



# Get Us To College

Proven strategies for helping NYC students  
navigate the college process

A white paper researched by the



**Urban Youth Collaborative**

**Founded in 2004, the Urban Youth Collaborative (UYC) is a coalition of youth organizing groups that join together to fight for a voice in high school education reform:**

**Make the Road New York (MRNY): an organizing group that builds the power of Latino and working class communities to achieve dignity and justice. With centers in Bushwick, Jackson Heights, Port Richmond and Brentwood, MRNY achieves this through organizing, policy innovation, youth/adult education, and supportive services.**

**Sistas and Brothas United (SBU): an affiliate of the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition, SBU develops the leadership of youth interested in developing creative ways to concretely address community problems. SBU's leaders fight for educational justice, more jobs for youth and community residents, and more community-based resources.**

**Future of Tomorrow (FOT): a part of the Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation organizing division, FOT is committed creating networks of passionate and engaged neighborhood leaders who come together and work for a peaceful and educationally successful Cypress Hills and East New York.**

## UYC Get Us To College Platform

### 1. WE NEED THE NUMBERS

- The DOE does not have an accurate and comprehensive record of what its schools are doing to support students through the college process, or even how many of its schools have college counselors. The DOE should launch a system-wide assessment of what support schools are currently providing to students and make that assessment public.
- The DOE must create an early warning system so that all high school students know how many credits they have, what classes they should be taking to prepare for college, and whether they are on track for graduation and college.
- When students are off-track for graduation and college, guidance counselors and schools must intervene to get them back on track. To do this, school guidance counselors should have a maximum of 250 students on their caseload.

### 2. START EARLY, AND PROVIDE US WITH THE NECESSARY EXPERTISE

The DOE must provide adequate funding and support to schools to create a comprehensive college access system, which should include some combination of the following:

- College Counselors: There is currently no line in the NYC DOE budget for a college counselor, despite the abundance of evidence showing that they have a dramatic impact on college-going rates and financial support for college, especially for students who are the first in their family to go to college or are undocumented. Every school should have one well-trained college counselor for every 100 seniors, who starts working with students as early as 9th grade.
- Student Success Centers (SSCs) train high school students to help other students navigate every step of the college process, and have significantly improved college acceptances and financial aid packages. The SSCs have also played a critical role in creating school-wide “college going cultures” across the entire school campus and have effectively served undocumented students. The DOE must maintain support for the existing SSCs & launch additional ones at low-performing multi-campus high schools.
- Distributive Guidance is a proven model of teachers supporting students through the college process in advisories. The DOE must ensure that schools using this model provide teachers with ongoing training, adequate time to fulfill their college support role, and the necessary resources for the program.

### 3. STICK WITH US UNTIL THE END

- Extend Summer Bridge to College Programs: Many students, especially those who are the first in their family to go to college, get accepted into college and plan to go, but end up not enrolling. Summer bridge programs train college students to return to their high schools to support new graduates in completing financial aid documents, registering for classes, filling out paperwork and staying on track to start college in the fall. The DOE should provide funding and support to high schools to implement Summer Bridge to College programs at all NYC high schools.

The Urban Youth Collaborative strives for social and economic justice throughout our communities — overcoming obstacles to make sure youth voices are heard and youth empowerment is emphasized. We are committed to building a strong youth voice, a voice that can ensure our high schools prepare students to go to college, earn a living wage, and actively participate in our democracy.

In the subsequent pages is a set of proposals to ensure that high schools serving low-income youth of color meet the new Department of Education standards for college readiness. We offer multiple ways to pursue each goal, and recommend that combinations of the aspects of models we present be considered.

The report is organized to share what we know about why items on our platform are important and to give information to help fellow students, education advocates, and the NYC DOE work toward implementing changes.

### ***THINK ABOUT IT:***

*In New York City, only 12 percent of Latino and African American students are graduating “college ready” according to the NYCDOE.*

## I. We need numbers

**Early warning system**  
**Guidance counselors**



**If students know exactly how they're doing and what needs to be done from the beginning of high school on, they can figure out what support they need to get to graduation.**

## Where we are now:

Since 2007, NYC public schools have used the Achievement Reporting and Innovation System (ARIS) to track student progress. The Department of Education spent over \$85 million to develop and implement the system.<sup>1</sup>

Student data available through ARIS includes current and past state test scores, credits, grades, attendance, enrollment, family contact information, English Language Learner and special education status, and other biographical information.<sup>2</sup>

The system allows parents to check on their student's progress, and it helps teachers, administrators and DOE employees to analyze student data and to share and communicate with colleagues throughout the city. Unfortunately, many educators have called the system challenging to use and limited in how much it helps classroom instruction. In addition, many saw need for improvement and expansion of ARIS's content, in general.<sup>3</sup>

In 2010, New York State received a \$19.7 million "State Longitudinal Data System" grant to build on ARIS and other existing systems. Expansions will include links to data from higher education, the workforce, health, and social service institutions, an Instructional Support system that guides teachers in using data to improve instruction, a database specifically for research and policy analysis, and a student progress tracking system.<sup>4</sup> This is promising progress, and luckily there are some existing structures that developers can look to for ideas about how to keep students up to date on their own advancement.

## Someone got it right:

New Visions for New Public Schools Early Warning System addresses the barriers reported by the Research Alliance for New York City Schools and can be replicated.

Since 1993, New Visions for New Public Schools has created 133 schools in NYC that strive to prepare students for high school graduation and successful futures in a career or college. A Partnership Support Organization (PSO), New Visions is now accountable for more than 38,000 students.

New Visions' "College Readiness metric" categorizes students based on important graduation and post-secondary expectations. The metric combines overall credit accumulation, core subject credit accumulation, Regents exam scores, and semester sequence information in order to locate where the student should be on the graduation and college readiness trajectory over the course of eight semesters. At the end of each semester, the color-coded system classifies students into one of four groups: On Track for College Readiness, On Track to Graduate, Almost on Track to Graduate, and Off Track.<sup>5</sup>

New Visions' system also includes tools that can help principals understand how their school is doing as a whole, and areas for improvement, and other tools that are targeted to students and parents, to help them create plans for how to stay on track or get back on track. The system has a special set of tools for ninth graders and their parents, to help those families start preparing for college readiness upon graduation at the very start of high school.

## UYC advocates:

**The DOE must create an early warning system so that all high school students know how many credits they have, what classes they should be taking to prepare for college, and whether they are on track for graduation and college.**

## **We need school guidance counselors who offer us individualized attention.**

### **Where we are now:**

Currently, more than *50 percent* of students from grades 9-12 have a student-to-counselor ratio that is greater than 250:1,<sup>6</sup> and most counselors are responsible for student class schedules, tracking attendance, and providing personal and emotional support in addition to guidance in the college process. Because of these large caseloads and varied responsibilities, counselors in New York City cannot adequately address individual student academic, social, and emotional developmental needs.<sup>7</sup> A 2005 survey conducted by the Urban Youth Collaborative found that 61% of students in large schools and 69% in small schools on large campuses said they were never, rarely, or sometimes able to see a guidance counselor when they needed to, and 66% of students in large schools and 50% in small schools on large campuses said they were never, rarely, or sometimes able to get help at school when they had questions about college.<sup>8</sup>

In a series of studies cited by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, lower student-counselor ratios were found to significantly correlate to higher graduation rates and fewer disciplinary incidents.<sup>9</sup> The schools participating in one study were divided into two groups: those that met the ASCA recommendation of 1 counselor for every 250 students, and those that did not. The first group had higher graduation and attendance rates and disciplinary incidents were almost twice as frequent in the second group. In addition, the number of counselors and extent of student contact with them around college application were found to increase the number of students applying to two or more colleges, increasing student chances of being accepted.

### ***Think about it:***

*There are more than 5,100 police personnel in the public schools, a number that is approximately 70% larger than the city's guidance counselor workforce.<sup>10</sup>*

### **UYC advocates:**

**In order to achieve a more personalized approach to student support, school counselors should have a maximum of 250 students in their caseload. In addition to this cap, schools should *separate* the responsibilities of guidance counselors and college counselors in order to better support students academically, socially and emotionally in a school setting.**



## **II: Start early and provide us with the necessary expertise**

**Dedicated college counselors  
Student Success Centers  
Distributive Guidance**



**While guidance counselors aim to fulfill student holistic needs and keep them on track for graduation, there is a need for expert help to steer students through the college process. Well-trained college counselors with reasonable caseloads who start to build relationships early can make a dramatic impact on college going rates and financial support. Both figures can be critical in making sure students get to college.**

***Think about it:***

*\$68.9 million, the amount of aid generated by the CBI program, is enough to pay for 12,024 years at a four-year CUNY, or 3,006 4-year college degrees!*

## **Someone got it right:**

College Counselors: Young Womens' Leadership Network  
CollegeBound Initiative

In 1996, The Young Women's Leadership School (YTWLS) of East Harlem opened— the first public all-girls school to open in the United States in 30 years. Since the founding of the Young Women's Leadership Network not-for-profit in 1998, five high-performing TYWLS public schools in NYC serve more than 1,900 students.

The college guidance aspects of the program were so successful that the organization decided to make them available to schools outside of their network through the CollegeBound Initiative (CBI) —a year-round college guidance program. CBI works with low-income students, both male and female, from 6th to 12th grade in an array of schools to promote a college-going culture and accessibility plan by placing a well-trained and dedicated college counselor in the school. With a student to counselor ratio of 80-100 students to 1 college counselor, CBI increases students' college enrollment rates and financial aid arrangements—with more than 5,400 students accepted into college, and more than \$68.9 million generated in aid for their students since 2001. In 2012-2013, YWLN will serve more than 10,000 students in the 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades.<sup>11</sup>

**UYC advocates:**

**Every school should have one well-trained college counselor for every 100 seniors, who starts working with students as early as 9th grade.**

**Programs that engage students to help teach and learn from each other can be cost-effective and have the power to promote school-wide “college going cultures,” increase acceptances, and improve financial aid options.**

## **Someone got it right:**

### **Student Success Centers (SSC) Case Study:**

SSCs are centrally-located spaces within high schools where students can go at any time to work with trained peer leaders and partnering adult staff on the college application process. SSC peer leaders undergo extensive training in college readiness, youth development, and organizing, all in order to help other high school students navigate every step of the college process. Their efforts have significantly improved college acceptances and financial aid packages for participating students. SSCs have also played a critical role in creating school-wide “college going cultures” across campuses and have effectively served undocumented students.

The SSC’s have had strong results. At the Bushwick Campus SSC, more than 80% of graduating seniors applied to 6 or more colleges in the 2011-12 school year, creating better odds for college acceptance and boosting matriculation rates. Schools served by the Franklin K. Lane campus are also benefiting from the SSC in their building. By June 2012, Academy of Innovative Technology achieved 100% college acceptance, Cypress Hills Collegiate Prep achieved 93% college acceptance, Multicultural High School and Brooklyn Lab School both reached 86% acceptance.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Think about it:***

*One youth leader at a SSC is stipend at about \$80/week, to help 80 or so seniors through the college process.*

*That’s about \$1/week for every student being helped!*

## **UYC advocates:**

**The DOE must maintain support for the existing SSCs & launch additional ones at low-performing multi-campus high schools.**

“You have your college counselor and your Youth Leader, they follow you the whole time and stick with you from beginning to end... Everything around you in the SSC is about college. When you're curious about stuff there are multiple people to ask and you always get an answer. Counselors who work in the office project their college experience in a positive way. My classmates tell me all the time they feel more comfortable coming to me. They know that teachers and counselors always say they don't have time, but with me it's easier to talk to a friend and I'm always here.

**Annabelle – SSC Youth Leader**

**If teachers are granted sufficient time and training, they can be another valuable resource in guiding students through the college process.**

**Someone got it right:**

**Distributive Guidance Case Study: Institute for Student Achievement**

The Institute for Student Achievement (ISA), founded in 1990, is a high school turnaround partner used to improve high school education for at-risk youth in public school districts across several states.<sup>13</sup> Among the seven “research-based principles” that lead to improved student outcomes is “distributive guidance,” a principle that offers a safety net of very personalized student support services involving entire school communities. At the foundation of “distributive counseling” are beliefs in the value of teachers, students, and parents building relationships and working together as partners in a student’s education.<sup>14</sup>

The ISA makes sure that teachers and counselors collaborate on a regular basis to support the academic and social-emotional development of students. ISA highlights advisory or grade-level seminars as structures key to making a distributive faculty support model possible. It also shifts teacher responsibilities by requiring that every faculty member meet with a group of students several times a week for forty-five to eighty minutes total. This structure offers a differentiated and personalized learning environment for every student.

***Think about it:***

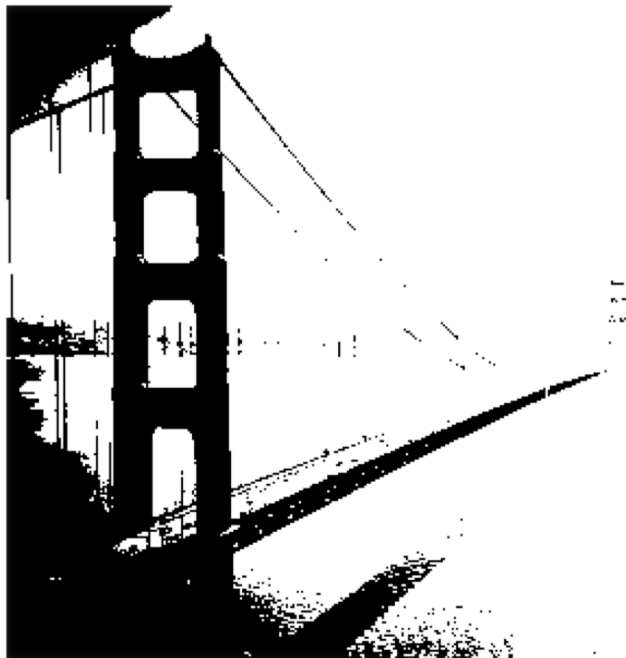
*In a six year longitudinal study of two ninth grade ISA cohorts, ISA students were 49% less likely to drop out of high school than comparison students, and the graduation rate across the ISA network (79%) substantially exceeded that of comparison students (63%).<sup>15</sup>*

**UYC advocates:**

**The DOE must ensure that schools using this model provide teachers with ongoing training, adequate time to fulfill their college support role, and the necessary resources in order to provide meaningful, advisory-based, college process support for students.**

### **III. Stick with us until the end**

**Extend the Summer Bridge to  
College program**



**Recent graduates who have successfully entered college have the potential to help current graduates navigate the transition from high school into college.**

Someone got it right:

Summer Bridge to College:

The Urban Assembly, CUNY At Home in College, and College Access: Research and Action (CARA) collaborated to pilot the Summer Bridge to College Program. Summer Bridge to College programs are designed to ease the transition into college—especially for first-generation college-bound students—by building skills and increasing their knowledge of the college environment. Alumni from 80 participating high schools (one-fifth of high schools throughout NYC) are trained to support new graduates in completing financial aid documents, registering for college, and staying on track to begin classes in the fall. Designated as College Coaches, these returning graduates each support a caseload of seniors through a series of in-person meeting, phone check-ins, in-school workshops, Facebook, and email exchanges. Additionally, the program employs trained school based-adult supervisors, program evaluation through interaction logs and student data, and weekly summer sessions for seniors to meet other graduates attending the same college and explore selected topics and themes.<sup>16</sup>

At The Urban Assembly, participants saw an increase in college matriculation from 65% to 74% in 2011.<sup>17</sup>

**UYC advocates:**

**The DOE should provide funding and support to maintain and expand Summer Bridge to College programs throughout all NYC high schools.**

*Think about it:*

*As many as half of NYC low-income students who are accepted to college do not attend come fall.<sup>18</sup>*

## End notes

- <sup>1</sup> <http://publicadvocategotbaum.com/pages/documents/ARISFINAL.pdf>
- <sup>2</sup> <http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/resources/aris/ARIS.htm>
- <sup>3</sup> <https://files.nyu.edu/RANYCS/public/media/ARIS-YR1-FullReport.pdf>
- <sup>4</sup> <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/pdf/newyorkabstract2009ARRA.pdf>
- <sup>5</sup> [http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=4&cad=rja&ved=0CEUQFjAD&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.hfrp.org%2Fcontent%2Fdownload%2F3646%2F102551%2Ffile%2FFINE-NewVisions-101210.pdf&ei=SZl-UefNFNCH0QG\\_roDoAw&usg=AFQjCNErXmfVJ-iOXF7fsswoB6zpqj3fxA&sig2=1-elSTBUF8zbzGGF4ohe2g](http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=4&cad=rja&ved=0CEUQFjAD&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.hfrp.org%2Fcontent%2Fdownload%2F3646%2F102551%2Ffile%2FFINE-NewVisions-101210.pdf&ei=SZl-UefNFNCH0QG_roDoAw&usg=AFQjCNErXmfVJ-iOXF7fsswoB6zpqj3fxA&sig2=1-elSTBUF8zbzGGF4ohe2g)
- <sup>6</sup> [http://comptroller.nyc.gov/bureaus/opm/reports/2012/Power\\_of\\_Guidance\\_Oct\\_PDF.pdf](http://comptroller.nyc.gov/bureaus/opm/reports/2012/Power_of_Guidance_Oct_PDF.pdf)
- <sup>7</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>8</sup> [http://annenberginstitute.org/sites/default/files/product/200/files/Garvey\\_Report.pdf](http://annenberginstitute.org/sites/default/files/product/200/files/Garvey_Report.pdf)
- <sup>9</sup> [http://dese.mo.gov/divcareered/guidance\\_placement\\_research.htm](http://dese.mo.gov/divcareered/guidance_placement_research.htm)
- <sup>10</sup> <http://aplusnyc.org/police-in-schools/>
- <sup>11</sup> <http://www.ywln.org/college-prep>
- <sup>12</sup> <http://bushwickssc.wordpress.com/about/>
- <sup>13</sup> [http://www.studentachievement.org/PortalSettings/ABOUT\\_ISAHISTORY.aspx?Id=zvBzq70rs8g=](http://www.studentachievement.org/PortalSettings/ABOUT_ISAHISTORY.aspx?Id=zvBzq70rs8g=)
- <sup>14</sup> <http://www.tc.edu/ncrest/onlinepub/ISA%20DC.SP.FINAL.pdf>
- <sup>15</sup> <http://www.studentachievement.org/HowISAWork.aspx>
- <sup>16</sup> <http://caranyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/CoreComponents.pdf>
- <sup>17</sup> <http://www.urbanassembly.org/>
- <sup>18</sup> *ibid*