



# IMPROVING ACADEMIC READINESS FOR COLLEGE: A GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS

Many educators around the country are deeply committed to serving their Black and Latino male students and helping provide the support they need to pursue postsecondary education. But relatively few resources offer practical guidance about how to approach this work.

*Improving Academic Readiness for College: A Guide for Educators* is one of several guides produced by the Research Alliance for New York City Schools as part of our [evaluation of the City's Expanded Success Initiative \(ESI\)](#). ESI created opportunities for participating high schools to try new strategies (or expand existing programs) aimed at increasing college and career readiness for Black and Latino male students.

[The guides](#) cover approaches that principals and teachers across ESI high schools have identified as important to helping young men of color

reach—and be well prepared for—college. (Other topics include Early Exposure to and Preparation for College, Culturally Relevant Education, and Creating Supportive Bonds of Brotherhood).

Drawing on interviews and observations in five ESI high schools, each guide begins by briefly describing one of these approaches to boosting college readiness and why schools are using it. The guides then explain *how* individual schools have implemented that strategy, including concrete examples, tips, and tools. Each guide also provides a list of discussion questions and resources for educators.

Together, these materials are designed to inform educators in NYC and beyond as they work to develop innovative programs and services for Black and Latino male high school students.

## What Does It Mean to Be “College Ready”?

College readiness involves a broad set of skills and experiences that students need in order to transition to—and succeed in—a college environment. While academic preparation is not the *only* element of college readiness, it is an *essential* one. Some content knowledge, as well as strong study habits, the ability to write in long form and comprehend complex reading material, and basic research skills, for instance, are necessary for succeeding in most college classes. Another important aspect of academic readiness is whether students are eligible to enroll in college without taking remedial courses. For many NYC students who enroll in the City University of New York (CUNY) system, this is determined by their scores on New York State’s Regents exams.

## Why Focus on Academic Readiness?

While high school graduation rates have continued to rise for males of color in New York City over the last decade, very few of these students are leaving high school with the requisite academic skills to succeed in college.<sup>i</sup> Consequently, many young men of color who do enroll in college must participate in remedial education prior to taking credit-bearing courses. This is troubling because less than a quarter of students who enroll in remedial college coursework graduate college within eight years.<sup>ii</sup> The widespread lack of academic readiness contributes to racial and ethnic gaps in college degree attainment: Nationally, only 26 percent of Black males and 18 percent of Latino males earn an associate degree or higher, compared to 41 percent of students overall.<sup>iii</sup>

One especially strong predictor of success in college is having completed college preparatory math in high school.<sup>iv</sup> However, high school students don’t always have access to these classes. In fact, a large proportion of Black and Latino students attend high schools that don’t offer Algebra II.<sup>v</sup> Focusing on academic preparation, and math in particular, is an important part of ensuring that students not only enroll in college, but have the skills to succeed when they are there.

The schools highlighted in this guide have attempted to address these challenges by bolstering academic supports available to their students and increasing the academic rigor of their classes.

This guide was authored by Tony Laing and Adriana Villavicencio.

The authors would like to express their sincere appreciation to the schools featured in the guides: **ACORN Community High School, East Bronx Academy for the Future, High School for Law and Public Service, Manhattan Bridges High School, and Queens Vocational and Technical High School.** We are especially grateful to the staff members who shared their time and insights: Corey Alexander, Alexandra Brown, Melissa Burg, Naoimie Gonzalez, George Lock, Hegal Martinez, Mirza Sanchez Martinez, Andrea Piper, Nicholas Politis, Miriam Rosa, Sarah Scrogin, and Claude Stuart.

We would also like to thank Paul Forbes, Lillian Dunn, Elise Corwin, and Richard Haynes, the members of the NYC Department of Education’s ESI team, for their thoughtful input. Finally, we are grateful for the contributions of our Research Alliance colleagues, James Kemple, Chelsea Farley, Shifra Goldenberg, Linda Tigani, Stefano Biguzzi-Velcich, and Rory Santaloci.

# SUMMER BRIDGE TO HIGH SCHOOL

## HIGH SCHOOL FOR LAW AND PUBLIC SERVICE

To help prepare students to transition from middle to high school, the High School for Law and Public Service (HSLPS) offers incoming 9<sup>th</sup> graders a week-long “summer bridge” program in early August. The school sends families a postcard about the program in late June, including a self-addressed, stamped RSVP card. The school also sends a follow-up letter and calls families to boost participation. HSLPS leadership sees summer bridge as the first step toward academic readiness for college, because it makes sure that students start off high school on the right track. Indeed, we know that performance in 9<sup>th</sup> grade is an important predictor of high school graduation.<sup>vi</sup> Several promising strategies emerged from HSLPS’s summer bridge program:

### Offer a well-rounded experience.

The summer bridge program provides a combination of Algebra I, sports, and classes focused on general skills needed for high school success, such as time management and organizational skills. HSLPS brings summer bridge students on a college trip on the final day of the program, which also incentivizes participation.

### Familiarize students with their new school setting.

Summer bridge gives participants an early start on getting to know their peers and some of their teachers. Staff report that the students who participate in the program begin 9<sup>th</sup> grade better acclimated to high school than their peers who didn’t participate.

### Cultivate student leaders.

According to teachers, because summer bridge students benefit from an easier transition to high school, they come to view themselves as leaders within their grades. These students are able to help others who didn’t attend the summer bridge program, serving as ambassadors for the school’s culture among their peers. Later in high school, HSLPS creates formal opportunities for students to play a leadership role. For example, in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, they can become peer mentors to incoming 9<sup>th</sup> graders. One staff member noted that many summer bridge students do, in fact, take this path.

### Link to high school coursework and the path to college.

Staff at HSLPS describe the summer bridge program to students and families as a conduit to their 9<sup>th</sup> grade college-prep course, Core Pathways (see page 5). This allows HSLPS to emphasize the importance of college from very early on in students’ high school careers.

“The summer bridge was [about] transitioning—getting them into high school and [setting] expectations we have as a school and then getting them... **acclimated to the school culture sooner rather than later.** What we have seen is that they come in very comfortable in their setting.”  
– HSLPS Assistant Principal

# SUMMER BRIDGE TO HIGH SCHOOL

## MANHATTAN BRIDGES HIGH SCHOOL

Manhattan Bridges offers incoming 9<sup>th</sup> grade students the chance to participate in Summer Gateway Academy, a six-week summer bridge program during July and August, which focuses on math and science. While the program includes youth development components, its primary goal is to prepare students for academic success. It encourages students to perceive the transition to high school as one that will require a more pronounced level of effort and to consider high school coursework as explicit preparation for college.

### **Distinguish course offerings from the academic year.**

Because it can be difficult to attract students to a summer program and keep them engaged, the staff at Manhattan Bridges tries to make summer coursework as interesting as possible. For example, Summer Gateway Academy offers a class in robotics, which allows students to apply math and science through fun, hands-on projects. The summer program also prioritizes collaboration; students regularly present their work to peers in small and large groups.

### **Inform better class placements for the fall.**

At the end of the Summer Gateway Academy, students take a math diagnostic test. The results help teachers determine which math class is most appropriate for entering students. This strategy allows the school to be responsive—both to students who need extra support and those who should receive more challenging coursework (a gap the school had identified in previous years). Educators reported that students who do not take the diagnostic at this stage are more likely to change math classes in the middle of the academic year.



# TEACHING CORE SKILLS IN 9<sup>TH</sup> GRADE

## HIGH SCHOOL FOR LAW AND PUBLIC SERVICE

All HSLPS 9<sup>th</sup> graders take a course called Core Pathways, which is aimed broadly at preparing students for college and careers. HSLPS teachers developed the Core Pathways curriculum by asking themselves, “What skills do our students need to succeed in college that are not taught in regular academic classes?” They came up with a list of foundational skills that were lacking for many incoming students, particularly boys.

According to one staff member, “[students] in wealthier districts often enter high school with these skills fairly well developed,” yet many HSLPS students had limited opportunities to acquire and practice these skills. Students attend Core Pathways once a week, in lieu of an advisory period, for the entire year. Students rotate through all six modules by the end of the year. The six modules—each led by a different teacher—are:

- **Type-it**, which builds students’ word processing/typing skills;
- **Code-it**, which helps students develop proficiency in computer coding, math, and technology-related skills;
- **Lex-it**, which teaches students about the law and social justice through current events, with a focus on oral debate as well as writing to persuade and make an argument;
- **Plan-it**, which begins to prepare students for the college application process through such activities as a college major scavenger hunt, a career interest survey, mock college admission panels, and case studies examining different student experiences in college. Ninth graders also attend college trips while enrolled in this module;
- **Present-it**, which helps students develop public speaking skills through formal and informal debates; and
- **Resolve-it**, which focuses on students’ social-emotional learning, in particular, character development, communication skills, and conflict resolution.

Several goals are central to the Core Pathways approach:

### **Help students develop skills for life beyond high school.**

As one teacher put it, the skills developed in Core Pathways will matter for students, “when they go on to college, and in life, too.” By engaging 9<sup>th</sup> graders in clear, ongoing conversations about what they need to do well in college and the workforce, Core Pathways aims to help them focus on college as a goal from the beginning of high school. School leaders believe these early discussions are paying off. One explained, “Because of the summer bridge and then the Core Pathways... I find that they come in taking high school a little bit more seriously than they might have, had they not had that support for the first year that they’re here.”

### Schedule in “Prime Time.”

When HSLPS first offered Core Pathways, it was scheduled during the first and last period of the school day. As a result, according to staff, attendance was low and students were under the impression that the classes were less important or “something extra.” Now, the classes are offered during 3<sup>rd</sup> period.

### Facilitate student-led instruction.

Core Pathways modules include many student-led conversations and student-run projects and involves students in the design of the classes. For example, after the first year that HSLPS offered the course, staff made changes to the curriculum based on student feedback. Students fill out a survey at the end of each module, which helps keep them engaged in their own learning and provides teachers with ongoing feedback about how to improve classes.

### Assess students on a portfolio of work.

At the end of each module, students reflect on what they have studied and build a portfolio, including three definitive pieces that exemplify their “Core Learning.” These portfolios (except the one from the Type-It module) contribute to students’ final grade in the Core Pathway course.



“I think these...Core Pathways [have]...showed us that going to college is not only for White people, and it’s open to anybody. Anybody can get there. I think these Core Pathways really give people the boost that they need, that support that they might not have at home because the teachers... are very supportive, and they’re giving them that boost to say that **you can do it. You can make it in life.**”

– HSLPS Student

# RETHINKING MATH AND SCIENCE TEACHING

## MANHATTAN BRIDGES HIGH SCHOOL

A core group of experienced teachers at Manhattan Bridges have made a concerted effort to improve math and science instruction at the school. Their goals were to increase the rigor of coursework, align the curriculum with the Common Core State Standards, and prepare students for more advanced math and science, including Advanced Placement courses. The staff view rigorous math and science instruction as a gateway to college and a vehicle to prepare students to succeed in college classes.

### Update curricula.

A group of eight math and science teachers spanning grades 9-12 used the summer to as an opportunity to deeply examine, and then redesign, their curricula. They developed units that mapped onto Common Core standards, incorporated elements of the College Access: Research and Action (CARA) curriculum (which maps the college landscape and provides guidance on applying to and paying for college), and provided more scaffolding to help students ramp up to AP coursework. They also created a new course for the lowest performing students to help them advance toward grade-level work.

### Strengthen assessments.

The redesigned curriculum also focuses on building in more regular formative and summative assessments and ensuring strong alignment between learning activities and relevant standards and exams. Assessments emphasize higher-order thinking and use of academic vocabulary across both math and science. Instructional strategies are designed to promote peer and self-assessment.

### Improve alignment across subjects and grade levels.

Teachers also worked to integrate curricula across subject areas, with the goal of building a curricular ladder that students can climb from 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade (and hopefully on to college). Teachers asked themselves, for example, which skills students should show proficiency or mastery in each year of high school. Then they created standard rubrics for teachers to use across subjects.

# DIFFERENTIATING ACADEMIC OFFERINGS

## MANHATTAN BRIDGES HIGH SCHOOL

Manhattan Bridges also aims to improve students' academic readiness through a range of differentiated supports designed to meet the needs of a diverse student body. This allows staff to tailor academic experiences for each student.

### Offer more advanced classes.

The principal of Manhattan Bridges recounted that a former student who is now attending college provided a sobering assessment of his high school experience: "He told me when he came back for the December break, 'You guys are wasting your time. You did not teach me anything...You didn't give me enough AP classes. You didn't tell me how hard [college] was going to be.'" Since then, the school has increased the number of AP, honors, and accelerated math classes it offers. Importantly, they have not just increased the number of these courses, but also the number of students taking the courses, in part by "opening up a pipeline," so students can enter advanced courses at different points in their high school careers. One staff member explained, "If a student who starts here is not doing so well, that doesn't mean that's where they're going to stay."

### Provide targeted supports for students who fall behind.

Manhattan Bridges offers a semester-long Saturday math prep course as well as tutoring sessions before and after school for struggling students. They have also piloted Reading Plus—a computerized reading program for students struggling to read on grade level. In addition, each year the school identifies 10-20 students who are not on track to graduate or who are struggling. Teachers are assigned several students from that list and have weekly one-on-one meetings with them to discuss their needs and progress.

### Modify course sequencing to provide more math.

At the request of some advanced students who wanted to take higher-level math during high school, the school started allowing students to take Algebra I in a single semester by taking it for two periods each day. They applied the same tactic with Geometry. These changes allowed students to take Algebra II, trigonometry, and statistics before graduating. A school leader said, "The students asked for this. They say we think we can handle the challenge, and they did very well. Ninety-seven percent passed the Algebra [I] Regents, so that shows that they feel committed, and they've understood why we are here and why we're doing it."

"That kind of intervention shows a kid that we care... that **you're not going to just fall through the cracks**, that we are actually actively trying to figure out what's wrong, and how to fix it, or how to help you and support you."  
– *Manhattan Bridges School Leader*

## Questions for Educators

1. Consider reaching out to alumni of your school. Ask them about ways your school adequately prepared them for college and ways in which they felt unprepared for college. Based on these conversations, what additional academic skills might your school focus on?
2. Many of the examples highlighted in this guide involved making changes to academic schedules. Where might you adjust your current program to provide stronger academic supports?
3. To what extent do the curricula, activities, and assessments in your school's current courses reflect the academic requirements for a college-oriented student? Are there ways to insert more instruction of college-oriented skills (such as those featured on the Core Change Pathways course) into new or existing courses?
4. Would a summer bridge program have benefits for your students? What activities (academic and extracurricular) might your summer bridge include? What would be the initial steps in planning a summer bridge in your school?
5. What process could your school utilize to identify course curricula that need updating and a team of staff to manage these revisions?
6. Do students in your school have the opportunity to take four years of math? How can you supplement math instruction so students can avoid remedial college coursework?
7. How does your school support students who are struggling academically? Does your school provide challenging work to students who are performing at an advanced level? How can you better support these two groups of students?

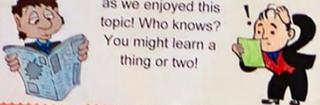
1) Simply choose an essay and pull it out of the clear protective sheet.

2) When you are finished, please place it back in the sheet protector.

3) You will be able to read their essay, view the scoring and comments provided by their peer, view their teacher comments and scores, and see their total essay writing score.

4) Their total essay writing project score is their partners score plus the teacher score calculated out of 100%. *Note that these essays are representative of a variety of student levels.*

5) I hope you enjoy reading their essays as much as we enjoyed this topic! Who knows? You might learn a thing or two!



New York City Performance Assessment Common Rubric: Climate Change Argumentative Essay Writing Project

Grade 10 Score	Level 4 Exceeding the Standards	Level 3 Meeting the Standards	Level 2 Approaching the Standards	Level 1 Approaching the Standards	Level 0
Track 1: Focus: Position	1. Establishes a position and provides evidence to support the position.	1. Establishes a position and provides evidence to support the position.	1. Establishes a position and provides evidence to support the position.	1. Establishes a position and provides evidence to support the position.	1. Establishes a position and provides evidence to support the position.
Track 2: Elaboration	2. Provides detailed substantiation of the position through facts, data, and relevant sources that support and elaborate the position.	2. Provides substantiation of the position through facts, data, and relevant sources.	2. Provides substantiation of the position through facts, data, and relevant sources.	2. Provides substantiation of the position through facts, data, and relevant sources.	2. Provides substantiation of the position through facts, data, and relevant sources.
Track 3: Counter-Claims	3. Analyzes counterclaims or opposing claims, refutes them with evidence, and explains why counterclaims do not outweigh the position.	3. Analyzes counterclaims or opposing claims, refutes them with evidence, and explains why counterclaims do not outweigh the position.	3. Analyzes counterclaims or opposing claims, refutes them with evidence, and explains why counterclaims do not outweigh the position.	3. Analyzes counterclaims or opposing claims, refutes them with evidence, and explains why counterclaims do not outweigh the position.	3. Analyzes counterclaims or opposing claims, refutes them with evidence, and explains why counterclaims do not outweigh the position.
Track 4: Organization	4. Organizes ideas into paragraphs and sections that are clearly defined and easy to follow.	4. Organizes ideas into paragraphs and sections that are clearly defined and easy to follow.	4. Organizes ideas into paragraphs and sections that are clearly defined and easy to follow.	4. Organizes ideas into paragraphs and sections that are clearly defined and easy to follow.	4. Organizes ideas into paragraphs and sections that are clearly defined and easy to follow.
Track 5: Reading & Text Analysis	5. Analyzes the author's purpose and audience, and explains how the author's use of language, style, and rhetorical devices serves to achieve their purpose.	5. Analyzes the author's purpose and audience, and explains how the author's use of language, style, and rhetorical devices serves to achieve their purpose.	5. Analyzes the author's purpose and audience, and explains how the author's use of language, style, and rhetorical devices serves to achieve their purpose.	5. Analyzes the author's purpose and audience, and explains how the author's use of language, style, and rhetorical devices serves to achieve their purpose.	5. Analyzes the author's purpose and audience, and explains how the author's use of language, style, and rhetorical devices serves to achieve their purpose.
Track 6: Style	6. Uses precise language and appropriate tone to communicate the position.	6. Uses precise language and appropriate tone to communicate the position.	6. Uses precise language and appropriate tone to communicate the position.	6. Uses precise language and appropriate tone to communicate the position.	6. Uses precise language and appropriate tone to communicate the position.
Track 7: Comments	7. Provides a thoughtful and detailed response to the position.	7. Provides a thoughtful and detailed response to the position.	7. Provides a thoughtful and detailed response to the position.	7. Provides a thoughtful and detailed response to the position.	7. Provides a thoughtful and detailed response to the position.

Name: Richard D. Simon Earth Science

### Why Wait For The Consequences?

Planet earth has faced many challenges in the past but it overcame them within a long period of time. But this time planet earth faces a new obstacle that may not be easy to overcome. This obstacle is called Climate Change. Climate Change is caused because of the Greenhouse Effect getting stronger. The Greenhouse Effect is the warming up of the earth by Greenhouse gases. These Greenhouse gases are called carbon dioxide (CO2) and Methane (CH4). These gases heat up the Earth by absorbing rays of heat from the sun and keeping these rays trapped on earth. Before the Greenhouse effect was ever to be even thought as an obstacle it was one of earth's Greatest necessities because it prevented Earth from becoming a freezing planet. The Greenhouse Effect started to become an obstacle because during the 19th century humans started to increase the effect of the Greenhouse Effect by releasing more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Making more heat come to Earth and less heat escaping Earth. This became an obstacle because the Earth is starting to heat up **700 MICH**, making it harder for humans and other organisms to survive because the climate is changing more often than what is naturally supposed to. Now because the Greenhouse Effect became dangerous due to human actions, it should be the responsibility of humans to take action to prevent Climate Change and to clean up the mess they made.

One way on how humans are contributing positively to delay climate change is that they are finding cleaner sources of energy to replace fossil fuels. Evidence of this is in the

## Professional Development Resources

Schools interested in providing their staff with training around academic readiness for college may consult the following list of providers.

Adelaide L. Sanford Institute  
<http://www.sanfordinstitute.org/>

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) <http://www.avid.org/>

America's Promise Alliance  
<http://www.americaspromise.org/>

American Museum of Natural History  
<http://www.amnh.org/learn-teach>

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)  
<http://www.ascd.org>

Engage NY  
<http://www.engageny.org>

Facing History and Ourselves  
<https://www.facinghistory.org/>

National Council of Teachers of English  
<http://www.ncte.org>

National Science Teachers Association  
<http://www.nsta.org>

New-York Historical Society Museum & Library  
<http://www.nyhistory.org/education/professional-learning>

The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History  
<http://www.gilderlehrman.org/programs-exhibitions/for-educators>

The Rockefeller University  
<http://www.rockefeller.edu/outreach/educators>

Teaching Matters  
<http://www.teachingmatters.org/>

## Related Sources

Schools interested in providing their staff with books related to curriculum and instruction may refer to this abbreviated list:

Boss, S. (2015). *Real-World Project: How do I Design Relevant and Engaging Learning Experiences?* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2002). *Responsive Curriculum Design in Secondary Schools: Meeting the Diverse Needs of Students*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Jacobs, H.H. (2010). *Curriculum 21: Essential Education for a Changing World*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Ornstein, A.C., & Hunkins, F.P. (2012). *Curriculum: Foundations, Principles, and Issues: Student Value Edition* (6<sup>th</sup> Edition). New York, NY: Pearson.

Schere, M. (2009). *Challenging the Whole Child: Reflections on Best Practices in Learning, Teaching and Leadership*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.



## Notes

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- <sup>ii</sup> Bailey, T., & Cho, S. (2010). *Issue Brief: Developmental Education in Community Colleges*. Prepared for The White House Summit on Community College. Retrieved from <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/developmental-education-community-colleges.pdf>.
- <sup>iii</sup> Lee Jr., J. M., & Ransom, T. (2011). *The Educational Experience of Young Men of Color: A Review of Research, Pathways and Progress*. New York, NY: College Board. Retrieved from <http://media.collegeboard.com/digitalServices/pdf/advocacy/nosca/nosca-educational-experience-young-men-color-research.pdf>
- <sup>iv</sup> Toldson, I.A., (2011). *Breaking Barriers 2: Plotting the Path Away from Juvenile Detention and toward Academic Success for School-Age African-American Males*. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Black Caucus Foundation.
- <sup>v</sup> U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, (2012). *Revealing New Truths About Our Nation's Schools*. Retrieved from [http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/o\\_cr/docs/crdc-2012-data-summary.pdf](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/o_cr/docs/crdc-2012-data-summary.pdf)
- <sup>vi</sup> Kemple, J., M. Segeritz, and N. Stephenson, (2013). "Building On-Track Indicators for High School Graduation and College Readiness: Evidence from New York City." *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 18(1), 7-28.

To learn more about our evaluation of the Expanded Success Initiative, please visit our website:

[http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/research\\_alliance/research/projects/esi\\_evaluation](http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/research_alliance/research/projects/esi_evaluation)

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.

The Research Alliance for New York City Schools  
285 Mercer Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
New York, New York 10003-9502  
212-992-7697  
[research.alliance@nyu.edu](mailto:research.alliance@nyu.edu)  
[www.ranycs.org](http://www.ranycs.org)

### Author Contact Information

Tony Laing: [tal208@nyu.edu](mailto:tal208@nyu.edu)  
Adriana Villavicencio: [arv228@nyu.edu](mailto:arv228@nyu.edu)

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