieves its goals. While test scores and four-year graduation rates will be important measures of success, other outcomes matter as well. To that end, our evaluation is also investigating ESI’s effects on students’ belief in their ability to succeed and aspirations for the future. By examining a wide set of outcomes and carefully assessing how services and supports are implemented, we will be able to say which aspects of ESI should be replicated, for whom, and under what conditions.

ESI’s aims are highly relevant in the context of an increasing national focus on supporting Black and Latino students more effectively. At this point in our
evaluation, many more questions are raised than answered. For example, how do schools’ work plans differ from their actual implementation? What obstacles will schools face as they attempt to implement these strategies? Will schools with more emphasis on any one of the domains have more effective implementation—or better results? Future reports will explore these and other important questions.

Executive Summary Notes


3 According to New York State’s Aspirational Performance Measure, students are deemed college ready if they earn a Regents or Advanced Regents diploma within five years of starting high school and score a 75 on the English Regents exam and an 80 on a math Regents. The Research Alliance is currently engaged in work to help create better measures of college readiness.

4 Schools applied in Spring 2012; eligibility criteria applied to the 2010-2011 school year.
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 non-partisan evidence about policies and practices that promote students’ development and academic success.