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BREAKING THROUGH: COLLEGE ASPIRATIONS AND OUTCOMES
OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES FROM YONKERS, NEW YORK

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

BREAKING THROUGH: COLLEGE ASPIRATIONS AND OUTCOMES
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This mixed-methods study examines the pathways and barriers to college and the postsecondary outcomes of students who graduate from public high schools in Yonkers, New York. The project describes the ways in which students plan for life after high school and negotiate the college search and selection process. Data from the National Student Clearinghouse, surveys, interviews, focus groups, and participant observation were used to inform findings. The data show that students from Yonkers have high levels of college intentions and enrollment; in some cases, these levels are at or above national norms. This is especially encouraging, considering that Yonkers is a high-needs school district and that most graduates qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, are members of underrepresented minorities, and are potential first-generation college goers. Recent cohorts of Yonkers graduates enroll in postsecondary institutions more quickly than previous cohorts and persist into the second year at higher rates. Yonkers graduates have had mixed success with degree attainment. Survey, interview, and focus group data demonstrated that financial aid and family support systems were key to persistence toward graduation. Participants demonstrated low levels of financial awareness and many misconceptions about college costs, financial aid, and student loans.

Dedication

For my children Selene and Zan.

I promise to work tirelessly to make the world that I leave you
a little better than the one that I brought you into.

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I would like to take this opportunity to thank all who have made this seemingly endless endeavor possible. My husband Quinn, who has always encouraged me to follow my passions and take chances, spent many evenings and weekends as a “single dad” while I took coursework or hid behind a computer screen. I am so lucky to have his love and support. His genuine belief that I am capable of anything kept me going throughout this process.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For years, I worked as a College Advisor in a small high school in the South Bronx. Each year, I watched hundreds of bright and inquisitive students start the 9th grade but fail to reach graduation. Of those who managed to graduate, most stopped there. While many said that they had plans to enroll, somewhere over the summer those plans did not materialize into matriculation. Of the students who went on to college, almost all dropped out before the end of their first year. I have kept in touch with hundreds of former students through social media and email, and I have found that only a handful have earned 4-year degrees.

It was not for lack of trying on my part. I did my best to give these students a chance at college, sometimes forcing them to complete college applications. My school boasted a 100% *application* rate, proud that our students would have the option of continuing education. Unfortunately, there was little discussion about what the students would need realistically to enter and graduate from college. While many of the students' goals included earning a college degree, many did not feel that they had the ability or support to actually enroll and persist. Those who did enroll often had to take remedial classes and still found that coursework was very difficult. Still others found that they were able to keep up academically but outside obligations, such as work or taking care of siblings or even their own children made it difficult to pay tuition, spend time studying, or justify not working at a full-time job.

Problem Statement

In June 2011, the *New York Times* published a series of articles citing a report from the New York State Education Department (NYSED) detailing the low number of students in New York State who were graduating from high school and were prepared to do college-level work (Otterman, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c). According to the report, only 37% of students who entered a public high school in New York State in 2006 were adequately prepared for college 4 years later. In Yonkers, New York's fourth-largest city, the graduation rate that year was 63.2%, but only 14.5% of the students were leaving high school "college and career ready" (NYSED, 2011a).¹ Yonkers is a high-poverty school district; 75.5% of all students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches (NYSED, 2013a). In some high schools in the city, the percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunches is as high as 93% (NYSED, 2011d). It has been well documented that an achievement gap exists between low-income students and their more-affluent peers (Jenks & Phillips, 1998; Reardon, 2013; Rothstein, 2004). These students are less likely than their more-affluent peers to enroll in and graduate from college (Allensworth, 2006; Buckley & Muraskin, 2009; Choy, Horn, Nunez, & Chen, 2000; Gillespie & Noble, 1992).

The importance of a college education has increased exponentially in the past 30 years. The number of highly skilled college graduates in nations around the world has risen, and American students are finding the job market both here and abroad to be increasingly competitive (Friedman, 2005). If the United States is to remain an economic

¹New York State does not have a clear definition of "college and career ready." NYSED reports that students who earn any diploma, earn a score of 75 or higher on the English Regents Examination, and earn a score of 80 or higher on the Regents Mathematics Examination are statistically unlikely to need remedial coursework in a postsecondary setting.

superpower, American students must be able to compete for high-skill jobs with their counterparts in other parts of the world.

More than ever, attending college provides opportunities for graduates that are not as plentiful as those available to students have completed only high school (Cowen, 2011). The students of Yonkers will not be immune to this increasing demand for highly educated and skilled job candidates. In previous generations, high school graduates found secure employment in dozens of local industries in Yonkers and the New York City metropolitan area. Factories along the Hudson River waterfront employed high school graduates at good salaries with attractive benefits packages. Today, due to a growing trend of deindustrialization, globalization, and job outsourcing, such occupations are no longer available (Freidman, 2005; Friedman, 2008). The United States has been transformed from a manufacturing-based economy to one based on knowledge, and a quality college education has become tantamount to what a high school education was 50 years ago (Friedman, 2005). In order to compete in today's tight job markets, students in Yonkers will need some type of education or training beyond high school.

The clear majority of students nationwide want to go to college. According to a 2003 survey conducted by ACT, Inc. (2004), 78% of high school graduates said that they wanted to go or had some intention of going on to postsecondary education. According to Yonkers Partners in Education (YPIE), a privately run nonprofit organization that operates College and Career Centers in Yonkers high schools, 90% of Yonkers graduates apply to 2- and 4-year colleges and more than 80% say that they have intentions to attend after graduation from high school (YPIE, 2012).

Clearly, students' college aspirations are high but, if the NYSED is correct, only a small number of these students will graduate from high school prepared for college-level work. What will happen to these students once they leave high school? Will they struggle in a postsecondary setting? Will they find it difficult to persist beyond their first year and achieve graduation? What jobs will be available to them, whether or not they attend college?

This study was designed to identify postsecondary aspirations and outcomes of students in Yonkers, a high-poverty mid-size city just north of New York City. The study explored how public school students in Yonkers negotiate the postsecondary planning process and what supports they seek and access. The study determined the rate at which students persist in or leave a postsecondary setting once they are there and identified factors that enabled or prevented attainment of a postsecondary degree.

Research Questions

This study was guided by five research questions:

1. How do students from the Yonkers Public Schools (YPS) negotiate the college research and application process?
2. What is the pattern of college enrollment and matriculation in postsecondary educational institutions among YPS graduates?
3. How do the college intentions of YPS graduates compare with the actual rate of postsecondary enrollment and persistence?
4. Are YPS graduates more successful in terms of persisting and obtaining a degree when they attend certain postsecondary institutions?

5. What factors facilitate or impair YPS graduates from college enrollment and obtaining a postsecondary degree?

6. How can college enrollment and persistence patterns in Yonkers inform policies regarding college access nationally?

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are herein defined:

Community college: A postsecondary institution (usually public) that generally grants Associate degrees and/or vocational certificates. Coursework is designed to be completed in 2 academic years, although average time to completion is 3 to 4 years. These schools are sometimes referred to as 2-year colleges, junior colleges, or (in New Jersey) county colleges. In this dissertation, the terms *community college* and *2-year college* are used interchangeably.

Financial aid: Student financial aid consists of any grant, scholarship, loan, or work program provided to students to pay education-related expenses (tuition, books, room/board, etc.). These awards may be based on need or merit. Most financial aid comes from the federal government or state government; students qualify by completing Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) forms in the spring prior to enrollment. Some institutions, particularly those with large endowments, also provide separate institutional aid to students. This private institutional aid has allowed many elite colleges and universities to offer no-loan programs to high-achieving, low-income students.

First-generation college student: A student whose parents did not attend any academic schooling beyond high school.

For-profit college: Any educational institution that operates as a private enterprise for a profit. The for-profit college sector has grown exponentially over the past 2 decades. Approximately 10-12% of college students attend a for-profit institution (Lynch, Engle, & Cruz, 2010). These schools grant vocational certificates and undergraduate and graduate degrees. Many offer online and year-round options, which are particularly appealing to nontraditional college students or people who work full time.

4-year college: Any bachelor's degree-granting institution with a traditional 4-year program. In the literature and in this dissertation, 4-year colleges are sometimes referred to as "senior colleges."

Free or reduced-priced lunch (FRPL) status: Every year low-income students are encouraged to apply for free or reduced-price lunches through the National School Lunch Program, operated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Currently, students from a family of four qualify for free lunches if their family income is at or below \$30,615 per year and for reduced-price lunches if their family income is below \$43,568 per year. Since other measures of family socioeconomic status (SES) are difficult to collect, FRPL status is often used to determine a student's SES.

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA): A form that must be completed and submitted each year, either by mail or online, to qualify for financial aid from most schools. Applications can be filed after January 1 of the year for which aid is desired. Aid is based on family income from the previous year and the value of family assets. Students are offered aid packages by the individual institutions to which they have applied.

Low-income students: In this dissertation, any students who are eligible for FRPL based on their status of low income, as defined by the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

National Student Clearinghouse (NSC): A nonprofit organization that acts as a source of enrollment verification for postsecondary degrees and diplomas. The NSC also works with secondary schools to track their graduates through college, which allows schools and districts to improve efficiency and enhance the quality of service that they provide to their students and alumni.

Postsecondary education: Any education completed after high school, including 2-year and 4-year colleges, vocational and technical programs, and any accredited program that leads to a certificate, diploma, or licensure.

Pre-college outreach/intervention programs: Programs offered in schools or communities that have large populations of students who are traditionally underrepresented in colleges and universities, with the intent to increase college awareness and enrollment. The programs may include counseling, test preparation, tutoring, essay writing clinics, and helping students to apply to colleges and for scholarships.

Technical colleges: Institutions that provide technical or vocation training. These schools may grant Associate degrees and/or vocational certificates; some also offer high school equivalency certificates. These schools are usually privately owned and may or may not be for-profit institutions.

Yonkers Partners in Education (YPIE): A nonprofit organization that works with the Yonkers School District and serves the students of Yonkers in a public-private

partnership aimed at increasing the number of students who apply to, attend, and graduate from postsecondary institutions.

Significance of the Study

We have entered into an era of data-driven education reform and public outcry for school accountability. Parents are demanding that their children receive a high-quality education and learn marketable skills. Taxpayers want proof that their property tax dollars are not being wasted on inefficient and outdated models of education. The American public wants to see that schools can measure, track, and demonstrate success. Grade inflation, inconsistency in grading, and inconsistencies in the way in which schools determine graduation rates have made it difficult to assess how successful public schools are at preparing young people for the future (Camara, Kimmel, Scheuneman, & Satwall, 2003; Godfrey, 2011; Greene & Winters, 2005). College access, entrance, persistence, and graduation may be better ways to evaluate public school and district effectiveness. This study serves as the first step in understanding the college-going patterns of students in Yonkers, which may help to improve their postsecondary access and outcomes and lead to better access to the postsecondary job market.

Many cities across the United States are similar to Yonkers. Scholars have addressed issues of college access and persistence in larger and more glamorous cities such as New York and Chicago, but these large cities are anomalies in the American landscape (Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2011). Despite the drop in industrial output and manufacturing, those cities have leveraged their size, influence, and geographic position to remain political, social, and cultural powerhouses. Yonkers is like so many lesser-known cities—Akron and Cleveland, Ohio; Newark, New Jersey; and Rochester and

Buffalo, New York—battered by a pattern of deindustrialization and middle-class flight that has led to concentrations of poverty and struggling public schools. Literature on college planning and postsecondary outcomes in smaller cities is limited. As this dissertation is written, the Newark School Research Collaborative is preparing a report on the secondary outcomes of graduates from the Newark Public Schools (Backstrand et al., 2014). Other small districts may be working on but have yet to publish such reports. Therefore, this study contributes to this area of research.

Like many of the aforementioned medium-size cities, Yonkers has tried to restore its image through urban renewal programs and development incentives. City leaders and developers have begun to transform the most ravaged parts of the old industrial core of Yonkers into a new-urbanist mecca, with shopping and entertainment venues, walkable streets, high-end residences, and a waterfront geared to recreation. Unfortunately, many of the people who might be interested in moving into a redeveloped Yonkers hesitate because of the reputation of the city's schools. If this city is to attract families who can afford to live in its new luxury condos, it needs a school system that is perceived to be successful. In cities that have experienced urban renaissance, such as Hoboken or Jersey City, parents have circumnavigated what are perceived as failing traditional public through charter schools (Makris, 2013; Morrison, 2011). Parents in Yonkers do not have this option. Presently, only one small charter school exists in Yonkers and, to date, it has not been a magnet for middle-class families. The only school options in Yonkers are the public schools and a handful of expensive private schools. Therefore, Yonkers and YPS can benefit greatly from the data provided in this study. The findings may help the schools and YPIE determine which policies and programs will help students to earn a

postsecondary education and enter the job market successfully. The findings also may offer insight on areas for potential policy or program improvement and determine which populations need additional support and resources.

My reasons for studying Yonkers are also personal. I own a home and pay property taxes in Yonkers. One of my two children is in public school and the other will be there soon. Like every other parent in the city, I want to ensure that, when my children graduate from high school and go on to college, they can compete with students from wealthier neighboring districts for access to college and jobs. I worry about what the district's financial troubles and poor reputation mean for the future of all of the children of Yonkers. If this study helps even one more student make a path toward a successful career, it has been well worth the effort.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into nine chapters. Chapter 2 is a review of the most recent and relevant literature on low-income students' college access, persistence, and degree attainment. It cites several other studies that use data from the NSC and includes a discussion on student loan debt. Chapter 3 is a discussion of research methods applied in this study. This dissertation fulfills the requirements for a doctoral program in Urban Systems, which asks students to look at the intersection of schools, public health, and built environment in cities. This is especially important in a city such as Yonkers, where these elements are intertwined and have a definite impact on students and their families. Therefore, Chapter 4 presents a brief history and discussion of Yonkers. Chapter 5 focuses on the history, organization, and achievement of the YPS, including a brief description of each of the high schools in the system. Chapter 6 discusses the way in

which students in Yonkers plan for life after high school, to whom they turn for information about college and career, and how they navigate the college application process. It also includes a detailed discussion of the role of YPIE in YPS. Chapter 7 is an analysis of YPS graduates' postsecondary outcomes as reported by the NSC and an alumni survey. Chapter 8 offers a discussion of the factors that enable or serve as barriers to college degree attainment, as well as possible policy implications. Chapter 9 presents overall conclusions from the study, identifies policy implications, and presents recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Achievement Gap

Achievement gap is a term used in the field of education to refer to the disparity in educational outcomes among groups; it is usually highlighted by race/ethnicity, gender, and/or SES. This gap in achievement is observed in students from preschool through college and is demonstrated in classroom grades, grade point average (GPA), standardized test scores, graduation rates, and college enrollment and college completion rates (Jenks & Phillips, 1998; Rouse, Brooks-Gunn, & McLanahan, 2005). Teachers and scholars have noted that the achievement gap is apparent even in the first years in school, where it manifests in standardized test score disparities (Rouse et al., 2005). Some researchers have suggested that the gap begins well before kindergarten, as a gap in school readiness. Studies suggest that what happens in early childhood profoundly affects educational achievement and outcomes (Jenks & Phillips, 1998; Phillips, Crouse, & Ralph, 1998).

The achievement gap is especially apparent after high school graduation, when school is no longer compulsory or free. Increasingly, a postsecondary education is an essential part of economic and social stability, and policy changes over the past several decades have made a college education a reality for more students than ever before. Unfortunately, inequality in college access between low-income, minority, and first-generation college goers and their more affluent peers persists. College-going rates for low-income students and students of color have traditionally been lower than rates for middle- and high-income White and Asian students. In general, this is not for lack of

desire to attend college—these traditionally underrepresented students share similar college aspirations as their peers—yet several barriers prevent these young people from going to college (McDonough, 2004; Noeth & Wimberly, 2002). Due to compounded factors such as segregated schools, poor funding, and limited resources, low-income and minority students can spend their entire academic careers at a disadvantage to their more affluent or nonminority peers. According to Education Trust (2004), these students are nearly 3 years behind White and Asian students by eighth grade and 4 years behind by 12th grade. Even when students have excellent academic records and a great deal of personal efficacy, their family background and SES put them at risk of not graduating high school or of continuing to college.

Research demonstrates that low-income students with qualifications similar to their more advantaged peers are less likely to attend college (Hanson, 1994; Hern, 1991; Manski & Wise, 1993; Pallais & Turner, 2006; Roderick et al., 2011). Those who attend college are more likely to attend 2-year colleges instead of 4-year schools, and they are less likely to apply to “top tier” schools. This can have an impact on their ability to graduate and even to find a job (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; Perna, 2008; Perna, Lundy-Wagner, Yee, & Tadal, 2010)

Since World War II, the college-going rates for all American students have been on the rise. However, data demonstrate that college attendance and degree attainment gaps persist between White and Asian students and other students of color, as well as between affluent students and low-income students (ACT, Inc., 2010; Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; Excelencia in Education, 2011). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 2011), from 1972 to 2010 the percentage of White students

attending college immediately after high school increased from 50% to 71%, the percentage of African American students increased from 38% to 63%, and the percentage of Hispanic students increased from 50% to 62% (NCES, 2011). The Pew Center's Hispanic Trends Project released a report that showed that Hispanic high school graduates actually out-enrolled White high school graduates at the postsecondary level for the first time in U.S. history (Pew Hispanic Center, 2013). Still, the overall number of Hispanics graduating from high school is much lower than that of White students; the overall number of Hispanic students actually attending to college remains low. This signals that there is much work to be done.

Degree completion rates also show gaps among student groups. The 6-year degree completion rate for White students in 2010 was 61%, for Asians 68%, but for Hispanics and Black students 49% and 39%, respectively. These access and graduation gaps translate to lower overall education attainment rates for young adults in high-risk groups nationwide. The National Center for Education Statistics reported that in 2010, 39% of White young adults ages 24–29 had earned a 4-year degree, while only 13% of Hispanics and 11% of Blacks had done so. This achievement gap is more profoundly highlighted by income. While 82% of high-income students of any color earn a 4-year degree, only 8% of students in the lowest quartile of income do the same (Aud, Fox, & Kewel Ramani, 2010).²

Hispanics are the fastest-growing group in the United States and in the city of Yonkers (Grip, 2011; Pew Hispanic Center, 2013). The Hispanic population of the United States grew 43% between 2000 and 2010, which made up more than half the

²This number increased from 7% in 1975 to only 8% in 2010.

nationwide population growth during this time (Pew Hispanic Center, 2013). Mirroring national trends, Hispanics are now the largest ethnic/racial group attending public schools in YPS, representing about 54% or about 13,500 students. A February 2011 demographic study conducted by the school district forecast that the Hispanic student enrollment in the district would reach 19,000 or 61% of total enrollment by the year 2020 (Grip, 2011).

According to a report on Hispanic educational opportunity published by the White House, only about half of all Hispanic students earn a high school diploma on time, and those who do so are half as likely as their peers to be prepared for college-level work (U.S. White House, 2011). More Hispanic students are attending college than ever before; however, Hispanics still have the lowest level of education attainment in the nation: Just 13% have a bachelor's degree and only 4% have earned graduate degrees. Also, according to a report by Georgetown University's Public Policy Institute, the college options available for Hispanic students who attend college are often limited to 2-year and open-access colleges, not prestigious or top tier universities (Bailey, Jenkins, & Leinbach, 2005; Carnevale & Strohl, 2013).

Many Hispanic college goers are the first in their families to attend college, as their parents are often from working-class families without a strong history of college attendance and many were raised in other countries. Almost half of Hispanic undergraduates' parents have never enrolled in a postsecondary institution (Excelencia in Education, 2011; Reyes & Nora, 2012). Without a family history of college going, these students sometimes find it difficult to engage completely in college life (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Also, according to Edward Lascher, Hispanic students face the most financial stress with regard to attending a postsecondary school, even more so than

African Americans, who often have a similarly low SES (Lascher, 2008). These factors mean that many students are not able to persist in college, even beyond their first year, and therefore do not graduate.

Hispanics are more likely to be nontraditional college students, meaning that they attend 2-year colleges instead of 4-year colleges; they attend part time and do not necessarily enroll immediately following high school graduation at higher rates than non-Hispanic counterparts (Santiago & Stettner, 2013). This can affect their ability to persist and earn a degree. Arbona and Nora (2007) examined college enrollment degree attainment data for Hispanic students using the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) of 1988 (NCES, 1988). They found that Hispanic students who attended a 4-year college immediately following high school graduation were far more likely to earn a 4-year degree than peers who started college careers at a community or 2-year college.

Family History of College Attendance

Almost half of all students who graduate from YPS have parents who have neither enrolled in nor graduated from college. In the literature on college enrollment and retention, students whose parents have never enrolled in postsecondary education are referred to as *first-generation college goers* or *first-generation college students* (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Horn and Nunez (2000) found that these students tended to be from low-income families and were more likely to be Hispanic or African American than students from families with longer traditions of college attendance. Chen (2005) looked at first-generation college-going students and their course-taking experiences and their transcript data. He found that first-generation college goers tended to take more remedial classes, have lower GPAs, withdraw/drop classes more often, and accumulate fewer

credits per year than peers whose parents have earned a Bachelor's degree. They are also more likely to "stop out" of school, characterized by breaks between semesters of enrollment. These students have family demographic and other characteristics that put them at risk for attrition. They are more likely than peers to have lower academic achievement in high school and lower degree aspirations overall, and are less likely to earn a degree.

First-generation college students are more likely to be older than traditional college students, to be employed full time, and to have one or more dependent children (Nomi, 2005; Terenzini, 1996). Also, these students are more likely to enroll in community colleges rather than 4-year institutions. Community colleges provide basic postsecondary education at a lower cost than public and private 4-year schools. However, some lack the resources to support students and meet their diverse sets of needs (Bailey et al., 2005; Nomi, 2005).

Access to Information About College and Financial Aid

Lack of information about college planning prevents many young people from realizing educational goals. When students are the first in their families to plan for and attend college, their parents cannot provide guidance based on their own experiences in the way that students from families with a college-going history can (Cunningham, Merisotis, O'Brian, & Stringer, 1998). This often means that students who can and should go to college do not apply and that the majority of very high-achieving students from low-income families do not apply to selective colleges or universities (Hoxby & Turner, 2012; National Center for Policy Analysis, 2013; Perna, 2004).

Lareau and Weininger (2003) maintained that drive, determination, and hard work are not necessarily enough to get low-income or working-class students into 4-year colleges. She posited that it is often intimate knowledge of the higher educational system and hierarchy that middle-class parents have that gives their children the advantage when applying to these schools. For middle-class and upper-middle-class families, the parent role in the college application process is substantial. Parents procure brochures and other reading material, arrange college trips during holiday vacations, help their children to construct application essays, and generally monitor the process. However, this kind of assistance takes both financial resources and a certain kind of college “savvy” that working-class families do not have. As a result, working-class and less-affluent parents often allow school personnel to be their child’s sole college process guidance.

In a review of literature, Long (2004) found that many low-income students had little to no access to information about postsecondary educational opportunities and that the information that they received was often incomplete or inaccurate. Students and their parents who have had access to information about college are more likely to predict accurately and plan for college costs than their peers, for whom information has been scarce (Perna, 2004). Also, misinformation is prolific. Low-income and minority parents tend to overestimate college costs, believe that they make too much money to apply for financial aid, think that all financial aid funds must be repaid, or believe that aid eligibility is dependent on good grades (Grodsky & Jones, 2004; Matus-Grossman, Gooden, Wavelet, Diaz, & Seupersad, 2002; Zarate & Panchon, 2006).

Even when disadvantaged students, students of color, and first-generation college goers manage to navigate the college application, they may find that costs put a

postsecondary education out of their reach. The Center for Postsecondary and Economic Success found that college-qualified high school graduates from families of low and moderate income were faced with an average unmet need of \$9,000 to 11,000 (Choitz & Reimherr, 2013). This translates to 48% of low-income students not attending 4-year colleges and 22% not attending college at all (NCES, 2002). In a review of literature, Jager-Hyman (2004) found that race and family income were highly correlated with college enrollment and graduation rates.

Although underrepresented students may rise above systemic and social barriers to college, they may fail to matriculate or persist in college because of cost. While the majority of federal funds for higher education are based on student need (Perna & Swail, 2002), it is essential to ensure that all students have proper information about financial aid programs. Low-income students and their families may not know enough about financial aid, making the application process cumbersome and intimidating. Vargas (2004) found that low-income students and parents were the most uninformed and fearful group regarding financial aid application. Cabrera and La Nasa (2001) maintained that students from these backgrounds generally do not receive as much information about financial aid from their parents as do their wealthier peers. Perna and Swail (2002) found that students were less likely to enroll in higher education when their parents were not knowledgeable about financial aid.

Student Debt and College Cost Awareness

Access to information about financial aid programs is not enough. Students and parents must be educated about student loans in particular, as financial aid packages increasingly include fewer grants and more loans (Heller, 2002). In summer 2013,

student loan debt took center stage in the national media as rates on federally subsidized Stafford loans were doubled (although temporarily) from 3.4% to 6.8%. This helped to start a public conversation that scholars have been having for some time. The questions usually asked are (a) Are students borrowing too much for college? (b) How much student loan debt is too much? and (c) Are students getting a return on their investment?

A college degree in today's job market is not just valuable; it is almost essential. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012), the median annual earnings of a high school graduate are approximately \$33,000, while workers with Associate's degrees make approximately \$40,000 and those with bachelor's degree make about \$55,000. College-educated workers are also less likely to face unemployment than their less-educated counterparts. According to the Bureau, the unemployment rate for high school graduates in 2012 was 8.3%, while for 4-year college graduates it was 4.5%.

Federal student loans have existed in the United States for more than half a century; they have provided opportunities for a college degree to students whose families would never have been able to afford college tuition. In the past 20 years, student loan debt has more than quadrupled. In June 2008, total student debt rose to more than \$800 billion, overtaking credit card debt for the first time in history (Avery & Turner, 2012). In 2011, total student debt rose above one billion dollars; more than 37 million Americans owed money to repay their education loans. Economists and politicians are predicting that the next U.S. economic crisis will result from student loan default. They have named this impending crisis the Student Debt Bubble, as stories in major newspapers describe 20-somethings with more than \$120,000 debt (Bonner, B., 2012; Carney, 2013; Martin & Lehern, 2012; Planes, 2013). These students are part of what Daniel Austin (2012) called

the “Indentured Generation”; he argued that many of them will be burdened with student loan debt for much of (or the rest of) their lives.

According to The Project on Student Debt (2012), two thirds of college seniors who graduated in 2011 had some type of student loan debt, with an average \$26,600 balance. In their study of student debt at colleges and universities nationwide, they found that state averages for loan debt from 4-year colleges ranged widely across the nation, with the highest loan debt reported in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states. Some schools reported that 100% of their student body had some type of loans.

Race and family income seem to play a role in the amount of money students borrow for college. High-level student debt, characterized by owing \$30,500 or more, is more prevalent among students from families whose parents make less than \$100,000 a year (Baum & Steele, 2010). High-level debt is also more common among Black students than among those from other demographic groups. According to Baum and Steele (2010), these differences are not entirely explained by differences in family income levels: 27% of 2007-2008 Black bachelor’s degree recipients borrowed \$30,500 or more, compared to 16% of Whites, 14% of Hispanics, and 9% of Asians.

Avery and Turner (2012) rejected the idea that student borrowing is too high. They maintained that enrolling in college is the first capital investment that a student will make over the course of the lifespan and, to do this, they will need loans. They suggested that high school graduates contemplate the consequences of their investment and “estimate the probabilities of the long- term outcomes as precisely as possible” (p. 182). Avery and Turner, like many economists, see college access through the lens of human capital theory, which assumes that students perform a sort of cost-benefit analysis when

making college choices and that people (in this case, students) will act rationally in ways to maximize utility and accurately predict their future outcomes (Becker, 1993; Perna et al., 2010). According to Perna (2008), students borrow based on the belief that they will make enough money that the benefits of borrowing will exceed the costs.

However, others are skeptical that student borrowers are well enough informed to be so mindful and conscientious. Lusardi, Mitchell, and Curto (2010) showed that financial literacy was low among young people under age 25; less than one third possessed basic knowledge about interest rates and inflation. Also, financial literacy was strongly related to SES and the family's financial sophistication. In a report by the College Board, Baum and Steele (2010) argued that many students do not have a complete understanding of the effects of the financial obligations that they are undertaking and cannot accurately predict future earnings. According to a recently completed survey by the Credit Union National Association (2013), almost half of all American 12th-grade students could not accurately estimate how much money they would need to pay for college, and even fewer were able to understand the basic terms of a student loan agreement. Eighty-three percent did not know the interest rate on the loans that they were planning to take and 77% did not know how long they would be paying for those loans. Baum and Steele (2010) called for strengthening of postsecondary financing policies and help for students through improved financial literacy before they borrow to finance their education.

Financial awareness seems to be a serious concern for college students, especially those from low-income families (Barrow, Brock, & Rouse, 2013; Murphy, A., 2005). This lack of awareness may come from parents who themselves have never been to

college. Tornatzky, Cutler, and Lee (2002) measured college and financial aid awareness in parents of high school-age students and found that parents of low SES answered incorrectly more than 75% of the questions about college costs and financial aid. If parents are not well informed about college costs and ways of paying for college, then chances are good that the students will also be misinformed.

Pre-College Intervention and Outreach Programs

High school guidance counselors are usually a high school junior or senior's first source for financial aid information (Luna De La Rosa, 2006). Minority and low-income students are much more dependent on high school personnel for information about college than are their more affluent peers, who rely on their parents as a source for information (Freeman, 1997; Goldrick-Rab, 2007; Horn, Chen, & Chapman 2003; McDonough, 1997; Perna, 2004; Terenzini, Cabrera, & Bernal 2001; Zarate & Pachon, 2006). In many large cities, this reliance on school staff puts these students at a greater disadvantage because time with these individuals is at a premium. In Yonkers, a district with persistent budgetary constraints, the ratio of students to guidance counselors is approximately 600:1, making regular access nearly impossible.

One way to address limited access to guidance counselors, lack of information, or excess of misinformation about college and financial aid is through pre-college intervention and outreach programs such as YPIE (described thoroughly in Chapter 6). Usually established in partnership with a school, district, college, or local community, these outreach programs can be publicly or privately funded, nonprofit or for-profit organizations. Generally, they are student centered and target individual students for intervention (Gullat & Jan, 2003). These programs may have many functions, but

ultimately they act as guides for students when parents and school staff are either unable to or unwilling to help students to find their way to college. Outreach programs do this by helping students to set college and career goals, giving students personal attention, offering peer support, offering scholarship assistance, and providing positive adult role models.

Some outreach programs are more successful than others. A few models such as Gear-Up and Upward Bound are of national scope and have had a great deal of success. According to Gandara (2001), the most successful programs are those that serve students by developing long-lasting relationships between the students and informed mentors. Effective programs also provide some academic support through workshops and/or tutoring and supply assistance with college applications, test preparation, and/or scholarship applications. Outreach programs differ significantly in scope and design. The specific programs, program characteristics, and delivery methods vary based on access to students and availability of monetary resources. Research has shown that, while many of these programs are well meaning, they reach only a small percentage of low-income and minority students. The focus has been on a small subset of high-achieving at-risk students in a school or community but the programs have failed to meet the needs of all students (Gandara, 2001; Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002).

Another concern about pre-college outreach programs is how to evaluate their effectiveness. According to Gullat and Jan (2003), most pre-college outreach organizations produce some type of data regarding their successes and effectiveness, but few of these programs have undergone rigorous program evaluations. Few programs track control groups and baseline data to determine the effects of their program on

participants versus nonparticipants, and even fewer track longitudinal data (Gandara, 2001; Gullat & Jan, 2003).

Gandara (2001) pointed out that estimating program impact is especially difficult because attrition rates are generally very high. Gandara suggested that these programs collect baseline data on participants and monitor attendance and program attrition rates. Also, they should attempt to identify control groups and be attentive to carefully and honestly measuring outcomes. Gandara suggested that outreach programs be connected with their host districts and be aware of and in tune with school reform efforts that have an impact on the students whom they serve.

While it has been difficult to assess the effectiveness of existing college outreach programs, scholars have outlined characteristics of the programs that seem to have the greatest impact. Oesterreich (2000) surmised that the best programs are those that can offer students a combination of services, that start early in high school or even junior high school, that focus on college readiness and not remediation, and that offer one-on-one counseling, tutoring, college visits, mentoring programs, and guest speakers. Gandara (2001) maintained that the most effective outreach programs provide a key person who monitors student progress and success over time, access to challenging classes, peer group support, and financial assistance as needed. Perna and Swail (2002) noted that the most successful programs facilitate post high school educational advancement for low-income or at-risk students and usually meet the following criteria: (a) They believe that their students can make it to college and they help to instill this expectation in the students and their families; (b) they expose students to college life through tours, visits, fairs, and college days; (c) they help students to research colleges, complete applications,

write essays, and plan for going to college; (d) they encourage students to take more rigorous coursework and maintain good grades; (e) they involve parents in goal setting and attempt to get parents involved in the college process; and (f) they start the conversation about college early, usually by eighth grade, to facilitate curricular planning.

It is for these reasons that Yonkers presents a very interesting case to study. YPIE serves all students in the seven schools in which they have College and Career Centers. There is no inclusion or exclusion policy, students are not required to enroll with YPIE, and, so long as the students remain enrolled at a YPS school, there is no concern about attrition. YPIE is committed to keeping high-quality data about their services and their students' outcomes. Also, YPIE's college program meets the criteria for success set forth by Perna and Swail, as well as those proposed by Gandara.

Postsecondary Persistence

In 2009, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced that, as part of the Race to the Top initiative, school districts would be measured by more than just mathematics and reading scores; they would also be assessed by the rate at which graduates enrolled in college and accumulated credits. Traditionally, schools have boasted high numbers of students who go onto college, usually reflecting what students say they will do in the year following high school graduation; however, these promises have not been representative of how many of those students actually enroll, attend classes, or graduate from college (Schramm & Zalesne, 2011). College persistence, attrition, and graduation rates are important, as they are perceived to be indicators of academic quality and overall student success.

It is important to note the difference between college retention and persistence. While they are important, *retention* indicates only which students are enroll in college classes year to year. *Persistence* is defined as a student's continuation behavior that leads toward attainment of a degree. The NCES found that only 29.4% of those who began at a 4-year public institution graduated within 6 years and 20.3% graduated from a 2-year public institution within 3 years (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Ginder, 2012). Concerns about persistence are especially strong regarding students from low-income families or families without a strong history of postsecondary education.

Theories that attempt to understand the causes of student persistence or attrition are plentiful. Astin (1985) argued that students who are highly involved in school and devote considerable energy to studying, participate in student organizations, and interact frequently with faculty members show greater commitment to their institutions and are therefore more likely to stay enrolled in them. Bean and Metzner (1985) argued that environmental factors have greater impact on student departure decisions than do academic factors.

Most often cited in college persistence studies is Tinto's model of college retention. Tinto's work (1993) includes three main ideas. Students persist in college because of individual pre-college characteristics, such as family background, strong academic preparation, and individual goals and commitment to education. These individual characteristics interact over time with the student's academic and social institutional experiences, both formal and informal. This, compounded with the student's level of integration into the academic and social system of the school, determines the likelihood to withdraw from the school (Tinto, 1993). Students who have positive

experiences, form meaningful connections, and experience an overall level of satisfaction are more likely to persist and therefore graduate (Egstrom & Tinto, 2008). Tinto and Russo (1994) found that many students had obligations other than school that affected their ability to maintain grades, persist, and earn a degree, such as full-time employment, family obligations, and financial constraints. Tinto (1993) outlined the necessary conditions that create a learning environment that maximizes a student's potential for success, regardless of individual background.

1. Institutions must communicate to all students both verbally and nonverbally that there is an expectation that they be successful.
2. Students need *guidance* and help in defining goals, skills, and interests, and in choosing a career major. They may also need guidance in understanding institutional policies, which may have an impact on how and when they complete the degree.
3. Schools should offer a conglomerate of academic, social, and personal support through formal and informal means, including mentoring, advisories, and social mixers.
4. Student cannot be allowed to remain isolated from others. They should be encouraged to seek advice and guidance from other students, as well as faculty members.
5. Schools should see that their students are actively engaged, which will encourage them to continue despite challenges and hardships.

Community Colleges and 2-Year Colleges

A large number of students who graduate from YPS attend community college as their first or only postsecondary school. Community and 2-year colleges provide an important service; they are generally open-access schools that accept all students who apply, so long as they have earned a high school diploma or equivalency. The majority of

these schools are public institutions, drawing students from the local community; however, there are private 2-year schools as well. For the purpose of this study, any school that fit in this category is referred to as a *community college*. Generally, these schools grant Associate degrees and sometimes trade certificates.

Community colleges have by far the highest proportion of undergraduate students of all types of postsecondary school setting. Several factors contribute to the popularity of these institutions. First, they are cheap; the average cost of attendance at a public 2-year college is about \$2,700 per academic year, compared to \$7,600 for a public 4-year school and \$27,000 for a private 4-year school (Baum, Little, & Payea, 2011). Students who enroll in community college are not generally required to take the SAT/ACT exams and do not need the type of rigorous college preparatory classes that 4-year colleges expect from their applicants.

Most community college curricula can be completed within 2 years, perhaps less. However, NCES (2011) reported that the average time to earn an Associate degree was 39 months. Degree completion takes longer for many students because they enroll part time, and for others because they are required to take one or more remedial or developmental skills classes (Long & Kurlaender, 2009). Unfortunately for those students, most community colleges do not grant credit for taking these courses. Community college students have the highest rates of remedial course enrollment among peers in other types of secondary institutions, with more than 40% attending one or more developmental skills class (Bailey et al., 2005; NCES, 2003). A thorough discussion of remediation is presented in the College Readiness section of this literature review.

More than half of all Hispanic students enrolled in undergraduate programs, as well as a disproportionately large number of African American students, enroll in community colleges instead of 4-year institutions (Bailey et al., 2005). Recently, community colleges have come under increased scrutiny because their students are not earning degrees in great numbers. In a surprisingly self-critical report, the American Association of Community Colleges (2012) said,

Community colleges need to be redesigned for new times. What we find today are student success rates that are unacceptably low, employment preparation that is inadequately connected to job market needs, and disconnects in transitions between high schools, community colleges, and baccalaureate institutions. (p. 9)

The retention of community college students from one semester to the next is a challenge (Goldrick-Rab, 2007). Nationally, fewer than 26% of community college students earn an Associate degree (NCES, 2011). Students who started at a community college were 14.5% less likely to complete a bachelor's degrees within 9 years (Long & Kurlaender, 2009). Several factors contribute to low graduation rates at these schools, including poor academic preparation, the preponderance of nontraditional students, and the part-time nature of student attendance (Bailey et al., 2005; Center for an Urban Future, 2012).

College Readiness, Remediation, and College for All

In a speech in 2009, President Barak Obama proposed a goal for the United States to once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020 (Obama, 2009). Colleges and universities are increasingly faced with the challenge of educating students who are underprepared for college-level work: Only 32% of high school students graduate are prepared to enter college. For African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans, the numbers drop to 20%, 16%, and 14%, respectively. Students

who do not enter college prepared for this work are generally required to take one or several semesters of remedial coursework (Greene & Forster, 2003).

In the first part of the 20th century, many students, especially those from low-income families or ones without a strong history of college attendance, often completed certificate programs in high school or in trade schools. This afforded the opportunity to get good-paying jobs without the high costs of college and lead the way to a comfortable middle-class lifestyle. With the introduction of the GI Bill, there was a shift in focus toward college education. As jobs began to require more formalized education and college degrees, these technical programs became increasingly poor-quality mechanisms to track low-income students and children of color away from college preparatory programs (Neckerman, 2007). Over the past few decades, a college education has become the widely accepted path toward the middle class, effectively leading to a college-for-all model career and technical program. In the 1960s and 1970s, colleges began to accept more disadvantaged and minority students through open enrollment policies (Lavin & Hyllegard, 1981). These policies garnered a great deal of criticism, as the “new students” were thought to be unprepared to do college-level work or were not college ready.

Conley (2007) defined college readiness as the level of preparation that a student needs to succeed without remediation in credit-bearing coursework at the postsecondary level. A variety of measures can be employed to determine whether a student is prepared to enroll in postsecondary-level courses, such as high school GPA, class rank, standardized test scores, and performance in particular high school college preparatory coursework. Conley also argued that graduation requirements set by districts or states often serve as poor indicators of postsecondary preparation and predictors of future

performance because they are not aligned with college acceptance requirements or college curricula. He cited the number of remedial courses high school graduates must complete when they arrive on college campuses as evidence of this misalignment.

Each year, 20%–25% of first-time college students and about 65% of first-year community college students take remedial classes (NCES, 2013). Also, 50% to 60% of students enrolled in 2-year colleges in New York State take remedial coursework (King, 2013). Most of these students leave college before graduating, some before they ever earn any actual credits. The literature on remedial program effectiveness is mixed and a cause for serious debate. For many, remedial education is a necessary part of accessing a postsecondary education by underprepared students or nontraditional students (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006; Bahr, 2008; Shaw, 1997). Proponents of these programs maintain that students who complete remedial programs have college completion rates similar to those of students who did not need to take remedial courses (Attewell et al., 2006; Bahr, 2008). Supporters see these courses as an inconvenient but necessary means to an end. Students must be prepared for credit-bearing courses and some enter college unable to do even the remedial-level work (Foderaro, 2011). These courses help students to make up for what they failed to learn or be taught in high school.

Critics of remedial programs have expressed concern about both their costs and their effectiveness (Bettinger & Long, 2004; Rosenbaum, 2001). According to Bettinger and Long (2004), students who are enrolled in remedial courses may actually have more negative outcomes than those who are not enrolled in these courses, as they are likely to transfer to or choose a less-selective college or to be unable to finish a degree in 4 years. Cost, both economic and time, is often cited as a drawback to postsecondary remedial

education programs. Students who take these courses often take much longer to complete a degree, which not only drives up the cost of their education but delays their ability to find gainful employment (Jenkins & Boswell, 2002; Rosenbaum, 2001). Students are often compelled to take several remedial courses or repeat the same course several times before they are allowed to begin basic courses required for graduation, and financial aid can be used to pay for these courses for only a certain number of times. Undoubtedly, this can be frustrating for students and may lead to attrition.

For years, a type of scholarly debate was waged by David Lavin and James Rosenbaum about the merits of college remediation and the college-for-all model that many high schools have adopted. Rosenbaum (2001) suggested that underprepared students would benefit more from attaining an Associate degree or a technical 2-year degree than attempting to enter or transfer to 4-year colleges and earn a bachelor's degree. Lavin and Weininger (2000) maintained that failure of college placement exams and remedial education is not an academic death sentence. In an article on admission changes at City University of New York (CUNY), the team maintained that, for students of color, those who failed placement exams and were required to take remedial coursework graduated at higher rates than those who had passed all placement exams.

There has been a growing national backlash against remedial courses. National media coverage questions the cost and efficacy of these courses (Dillon, 2009; Lew, 2013). State University of New York (SUNY) Chancellor Nancy Zimpher (2012) announced in her State of the University speech that SUNY would be putting an end to remedial courses at all 2-year and 4-year campuses within 10 years. Her plan is to test students in the 10th grade and have high schools identify students who may need

remediation while still in high school. As of 2014, lawmakers in Florida have made both placement tests and remedial classes in mathematics, reading, and English optional for students (Fain, 2012). In Connecticut, Governor Malloy signed a bill that would prohibit community colleges from compelling students to take more than one semester of remedial coursework and would change the system that determines which students need remediation (Thomas, 2012). Connecticut's new law mandates that, instead of students taking the same remedial coursework multiple times, colleges must weave academic intervention services into credit-bearing courses, thus putting the onus on the college to provide a smoother avenue for student success. Sadovnik (1994) argued that, if colleges accept underprepared students, they have a moral obligation to ensure that *access* is turned into *success*.

The debate over remediation forces scholars and policy makers to deal with a very uncomfortable set of questions. Is college an appropriate place for all students? In other terms, should college always be the default place to send students after high school graduation? Education scholar Diane Ravitch (2012) called the idea of college for all a "sham." The Illinois Association of School Boards called the idea that the President's goal (mentioned earlier) can be reached only through 4-year college degrees narrow and based on misconceptions about the actual payoffs of college (Klingborg & Halverson, 2014).

In 2009, Attewell, Lavin, Domina, and Levey conducted a follow-up study of the women who had attended CUNY following the change in policy to "open admissions" in 1970. The researchers found that the children of women from underprivileged backgrounds who went to college were more likely to attend college than their peers

nationally and to earn college degrees, even if their mothers had never graduated. They also found that women who earned a college degree were more likely to expect their children to attend and graduate from college. College-educated women were more likely to raise children in both financially stable and two-parent households, which has also been known to increase postsecondary success. These women were more likely to have extensive discussions with their children about college and to be involved in their schooling and college choice process. The authors asserted that offering access to a college education to those who would normally have been denied one has changed not only their own career and life paths but also those of their children and grandchildren.

The Postsecondary Institution's Role in Student Persistence

Research indicates that the type of postsecondary institution that students attend may have a strong influence on their ability to earn a degree (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009). Some schools are better at moving low-income, minority and first-generation college students toward graduation than others (Bowen et al., 2009; Hoxby & Avery, 2013; Lynch & Engel, 2010a, 2010b). The most selective schools, including but not limited to the Ivy League schools, have been shown to have some of the highest graduation rates for students of color, all more than 90% ("Here Is Good News," 2008; Kelly, A., Schneider, & Carey, 2010). Carnevale and Strohl (2013) maintained that the more selective schools spend 2 to 5 times as much on instruction, which leads to higher graduation rates and may even translate into more students attending graduate school. Also, more selective schools tend to have large endowments and, despite their high costs, can be far cheaper for low-income students than open-access schools, sometimes even free. Also important are schools that have managed to lessen or close graduation gaps

between minority students and their White counterparts. Most of the highly selective schools are in this category, as well as many more-selective state colleges and universities (Kelly, A., et al., 2010; Lynch & Engel, 2010a, 2010b).

High-achieving low-income or minority students who go to less-selective open-access colleges are about half as likely to graduate as those who go to more-selective colleges (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013). Unfortunately, many students experience something known in college admissions circles as *undermatching*, when students apply to less-selective schools than their academic credentials and record would indicate they are prepared for (Bowen et al., 2009; Hoxby & Avery, 2013). According to Carnevale and Strohl (2013), undermatching is endemic for low-income and minority students. Despite fairly equal levels of preparedness between White students and their minority counterparts, students of color were far less likely to apply for and attend highly selective colleges, where they would be more likely to graduate.

Similar Studies

Only in the past few years have states and school districts been compelled to examine their graduates' success through college enrollment and retention data. Cities and districts driving this type of research include Chicago (Allensworth, 2006; Roderick et al., 2011; Roderick, Nagaoka, & Allensworth, 2006), New York City (Garvey, 2009), Boston (Sum et al., 2008), the state of Washington (Stroh, Fouts, & Gratama, 2007), Denver (Buckley & Muraskin, 2009), and Newark (Backstrand et al., 2014). These studies focused on three main themes: college and career readiness, college enrollment, and persistence and degree attainment. They all included analyses of gender, ethnicity, and SES for their respective districts. The findings mirror the previously discussed

national statistics that demonstrate that Asians and Whites have higher postsecondary enrollment and completion rates than Blacks and Hispanics and that women now have higher college enrollment and completion rates than men.

In Chicago, studies found a high correlation between students' high school grades and ACT/SAT scores and their college access and persistence. Also correlated were advanced placement and advanced high school coursework and access to more-selective colleges. Researchers found wide variation in college access from disparate schools in the same district (Allensworth, 2006; Roderick et al., 2011; Roderick et al., 2006). Schools that had a strong college-going culture tended to have more students enroll in and persist in college. Finally, students tended to persist longer in 4-year schools than in 2-year schools, as well as in more-selective schools than in less-selective or nonselective schools.

In New York City, Garvey's (2009) analysis of college readiness of public school graduates used student data from the City University of New York (CUNY), which serves more than one half million students, most of whom attended New York public high schools. Garvey reported that the weakest indicators of college readiness were No Child Left Behind (NCLB)-related assessments, high school graduation, and college placement test results. The most predictive indicators were the intensity and rigor of coursework, class grades and GPA, and academic quality of the high school. As in Chicago, he noted wide variation in success depending on which high school students attended. Garvey suggested that parents, students, and education professionals should increase their understanding of college success criteria and called for formation of partnerships between school communities and institutions of higher education.

In the state of Washington, Stroh et al. (2007) sought to determine what percentage of the state's high school graduates met the entrance requirements for most 4-year colleges, as well as the college attendance and persistence rates of state graduates. They found that only 41% of the graduates from the classes of 2005 and 2006 took courses required for admission to a Washington 4-year college. They also found that college eligibility rates and persistence rates differed by gender and ethnic group status. A higher percentage of females met course requirements for admission to college and were significantly more likely to persist and graduate. This held true for Asian and White students when compared to Native American, Hispanic, and African American students. They also noted a nearly 10% decline in overall enrollment of students from the first year following high school graduation to the second year, indicating a problem in persistence.

Stroh et al. (2007) also found that students who took the more rigorous college preparation courses prior to graduation had higher GPAs than students who had not taken those courses. Like Garvey in New York City, they found that graduation requirements did not align with college entrance requirements and that students were therefore likely to lack necessary mathematics or foreign language credits to enter a 4-year school. Finally, similar to Roderick et al. (2006) and Roderick et al. (2011) in Chicago, researchers in Washington noted that schools that were working to create a college-going environment had noticeably higher rates of graduates attending colleges.

The Denver Public Schools study conducted by The Piton Foundation found that 56% of Denver graduates from 2002 to 2007 had enrolled in college and within 6 years 39% had either 2-year or 4-year degrees. Enrollment and graduation rates were highest for White students (71% and 52%, respectively) and lowest for Hispanic students (39%

and 25%, respectively). Of African American students, 63% enrolled in college and 30% had graduated (Buckley & Muraskin, 2009).

In Newark, researchers matched NSC data and to demographic and academic data provided by the Newark Public Schools. The research questions addressed and methods used by the researchers (Backstrand et al., 2014) were very similar to those in the current study. The researchers found that, for Newark Public Schools graduates, enrollment in the first semester following high school was significantly lower than the national average reported by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013a): 39% versus 71%. More Newark graduates enrolled in 2-year colleges than in 4-year colleges and approximately 25% of those who matriculated earned some type of degree within 6 years. Enrollment was higher for graduates from magnet or specialized schools than from comprehensive or traditional public schools. As with the nation as a whole, girls in Newark outenrolled boys but, contrary to national trends, Black graduates from Newark enrolled in college at higher rates than their Latino or White or Other counterparts. While White students from Newark enrolled at lower rates than their Black or Hispanic counterparts, they persisted and earned degrees at higher rates than other high school graduates.

Theoretical Framework

The literature on college access and degree attainment is prolific, drawing from myriad disciplines and using diverse methodologies. I was not convinced that patterns of college access, attendance, and graduation could be understood as solely sociological issues, nor could I accept that these were simply issues education or economics. I had abandoned this effort, resigning myself to the fact that this work would simply be descriptive in nature, when I encountered a framework developed by Laura Perna in

2006). This multidisciplinary, multi-approach framework, to which she has not given a name but to which I refer as the “success-gap framework,” is intended to help those who study or attempt to address gaps in college enrollment, retention, and completion among students who are traditionally underrepresented in colleges and universities (Perna, 2006). The theory offers a much-needed definition of the term *student success*, which Perna defined as a longitudinal process in which students pass through four stages: college readiness, college enrollment, college achievement, and postgraduate labor market participation or entry into a graduate program. Figure 1 shows these four major stages and the 10 substages of college success.

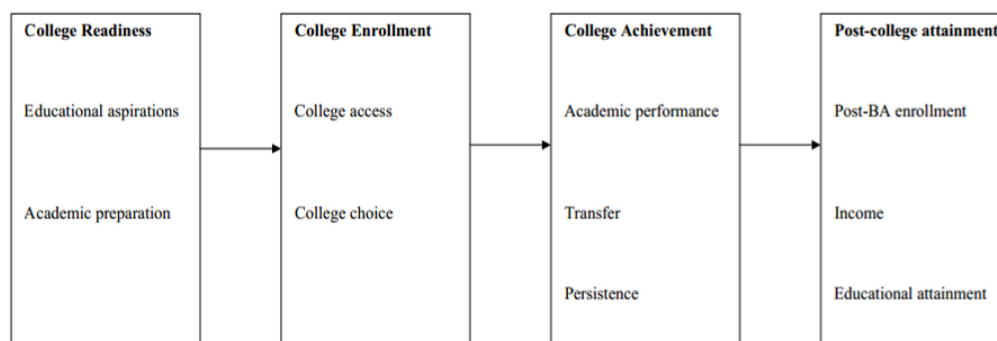


Figure 1. The four major stages and 10 substages of college success.

The success-gap framework explains a means to implement a series of effective policies to improve student outcomes, rather than find a “single bullet” theory, method, policy, or practice (Perna, 2006, p. 101). Student postsecondary achievement or attrition cannot possibly be explained by a single variable. Multiple social, physiological, academic, institutional/ organizational, and economic factors can influence postsecondary success. Perna argued that, while researchers have tried to understand student success

through the lens of particular disciplines, a single methodology, or even a single unit of analysis, student success can be understood only through a multidisciplinary, multimethod approach that examines more than just student-level data (including school-level or district-level data). “Considering these varying approaches together produces a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which policymakers and practitioners can intervene to promote student success” (Perna, 2006, p. 105).

In this framework Perna (2006) argued that postsecondary success is largely determined by students as they make choices throughout their educational journey that affect their postsecondary outcomes. However, the model also assumes that “success” is influenced by disparate external factors, over many of which the student has little control. These include but are not limited to the student’s family circumstances, SES, the quality of high school attended, peer groups inside and outside college, level of academic preparation, and even larger factors such as availability of federal financial aid in a given year. Perna offered a model shaped by four nested contextual layers that affect student outcomes individually and sometimes interact to produce a compounded effect on student outcomes (Figure 2). The model is complex and implies that factors that influence student success are not always easily studied or clearly disentangled. Policies that demonstrate success for one group of students might prove to be less effective for another group. This model’s “messiness” is exactly what makes it appealing. Too often, social scientists, economists, politicians, and educators try to fit patterns of college access and persistence into a neat set of variables. At the center of Perna’s framework is economic human capital theory. Perna argued that students make choices about college enrollment through a series of cost-benefit analyses that motivates them to do well in high school, apply to

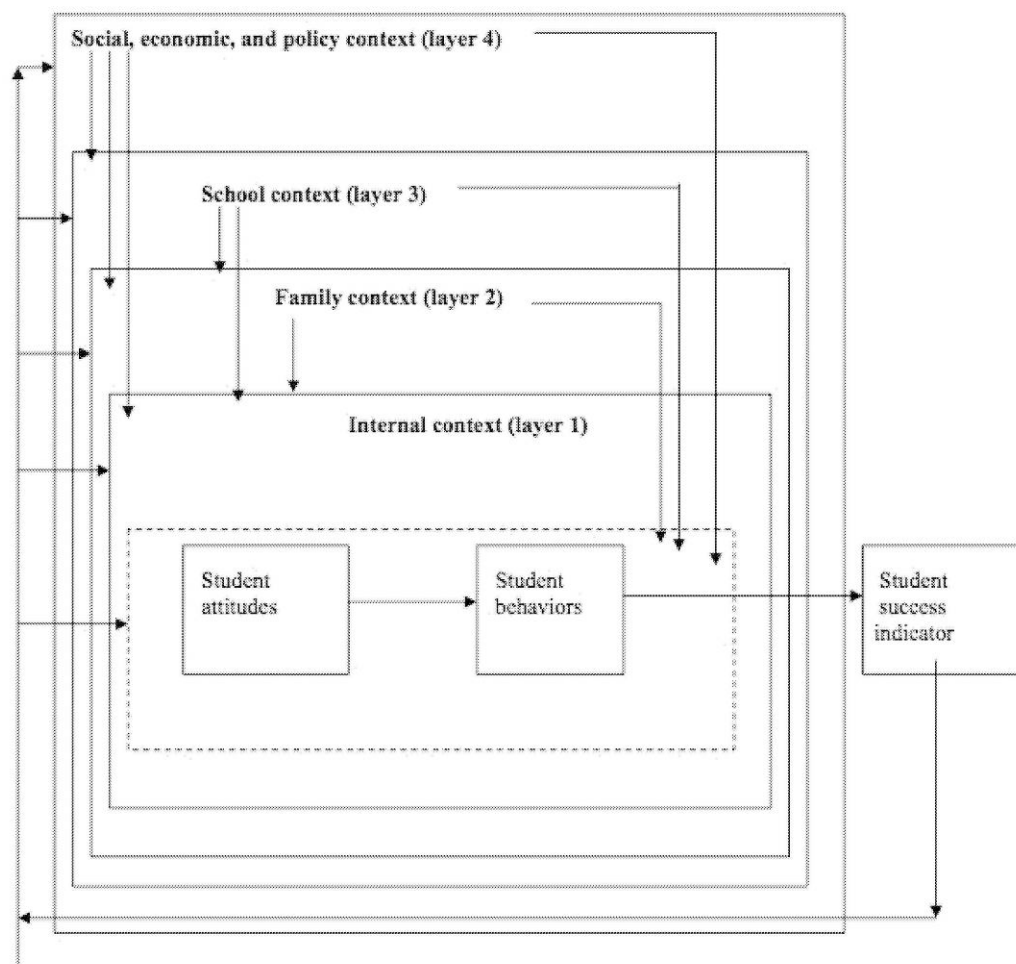


Figure 2. Perna's success gap framework. Source: "Studying College Access and Choice: A Proposed Conceptual Model" by L. Perna, 2006, in J. C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research* (pp. 99-157), New York, NY: Springer.

college, invest in a postsecondary education, and make choices about taking college loans. Other factors, such as family context, academic preparation, institutional engagement, and self-efficacy, move students toward or away from a path of enrollment, persistence, degree attainment, and employment.

The success-gap model encourages researchers and practitioners to examine postsecondary success using a multimethods approach. Early in this process, I thought about excluding the qualitative part of this research and examine only postsecondary

outcomes of YPS graduates quantitatively. However, Perna (2006) implied that reasons for persistence or attrition from college are too nuanced to understand from a single survey instrument or data set. This position influenced me to include a qualitative data section to this work (see Chapter 3).

This model also encourages researchers to see student success through a multidisciplinary lens. In a joint degree program that asks students to examine urban issues holistically instead of in a set of individual problems, I have come to understand that multidisciplinary approaches to issues as large as student success are essential in ensuring long-term outcomes.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Mixed-Methods Research

This study is a mixed-methods, multimethod case study of the postsecondary planning and outcomes of students who graduated from public high schools in Yonkers, New York. It received approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Rutgers University in November 2012 (IRB Protocol # 13-206Mc; Appendix A), with amendments in February, June, August, and October 2013. Using mixed methods allows researchers to address complex research questions and collect richer information than can be collected with a single method (Yin, 2009).

Mixed methods research is the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration. (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007, p. 123)

The qualitative methods used in this research were direct and participant observation, interviews, focus groups, and archival/historical research. The quantitative methods used in this research were analysis of survey data and analysis of postsecondary data from the NSC.

Case Study

Case study research offers a path to in-depth knowledge of complex issues and creates in-depth understanding of what has already been researched. Case studies have been used for decades across the social sciences. This method allows researchers to understand real-life situations and provides a basis for application of ideas (Swanson & Holton, 2005). Yin (2009) called case studies the “preferred method” when the “focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context” (p. 2) and when the researcher

is not in control of the events to be studied. The topic of postsecondary access for low-income students from urban areas could not be more “real life” or “contemporary,” as it is increasingly a topic for discussion in both education and political circles. This is not a controlled environment, and I did not conduct experimental research. I had little to no control over how students navigate the college planning process, or what they do once they graduate from high school.

As described later in greater detail, the data sets in this study were not perfect and were at times inconsistent. Yin (2009) maintained that using case studies allows researchers to cope “with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion” (p. 18). To understand why certain young people attend college and persist in a postsecondary setting while others do not, the case study approach offered a variety of data sources, including interviews, surveys, postsecondary data analysis, and participant observation.

Yonkers served as this study’s single case. According to Yin (2009), a single case can “represent a significant contribution to knowledge and theory building” (p. 47). Despite a reputation as “soft science” (Yin, 2009, p. 21) or the “weaker sister” of other methods (Berg, 2009, p. 317), case studies are ideal in situations such as this study, where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear and where disparate sources of evidence must be used (Yin, 1984).

Access to Data

I was granted access to records and necessary data through a partnership between Rutgers University-Newark and YPIE, in collaboration with YPS. YPIE is a local

independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, established in 2007, that works alongside the YPS District to increase the number of students who graduate from college high school and pursue a postsecondary education. (Chapter 6 contains a detailed description of YPIE.) In spring 2011, YPIE's Executive Director, Wendy Nadel, approached my advisor about a research project that would examine postsecondary outcomes of the students whom they serve. The collaboration with YPIE was both serendipitous and a natural fit. I had served as a College Advisor in a low-income school and understood the intricacies of the college application process and the struggles that low-income students have once they enroll in postsecondary programs. Also, I live in Yonkers and am keenly aware of the internal and external forces that shape the public school system and may influence students' ability to enroll in and succeed in a postsecondary setting.

Data Sources

Methods for data collection in this study are listed in Table 1, along with the sources of data used in each method.

Ethnography

Ethnography, popularized by researchers from the University of Chicago in the early half of the 20th century, has become a powerful tool for sociological research (Sadovnik, 2006). Those researchers saw field research and observational methods as key to understanding the "natural ecology" of Chicago (Deegan, 2001). In the current research project, I used several ethnographic and qualitative methods, including direct observation, participant observation, interviews and focus groups, and archival and document research. These methods helped to paint a picture of how students negotiate the

Table 1

Methods and Data Sources

Method	Data source
Qualitative Data	
Ethnography	Direct observation Participant observation at YPIE office Yonkers High School College Office College information events Yonkers Board of Education meetings
Focus groups	YPS alumni in all (18; see Table 2)
Interviews	College Advisor interviews (3) YPIE staff interviews (2) YPS alumni (13; see Table 3)
Archival and existing sources	Court documents Local periodicals District documents (YPS school choice brochure, New York State district and school report cards, 1985 desegregation plan School documents (yearbooks, photographs, brochures, pictures, websites, school newspapers) U.S. censuses 1960–2010 Social Explorer census/map tool Google maps/Google Earth YPIE internal documents (data sheets, sign-in sheets, meeting notes, agendas)
Quantitative Data	
Postsecondary enrollment and first-year persistence data	National Student Clearinghouse data for classes 2005–2011 Demographic data from Naviance (race/ethnicity/gender)
Survey data	Survey 2,335 students in Grade 12, classes of 2010–2012

Note. YPIE = Yonkers Partners in Education; YPS = Yonkers Public Schools.

college research and application process and to identify factors that enable or inhibit postsecondary educational persistence.

To understand the college application process and the roadblocks to college educational attainment, I used direct and participant observation techniques, both of which require copious field notes (Robson, 2002). Between September 2011 and February 2013, I conducted direct observation at the YPIE office and at the College and College Centers, taking field notes during school visits and during major events and activities: the Bi-Annual College Summit, YPIE staff meetings, Hispanic College Symposium, YPIE Annual Gala and other fundraising events, College Nights, and Board of Education and City Council meetings. I spent approximately 3 days a week in research and data analysis at the YPIE office. These experiences offered in-depth understanding of the workings of YPIE and YPS. I gained access to YPIE's internal documents, memos, graphic presentations, sign-in sheets, and so forth.

In April 2013 the directors of YPIE asked me to serve as temporary College Advisor at Yonkers Middle High School (YMHS). The former advisor had taken another job and there was not enough time left in the school year to warrant hiring someone new. During this time I moved to the role of participant observer, as I was an observer who then became a member of the observed group (Robson, 2002). My time with YPIE and at the college office in YMHS provided insights and understanding of the college application process and the organization of the YPS that is usually available only to insiders, making this work akin to but not strictly what has previously been described as "insider research" (Bonner, A., & Tolhurst, 2002; Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Semel, 1992, 1994). A. Bonner and Tolhurst (2002) identified three key advantages to

conducting insider research: The researcher has a greater understanding of the culture or organization being studied, the insider's presence does not alter the flow of social exchanges in the same way that an outsider might, and the established intimacy promotes telling and judging the truth.

My insider role proved to be invaluable during data analysis. While I understood through my college center visits and interactions at YPIE that many students were faced with high levels of unmet financial need as they were about to embark on a college career, I interacted with these students as the College Advisor and came to appreciate the heartache and difficult decisions that were the fallout from unmet financial need. Also, my role made me uniquely aware of small details about college application and attendance patterns to which an outsider would not have been privy. Had I not known, for example, the high rates at which YPS students apply to and go to for-profit colleges, I might have misreported degree attainment rates from these schools, as they sometimes report differently to the NSC than traditional colleges.

In the 9-week period in which I acted as College Advisor, I was in the office 2 to 3 per week for 4 hours each day. At the close of each day, I made copious notes about my experiences. This was an important tool that allowed me to remember and make sense of my experiences; it also presented a dilemma. The conversations and informal interactions with students, unlike the interviews or focus groups (discussed later), were not part of the original research plan and had not been included in the IRB application. Many of these conversations were with underage students who could not grant permission to participate formally in the research; they were also often personal in nature. I am certainly not the only embedded researcher to be presented with this type of moral conundrum (Morrison,

2011; Semel, 1994). I followed the example of others who have used their experiences to frame their understanding of the environment, but I excluded student-specific details or quotes from any written work.

Because I chose not to interview YPS students directly, much of the information about how students negotiate the postsecondary research and application process comes from YPIE staffers. I conducted three semistructured interviews with current and former College Advisors, some in person at a local coffee shop, others by telephone (Appendix B contains the College Advisor interview outline). The interviews generally took 20 to 35 minutes each. I transcribed the interview recordings and thematically coded the generated data. Questions included some about the advisor's daily responsibilities, the triumphs and challenges of the job, the relationship to the guidance staff, the willingness and ability to complete FAFSA forms, and thoughts about a "college-for-all" approach to advisement. I also conducted interviews with YPIE's Executive Director Wendy Nadel and Project Director Ellen Cutler Levy. Questions addressed YPIE's history, role in the college process, organizational goals and missions, and relationships in the city, among other things (Appendix C contains that interview outline).

Alumni Focus Groups and Interviews

I had planned to conduct 30 to 40 semistructured interviews with YPS graduates. In the last question on the Alumni Survey (discussed below), I asked participants whether they would be willing to sit for a 20- to 25-minute interview. While 44% of participants said *yes*, getting potential interviewees to commit to a time and place proved difficult. Based on a suggestion by one of my professors, I switched the interviews to focus groups, grouping participants in one of three categories: (a) those who had enrolled in

and persisted in college for at least 2 years or had graduated from college, designated as Group 1; (b) those who had enrolled in college for no more than two semesters and had dropped out, designated as Group 2; and (c) those who did not enroll in college, designated as Group 3. Appendices D contains the interview outline and Appendices E, F, and G contain the three focus group outlines.

Recruitment and Sample

Group 1 was the easiest group to recruit. As a result, I organized two separate Group 1 focus groups of five students each, based on their schedule availability. Group 1A included four Hispanic females and one Hispanic male; Group 1B included two Hispanic females, one Hispanic male, one White male, and one Asian female. Serendipitously, all members of Group 1A had been high achievers in high school, had taken advanced placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) courses, had participated in a large number of extracurricular activities, and had earned a self-reported GPA of at least 3.5 in college. For ease of identification, they are referred to herein as High Achievers. Participants in Group 1B had been middle- to high-achieving in high school, had been less involved in extracurricular activities, had not taken AP courses, and reported that they had struggled with mathematics and writing in college. GPAs for this group were one at 3.5 GPA, three between 2.5 and 3.2, and one not sure but probably less than 3.0. For ease of identification, they are referred to herein as Strugglers.

Recruiting participants for Group 2 was the most difficult, eventually including only three participants: two Hispanic males and one Black female. At the end of our focus talk, I informally joked with Group 2 about this phenomenon. I was being rhetorical and not looking for an actual answer, but it generated an interesting exchange.

Researcher: So, I have to tell you guys that I had a really hard time finding people to create this group. I had a much easier time finding people who had never been to college at all to talk to me. Why do you think that is?

Participant 2: Because we think it's all our fault. If we thought we was never gonna go to college, it wouldn't have [been] a problem, for the simple fact that we didn't have to impress anyone. But maybe people feel like they should be embarrassed, and that you know . . . it's all their fault.

Participant 3: [Nodding] And so maybe they just don't want to talk about how they fucked up. [Covers mouth and smiles] Excuse my language. [Laughs softly]

Researcher: That's okay. . . . But it's not always your fault, right? Didn't you just spend the last 27 minutes just telling me that? There were other factors at play. It's not as simple as you deciding school was boring and you weren't going back.

Participant 3: Yeah, but at the end of the day, nobody's gonna give you a job based on that. . . . And everyone's just gonna see the guy that just dropped out.

Participant 2: And I think that's all my mom is going to see when she looks at me. And I know how badly she wanted me to go to college, because she didn't.

This exchange demonstrates the fear or trepidation that alumni in similar situations may have had about responding to the request for interviews. It is also telling with regard to the participants' sense of defeat and possibly shame over their lack of postsecondary persistence.

Group 3 participants included one Black female, one Black male, two Hispanic males, and one White female. None of these participants had enrolled in college; three were employed full time and the other two were looking for work. Table 2 summarizes the composition of the focus groups.

Questions presented in the focus group sessions were open ended and conversational. Depending on their postsecondary outcomes, I asked the alumni about the factors related to their postsecondary success or attrition, to whom if anyone they had turned for help with school, their experiences with the costs of college and their

Table 2

Focus Group Participants and Their Demographic Characteristics

Group	Partici- pant	Race/ethnicity and gender	Postsecondary activity	Parents? ^a
1A: High achievers	1	Hispanic male	4-year private college	Yes
	2	Hispanic female	4-year public college	Yes
	3	Hispanic female	4-year private college	No
	4	Hispanic female	4-year private college	Yes
	5	Hispanic female	4-year private college	No
1B: Strugglers	6	Hispanic female	Public 4-year college	Yes
	7	Hispanic male	Public 4-year college	Yes
	8	Hispanic female	Public 2 year college	No
	9	White male	Private 4-year college	Yes
	10	Asian female	Private 4-year college	Yes
2: Enrolled but withdrew	11	Black female	Withdrew from 2-year college, employed full time	No
	12	Hispanic male	Withdrew from 4-year college, not employed	No
	13	Hispanic male	Withdrew from 2-year college, employed part time	Yes
3: Never enrolled	14	Black female	Not enrolled/not employed	No
	15	Black male	Not enrolled/not employed	No
	16	Hispanic male	Employed full time	Yes
	17	Hispanic male	Not enrolled/not employed	No
	18	White female	Employed full time	Yes

^aParents = Did parent(s) ever attend college?

willingness to take on debt to pay for their education, and their experiences in planning for life after high school. The focus groups sessions lasted approximately 50 to 75 minutes and were conducted on two Saturdays at the YPIE office and a local coffee shop. I offered participants lunch and refreshments to thank them for participation.

As I recruited focus groups participants, some indicated that they would prefer to be interviewed individually. I had already committed to the focus groups but decided that their perspectives would justify a dual approach. I had planned to interview three participants, but slowly more potential participants began to reach out either through friends, email, or staff connections at YPIE. Eventually, 13 interviews were conducted: five with participants who were enrolled in college and three with High Achievers: one Black male, one Hispanic female, and one White female. The Hispanic female was a first-generation college goer. Three were Strugglers: one White male, one Black male, and one Asian female, none of them first-generation college goers. Thinking that their perspectives on college would be informative, the staff at YPIE referred two Ivy League students, one female and one male, herein referred to as Ivy Leaguers. Also, I interviewed one Black female who had enrolled in college for a year as a first-generation student and had withdrawn after her second semester. She reported intentions to re-enroll next year. One participant, a Hispanic female, had plans to go to college but had not completed a FAFSA form while in high school and therefore could not afford to go. Instead, she had enrolled in a cosmetology program and completed it within a year, and now works in the beauty industry. She was the only participant who had attended a non-college postsecondary school. One participant, a Hispanic male, had graduated from high school more than 1 year previously. Both said that they had plans to enroll in college at some

point but had not made any plans to do so in the current year. One participant, a Hispanic female, said that she planned to enroll at a community college in the coming winter and had completed all necessary steps for enrollment, including submitting the FAFSA. The final participant, a Black male, had not enrolled in any postsecondary institution and had no immediate plans to do so. Neither of his parents had ever enrolled in college. Table 3 describes all interview participants.

During the interviews, I asked participants personal questions about factors that might have affected persistence in school, or lack thereof. I also asked the students about their grades and how well they had done in particular courses. I asked about financial choices that had guided their decisions to enroll, persist, abstain, or withdraw from a postsecondary school.

Coding

Code construction for this study was both an inductive process and a deductive process. I worked at YPIE for more than a year before conducting the literature review and choosing a methodology. This time helped to form understanding of the supports and barriers to college success for low-income students. The literature review supported and expanded my observations. I used the combination to create the interview and focus group questions, as well as coding. Following the focus groups and interviews, I transcribed the audio recordings from those meeting, except where participants preferred that sessions not be recorded. Doing the transcription myself was highly beneficial as it allowed me to examine the data line by line after I had experienced it in a holistic manner in session. In cases in which I was not given permission to record sessions, I took copious notes that allowed me to organize these data in the same categories with relative ease.

Table 3

Interview Participants and Their Demographic Characteristics

Partici- pant	Race/ethnicity and gender	Postsecondary activity	Parents? ^a
1	Black male	High Achiever, 4-year private college	Yes
2	White male	Struggler, 2-year public college	Yes
3	Hispanic female	High Achiever, 4-year private college	No
4	Black male	Struggler, 4-year private college	No
5	Asian female	Struggler, 4-year private college	Yes
6	White female	High Achiever, 4-year public college	Yes
7	Black female	Ivy Leaguer, 4-year private college	Yes
8	White male	Ivy Leaguer, 4-year private college	Yes
9	Black female	Withdrew from 4-year private college, not employed	Yes
10	Hispanic female	Attended/completed private 1-year cosmetology program	Yes
11	Black male	Never enrolled, not employed	No
12	Hispanic male	Never enrolled, plans to enroll in the future, not employed	No
13	Hispanic female	Plans to start January 2014, forms submitted, employed part time	No

^aParents = Did parent(s) ever attend college?

I started with nearly 60 codes but subsequently used focused coding to identify the most significant and/or frequent line by line codes that resulted in 38 codes to categorize the emerging themes and patterns (Appendix H). I combined codes that described the same phenomenon. For example, I combined “SAT” and “SAT prep” because the respondents never discussed SAT preparation without mentioning their experience with the test itself. I split some codes; for example, “financial aid” was too broad a term and respondents were often confused or misinformed about its meaning. So I split “financial aid” into “student loans,” “grants and scholarships,” and “work study.” Some codes were assigned subcategories, such as the code “parents” was assigned subcategories “mom” and “dad.”

Identifying Information

Several interview/focus groups participants were concerned about their privacy and protecting their identity in this process. Seven of the 13 interviewees asked that interviews not be recorded, and participants in three of the focus groups were not comfortable with recording. In these cases I took copious field notes. I also interviewed several current and former YPIE staff members, some of who requested that I not use any information that would allow others to identify them. Therefore, all names and identifying information are omitted from this dissertation to protect the identity of participants. When necessary, a pseudonym was assigned to a participant, and this change is indicated by a footnote. Schools that participants had attended or worked at were not identified to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

Archival Research

In addition to collecting data, I reviewed existing historical and census data to provide a short history of Yonkers and YPS. The main branch of the Yonkers public library was an excellent source of primary and secondary resources. The library has a little-known and almost-never-utilized Local History room, where anything written about Yonkers is stored. This collection includes periodicals, court case records, legal documents, school documents (brochures, newsletters, yearbooks, etc.), city council and government documents, and several doctoral dissertations about YPS.

Information on city demographics and housing came from U.S. decennial census data from 1980 to 2010 and American Community Survey Data 3-Year Estimates from 2009 through 2011. Maps showing demographic trends were created using Google Maps™ and Social Explorer®. School demographics and test scores came from the NYSED 2000–2013 school report cards, and documents available on the YPS website.

Survey Data

12th Grade Survey

YPIE administers a 12th-Grade Survey (sometimes called the Senior Survey) to every 12th-grade student in the district upon the completion of the college planning and application process in late spring. YPIE began this to gauge how students fare during the college planning and application process and to determine their organizational role in this process for individual students. The 12th-Grade Survey was initially offered in 2010; it was written by an independent survey writer who offered her services pro bono to YPIE. I collected data on, maintained, and made changes to the survey in each subsequent year. Students complete the survey on any computer, using their Naviance account. The

students' responses are automatically linked to their accounts by their Naviance ID number, and more robust demographic information was obtained about participants through a file merge using SAS[®].

In its first incarnation, the 12th-Grade Survey generated a relatively small response rate: Only 334 of the 1,394 graduating seniors responded to the survey. To increase participation, the YPIE staff asked the high schools with YPIE College and Career Centers to facilitate completion of the survey. Since 2011, each high school has agreed to allow 12th-grade students time to complete the survey during English classes, and students are escorted by their English teacher and YPIE College Advisor to accomplish this. In 2011, the district-wide response rate was 73.8% and in 2012 it was 72.5%. Students who do not access their Naviance account regularly are less likely than those who do to remember their username and password and therefore may be less likely to complete the survey than regular Naviance users. Also, students who have not been engaged in the college search process or are not planning to attend college may be discouraged by a survey that primarily asks about the college planning experience.

Students are not required to answer every question to have their surveys counted; therefore, the response rate per question varies significantly. Open-ended questions and questions that do not apply to all students can have response rates as low as 11%. Students can stop the survey at any time and return to it later. Once the survey has been submitted, the students are not given access to it again, and they are allowed to complete the survey only once.

The survey has changed in content somewhat since its incarnation in 2010, although many questions have remained the same. In its current form, the 12th-Grade

Survey has 26 questions, including multiple choice, Likert-type scale questions, and constructed responses. The first four questions ask the students for basic demographic and contact information. Questions 5–11 ask about the students’ postsecondary plans: whether, when, and where they will go to college, what they plan to study, whether they intend to work, what they will do if they do not attend college, and so forth. Questions 12–13 ask whether the students took a campus tour and what if any influence this had on their decision-making process. Question 14 asks students who do not plan to attend college why they will not attend. Questions 15, 16, 20, and 21 ask students about their experiences with the postsecondary planning process and whom they found to be most helpful during the process. Questions 17–18 ask students about their parents’ attendance and graduation from college, and Question 19 asks students to name the highest level of education that they plan to obtain. Questions 22–24 ask students to rate their experience with YPIE and Naviance and Questions 25–26 ask students whether YPIE can contact them in the future and offers space to leave multiple means of contact (telephone, email, Facebook, Twitter). (Appendix I contains a copy of the 12th-Grade Survey.)

The evolution of the 12th Grade Survey over the 3 years resulted in better questions but also created inconsistency in the data, making cross-year comparison suspect. Many students from these three graduating classes are first-generation college goers. On the 2010 and 2011 surveys, students were asked whether they were “the first in their families to go to college” and 66% responded *no*. This question is not ideal; it assumes that the participant is going to college; if not going to college the respondent might be inclined to answer *no* despite having parents who have not attended college. It also does not ask about the participant’s parents specifically. The student may have

cousins or aunts and uncles, or even a sibling, who has gone to college. This would encourage a *no* answer despite actually being in a critical first-generation group. The current version of the survey asks about parental history of college going in two questions: “Have either of your parents ever attended college?” and “Have either of your parents ever graduated from college?” This has changed the way students approach the question; the number of students self-identifying as first-generation college goers has risen.

Survey respondents are not an ideal representative sample of the YPS graduating seniors; 87.4% of survey respondents reported plans to attend college but on the whole, only 80.7% of all graduates for these years reported planning to attend a 2-year or 4-year college. Again, students not planning to attend a postsecondary school may not be inclined to complete a survey about college. Also, students who do not attend class regularly may not be in attendance when their class completes the survey.

Survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency, median, and mode, as well as cross-tabulation. Data analysis was done using SPSS™ and Microsoft® Excel®, and SAS™ when file merging was necessary.

Alumni Survey

The Alumni Survey was administered to members of the graduating classes of 2010–2012 with the goal of understanding what happens to YPS students once they graduate from high school. YPIE provided the last known contact information for these students, which included home addresses, email addresses, and telephone numbers. I used these to contact prospective participants.

I had planned to send the survey by U.S. Postal Service with a stamped envelope to return the forms; however, when a test run of 200 surveys generated only 6 responses, I created an online version of the survey with Qualtrics[®]. Using the email addresses provided by YPIE, I sent 1,941 emails to YPS alumni, representing every member of these three graduating classes for which I had an email address. About half (843) of these email addresses had been assigned to students while they were active enrollees in YPS, and it is unlikely that students who graduated more than a year previously still checked these emails regularly, if at all. Qualtrics does not inform survey creators which emails are delivered and which have bounced back to their mail system. In the first round of emails, I received only 42 responses.

To increase survey participation, I asked Rutgers University IRB for an amendment to the protocol that allowed me to call prospective respondents using telephone numbers provided by YPIE and to administer the survey by telephone. More than half of these telephone numbers were incorrect or no longer in service. Of the alumni whom I reached by telephone, many were reluctant to speak to me for fear of identity theft or some sort of scam. After much assurance, some acquiesced. The first round of surveys was completed almost entirely by students who had enrolled in and were still enrolled in some kind of postsecondary institution. In order to increase the voices of those who had never enrolled in college or who had enrolled and left at some point, I specifically contacted students who were listed as such with the NSC.

I used a form of snowball sampling to increase participation in the survey. I enlisted the help of YPS graduates who had a relationship with YPIE, either through schools, jobs, or as tutors. I asked them to give the survey link to friends and to tell them

about the opportunity to win an iPad Mini. One YPS alumnus posted the survey link on her Twitter and Facebook feeds. This helped efforts significantly, as prospective participants began to trust that my intentions were legitimate.

In all, 224 surveys were completed, but three participants chose the option, “I do not wish to participate in the study.” The demographic makeup of survey completers basically mirrored the overall demographic makeup of the sampled cohorts: 54% of the participants were Hispanic, 13% White, 26% Black, and 9% Asian; 53% were female and 47% were male, also mirroring the makeup of the sampled graduating classes.

The Alumni Survey included 39 questions and required an average 8 minutes to complete. Not all participants were asked or required to respond to all questions. The Qualtrics software offers advanced “skip logic” and “display logic,” which allows the survey builder to ask a specific set of questions to participants based on their answers to previous questions. The first few questions asked about race/ethnicity, gender, high school attended, and graduation date. Respondents were then asked whether and when they had enrolled in a postsecondary institution, whether they were still enrolled, whether they had transferred, and (if they had left) why they had left. Respondents who had not attended a postsecondary school or who were not currently attending were asked about the importance of college in their life, what type of work they did, their family’s history of college attendance, and their anticipated level of educational attainment in the future.

Respondents who had enrolled in and/or graduated from a postsecondary school were asked about the types of support systems available to them on campus, how often they made use of these, and the difficulty of their coursework. They were asked about the

importance of college in their life, what type of work they did, their family's history of college attendance, and their anticipated level of educational attainment in the future.

Data analysis for the surveys was completed on Excel[®] and SPSS[™]. The statistical procedures that were employed included descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, means, and medians, and cross-tabulations. Appendix J contains a copy of the Alumni Survey.

National Student Clearinghouse Data

The NSC, established in 1993, is a repository for student enrollment data and degree verification. NSC has a program called StudentTracker[™] for high schools and school districts to track which of their students attended and persisted in more than 3,200 colleges and postsecondary institutions in the United States (approximately 93% of all schools in North America). Institutional participation varies by college type; Dynarski, Hemelt, and Hyman (2013) found that, while 99% of traditional 4-year colleges report to the NSC, only about 48% of for-profit colleges and job programs provide data.

NSC data allow school districts and researchers to follow a student over the course of several years, making it possible to account for matriculation, transfers, stop outs and re-enrollments, and degree attainment (one or multiple). The NSC matches students to school records by name, high school attended, birth date, and school ID number. NSC variables include semester of enrollment, institution name, public versus private institutional status, 2-year versus 4-year schools, degree type, date of degree, and (in some cases) degree major.

NSC data require a significant amount of “cleaning” before analysis, and even then the data are not totally reliable. Colleges are not required to report enrollment or

degree attainment data to NSC uniformly, which complicates analysis. All schools list the students' enrollment behavior but do not always define enrollment status (e.g., full time, part time, withdrawn). More than half of the records were missing enrollment status, making it impossible to draw connections between enrollment type and persistence. Colleges also record degree attainment information in different formats. Some postsecondary schools denote a student's graduation on one line of the data set while others use two or more separate lines. Some schools use one line for some students but two or three lines for other students. Some schools give two or three separate dates for a single graduation event; occasionally, these dates are 6 weeks or more apart.

The most frustrating inconsistency in NSC data relates to lack of information about the type of degree earned. While all postsecondary schools report if a student earns a degree, they do not necessarily report the type of degree or from which major. This was the case for nearly one third of the graduation records reviewed. In most cases, I was able to recode the degrees based on school type, what type of degree the school generally confirms, how long it took to earn the degree, and whether it was the student's first graduation event. When students earned multiple degrees, I assumed that anything unlabeled beyond the first bachelor's degree was a graduate degree. I could not make the same assumption for Associate degrees, as it became clear that several students had earned multiple Associate degrees.

For example, Berkeley College and the College of Westchester are listed as 4-year colleges by the NSC; however, these for-profit schools grant vocational certificates, as well as Associate and bachelor's degrees. These two schools alone accounted for more than 200 graduation events. In cases such as these, there was no way to determine with

assurance what kind of credential the student had earned. As a result, degree attainment information is approximate at best.

Despite consistency issues, the NSC remains the best option for tracking individual students' postsecondary progress. Stroh et al. (2007) maintained that using NSC data "is an economical, efficient, and accurate method for tracking high school graduates into colleges and universities to determine a given high school's, district's, or state's college attendance, college persistence, and college graduation rates" (Executive Summary, p. 5).

NSC data do not include demographic information, so demographic information, including gender and race/ethnicity as reported on Naviance, was merged with NSC data using Microsoft® Access®. Demographic information was available only for the years in which Naviance was in mass use: 2010–2012. In all, 2,475 student records from Naviance were matched with NSC records, an approximate 92% match.

This information described the rates at which varying strata of YPS graduates matriculated in postsecondary institutions and the extent to which they had persisted beyond the first year. The key variables derived from these data were (a) enrollment in college, (b) persistence beyond the first year, and (c) degree attainment (classes of 2004–2008). The principal independent variables were (a) high school attended, (b) graduating cohort, (c) demographic information (classes of 2010–2011), and (d) academic measures as collected by YPS (classes of 2010–2011). Data management and analyses were conducted using Access, Excel, SPSS, and SAS statistical software. The statistical procedures included descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, and medians), cross-tabulations and the Cox proportional-hazards regression model. The intent was to

complete a statistical analysis of postsecondary outcomes that linked NSC data to transcript information, including GPA and SAT score. Unfortunately, that was not possible because only about half of YPS graduates actually took the SAT. Also, student GPAs were inconsistently uploaded to Naviance and about one third of those were missing.

Cohort Definition

This study focuses solely on students who graduated from YPS and does not offer a discussion of outcomes for students who did not earn a high school diploma or its equivalent. Rates of college enrollment, persistence, and graduation relate to high school completers only. Students were placed in graduating cohorts based on date of high school completion, not high school start date. Students who graduated any time from January through October of a particular year were counted for that year. Some students take 5, 6, or possibly more years to graduate; they were counted as part of the graduating class with whom they earned a diploma, not part of the cohort with whom they entered high school. Graduating cohort sizes reported to NSC were smaller than those reported in Naviance. This work relied on data reported to the NSC by YPS. There was no choice but to take these data at face value and assume them to be the most accurate data available.

Limitations of the Study

Sample Mismatch

This study focuses on incongruent groups of YPS high school graduates; this is largely due to unequal access to student-level data. The original plan for this research was to focus on the YPS graduating classes of 2010–2012, with a limited discussion of postsecondary persistence and degree completion rates by 2004–2009 YPS graduates. I

chose to focus on the classes of 2010–2012 because Naviance supplemented NSC data with demographic data. I had access to 12th-Grade Survey data and college intention data from these three cohorts as well. To supplement these data, the research plan included administering interviews/focus groups and the Alumni Survey to only those cohorts.

Due to circumstances beyond my control, I have incomplete enrollment data information for the class of 2012, and therefore have omitted this cohort from enrollment and persistence analysis. By the time I had realized that I would be receiving no more data, I had already conducted interviews and surveys using 2012 graduates and had analyzed the college application activity, intentions data, and 12th-Grade Survey for the class of 2012 as well. Therefore, college planning and intentions are described using the classes of 2010–2012. Enrollment, persistence, and degree attainment data were analyzed for the classes of 2004–2011, with extra analysis based on demographics and academic information focused on the classes of 2010–2011. Factors that support or act as barriers to persistence are discussed for the classes of 2010–2012.

This research has other limitations. Since I was not able to design a perfect cohort study with demographic, enrollment, and survey data on the exact same cohorts of students, I was forced to treat data sets separately. Therefore, I could not make the kinds of connections among these sets that I had intended. There were consistency problems even within data sets. The YPIE 12th-Grade Survey has changed each year that it has been administered, and therefore comparing answers across cohorts was not possible for some key questions. Unfortunately, the response rate for the Alumni Survey was lower than anticipated. There were nearly 3,800 graduates in the classes of 2010–2012 but, even

after many reminders and various sampling strategies, only 224 surveys were completed. Therefore, the information derived from this survey is interesting but not generalizable.

This project addresses only the postsecondary outcomes of those YPS students who achieved graduation. As discussed in Chapter 5, almost one third of all students who begin the ninth grade on a YPS campus do not graduate. While some of these nongraduates may find their way to college or job training programs and be captured by the NSC, the great majority likely will not do so. Unfortunately, there would be no reasonable way to follow these young people and track their postsecondary outcomes.

Much of this study is based on qualitative data, so it is heavily reliant on the perceptions of those who were interviewed and/or observed, as well as my personal biases. Many of the questions asked during interviews and focus group sessions were personal in nature, and it is certainly possible that the participants were not entirely honest or forthcoming in their answers. Also, despite my best efforts, those who participated in the focus groups and interviews were not a representative sample of all YPS graduates. It was easiest to recruit students who knew that their postsecondary story would be considered a “success” and far less easy to recruit those who might be concerned about being perceived as a “failure.”

I acknowledge my own role in this research. My presence in the college offices and at College Advisor meetings may have made advisors uncomfortable. Although I built rapport and trust with them, my presence may have seemed intrusive at times. Also, interviewing employees about their role in an organization has the potential to make them worry about anonymity, despite continued reassurances. This may mean that the advisors and even former advisors were less than forthcoming in their answers.

Race and Ethnicity

This work focuses on socially sensitive issues of race, class, and gender rights and access to college. Dealing with race and ethnicity in this study was its own challenge. Since race and ethnicity are socially/politically and not biologically constructed, attaching racial categories to students sometimes seemed inappropriate. Throughout the study I categorized disparate sets of variables along racial and ethnic lines. However, it is impossible to be sure what these numbers truly signify. For example, in the class of 2010-2011 only one student was listed as Pacific Islander, despite the fact that several students in those cohorts self-identified as Philippino. Instead of being listed as Pacific Islanders, at some point in their school careers these students had been labeled as either Hispanic/Latino or Asian. Also, students from North Africa and the Middle East are categorized as White, while students from India and Pakistan are categorized as Asian. Therefore, a student from Afghanistan would technically be considered a different race from someone from their same ethnic group whose family resided in Pakistan.

For the purpose of this work, I use only the four main racial/ethnic categories used by the YPS: Asian, Black, White, and Hispanic. The term *Asian* includes students from Eastern and Western Asia, including India and Pakistan, as well as most of the Pacific Islands, including Malaysia and Indonesia. The term *Black* includes students of African American, Sub-Saharan African, and non-Hispanic and non-European Caribbean descent. The term *White* refers to students of European, Middle Eastern, and North African origin. Many White students in the YPS are first-generation Americans from Eastern Europe, Eurasia, and the Middle East. The term *Hispanic* refers to students

whose families come from Latin American countries, and sometimes from the Iberian Peninsula and the Philippines.

CHAPTER 4

A BRIEF HISTORY OF YONKERS

Early History

Like New York City, its neighbor to the south, Yonkers was settled in the 17th century by Dutch farmers and shipping merchants. Previously, the land had been inhabited by Algonquin Indians who had established a small settlement between the Hudson and Neppara Rivers. The city is named after Adriaen van der Donck, a young Dutch lawyer who negotiated for the land and established his estate. The Dutch referred to Van der Donck as De Jonkeer (young man) and his land as De Jonkeer's. Eventually the British changed the name to Yonkers (Lamon-Doherty Earth Institute, 2010; Walton, 1951).

For two centuries Yonkers remained a relatively small farming and fishing town with some small-scale industrial activity along the Hudson waterfront. The community of fewer than 8,000 residents was incorporated as a village in 1854 (Walton, 1951; Yonkers Historical Society, 2009). As industrialization took hold in the northeast, Yonkers used its location along the river, its proximity to New York City, and the Hudson River rail line to develop into a significant industrial center, eventually becoming the commercial hub of Westchester County (Vookles, 2006). The population grew steadily and Yonkers incorporated as a city in 1872, after residents overwhelmingly voted against annexation into New York City (Nevius & Nevius, 2009).

Numerous businesses and factories made their home between the Saw Mill and Hudson Rivers, giving rise to Yonkers's downtown, known as Getty Square. Soon the Otis Elevator Company, Federal Sugar, the Waring Hat Company, and the Alexander

Smith & Sons Carpet Company made their homes in the city (Walton, 1951). Immigrants, largely Italian and Irish but from many other nations, came to industrializing Yonkers because of a surplus of jobs and to escape the crowds and “problems” in New York City (Madden, 1992, p. 17). They moved into housing built by factory leaders in the southwest section of the city (Belkin, 1999).

Business in Yonkers boomed in the early half of the 20th century and businesses began to grow and hire large numbers of workers; the Alexander & Smith Carpet Company alone employed more than 7,000 workers at its peak in 1928 (Freidman, 2008). During the Great Depression, the city government offered businesses tax breaks and very cheap land and utilities to help local industry to stay afloat. Even after business recovered in the years during and following World War II, maintained these perks from the city. With increased profits, workers began to demand improvements in pay and working conditions and eventually joined the labor movement; by the 1950s more than 90% of the Yonkers work force was unionized (Freidman, 2008). Eventually, the city began to increase business taxes and to demand fair payment for utilities and services. For many factories, the cost of doing business in Yonkers became more than they were willing to pay, and they left the city for cheaper locales in the southern United States.

By the second half of the 20th century, Yonkers came to face a fate similar to that of other northern and eastern U.S. cities. Increasing labor costs and tax levies led to the mass exodus of industry and to eventual deterioration of the local economy. When Alexander & Sons closed in 1954, it was the largest private employer and taxpayer in the city, employing more than 5,000 people (Freidman, 2008). This started an exodus of businesses out of Yonkers, which continued until the 1983 closing of the Otis Elevator

factory. The rapid decline of the city's industrial core made those who could do so even more eager to leave for more suburban areas of the city or county.

A City of Neighborhoods

There is not one, but many Yonkers. City officials, in fact, have identified 38 distinct neighborhoods, from deteriorating blocks of public housing in the southwest to enclaves of mansions and sweeping lawns in the east. (Foderaro, 1988, p. C4)

Today, Yonkers is the fourth-largest city in New York State and has an estimated population of 200,000 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a, 2012b). After its 1872 incorporation, Yonkers grew beyond its original village borders to a 21-square-mile mini-metropolis (Figure 3). Yonkers is commonly divided into four geographic quadrants: Its east and west halves are divided by the Saw Mill River and the North and South halves are divided along the Cross County Parkway, which cuts through most of the city and terminates at the border of the downtown area. To the west lies the Hudson River and to the east are the Bronx River and the wealthier neighboring towns of Eastchester, Scarsdale, Bronxville, and Tuckahoe. Much of the city's eastern half, as well as some of the northwestern quadrant, contains single-family homes and cooperative garden apartments and buildings with a distinctly suburban feel. Houses currently listed for sale in these areas have asking prices of \$425,000 to \$1.4 million (Trulia, 2013).

Downtown Yonkers is located in the city's southwest quadrant. This area has the city's oldest building stock and is densely populated, comprising less than one quarter of the city's land mass but five times the density of other parts of the city (*U.S. v. Yonkers 1980; United States v. Yonkers Board of Education, 1985*). Although there are many one- and two-family homes exist in southwest Yonkers, many have been burned and abandoned, leaving the neighborhoods and communities blighted (Figure 4).

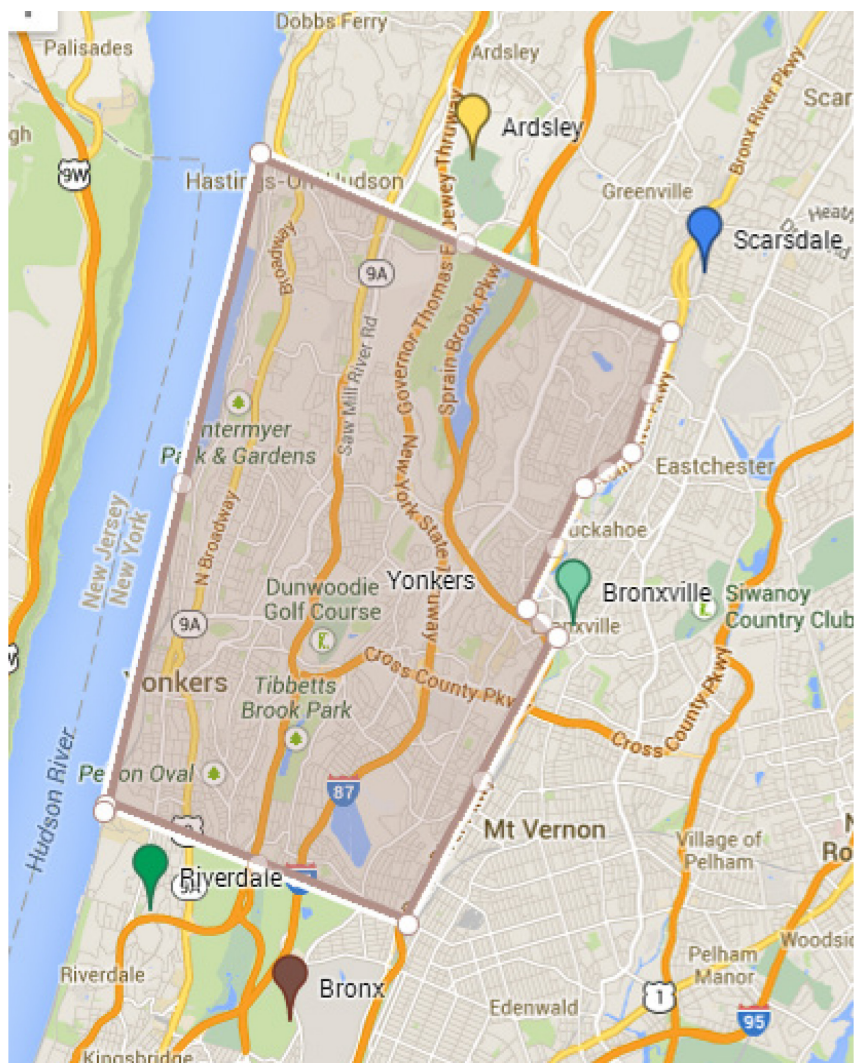


Figure 3. Map of Yonkers, 2013.



Figure 4. Burnt-out homes in downtown Yonkers.

Downtown Yonkers's outer-ring neighborhoods developed in several waves spurred by new modes of transportation (Foderaro, 1998). Following the late 19th-century boom in manufacturing, wealthy tycoons, business owners, and members of the landed elite built summer homes and compounds in northern Yonkers because of its beautiful views of the Hudson and its proximity to the Hudson rail line. This area is still characterized by many Victorian and Georgian Revival style homes, and even a castle built in the late 19th century (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Alder Manor, northwest Yonkers.

In the 1920s, the first suburban boom spawned by the mass production of the automobile and the construction of the Bronx River and Saw Mill River Parkways enticed many people who wished to escape New York City to the eastern borders of Yonkers. Many of the neighborhoods there, such as Lawrence Park, Colonial Heights, and Crestwood, are characterized by Tudor and Norman style homes and mansions that resemble other old-style suburbs such as neighboring Scarsdale and Bronxville.

After the Second World War, the construction of the U.S. Interstate Highway System and the New York State Thruway made living in new subdivisions, for as little as \$8,995, very attractive (advertisement from an unidentified magazine, 1953, in personal possession of the researcher). Neighborhoods such as Dunwoodie, Kimball, Wakefield Park, Homefield, and Runyon Heights came to be characterized by ranch or Cape Cod-style tract homes on small plots of land that were convenient to new shopping areas such as Central Park Avenue or the Cross-County Shopping Center. Over the years, Yonkers became less a unified community and more a collection of urban and suburban fiefdoms characterized by ethnic or religious enclaves (Belkin, 1999; Foderaro, 1988; Haynes, 2001).

According to Belkin (1999), who wrote extensively on Yonkers following court-ordered desegregation, the structure of the city government exacerbated the separatism that came to characterize the city of Yonkers. Until the late 1980s, Yonkers city government ran on a ward system with a 12-person City Council and a mayor who had no more power than any of the council members. Each member of the Council had de facto veto power over anything that happened in his district. If the councilmember said “no” to a project in his district, it would not be built; if his constituents complained, the councilmember would say “no.” The nature of politics in Yonkers lent itself to a general distrust of city government and officials. In the late 19th century, Yonkers was called “the city of hills.” In the 20th century it became “Yonkers, the city of hills, where nothing is on the level.” By the 1970s, it was not uncommon to hear about physical fights at council meetings, as well as charges of wire tapping and election fraud by city officials (Belkin, 1999; Brenner, 1997). Public officials have been known to change political

parties several times in their career and to gain endorsement by two diametrically opposed political groups (Reisman, 2011). The specter of corruption and distrust continues to plague the city (*Yonkers Tribune*, 2007).

Segregation and Desegregation

Almost any conversation about Yonkers, but especially one about its neighborhoods or its schools, invariably includes a discussion of court-ordered desegregation. Yonkers spent the bulk of the past three decades at the center of a school and housing desegregation case that garnered national media attention and continues to shape the city, its politics, and its policies. For the purpose of this study, I attempted to separate the narrative of school and housing desegregation into two chapters but soon realized that this was not possible. Because public schools in Yonkers were organized around neighborhood encatchment zones, residential and school segregation are absolutely intertwined.

Yonkers built its first public housing units in 1939 to replace cold-water flats occupied by industrial-era factory workers. After World War II, the post-war boom and Federal Housing Authority (FHA) loans made it possible for these workers to buy homes in other parts of the city. Black and, later, Hispanic families moved in and took their place in the public housing apartments (Belkin, 1999). The number of minorities in Yonkers increased steadily between 1940 and 1980 from 2.9% to 18.8% (Belkin, 1999). By the late 1960s, New York State helped to finance and build 10 housing projects in Yonkers; all but one senior housing development were built in predominantly high-minority, high-poverty areas (Horchschild & Danielson, 2004). According to court documents, several of these projects were explicitly built for people of color and all were

meant to maintain the patterns of segregation (Horchschild & Danielson, 2004; *U.S. v. Yonkers Board of Education*, 1985). Figure 6 displays the locations of these public housing projects.

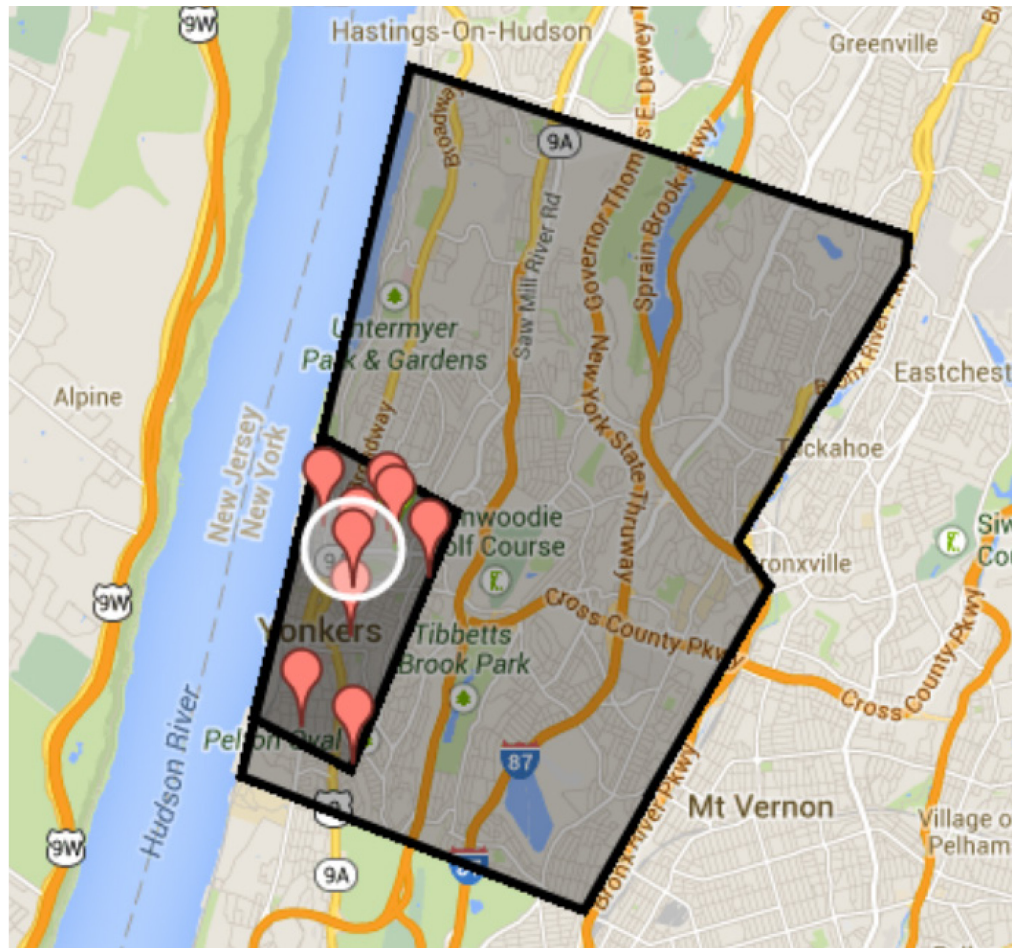


Figure 6. Yonkers municipal public housing locations prior to 1990.

Eventually the city of Yonkers would have 6,644 units of subsidized housing in an area approximately 1.1 miles square, located downtown (Belkin, 1999). The Fair Housing Act of 1968 prohibited housing discrimination based on color or race and established a system that monitored where cities were building their public housing

developments. Following this legislation, Yonkers built no more public housing, but the stage had been set for hypersegregation. In 1940, two of the 10 census tracts in Southwest Yonkers had minority populations of 10% to 50% (*United States, et al. v. Yonkers, et al.*, 1980). By 1980, four of the 10 census tracts in the southwest quadrant had minority populations of at least 20%, and five had minority populations of at least 50%. While Southwest Yonkers was home to only 37.5% of Yonkers's total population, it housed nearly 81% of Yonkers's minorities (*U.S. v. Yonkers*, 1980). Figure 7 shows the concentration of Black residents in Yonkers during the 1980s, prior to court-ordered desegregation efforts.

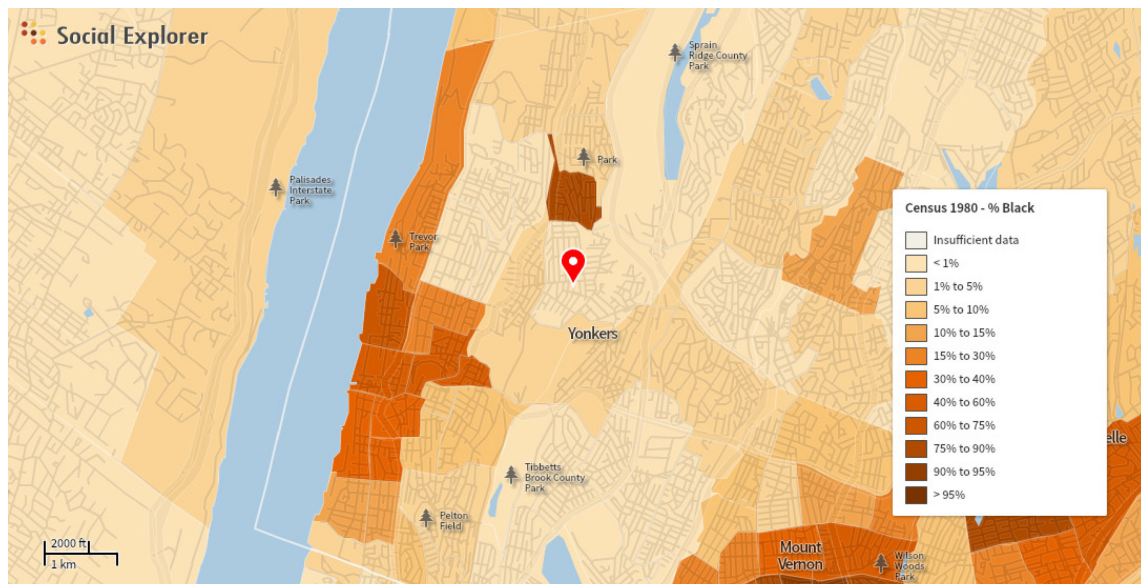


Figure 7. Black population in Yonkers in 1980 prior to desegregation order. Source: *Historical Demographic Data, Yonkers, New York*, by Social Explorer, 2013, retrieved from <http://www.socialexplorer.com/explore/tables/Yonkers/NewYork>

Eventually, downtown Yonkers became almost a separate, poorer city, detached from the rest of Yonkers. At times there were efforts to scatter public and subsidized

housing complexes in other parts of the city. However, bands of protestors flooded City Council meetings until all such proposals were tabled (Haynes, 2001). Members of the city planning board warned about the dire consequences of such a concentration of poverty on the downtown businesses and the area as a whole, but the all-powerful City Council was willing to sacrifice downtown in favor of wealthier northern and eastern parts of the city (Belkin, 1999).

In 1954 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* that in the field of public education the doctrine of “separate but equal” has no place. Brown paved the way for dozens of school segregation litigations throughout the country. Many schools districts enacted desegregation policies in the 1960s and 1970s. However, school systems in many northern cities such as New York, Newark, and Chicago became increasingly segregated in the 1960s through the 1980s, as middle-class Whites fled urban downtown areas for the suburbs, leaving a minority underclass to inherit the decaying cities and their schools (Massey & Denton, 1993). Northern cities, while having a reputation for being more welcoming or at least less hostile to non-Whites, actually became some of the most racially isolated districts in the United States (Khaleberg, 2001). In the years 1965 to 1980, the YPS White student enrollment declined by 47% and the minority student enrollment increased by 81% (Yazurlo, 1990).

A few Yonkers schools were “racially distinct” by 1960, but these racial imbalances did not become apparent until the late 1960s, when Whites began to move out of the area and the segregation became more pronounced. The population shift that was changing the city was also affecting the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic makeup of

many of the public schools. By 1980, 64% of the district's White students were enrolled in schools that were at least 90% White, and 28% of the city's minority students were enrolled in schools with at least 80% Black or Hispanic students. Fourteen of the then 25 elementary schools in the district had White populations over 90%, while three had enrollments that were 90% minority (Belkin, 1999; Pisacreta, 1998; Yazurlo, 1990).

The population of the city of Yonkers peaked in 1970 at 204,297 and then declined steadily for the next two decades (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a, 2012b; Social Explorer, 2013). The 1990 census recorded the population at 188,082 (Social Explorer, 2013). As a result, many of the school buildings in operation were underutilized, some schools operating at 65% capacity (Yonkers Board of Education, 1986). During a budget crisis in the 1970s, Yonkers was taken over by New York State Financial Control Board. One of the Control Board's recommendations was to close several of the underutilized schools. Although this solved the isolation problem in the short term, it exacerbated the isolation of racial minorities in certain schools (Haynes, 2001).

As early as 1975, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) of Yonkers had requested that the Board of Education and the City of Yonkers voluntarily "address the inequities that exist" in the city's schools (NAACP, Yonkers Branch, 1979, p. 5). The Board of Education made some attempts to address the growing racial segregation in the city. However, in the following year the mayor replaced every member of the board and no further voluntary attempts were made to desegregate the schools. Because the City Council had complete financial control over the Board of Education, they could make line-by-line vetoes of the school board's budgets. They could also hold all of the school system's finances hostage, should the Board again attempt to

desegregate. In court statements, former mayor Angelo Martinelli explained that, although the Board of Education and the schools should be run as a system independent from the city, the Board was not an autonomous body and was dependent on city officials for power and adequate funding. This put the school system at the mercy of the City Council members and their constituents.

Salerno (1985) maintained that, instead of enacting policies that might help to bring racial balance to the schools, the new school board adopted a plan of “non-policy making” in order to bow to constituent pressure to not upset the status quo. According to the NAACP of Yonkers (1979), the one policy that was enacted in the district was voluntary busing. However, unlike almost every other district in the state, students’ families were required to pay for this service, thereby ensuring that more affluent families but not poor families would have a way out of their local failing school.

In 1979, the NAACP published what was called the “Black Paper.” In it, the organization demonstrated how the racial isolation of minorities in the city’s schools was a result of purposeful and intentional policies enacted by the city. These policies included closure of schools in mixed-race neighborhoods, school zone boundary changes, hiring assignments that sent the majority of Black and Hispanic teachers to predominantly Black schools, and the district’s pupil assignment policies. According to the paper, only 3 of the then 25 elementary schools in the city were “racially balanced” (NAACP, 1979). The Black student dropout rate was triple that of Whites, and the suspension rate was 4 times greater. On average, Black students in Yonkers were starting high school reading three grade levels behind their White counterparts. For the NAACP, the quality of education received by the students in majority Black schools was far inferior to the quality of

education received by students in the city's predominantly White schools, thereby limiting job prospects for Blacks and subjecting them to an ever-declining quality of life.

Early in 1980, the U.S. Department of Justice (USDOJ), acting on several complaints filed by the NAACP of Yonkers, other civil rights groups, and several parents, began an investigation into the claims that students of color were being denied equal educational opportunity in Yonkers. The USDOJ and the Office of Civil Rights notified the Yonkers Board of Education that they were in violation of Title IV and Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The city began to act in good faith and create a plan for desegregation, but plans stalled.

Seeing no voluntary progress to desegregate the city schools, the USDOJ sued the city of Yonkers, the Yonkers Board of Education, and the Yonkers Community Development Agency, in December 1980. The NAACP of Yonkers joined the suit. The plaintiffs claimed that the city had purposefully and willingly segregated the city's neighborhoods and schools by building all of the low-income housing projects in the poorest and most racially segregated neighborhoods. This led to an increase in the city's racial segregation and, by 1980, the majority of the city's African Americans were living in the city's poor and rundown downtown area and attending segregated schools.

After nearly 5 years of preparation and a trial lasting 3 months, Judge Leonard B. Sand agreed that the city and the Board of Education had in fact segregated the city's housing and schools based on racial identity (*U.S. v. Yonkers Board of Education and the City of Yonkers*, 1985). The city was ordered to designate sites for public housing and desegregate the school system. The suit caused extensive strife in the City of Yonkers.

There were many protests and pleas that reached as high as President Reagan's office to intervene on Yonkers's behalf. The suit also caused a second wave of "White flight" from the school system. Between 1980 and 1985, there was another significant drop in the number of YPS students. The school system lost 13.5% of its population, even as the city lost only 3.1% (Yonkers Board of Education, 1986).

In 1985, to rectify the segregation of public schools and housing, the New York Court of Appeals ordered that the city provide sites for 200 units of public housing in predominantly White, middle-class neighborhoods east of the Saw Mill River. Judge Sand also called for immediate desegregation of the public school system. For the public housing, Judge Sand enlisted the help of architect and city planner Oscar Newman, who suggested using townhouse-style public housing units instead of traditional high-rise apartment buildings and scattering them in seven neighborhoods in east Yonkers instead of clustering them in one place.

The housing order garnered major opposition; White homeowners expressed fears that building public housing would impact property values, lead to White flight, increase crime, and ruin the social fabric of neighborhoods (Belkin, 1999; Newman, 1996). After several years of public debate and turmoil, a pipe bombing of one of the housing sites, and several million dollars in fines accrued by a recalcitrant City Council, the City of Yonkers built 200 units of scattered-site low-income housing in seven middle-class neighborhoods in east Yonkers. In 1992, families that had been chosen by lottery from a list of Yonkers Municipal Housing Authority tenants moved in to the new townhouses (Newman, 1996).

School desegregation began in the following school year (1986) and cost the financially struggling city more than \$37 million (Wolters, 1996). School desegregation was far less controversial than the housing desegregation order and occurred with relatively little protest (Belkin, 1999). However, some claim that the movement of groups of students between high schools eventually led to gang activity and violence in the schools (Wolters, 1996).

Judge Sand approved a school desegregation plan called the Educational Improvement Plan (EIP), recommended by the court-appointed compliance monitor. The EIP recommended closing schools, converting existing schools to magnet schools, voluntary busing, and reassigning student and staff to enhance racial balance. The goal was to have 100% of the schools integrated within 2 academic years. A school would be considered desegregated when it was within 20 percentage points of the city's overall ethnic makeup. Students of color would be encouraged to apply for transfers to schools that were predominantly White and vice versa. In order to encourage these requests for transfers, many schools adopted some type of magnet program, including programs for gifted and talented students, Montessori students, performing arts students, and so forth. To disseminate information about the magnet system, the EIP required that the school district hold transfer fairs, create flyers in multiple languages, provide information for families via a multilanguage call center, and have district personnel canvas minority neighborhoods and visit homes to discuss transfer opportunities. Parents were offered a \$1,000 tax credit if they agreed to move their child to a school that would enhance integration of the school system.

It is almost ironic that the bulk of the public outcry was about the public housing order, not school desegregation. Today, nearly 20 years following construction of the housing, it has become clear that many of the residents' concerns were unfounded. It has been documented that housing prices have, for the most part, remained unaffected by the presence of the public housing, White and middle-class flight has not happened, and crime rates have gone down in many of the selected neighborhoods (Belkin, 1999; Briggs, Darden, & Aidala, 1999; City of Yonkers, 2010).

Conversely, the desegregation of the schools had a much more significant effect on the demographics of the YPS and continues to be controversial among city residents. Yonkers homeowners still lament the dismantling of neighborhood schools (Pachnowski, 1994; Pisacreta, 1998; Wolters, 1996; Yazurlo, 1990). In the years following the desegregation order, because of dissatisfaction over what they call "forced busing" and the declining quality of education in the city, White and middle-class families left the school system in large numbers (Wolters, 1996; Yazurlo, 1990).

Desegregation was meant to make the school system fairer for students of color. To some degree, it accomplished this goal. Elementary schools on Yonkers's east side that served few to no minority students in the 1980s are now well integrated. However, schools on the west side, such as Cross Hill Academy, Enrico Fermi, Martin Luther King, Jr. High School, and most of the high schools continue to have populations that are more than 90% students of color (NYSED, 2013a). School desegregation also served to alter completely the demographics of the school system; the number of White students in YPS decreased from 68% in 1985 to about 15% today (Pachnowski, 1994; YPS, 2013a). Today, while Whites make up 58.4% of the city's population, White children make up

only 18% of the public school population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010; YPS, 2012a).

According to a demographic study commissioned by the school district in 2011, there are approximately 7,740 White children ages 5–17 in the city, but more than half do not attend YPS (Grip, 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

Instead of taking advantage of the city's free schools, many families who have chosen to remain in Yonkers but opt for one of the city's many parochial schools pay for public schools in neighboring districts or choose elite private schools in the Bronx or other parts of the county (Brenner, 2011; Grip, 2011; Pachnowski, 1994). As a result there are few middle- and upper-middle-class students left in the district, when compared to their numbers in the city as a whole. In 1985, the year prior to the desegregation remedy, only 21% of the then-18,000 Yonkers students were eligible for free or reduced-priced lunches; today, that proportion is more than 75% of nearly 26,000 students (YPS, 2013a). Table 4 shows changes in the population of students of color in the city's high schools.

Desegregation was not necessarily popular with Black families, either. Many of the schools that had served Black families for generations were closed and the fabric of their neighborhoods was disrupted by busing (Belkin, 1999). Even when their schools of choice had remained opened, their children were often bused across the city to achieve racial balance, while White students were bused to them (Wolters, 1996).

Many argue that school desegregation in Yonkers has been a failure. Determining the merits of desegregation in Yonkers is far too complex for this project. The perpetuation of institutionalized racial segregation was addressed and remedied, and the city was no longer permitted to marginalize students based on color. Unfortunately, the

Table 4

Percentages of Minority Students per School Before and After Desegregation Remedy

School	1980	1985	2013
Gorton High School	47	67	91
Lincoln High School	2	13	90
Roosevelt High School	9	13	93
Riverside High School ^a	N/A	N/A	92
Saunders High School	18	34	74
Yonkers High School	62	77	72

^aRiverside High School was not established until 2008. Prior to that time, the building was occupied by Museum Middle School, established in 1986. Source: (a) *Educational Improvement Plan for the Yonkers Public Schools*, by Yonkers Board of Education, 1986, Yonkers, NY: Author; (b) *Desegregation: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow—A Case Study of the Yonkers Public Schools*, by M. Yazurlo, 1990, New York, NY: Fordham University; (c) New York State Education Department. (2013c). *Yonkers City School District Report Card 2011-2012*, by New York State Department of Education, 2013c, retrieved from <https://reportcards.nysed.gov/files/2011-12/RC-2012-662300010000.pdf>.

entire process may have been counterproductive. According to a study on the effects of desegregation by Michael Yazurlo (1990), the achievement gap between Whites and minority students actually widened in the years immediately following implementation of the desegregation plan and, until recently, little had been accomplished to remedy this fact.

Yonkers schools remain largely segregated by race and class because Yonkers remains largely segregated by race and class. Housing desegregation did little to alleviate the concentrations of poverty in the city. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012a),

one census tract in northeast Yonkers has a median household income of \$144,300, while another in the city's southwest has a median household income of \$16,488. Figure 8 shows the current state of poverty concentration within Yonkers. The city's southwest quadrant continues to house the largest number of low-income residents.

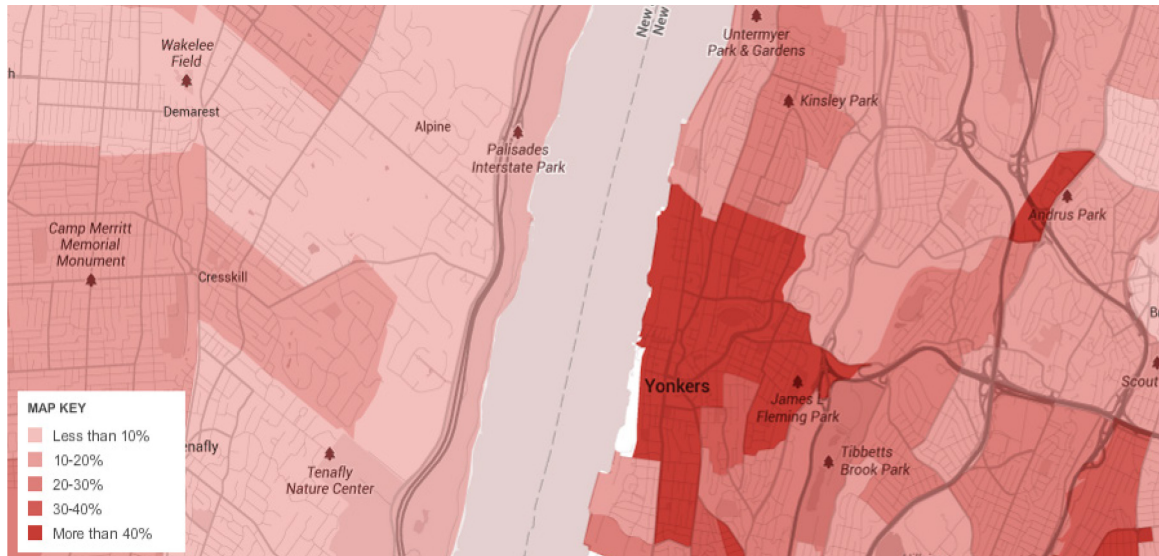


Figure 8. Yonkers households earning less than \$30,000 a year. Adapted from Mapping America: Every City, Every Block, a service of the *New York Times* using 2005–2009 American Community Survey and 2010 data from the U.S. Census Bureau, retrieved from <http://projects.nytimes.com/census/2010/map?ref=us>.

CHAPTER 5

THE YONKERS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Schools were built in Yonkers as early as 1785, around the time the township of Yonkers was decreed. These schools were consolidated into the Yonkers School District in 1881, following the city's incorporation. The first superintendent, Charles Gorton, for whom a high school is named, insisted that all students be given free text books; he also established evening classes. In the early half of the 20th century, Yonkers was considered one of, if not the best of, public school systems in New York State, being well regarded for its academic and vocational programs (Gorton High School, 1999; "Yonkers to Spend \$100,000," 1921). The district grew rapidly as the city expanded.

Today, approximately 26,000 students attend Yonkers's 39 schools. The 2012-2013 budget was about \$513.5 million (YPS, 2012a). The district employs about 1,600 teachers, 120 school-based administrators, and 650 paraprofessionals. According to the latest NYSED District Report Card, 100% of teachers in Yonkers have at least 3 years of teaching experience and are considered "highly qualified," and more than two thirds have a master's degree plus an 30 graduate credits or a doctorate (NYSED, 2013a).

Sixty-eight percent of the city's school children qualify for free lunches and another 7% qualify for reduced-price lunches, signifying that more than 75% of the district's children are living below poverty or near poverty. In the high schools this figure is nearly 90% (NYSED, 2013b).³ The district's demographics are as follows: 55%

³Federal poverty guidelines are that the poverty line for a family of four in 2013 is \$23,550. Students qualify for free lunch if their family earns up to 130% of the poverty line or \$30,316 for a family of four. Reduced-price lunch is offered if students' families earn income at 185% poverty or \$43,568 for a family of four. (For more information, see www.fns.us.gov.) However, the cost of living in Yonkers is 155% the national average, so students who receive reduced-price lunches are actually living in poverty.

Hispanic, 20% African American, 18% White, 6% Asian, and less than 1% Native American and “Other.” Twelve percent of the students are rated “limited English proficient.” According to the NYSED (2002), Yonkers is a “district with high student needs relative to district resource capacity” (p. 3).

The Yonkers Board of Education is an independent municipal corporation under the jurisdiction of the New York State Board of Regents. The YPS are under a modified form of Mayoral Control (Center for American Progress, 2013). The Board has nine unpaid members appointed by the mayor for 5-year terms. Yonkers has a *dependent school district*, meaning that it relies on funding from the city and that the Board of Education has no taxing authority. The Board is responsible for hiring the superintendent and other chief administrators, as well as setting policy regarding school construction, closing, attendance lines, and personnel policies (Yazurlo, 1990). At present, YPS is in a state of flux. Superintendent Bernard Pierorazio announced a sudden retirement in February 2014. Mayor Mike Spano has stated that he and the City Council President will seek legislation for full mayoral control of YPS, similar to the arrangement in New York City.

The Yonkers City School District has been plagued by poor student achievement. The 4-year graduation rate has risen slowly over the past decade, but is still well below state and national averages. The 4-year graduation rate was 64% in 2011 and 68% in 2012. The average SAT scores are 873 on the 1600 scale or 1307 on the 2400 scale, also below local and national averages. In 2011, 16 of the 40 YPS schools were on the Schools In Need of Improvement (SINI) list. This includes four of the city’s then nine high schools (NYSED Office of Educational Management, 2011). In 2012, New York

State adopted a new school accountability system. Yonkers has been rated a “focus” district as a result of low performance in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics and low graduation rates for one or more accountability groups: racial/ethnic groups, low-income students, English Language Learners, and students with disabilities (NYSED, 2012). Yonkers has eight schools listed as “priority” because they are among the poorest-performing in the state. Six more schools are listed as “focus” schools. One school is a “reward school,” among the highest-achieving or with the most progress in the state.

Yonkers had been making significant gains in ELA and mathematics scores at the elementary level (YPS, 2012b). The recent change to state examinations based on Common Core Standards was a challenge for the district. Only 16.4% of the students met or exceeded the ELA proficiency standard and 14.5% met or exceeded the mathematics proficiency standard; statewide, those numbers were 31% for both subjects (NYSED, 2013b). Table 5 compares ELA and mathematics scores in Yonkers to those of other large cities in New York State.

Finances

Yonkers and the YPS continue to struggle financially; the recent “Great Recession” exacerbated these problems. According to the YPS Superintendent, funding is the district’s “singular most pressing challenge” (as cited in Kelly, L., 2009, para. 2). The YPS have faced budget shortfalls almost every year in the past decade, which has meant repeated program and personnel cuts. Since 1997, YPS had offered free full-day Universal Pre-K to all students in the district but were forced to cut the program in 2011 to a half-day program to save money. In that year there were also more than 300 staffing

Table 5

New York State English Language Arts and Mathematics Scores for Grades 3–8, 2013

District/area	Mathematics (%)	English Language Arts (%)
New York City	29.6	26.4
Buffalo	9.6	11.5
Rochester	5.0	5.4
Syracuse	6.9	8.7
Yonkers	14.5	16.4
All New York State public schools	31.0	31.1
Large cities	9.0	10.4
Urban/suburban low income	15.1	17.7

Source: *State Education Department Releases Grades 3–8 Assessment Results*, by New York State Education Department, 2013b, retrieved from <http://www.oms.nysed.gov/press/grades-3-8-assessment-results-2013.html>

cuts, as well as cuts to sports and arts programs districtwide. Yonkers has had to cut more than 535 jobs since the 2008-2009 school year, despite an enrollment increase of more than 1,600 students (YPS, 2012b). Currently, the ratio of guidance counselors to students in the high schools is 1:650, which can mean that most students have little opportunity to spend a significant amount of time talking to a counselor about college or life after high school.

YPS buildings are in a state of chronic disrepair and estimates to fix them exceed \$1.6 billion (Pierorazio, 2013). The mean building age in the district is more than 73

years, nine buildings are almost a century old, and one building is nearly 130 years old. Nearly every building in the district received an *unsatisfactory* rating during a recent safety survey (KG&D Architects, 2011). Many of the buildings are poorly lit and lack infrastructure for current teaching styles and technologies. They are cold in the winter and can be uncomfortably warm in May and June. The buildings are also too small; on average, the buildings are overcrowded by 25%. YPS ranks second to last in square footage per student in New York, and population projections for the next decade show an increase in district student population of several thousand students (KG&D Architects, 2011; Pierorazio, 2013).

Yonkers budgetary woes are a result of several key factors. Generally, the bulk of school funding in a municipality comes from two major sources: the state education budget and real property taxes. Yonkers is an old city, with many parcels containing dilapidated building stock; this makes for low-value real property. Although the median house value in the city is \$418,000, some properties are valued at as little as \$100,000, thereby limiting the total revenue that the city can generate from property taxes. In contrast, neighboring Bronxville has a median home value of \$920,000 and in Scarsdale to the north, the median home value is \$1.2 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b). The Yonkers Board of Education is dependent on the City of Yonkers for its budget; it has no taxing authority. The smaller municipalities in Westchester County hold local school budget elections and constituents vote nearly every year to raise taxes to fund the school system. Yonkers's school funding system helps to keep property taxes among the lowest in the county but prevents the district from raising enough money. As a result, per-pupil

spending in Yonkers is significantly lower than in its more affluent neighbors: Yonkers \$19,506, Scarsdale \$27,219, Chappaqua \$26,712, and Ardsley \$29,182 (NYSED, 2013a).

Many high-poverty districts that cannot raise their own revenue look to their state to supplement funding to their district; however, the way New York distributes its education dollars actually penalizes Yonkers rather than helps it. Westchester County is very wealthy; the average taxable income per student is \$480,000 and the average real estate value per child is more than \$1.2 million. In Yonkers, these numbers are \$195,000 and \$500,000, respectively. The combined wealth ratio (CWR) per child in Westchester County is 2.760, while in Yonkers it is 1.021⁴ (Kelly, L., 2009; NYSED, 2013a). Yonkers has the dubious honor of being a poor city in a rich county. Unfortunately for YPS, state education funds are distributed to districts based on the wealth of the overall county and not the local municipality. Therefore, poorer cities such as Mount Vernon and Yonkers get neither adequate state funding nor real estate tax revenue to fund the schools fully. Former Superintendent Pierorazio and the last three mayoral administrations have been fierce advocates for reorganizing the state funding formula, lobbying each year for supplemental dollars.

Unfair funding formulas are not unique to Yonkers or New York State. In New Jersey, low-income families fought for and eventually won fairer funding formulas for districts such as Newark and Camden in the landmark New Jersey Supreme Court case *Abbott v. Burke* (Yaffe, 2007). As a result, New Jersey increased spending in the 31 *Abbott* district so that schools received 22% more per pupil than did non-*Abbott* districts

⁴CWR is the combined value of the Pupil Wealth Ratio (PWR) Index, which calculates district wealth based on real property value, and the Alternate Pupil Wealth Ratio Index (APWR), which calculates district wealth based on adjusted gross income of residents. Districts with a CWR of 1.25 or less represent communities of the poorest school districts in New York State (NYSED, n.d.)

(State of New Jersey Department of Education, 2011). Inspired by this success, New York City and Yonkers entered into litigation against Governor Pataki's administration, seeking compensation for what they claimed to be an inequitable school funding formula. After spending more than \$2 million, Yonkers withdrew from the suit and was not part of the multimillion-dollar remediation received by New York City (Aris, 2011).

The Reputation Problem

The preceding does not paint a rosy picture of Yonkers or its city schools. When I tell people that I live in Yonkers and send my daughter to a public school, they often look shocked, and more than a few people have told me that they would not look at homes in Yonkers because of the schools. A survey of online information and discussion boards such as Greatschools, City-Data, and Westchester Blockshopper demonstrate low faith in the city's schools; some words used to describe the public schools are "a mess," "terrible," "disgusting," "awful," and "hopeless." In short, the Yonkers schools have a bad reputation, which makes it difficult to attract middle-class families to live in the city and to send their children to the public schools.

To be fair, there are glimmers of hope in the city's schools. Yonkers High School (described below) has appeared on the *U.S. News and World Report's* "Top 100 High Schools in the U.S." list every year since the list was started and is a New York State "Reward" school under the new school rating system. There are also pockets of high-achieving pre-K–Grade 8 schools and the PEARLS Hawthorne School was named a 2013 "Exemplary High Performing" National Blue Ribbon School.

Yonkers is part of a group known as the Big Five School Districts, made up of the five largest districts in New York State (also New York City, Buffalo, Rochester, and

Syracuse), all of which happen to be dependent districts and struggling both financially and academically. Yonkers has consistently had the highest graduation rate of all Big Five School Districts (Yonkers Daily Voice, 2013). Yonkers schools also led the Big Five in Aspirational Performance Measures (APMs), with the greatest 1-year increase, from 9% to almost 23%. In 2013, Yonkers graduated more minority students than the state average: 71.5% of Hispanic students and 66.9% of Black students graduated on time, compared to state averages of 57.8% and 58.1%, respectively (Yonkers Daily Voice, 2013).

The Yonkers High Schools

As of June 2013, there were nine high schools in Yonkers (Figure 9), all of which had some magnet and honors programs. Below is a brief history of each school, with a description of the student body, programs, and academic achievement.

Gorton High School

Gorton High School, named for Yonkers's first superintendent, Charles E. Gorton, opened in 1924 in response to what was serious overcrowding at then-Yonkers High School. Gorton High School was built on the Moore property near Shonnard Place, then part of the first golf course in the United States and what is now a middle-class neighborhood. The Federalist style was meant to be reminiscent of older college campuses. The students at the new school soon formed clubs and a student government, a first for the city of Yonkers. A look at the first graduating class yearbook shows a vibrant school where students participated in three orchestras and bands, 15 clubs (e.g., glee, drama, library), and 17 fraternities, sororities, and secret societies. Of the 76 graduates that year, most were of German or Jewish descent; two were young women of color.

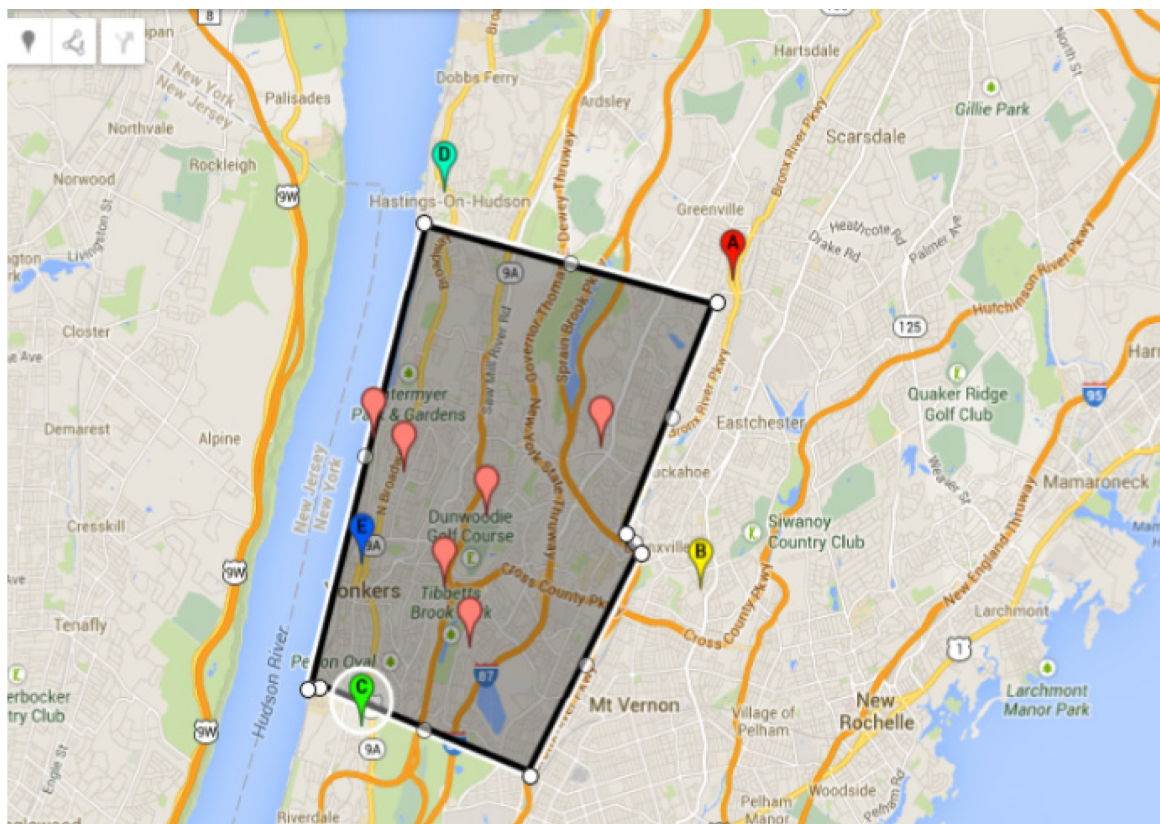


Figure 9. Map of Yonkers high schools, 2013.

By 1985, things had changed significantly at Gorton High School. The school was more than two thirds (67%) “non-White.” The daily attendance rate was only 78%, and fewer than half (41%) of the students who had graduated had been accepted to college. The plan for Gorton under the desegregation order was to widen the attendance zone eastward to include more middle- and upper-middle-class neighborhoods to encourage students from middle-class families to attend (Yonkers Board of Education, 1986).

Currently, Gorton has almost 1,300 students, of whom 91% qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, making it one of the poorest schools in the district. Eighty-four percent of the students are Black or Hispanic. The school operates under an academy system. Incoming freshman choose or are placed in one of the school’s programs and

concentrate on a field of study in addition to the standard college preparatory curriculum for New York State. Gorton is best known for its Medical and Health Professionals Academy, but it also has the Academy of Information Technology, the Law and Public Service Academy, the Professionals Academy, and the Commercial Horticulture Academy. Each academy has a partnership or affiliation with outside organizations or businesses.

Gorton has had its share of troubles in recent years. On *greatschools.com* it has a rating of 2 out of 10. Part of this low rating comes from the school's 63% graduation rate and the students' poor performance on state examinations. *U.S. News and World Report* (2012a) gave Gorton a 14.8 out of a possible 100 score on their College Readiness Index, indicating that students were not graduating ready to do college-level work. The average SAT scores for the class of 2012 were critical: reading 405, mathematics 394, and writing 404, approximately 300 points below the national average. According to the school's 2012 Report Card, 41% of the students were suspended during the 2011-2012 school year.

Gorton has many issues with its physical plant. The nearly-90-year-old building is being utilized at 146% of suggested occupancy and is in dire need of major repair. Paint is peeling off walls, large chips are scattered on the floor in the hallways and gymnasium, and pipes leak. According to a 2010 building study conducted by the district, Gorton needs more than \$27 million in repairs or to be completely replaced (KG&D Architects, 2011). A student was quoted in the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) newsletter when talking with AFT president Randi Weingarten: "We can hear the rats when they run through the ventilation system" (as cited in AFT, 2011, p. 1).

Lincoln High School

Lincoln High School was built in 1955 and named for the neighborhood in which it is located. Lincoln Park is an upper-middle-class neighborhood in South East Yonkers, just north of the New York City border. Like Gorton, Lincoln High School is operated on an academy system, the most popular of which is its successful business and entrepreneurship program called the Academy of Finance. This program prepares students for careers in the financial services industry through coursework and on-the-job experience. Students take courses in computer technology, economics, accounting, financial planning, and public speaking.

The first time I entered Lincoln High School was about 2 years ago to attend a YPIE open house in the school's College and Career Center. At the front door I was greeted by several young people in military-style attire who waited for me to register with the security desk and then escorted me to the center with a formal military-style walk. Lincoln has a popular Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) program. While there is no military obligation after high school, JROTC graduates are eligible for special consideration if they apply to a U.S. service academy or for ROTC scholarships, or they receive accelerated promotion upon enlistment.

Approximately 1,200 students are now enrolled at Lincoln; the demographics are as follows: 58% Hispanic, 27% Black, 11% White, and 4% Asian. Although Lincoln is in a fairly affluent neighborhood, the student body does not reflect this, as most of the students come from outside the immediate area. Eighty-eight percent of the students at Lincoln live at or below the poverty line. I have been to Lincoln on several occasions and have never seen a fight, altercation, or any major behavioral incident of any kind. Despite

this, nearly 300 students, or one quarter of the student population, were suspended in 2012. The 2012 graduation rate was 68%. Lincoln earned 3 out of 10 on the greatschools.com rates and *U.S. News and World Report* gave Lincoln 14.8 out of 100 on their College Readiness Index. The 2012 average SAT scores were critical reading 409, mathematics 392, and writing 398. These are the lowest average SAT scores of all current high schools in Yonkers.

Saunders High School

Saunders Trade and Technical High School opened in 1909 and was the first technical and vocational school in New York State (Wilcox & Angelis, 2011). Saunders moved to its current location following the 1985 desegregation order (Yonkers Board of Education, 1986). Saunders is centrally located in a working/middle-class neighborhood just north of the Cross County Parkway and just east of the Saw Mill River. The school draws students from all over the city for its vocational programs, which include cosmetology and culinary arts, in addition to the traditional college preparatory curriculum. Saunders offers 10 AP courses and is well regarded for its balance of vocational and academic curricula (*U.S. News and World Report*, 2011, 2012b; Wilcox & Angelis, 2011).

As with many of the other high schools in the district, Saunders is organized into four learning communities. Ninth-grade students take core courses that offer a strong academic foundation. They also take a career survey course during the first semester of ninth grade. In the 10th grade, students choose to major in one of 13 technical, vocational, or occupational programs, while continuing to be enrolled in Regents-level courses. The graduation requirements at Saunders exceed state requirements and those of

other Yonkers high schools. In order to take the classes necessary to meet these extended requirements, students are scheduled for a nine-period school day instead of the typical eight-period day.

There are 1,200 students at Saunders High school, with the following demographics: 50% Hispanic, 27% White, 16% Black, and 7% Asian. Currently, 81% of Saunders students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, making it the second-most affluent high school in the district. Saunders's reputation is better than all but one of the other high schools in Yonkers. The school enjoys a 92% graduation rate and makes Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) every year. Mean SAT scores are critical reading 437, 433 mathematics, and 427 writing. Saunders has been awarded *U.S. News and World Reports'* Bronze Medal of Distinction for 3 consecutive years starting in 2007, and then became a Silver Medal School in 2011 and 2012 (YPS, 2012b). The magazine gave Saunders a College Readiness Index rating of 17.7 and *gratschools.com* rated Saunders 3 out of 10.

Riverside High School

Riverside High School is located in a changing neighborhood in Northwest Yonkers on the site of the Hudson River Museum. It is housed in the former Museum Middle School campus, which closed due to poor performance. Riverside changed from a middle school to a high school in 2008. Like the other high schools in Yonkers, Riverside is a magnet school. Students are grouped into learning communities and can explore Environmental Engineering, Eco-Landscape Construction, Graphic Communications and Eco-Tourism, as well as Interior Design and Space Planning (NYSED Office of Educational Management, 2011).

Riverside currently enrolls about 1,000 students, 90% of whom qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. The school graduated its first class in 2011; its graduation rate is 71%. Riverside's students struggle academically; just over half of the students who graduated in 2012 met secondary English standards and only 5% were considered to exceed standards. Students perform somewhat better in mathematics, with 75% of 2012 graduates meeting state standards. However, only one quarter of the graduates took and passed the Geometry Regents examination and only 5% of graduates took and passed the Algebra 2/Trigonometry Regents examination. Riverside earned a rating of 2 out of 10 from greatschool.com and has not yet been ranked by *U.S. News and World Report*.

Roosevelt High School

Roosevelt High School was built in 1925 in a middle-class neighborhood in East Yonkers, on main thoroughfares Tuckahoe Road and Central Park Avenue. This neighborhood was highly segregated, which led to a high level of school segregation as well. Until the late 1970s, more than 90% of the student body at Roosevelt was White. In the years leading up to the desegregation order, the minority population increased somewhat. In the early 1980s, Roosevelt added a Communications Media and Fine Arts Magnet program to increase applications from outside the traditional encachment zone (Yonkers Board of Education, 1986). Desegregation changed the pattern of attendance for students in Yonkers: Between 1980 and 1990 more than half of the White students in Yonkers left the district. The shift in demographics was felt most by Roosevelt; by 1994 only about one third of the students at Roosevelt came from the original attendance zone (Pachnowski, 1994; Pisacreta, 1998). According to Roosevelt's 2012 Report Card, 90% of the students were counted as minorities.

Roosevelt High School has been phased out and graduated its last class in June 2013. It is being replaced by the phasing-in Early College High School. Roosevelt had been on the Schools Under Registration Review (SURR) list for several years (2004–2007) and suffered from an increasingly poor reputation with regard to safety and academics (*Yonkers Tribune*, 2007). The NYSED placed Roosevelt on its Persistently Lowest Achieving (PLA) schools list in 2010 and, in a report noted that during site visits, monitors observed relatively little student engagement and learning in the teacher-centered classrooms (NYSED, 2011b). The graduation rate for the class of 2012 was 57% and the mean SAT scores were critical reading 376, mathematics 361, and writing 367. In 2013, Roosevelt earned 9 out of 100 on the College Readiness Index and 2 out of 10 on the greatschools.com rating.

Yonkers Middle High School

YMHS is a Grades 7–12 school located between a working-class neighborhood and a middle- to upper-middle-class neighborhood in the Park Hill section of Yonkers. It is the oldest high school in the city, having opened in 1882 as Yonkers Central High School. Its original location was in downtown Yonkers between South Broadway and Riverdale Avenue near the city's former industrial core. The school moved three times before reaching its current location in winter 1974 (Yonkers High School, 1982).

Prior to the 1985 desegregation order, Yonkers High School was highly segregated, with more than 77% of its students non-White. Many of the few White students were tracked into the Century Honors Program. The average daily attendance rate was 68% (Yonkers Board of Education, 1986). The school was closed upon enactment of the desegregation order and the students were dispersed to other schools.

The school re-opened in 1998 as Yonkers Middle High School (YMHS), an IB magnet school with an entirely new freshman class (International Baccalaureate Organization [IBO], 2009b).

Today, YMHS, no is the most racially integrated high school in the district, with the demographics of approximately 1,200 students as follows: 16% Asian, 13% Black, 1% Native American, 44% Hispanic, and 25% White. The school is also the most affluent school in the district, with 68% of its students qualifying for free lunches. It is considered the jewel of the city's high schools, currently rated No. 41 in the top 100 public high schools in the nation by *U.S. News and World Report* every year since the list began in 2007 (*U.S. News and World Report*, 2011).⁵ The school has outranked every high school in Westchester County for 3 consecutive years. The graduation rate at is 94%, and more than 90% of the students in the class of 2012 were reported to be at or above grade level in mathematics and ELA. The average SAT scores are 480 critical reading, 485 mathematics, and 505 writing; these are the highest in the district but just below the national averages of 496 and 514. respectively (College Board, 2013a).

The key to the school's success is its IB program, in which students have the opportunity to take college-level classes and sit for qualifying examinations that earn them college credit. Any student is welcome to take any IB class and has the option of taking a full IB program and earning an IB diploma. According to IBO (2009b), the average student at YMHS takes at least two IB courses in their 4 years of high school. The program is unique in that it offers these advanced classes to all students instead of

⁵*U.S. News & World Report* ranking is based on the number of seniors taking AP or IB courses and examination scores. For more information, see <http://education.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-high-schools>.

just elite high achievers. It is this open access that keeps the school so highly ranked by *U.S. News and World Report* and makes it a noted school in reports by IBO (IBO, 2009a; *U.S. News and World Report*, 2011, 2012b). Not all students take a full IB course load to qualify for an IB diploma, as it is very challenging. The school graduates approximately 250 to 300 students yearly but grants only 30 to 40 IB diplomas. More than 20 IB courses are available, including Biology, Anthropology, Film, and Environmental Systems (IBO, 2009b).

Palisade Preparatory and Montessori Academy High School

Yonkers has two other high schools that were not included in this study. These schools are both new and YPIE has not had the opportunity to open College and Career Centers in their buildings. Palisade Preparatory Academy opened in 2007 and is a Grades 7–12 school. It was originally a College Board school but the two are no longer affiliated. This school was still in the phasing-in process when this study began and was not included as part of this research. Yonkers Montessori Academy will eventually grow to a Pre-K to Grade 12 school and will serve as the only public Montessori-based high school in the United States. This program is based on the style popularized by Maria Montessori, which emphasized child-centered classrooms in which students learn at their own pace and are placed in multi-age differentiated classes. This school is also still phasing in and will not have a graduating class until 2014.

CHAPTER 6

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Yonkers Partners in Education

In recent years, cities have looked to local business communities to fund and aid their school systems through public-private partnerships. Former Yonkers mayor Phil Amicone, understanding the effects of YPS's poor reputation and dwindling budget for the city's school children and graduates, brought together a group of local business people to help the schools. In 2007 they established YPIE as a local independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. YPIE's fledgling Board of Directors wanted to make real changes in YPS but were not sure what those changes should be. They hired Executive Director Wendy Nadel, who had more than 25 years of experience in nonprofits and fundraising; she suggested making the organization's mission college access and persistence.

YPIE has grown from a staff of 2 employees to 17 full- and part-time employees; it currently has an operating budget of approximately \$1 million. The bulk of the money for staff and programs comes from a piecemeal conglomeration of small and large private donors. Major program sponsors include Domino Sugar, New York Life Foundation, Related Companies, the Carvel Foundation, and the Bloomberg Foundation. Yonkers holds a yearly fundraising gala and other fundraising efforts throughout the year, both to bring in funds and to connect with the local community. YPIE has also received small grants from the City of Yonkers and other governmental agencies.

Today, YPIE works alongside the Yonkers Public School District to increase the number of students who graduate from high school and pursue a postsecondary

education. The organization does this through a research-based and multifaceted approach. Both Wendy Nadel and Director of Programs Ellen Cutler Levy clearly understand what models of college outreach programs have been shown to be most effective and have molded the YPIE to include the most effective components of these programs.

YPIE began its work by offering SAT preparation programs to the city's high school students. Soon, their focus turned to establishing College and Career Centers in the city's high schools (referred to herein as college centers). There are currently six operational college centers, one of which was serving two schools until June 2013. Each center is staffed by one full-time College Advisor who is a licensed guidance counselor in New York State. There are also 25 part-time volunteers who work a minimum of 2 hours per week in one of the centers to support students and their families. Since YPIE's inception, the number of seniors who have applied to college has increased by 59%, so that now 90% of 12th graders apply to at least one postsecondary school. Scholarship awards have increased by nearly \$30 million per year.

The services provided by the YPIE College Advisors include meeting with students and parents, in-class presentations, registration for workshops and programs, college planning, management of the college application and financial aid application process, and guidance with scholarships. The part-time volunteers assist students with completing applications, essay and resume writing, and occasionally financial aid package assessment. In addition to the college centers, YPIE implemented free SAT tutoring and test preparation classes; it arranges college and career fairs in both English and Spanish, facilitates college bus tours, arranges an Ivy League college interview day,

and through partnerships offers a small number of scholarships to college-bound graduates.

YPIE has several program partners that facilitate their programs and provide key services to district students. Essay writing is often cited by College Advisors as challenging to students, so YPIE pays for a nonprofit program called Essay Busters to teach a series of college essay writing workshops on Saturday mornings at one of the high schools. Sarah Lawrence College volunteer graduate students come to the college centers and help seniors with application essays. Because SAT scores can be a barrier to 4-year college access, YPIE offers low and no-cost classes through Vertias Prep, a service that would normally cost families \$1,200. Students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunches are eligible to take these classes for free; all other students pay a reduced fee of \$350. Among students who have participated in the YPIE SAT preparation classes, the average score increase was 150 points.

YPIE has a somewhat complicated relationship with the schools that it serves. YPIE College Advisors are not union members. Yonkers Federation of Teachers (YFT) officials maintained for most of the organization's history that the College Advisors were taking jobs that should be filled by unionized YPS Guidance Counselors. This became more complicated when in 2009–2011 the economic downturn forced YPS to make budget cuts that included laying off much of the high school guidance staff. The number of counselors in the high schools fell from 51 to 15. The ratio of guidance counselors to students increased to 1:650, which meant that the remaining guidance counselors were overwhelmed and could spend even less time focused on college and career. As a result, some of the College Advisors were working in schools with staff who both needed and

resented their presence, making for what one former YPIE staff member called a “pretty uncomfortable working relationship.” The contentious relationship between YFT and YPIE played out in local media and resulted in protests from YFT members at YPIE events (Murphy, D., 2012; Puleo, 2012; Stern, 2012). The relationship has been in a state of détente since January 2013, after YFT officials negotiated to bring back some of the laid-off guidance counselors in exchange for leaving YPIE alone.

Each of the schools that YPIE serves is different, which can affect the role that the College Advisor plays at the school. It would be unfair to say that there was no conversation about college happening prior to YPIE’s existence. Many students graduated and went on to college prior to establishment of the program. YPIE has helped to streamline this process and make it universally accessible to students. Guidance counselors in each school play very different roles in the college search and application process. At YMHS the guidance counselor is very present in the college process; she hosts parent nights, distributes SAT applications and fee waivers, writes letter of recommendations, discusses plans with students before graduation, and guides top students in elite college applications. In others schools, the whole conversation about college is left to the YPIE staff person, and the guidance staff has little to no input in the matter.

Naviance

YPIE pays for and uses a uniform districtwide system to track college planning and enrollment. This is done through Naviance, a web-based college planning and college application tool for students, parents, teachers, and school counselors. This program allows students to create and manage a multiyear path toward graduation and beyond.

Students in Yonkers schools begin work with Naviance as early as the seventh grade but at least by ninth grade, using it to take college knowledge quizzes, build career interest inventories, develop resumes, research colleges and careers, and upload essays. In the 11th and 12th grades, Naviance can be used to review academic and admission data for colleges. Students can gauge their chances of acceptance by comparing their own GPA and standardized test scores with those of recent Yonkers applicants who have gained admittance. Naviance also allows students to send applications and transcripts to colleges electronically.

In addition to the services that Naviance provides to students and their families, Naviance allows YPIE to track its success in the Yonkers schools. Through Naviance's data collection system, YPIE can view and track student and parent usage, college applications, scholarships dollars offered, standardized test scores, admission statistics, as well as outcomes by school, gender, race, ethnicity, and a variety of other variables. Naviance allows YPIE to manage data from NSC's StudentTracker system, a subscribed service that gives school districts the ability to track their graduates' progress and completion rates at postsecondary institutions.

Every Yonkers high school student is issued a Naviance account in the ninth grade, but usage varies among underclassman and across schools. Ninth- and 10th-grade students average 2.0 visits per year and 11th graders average 9.2 visits per year. Seventy percent of all Yonkers 12th-grade students make regular use of Naviance, logging in an average of 16.1 times in the academic year. Naviance has received mixed reviews from YPS high school students; some interview and focus group participants reported loving the software, while others said they did not find it helpful, were confused by it, or did not

like it overall. On the 12th Grade Survey, approximately two thirds (67.1%) of the respondents said that they *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that Naviance was a helpful tool in the college search and planning process. Table 6 summarizes recent use of Naviance services by 12th-grade students in YPS.

Table 6

Naviance Usage by Students in Yonkers High Schools, Grade 12, 2013

School	Students	Visits	Visits/student
Gorton High School	704	5,158	7.3
Lincoln High School	803	5,220	6.5
Riverside High School	395	11,039	27.9
Roosevelt High School	540	6,192	11.5
Saunders Trade High School	503	6,708	13.3
Yonkers Middle High School	632	8,637	13.7
Total	3,577	42,954	12.0

Note. Data gleaned from the Naviance data collection system.

Traditionally, high school students in the United States start to learn about college options in their freshman and sophomore years of high school, or perhaps later. YPIE has come to understand that students need information about college and career options earlier than ninth grade. Research indicates that all students, but especially low-income students, need access to this information even before the eighth grade (Levine & Nidiffer,

1996). In 2011 YPIE started a middle-school program called Getting Prepared for Success (GPS), which runs a full-year curriculum targeted at seventh- and eighth-grade students at seven schools. Staff members give lessons on college, career, and financial awareness with the aid of Naviance and computers. The GPS program culminates with eighth-grade students completing a career exploration capstone program. In 2013 YPIE began a new program called YPIE Scholars, which will give former GPS students the opportunity to be matched with a Graduation Coach. The coaches are volunteers who will follow the students through the end of their high school careers in order to support them, advocate for them, and increase their chances of graduating. Participants Subjects in this research did not have the benefit of GPS or YPIE Scholars, but the programs merit mentioning to understand the organization's role in the district as a whole.

The College and Career Centers

Each high school served by YPIE has allocated a moderate to large room for the college center. This room is equipped with 6 to 10 computers for student use, college resources such as books and brochures, SAT and ACT books, desks or tables, and separate areas for one-on-one meetings between advisors and students and/or their parents. The College Advisors keep records of which students sign in to the centers and for what reasons. In 2013, YPIE implemented a computer-based tracking system for this purpose. During the 2012-2013 academic year students signed in to use the computers in the six centers 23,783 times. There were 3,267 one-on-one meetings between students and advisors and 521 parents were supported by the College Advisors. They also took the students on 25 trips to visit colleges and hosted 194 college recruiting representatives.

Life in the college centers is cyclical in nature. Students traditionally begin to apply to colleges in the early fall of their 12th-grade year, and the offices are usually filled with students by the second week of school. Application activity peaks in November through the last week before the holiday break in December. Students can continue to apply to colleges after this peak, but the trend slows around mid-January. Students can officially apply for financial aid after January 1, but they generally wait until their parents have filed tax returns or have all tax documents ready. There is a second wave of peak activity at this time because students and their parents need a significant amount of support to complete FAFSA forms. In the 2012-2013 academic year, the College Advisors helped students to complete 547 FAFSA forms, representing more than one third of the graduating class. At Saunders Trade and Technical High School, the College Advisor completed or helped to complete more than two thirds (64.4%) of her students' FAFSA forms. When asked about this aspect of the job, one College Advisor said,

This is my least favorite part of the job. . . . I feel like it's a big scam and I'm going to be arrested for fraud. I don't really know what I'm doing, and I feel like I'm no better suited to do it than my students or their parents.

When asked why she chose to complete the applications, or at the very least with the students, another advisor responded,

I feel like I have no choice. At least I have experience doing this when I was a kid and then again in graduate school. Some of these students have never seen these forms before and they can be really overwhelming for them and their parents. But it gets hard . . . some of them have strange financial situations, a lot of them are on different public assistance programs, or they have different people claiming them on their taxes. It's pretty messy.

In March and early April, the college centers begin to slow down and the advisors use this time to move to the 9th- and 10th-grade classes to make presentations about

college and careers. The six advisors in the past academic year made 610 classroom and/or assembly presentations about college and career. During these sessions the advisors enrolled students for Naviance accounts and helped them to complete specific tasks using the program. These include administering a 9th-grade survey that asks questions about the students' level of college awareness and leads them to take learning style and career interest surveys. The advisors talk to students about taking rigorous courses, keeping up their grades, and participating in extracurricular activities. They discuss the types of students that specific schools look for and the level of education expected by various employers. They answer questions about financial aid, necessary standardized tests, and sometimes how to approach their parents about wanting to go away to college.

During these slow months, the advisors move to the 11th-grade classes. Here the conversation is focused on the actual college process and what students should start to do to make the process run more smoothly. Students are reminded to start asking teachers about letters of recommendation and to register for the SAT, SAT II, and/or ACT. The advisors invite the 11th graders to come to the college center to explore college options using Naviance or for one-on-one conferences to help with creating a prospective college list. In order to participate in any of YPIE's activities, such as college trips, SAT tutoring, or the college essay writing program, students must have completed a prospective college list and must have met with the College Advisor at least once.

The Classes of 2010–2012

There were 1,280 graduates in the class of 2010, 1,438 graduates in the class of 2011, and 1,429 graduates in the class of 2012. The demographics of these graduating

classes were as follows: 7.1% Asian, 26.1% Black, 48.7% Hispanic, and 17.3% White. In these cohorts, 7 students were listed as Native American and 1 as Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian. These would account for less than 1% of the student body combined and were omitted from data analysis. For these classes, the average SAT score (Critical Reading [CR] and mathematics only) was 853 ($SD = 186$, range = 400 to 1460). Table 7 shows the average GPA and SAT scores for students who graduated from 2010 to 2012.

Table 7

Profiles, Yonkers Public School Graduates, 2010–2012

Class	<i>N</i>	Average GPA	Average SAT, 1600 scale	Average SAT, 2400 scale	Apps/student	Acceptance rate
2010	1,275	80.2	832	1247	4.8	34%
2011	1,438	78.9	863	1304	5.3	39%
2012	1,429	78.6	873	1307	5.3	42%

Note. GPA = grade point average. Data gleaned from the Naviance data collection system.

Average SAT scores in Yonkers are significantly lower than the national average of 1498 (includes writing component). However, district SAT scores mirror national trends, with Asian students earning top scores, specifically Asian females dominating across groups. In general, Asian students earned the highest SAT scores, followed by Whites, Hispanics, and Blacks. Despite the success of Asian females, males generally earn higher scores (College Board, 2013b). The current cost of the SAT program is \$51,

but the majority of high school students qualify for fee waivers because of their FRPL status. These fee waivers entitle eligible students to take the SAT I twice and the SAT II twice, and to receive four free score reports. Students are allowed up to four college application fee waivers, which can be used at most colleges.

Historically, the number of students taking the SAT in Yonkers has been low. In 2010, only about one quarter of all graduates sat for the examination in 11th or 12th grade. Students who do not take either the SAT or ACT automatically reduce their 4-year college options by more than two thirds.⁶ To increase the number of students who take the SAT, YPS began to pay for students to sit for the PSAT in 10th and 11th grades, and the SAT in the 12th grade. This has increased the number of testers districtwide. In 2011, 52.7% of graduates sat for the SAT and in 2012, 65.6% of graduates did so.

A small percentage of students in Yonkers choose to take the ACT instead of or in addition to the SAT. The ACT tests science and social studies in addition to English and mathematics; it is more regularly given in the Midwest and southern states, while the SAT is more often given on the east and west coasts. According to ACT, 29% of students in New York take the ACT at least once. Colleges throughout the United States accept either test. As with the SAT, scores by students in Yonkers follow the national trends, and Yonkers students score significantly below the average scores of English 20.5, Mathematics 21.1, Reading 21.3, and Science 20.9 (ACT, Inc., 2012). The same differences exist for scores by racial/ethnic categories, but girls tend to do better than boys on the ACT, which was also the case in Yonkers (Table 8).

⁶Fairtest.org (National Center for Fair and Open Testing, 2014) reported that approximately 850 4-year colleges do not require standardized tests for admission. According to the NCES, there are approximately 2,800 4-year colleges in the United States. For a list of colleges that do not require the SAT or ACT exam see National Center for Fair and Open Testing, 2014).

Table 8

SAT and ACT Scores of Yonkers Public Schools Students by Gender and Ethnicity, 2010–2012

Test	Total M	Total F	White M	White F	Black M	Black F	Asian M	Asian F	Hisp. M	Hisp F
SAT, <i>N</i> =	1,264	1,781	277	256	295	481	150	202	505	800
SAT Total	1,300	1,289	1,400	1,408	1,208	1,215	1,380	1,479	1,277	1,248
SAT CR	432	428	464	462	406	407	444	474	427	417
SAT Math	448	422	482	461	410	392	494	506	438	407
ACT, <i>N</i> =	36	51	1	6	10	19	8	5	17	21
ACT English	14	16	12	19	14	15	13	22	14	16
ACT Math	17	17	16	18	17	16	18	20	17	17
ACT Reading	15	18	13	21	13	17	15	21	16	17
ACT Science	18	18	19	20	18	17	18	21	17	18

Note. Data gleaned from the Naviance data collection system.

According to YPIE's 12th Grade Survey, more than half of Yonkers students are potential first-generation college goers, a group identified in the literature as being at risk to fail to persist beyond the first year of postsecondary school (Choy et al., 2000). In the 2012 12th Grade Survey, 53% of participants reported that at least one parent had attended some college, and 39% reported that at least one parent had graduated from college. Family history of college attendance varied widely across schools. More than three quarters of YMHS students reported a parent with at least some college experience.

About half of Lincoln, Riverside, and Gorton students were potential first-generation college goers.

On the 12th-grade survey, students were asked to name the highest level of education that they planned to attaining in the future. Nearly 84% said that they planned to obtain at least a bachelor's degree and 55% said they that planned to earn some type of graduate degree. Only 6.7% of survey participants said that they planned to stop their education upon high school graduation. Results were categorized by school, demonstrating an inverse relationship between the number of students in each school who qualified for FRPL and the overall level of education that students planned to obtain. A similar relationship was apparent between the percentage of FRPL students and parental education attainment in each school (Table 9).

Applications and Acceptances

Students who responded to the 12th grade survey were asked what advice they would give to the subsequent year's seniors about planning for college. The majority chose, *apply to more colleges* as an options. According to the National Association for College Admissions and Counseling (NACAC), the average high school student applies to about nine schools. On average, students from Yonkers applied to approximately five postsecondary schools, although some did not apply to any schools or programs and some applied to as many as 16 schools. YPIE does not set limits on the number of applications that a student can file, but college application costs can be prohibitive for some students. Application costs can range from \$25 to \$100; some schools offer free or reduced applications costs if a student applies through their online system (Haynie, 2013). Since Yonkers is a high-poverty district, the majority of students can apply to at least some of

Table 9

Percentages of Yonkers Public Schools Students Receiving Free or Reduced-Price Lunches (FRPL) Versus Highest Expected Level of Education and Parental Level of Education

School	Qualify for FRPL	Plan on BA or higher	Plan on graduate degree	Parents some college	Parents degree
Yonkers	67	98.8	76.3	71.3	61.3
Saunders	80	91.0	62.7	55.1	36.7
Lincoln	88	80.1	46.3	50.9	36.6
Roosevelt	88	78.5	50.0	38.9	26.7
Riverside	89	83.4	55.3	53.3	39.2
Gorton	91	74.3	46.9	50.9	40.5

Note. From *Yonkers City School District Report Card 2011-2012*, by New York State Education Department, 2013c, retrieved from <https://reportcards.nysed.gov/files/2011-12/RC-2012-662300010000.pdf>

their college choices for free. CUNY schools are all on one application for a cost of \$65, but CUNY offers a very limited number of fee waivers to each school (sometimes only three or four).

Students from Yonkers applied to and were accepted by a wide range of colleges in 2010–2012. Students applied to more than 823 schools in 32 states and 13 countries. Students applied to 213 community and 2-year colleges across the country, both in-state and out-of-state public and private colleges, and all eight Ivy League schools. The top five schools were Westchester Community College, Lehman College, Hunter College,

Mercy College, and City College. Westchester Community College is Westchester County's only public 2-year school and part of SUNY. Lehman, Hunter, and City Colleges are public 4-year schools and part of the CUNY system in neighboring New York City. Mercy College is a private school with campuses located in Westchester County and the Bronx. Other private schools that garnered a significant number of YPS applications were Manhattan College, Iona College, College of Westchester, and Monroe College, all located within a 20-minute drive of Yonkers.

The most often applied-to state schools (SUNY) were Stony Brook University and SUNY Albany. Many students' possible plans included living at or staying close to home. All of the top 25 most-applied-to schools are in New York State, 21 can be reached by car in less than an hour. The out-of-state college most often applied to by Yonkers students was University of Bridgeport, a private school in Bridgeport, Connecticut. The 4-year colleges by which Yonkers students were most often accepted were Mercy College, Iona College, Lehman College, Manhattan College, College of Westchester, and College of Mount St. Vincent. All local community colleges are open access and all students who earn a regular diploma or better and submit applications are accepted.

According to Ellen Cutler Levy, one of YPIE's goals has been to increase student interest, application, and attendance at top-tier and Ivy League colleges and universities. Studies have shown that low-income students who attend highly selective colleges are more likely to persist, graduate, and earn more than their peers who attend schools traditionally attended by low-income students, such as community colleges and open-access state and private schools (Carnevale & Rose, 2004; Roderick et al., 2011). To

support students who apply to these top-tier schools, YPIE sets up Ivy Interview Days, bringing alumni interviewers from the top colleges to one location to meet students who have applied to the schools that they represent. Recognizing that these students sometimes are unfamiliar with interviewing etiquette and protocol, YPIE also provides interview skills workshops. Yonkers students have had varied luck at gaining entrance to these highly selective schools. Table 10 shows application and admission data for YPS students at a set of highly selective (less than 30% acceptance) schools for the classes of 2010–2012.

An Ivy League education is perhaps the most sought-after resume feature in the nation. Students and their families spend tens of thousands of dollars on achievement test preparation courses, admissions coaches, and extracurricular activities in the hope that these will make the student stand out when applying to one of these eight elite schools. Competition for a place in these institutions is strong; Harvard had more than 35,000 applicants last year and accepted fewer than 6% of them (Harvard College Admissions Office, 2013).

According to a Brookings Institution report, elite colleges are very interested in increasing the number of low-income and other traditionally underrepresented students at their schools (Hoxby & Avery, 2013). They do this by offering no-repay loan programs and adjusting admissions criteria to account for these students' lack of access to the kinds of application boosters mentioned earlier. This may be why students from Yonkers have gained admission to most of the Ivy League schools despite significantly lower SAT scores and weighted GPAs than the average applicant. Table 11 shows the average accepted GPA and SAT scores of students who were accepted by Ivy League colleges in

Table 10

Yonkers Public Schools Classes of 2010–2012 Most Applied to Top Tier College With Acceptances

College	Applied	Accepted
Barnard College	29	9
Brown University	35	4
Carnegie Mellon University	6	1
Columbia	89	3
Cornell University	62	3
Duke University	15	2
Georgetown University	8	0
Harvard University	29	2
Johns Hopkins	18	2
Massachusetts Institute of Technology	9	0
New York University	187	22
Stanford University	9	0
University of Pennsylvania	23	1
University of California Berkeley	5	0
University of Virginia	5	3
University of Chicago	5	0
Vassar College	14	4
Yale University	22	0

Note. Data gleaned from Naviance data collection system

Table 11

Yonkers Public Schools Students Accepted by Ivy League Schools Versus National Average

School	Yonkers Avg. Accepted SAT (1600 scale)	Yonkers Avg. Accepted GPA (weighted)	National Avg. Accepted SAT (1600 scale)	National Avg. Accepted GPA (weighted)
Brown University	1283	4.0	1430	4.26
Cornell University	1130	2.98	1389	4.22
Columbia University	1260	3.91	1460	4.2
Dartmouth University	1340	4.0	1450	4.31
Harvard College	1150	3.65	1490	4.33
Univ. of Penn.	1490	4.21	1440	4.24

Source: CollegeData.com (2013) and Naviance data collection system.

contrast to the schools' average accepted applicants. Schools such as Brown University and Columbia University have been willing to take a chance on Yonkers students despite SAT scores 150–200 points below their normal mean.

Student Perspectives on Planning for Life After High School

During focus groups and interviews and in both surveys, students were asked about their thoughts on the college/career planning process. Students served by the YPIE college offices generally expressed positive views of the offices, advisors, and YPIE in general. When asked on the 12th grade survey whether the YPIE College Advisor had played a key role in their college search and planning process, 89.4% marked *agree* or *strongly agree*. Similarly, 83.4% *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that the “college office was a

warm and friendly place to visit.” On the 12th grade survey, students were asked which people had been most helpful to them during the planning process; 49% name guidance counselors and 48% name YPIE College Advisors, followed by parents (42%), teachers (33%), and friends (16%). Students who attended high schools where the guidance counselors were more involved in the college planning process were more likely to rate their guidance counselors as helpful.

Although reports about YPIE were generally positive, many of the interview and focus group participants were not sure who had been their YPIE College Advisors and who had been their regular guidance counselor. In seeking clarification, answers about who was most helpful sometimes switched. Here is an excerpt from a transcript of an interview with one participant.

Researcher: So, let’s talk a little more about planning for college. Who in your high school would you say helped you most when planning for college and career?

Participant: Oh, I guess my counselor and my teacher Mr. Brinks [finance teacher], they were really helpful to me.

Researcher: Okay, so when you say your counselor, who do you mean exactly?

Participant: My guidance counselor, she helped me a lot. She even filled out my financial aid forms for me and helped me get one of those city scholarships, you know in the book.⁷

Researcher: So, did you ever go to the YPIE college office for help at all, or only to your Guidance Counselor?

Participant: Yeah, that’s who I mean, the lady in the college office, Ms. Diaz.

Researcher: Oh, okay, that’s who I mean when I’m talking the YPIE College Advisor. Let me clarify, this office that we are sitting in now is YPIE’s office. YPIE stands for Yonkers Partners in Education, it’s a community group that pays

⁷YPS publishes a book each year that lists city-funded and privately funded scholarships that are available exclusively to YPS students.

to keep the college offices at all of the high schools in Yonkers. Ms. Diaz works for YPIE, not the Yonkers Public Schools. Does that sound familiar?

Participant: Yeah [shaking head]. And they paid for the test prep class, right?

Researcher: Yes! That's them.

I asked focus group and interview participants whether they had received enough support during the college search and application process, both from YPIE staff members, as well as other school-based adults and family members. Generally, the participants acknowledged the role of the various adults in their college search. All but two college goers agreed that they had had enough support from YPIE staff and other adults during the process.

The following excerpt from the High Achiever focus group (Group 1A) transcript highlights the role of the school-based adults in the college planning process

Participant 3: The lady in the College Center was really nice, she was new that year but she helped me a lot, and so did Ms. Dale, she helped me a lot, too. I felt like they were always there to help me do stuff, like fill out applications and apply for financial aid. But at the end of the day, you just gotta sit down and write those essays and fill out the papers.

Participant 2: Oh my gosh, I had no idea what I was doing when I started the whole process. I felt really overwhelmed and my mom doesn't speak any English and she didn't go to college here, so she really didn't know. But I feel like I had so much help from Ms. Diaz [guidance counselor] and Ms. White [College Advisor], and actually the other people from here [YPIE], too. They really took care of me and they made sure that I got all of my stuff in and I can't thank them enough.

Participant 1: At my school it was only Ms. Britton [YPIE College Advisor] who helped us with college stuff; the Guidance Counselors did other stuff, I think. She was really great about helping, I mean at least helping me. I knew I could always go to her and ask her anything.

Researcher: This is great, but again you all are very successful students who have been able to negotiate your way through college, with what seems like relatively few issues. Do you think that most of your peers feel the same way about their college planning experiences?

Participant 2: No, I know there are kids I went to school with who had nobody to turn to for information about college. I ended up helping some of them. It was like, if you're not at the top of the class, you weren't going to get the kind of help that we got. It was easy for people who barely graduated, because they probably didn't go to college or went somewhere like WCC, but if you're in the middle, those kids, they needed more help and nobody was really there to give it to them.

Participant 5: Yeah that happened at my school, too . . . but she [YPIE College Advisor] had a lot of students and the office was busy all the time, even on the first day of school it was busy. So you had to take care of yourself, too, and go online and fill out the applications.

Self-efficacy plays a major role in college access. The college research and application process is difficult. It takes a good deal of tenacity to find, select, and apply to schools, write essays, and meet deadlines. The college offices are very busy, and as one former advisor mentioned, she was sometimes "overwhelmed" by the volume of students in the office. She admitted that sometimes the more assertive or persistent students garnered more of her attention.

All but one college goer made mention of personal self-efficacy and its importance in the process. This exchange with a Struggler demonstrates his dissatisfaction with the college search process.

Researcher: Did you feel then [in 12th grade] and do you feel now that you had enough help when choosing a college or planning for life after high school?

Participant: [Long pause] No, not really. I think I could have gone to a better school, if I knew more about what I was doing. I mean, I tried get help, but I couldn't.

Researcher: Why do you think that is? Did you ask for help and not get it? Or was it something else?

Participant: I came to the college office a lot, but Ms. Galino was very busy and she always had a lot of students there.

Researcher: Did she meet with you at all?

Participant: Yes, we met one time alone in the 11th grade. And then I met with her really quickly in the 12th grade, too. Then I didn't meet with her again for a long time, and I kind of fell behind on my stuff after that.

It was unclear what kind of support this student was looking for from his College Advisor, but his tone and responses indicated that he was not satisfied by the level of support that he received. It is difficult for an outsider to determine how much of this dissatisfaction with the planning process is a result of the College Advisors' lack of attention and how much results from a lack of self-efficacy in the participant.

Choosing a Postsecondary Plan

Just before graduation, students in all New York State high schools report their postsecondary plans to their guidance counselors. According to Naviance, 80.7% of YPS students reported that they planned to attend college after graduation. This is slightly higher than the average for New York State. More Yonkers graduates said that they would attend some college following graduation, although a larger proportion planned to attend 2-year colleges than 4-year colleges (NYSED, 2013d). Table 12 documents postsecondary plans for all student in the classes of 2010–2012, compared with New York State as a whole.

Students' college intentions generally mirror those of the national trends, with more girls than boys planning to enroll in a postsecondary institution, and girls being more likely to choose a 4-year college over a 2-year college. Asian females plan to enroll in 4-year colleges at the highest rates, followed by White females and Black females. Black and Hispanic males have the lowest overall rate of college intentions. Other than college, a small number of students plan to join the military and some say that they have arranged for employment. Perhaps reason for most concern are the statistics on the

Table 12

Yonkers Public School Students' Postsecondary Plans, Classes of 2010–2012 and New York State 2012

Outcome	Yonkers <i>N</i>	Yonkers %	New York State %
2-year college total	600	38.70	32.0
4-year college total	652	42.00	47.0
All college total	1,252	80.70	79.0
Career education	17	1.10	2.0
Employed	29	1.90	6.0
Military	21	1.40	2.0
Other	11	0.70	1.0
Unknown/undecided/no plans	211	13.6	10.0
Year off	7	0.50	N/A

Note. From *Yonkers City School District Report Card 2011-2012*, by New York State Education Department, 2013c, retrieved from <https://reportcards.nysed.gov/files/2011-12/RC-2012-662300010000.pdf>

postsecondary plans of young men across ethnic groups. More than 1 in 5 males reported having no immediate postsecondary plans. This was true for White, Black, and Hispanic young men, but significantly lower for Asian males. Table 13 summarizes college intentions by demographic characteristic.

On the 12th grade survey, students were asked about their main reasons for choosing their postsecondary institution. The top three answers in each year of the survey were that the school offered their academic area of interest, location, and the size and

Table 13

Yonkers Public Schools Students' College Intentions by Demographic Characteristic (Percentages)

Outcome	Total M	Total F	White M	White F	Black M	Black F	Asian M	Asian F	Hisp. M	Hisp F
4-yr college	34.2	46.2	38.1	56.8	31.9	42.2	53.0	71.6	29.3	39.2
2-yr college	35.9	35.3	36.5	31.8	36.9	30.3	33.1	23.0	40.0	38.6
Career education	0.9	0.0	0.0	0.5	1.1	0.9	1.0	0.0	1.8	0.0
Military	1.8	0.0	1.9	0.0	2.0	0.0	0.0	0.7	2.9	1.0
Employed	3.0	2.5	2.6	1.0	4.4	3.2	1.0	0.7	2.9	2.5
Other	0.9	0.2	0.8	0.5	1.1	0.9	1.0	0.0	0.0	1.0
None ^a	20.3	14.2	19.6	9.5	21.4	13.3	10.5	1.4	20.8	13.9
<i>N</i> =	2,018	2,226	378	296	504	621	151	148	967	1,143

Note. Data gleaned from the Naviance data collection system.

^aUnknown, undecided, no plan.

type of financial aid provided to students by the school. The students were asked whether they had taken a campus tour prior to reaching a decision about where to attend college; 55% said *yes* and 92.2% of those students rated this visit as either *somewhat important* or *very important* in their decision-making process.

On the 12th grade survey, students were asked what they might do differently if they had to start the college search and application process again. The top five answers were (a) work harder in Grades 9 to 11, (b) begin thinking about college earlier, (c) visit

more colleges, (d) study more for the SAT and take it more often, and (e) research and apply for more scholarships.

The survey included an open-ended question, “What advice would you give next year’s seniors about the college application process?” The top three themes in the answers were (a) plan early, don’t procrastinate; (b) apply to many colleges, give yourself many options; and (c) keep your grades up, “don’t become a slacker.”

Students Without Plans to Enroll

The 12th grade survey asked students without plans to attend college ($n = 331$) what major factors had been involved in this decision. They were offered several options. For all researched years, the top answer was *not enough financial aid*, with approximately one third of the participants checking that box. Also cited were *needing to stay home and work*, *transportation issues*, and *concerns over academic preparedness*. Figure 10 summarizes the students’ responses regarding no plans to enroll in college.

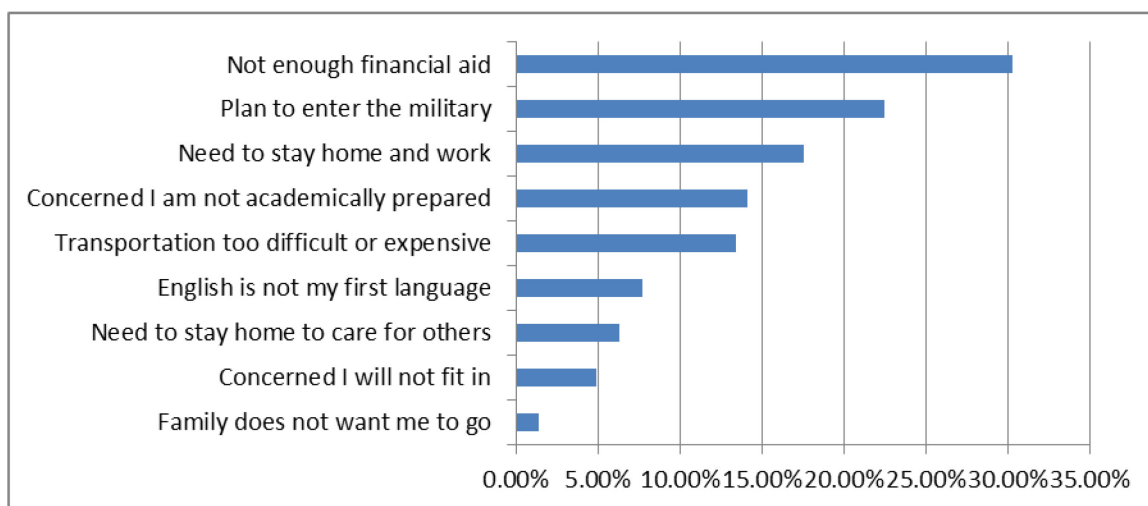


Figure 10. Students’ responses to the survey question, “For what reasons have you decided not to enroll in college? Check all that apply.”

During interviews and focus groups, seven participants reported not having yet enrolled in a postsecondary institution. Three said that they had not made plans to attend while they were in high school. Five of the 7 indicated that they planned to attend in the near future, citing money and needing to work as their main barriers to immediate enrollment. None mentioned academic preparedness as a barrier to possible enrollment. However, when asked whether they were prepared to do college-level work, three expressed concern about not excelling academically. When asked whether a college education was important in society, six of the seven agreed that it was. One said, “for some people, but not for everyone.” Similarly, when Alumni survey participants were asked whether a college degree was important in today’s society, 77% said that it was *very important* and 18% chose *somewhat important*. When asked where he expected to be in 5 years, a non-college goer said,

Participant: I’m not sure, I’m not sure where I’ll be tomorrow or the day after, or in 5 years . . . but then I guess, neither do you!

Researcher: True! [laughs]

Participant: Didn’t you just tell me that college professor jobs are hard to get, and that you may never get one? . . . So why bother with all this school? And if all these people out there are applying for one job, and they can’t all get them, why am I going to spend thousands of dollars on school, and let me find out they don’t want me for that job, anyway. Nah, forget that! I’m a keep doin’ what I do. I’ll get my paper, I’ll be okay.

CHAPTER 7

BUT DO THEY ACTUALLY GO?

In college access literature the phenomenon of students planning to attend college when they graduate but not actually enrolling at the end of summer is called *summer melt*. Castelman and Page (2013) argued that about 1 in 5 high school graduates who in the spring plan to enroll decide somewhere between June and September not to do so. They maintain that this number may be as high as 40% among low-income students and potential first-generation college students. When I undertook this project, I assumed and YPIE staff members worried that this was the case in Yonkers. When I first started work with YPIE, I was pleasantly surprised upon hearing that more than 80% of the students had intentions of going to college immediately following graduation. However, having worked in a college office and seeing this “summer melt” happen to even the best and brightest students, I was skeptical about this figure: “But do they actually go?”

Enrollment

Data analysis shows that, as with all groups of students, there is some summer melt among YPS graduates. More often than not, these students actually reach to college, although some take longer than others. Table 14 shows postsecondary enrollment of YPS students as of October 2013. Note that these data act almost as a snapshot in time, recording all enrollments up to and including that point. As a result, it is to be expected that earlier graduating cohorts report higher numbers of graduates, as students in these cohorts have had more time enroll. At the moment when this data was captured, the class of 2004 had 9 years to enroll, but the class of 2011 had only 2 years to enroll. Despite this, there is still an overall increase in enrollment between 2004 and 2011 graduates.

Table 14

Postsecondary Enrollment of All Yonkers Public Schools Graduates, per November 2013

Graduation year	<i>N</i>	Enrollment	%
2004 ^a	1,039	935	68.4
2005	1,099	1034	72.5
2006	1,100	897	74.3
2007	1,228	925	75.2
2008	1,325	935	73.0
2009	1,423	1034	74.8
2010	1,280	897	74.8
2011	1,438	925	74.4

Note. Data from *StudentTracker for High Schools*, by National Student Clearing House Research Center, (2014), retrieved from http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/high_schools/studenttracker/

^aData for 2004 available only through July 2012. It is reasonable to expect enrollment to have increased somewhat since that time.

The majority of 2010-2011 graduates enrolled in a postsecondary program within 1 to 2 years of leaving high school. This small change in behaviors is very important, as students who enroll in college immediately after their high school graduation year more closely resemble what are generally regarded to be “traditional” college students.

Traditional college students are more likely to persist into the second year and eventually graduate than their older, nontraditional peers (Long & Kurlaender, 2009; NCES, 2002).

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013b), approximately 70% of 2011 high school graduates nationwide had enrolled in a postsecondary institution by October of that year. In this same time period, 63.2% of YPS students had enrolled in a postsecondary institution. Yonkers graduates have consistently been below the national average for first-semester enrollment, but this gap appears to be closing over time. Figure 11 illustrates the closing gap in first-semester enrollment between Yonkers students and the nation as a whole. While there is a significant amount of work to be done in terms of enrollment, these numbers are promising, especially considering that more than 90% of high school students in Yonkers qualify for FRPL and that so many are first-generation college goers and/or members of underrepresented minorities. According to NCES (as cited in Aud et al., 2013), only 52% of low-income high school graduates and 67% of middle-income high school graduates attend college right after high school.

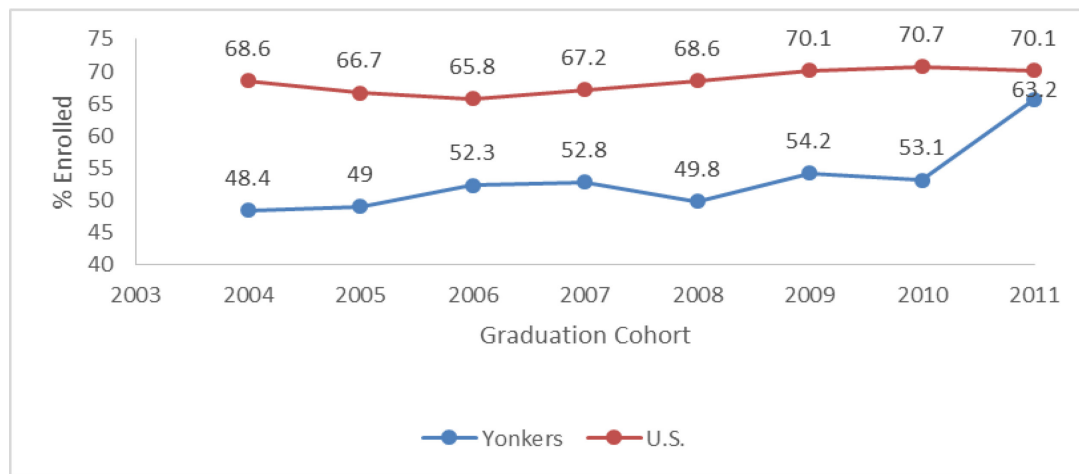


Figure 11. Enrollment in postsecondary institutions by high school graduates in the first semester after graduation, 2003–2011: Yonkers versus U.S. averages. Data for Yonkers from *StudentTracker for High Schools*, by National Student Clearing House Research Center, (2014), retrieved from http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/high_schools/studenttracker/; national data from *Earnings and Unemployment Rates by educational Attainment*, by U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013b, retrieved from http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_chart_001.htm

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013b) also reported that 6 in 10 first-time college goers from the most recent 5 graduation years had enrolled in 4-year colleges. The numbers for Yonkers graduates are similar. Approximately 58% of enrollees from 2011 and 55% of enrollees from 2010 attended a 4-year college within a year of their high school graduation, although some transferred from a 2-year college to a 4-year during that first year. Consistent with student intentions at graduation, YPS graduates enroll at Westchester Community College most often, with nearly one third of the graduates starting their postsecondary education there. Other 2-year colleges that Yonkers graduates attend are Bronx Community College, Borough of Manhattan Community College, and Hostos Community College, all in New York City.

A small number of students in the data set are listed as going to private 2-year schools or “less than 2-year” programs. These are generally technical or vocational schools, some of which grant Associate degrees but most of which grant some type of job training certificates. Enrollment in these schools accounts for less than 0.33% of total enrollment. However, it is possible that not all enrollment in these types of schools is captured by NSC and that the number is somewhat or significantly higher.

Figure 12 shows enrollment by YPS graduates by the number of days it takes for them to enroll in a postsecondary program from the time they graduate from high school. Like Table 14, these graphs demonstrate a significant shift in postsecondary enrollment behavior among YPS graduates. In previous years, the majority of students took 1 to 5 years to enroll in a postsecondary school; now they enroll almost immediately.

Figures 13 and 14 show the number of days to enrollment by institution type. These figures demonstrate that the shift in time to matriculation is due to an increase in

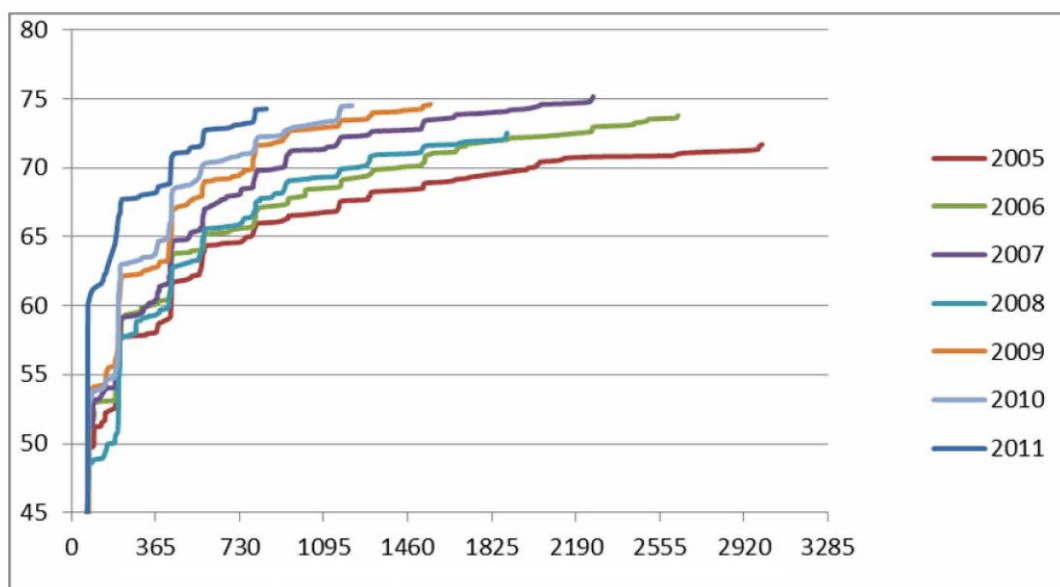


Figure 12. Student enrollment by year and number of days from high school graduation to enrollment in any postsecondary school. Source: *StudentTracker for High Schools*, by National Student Clearing House Research Center, (2014), retrieved from http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/high_schools/studenttracker/

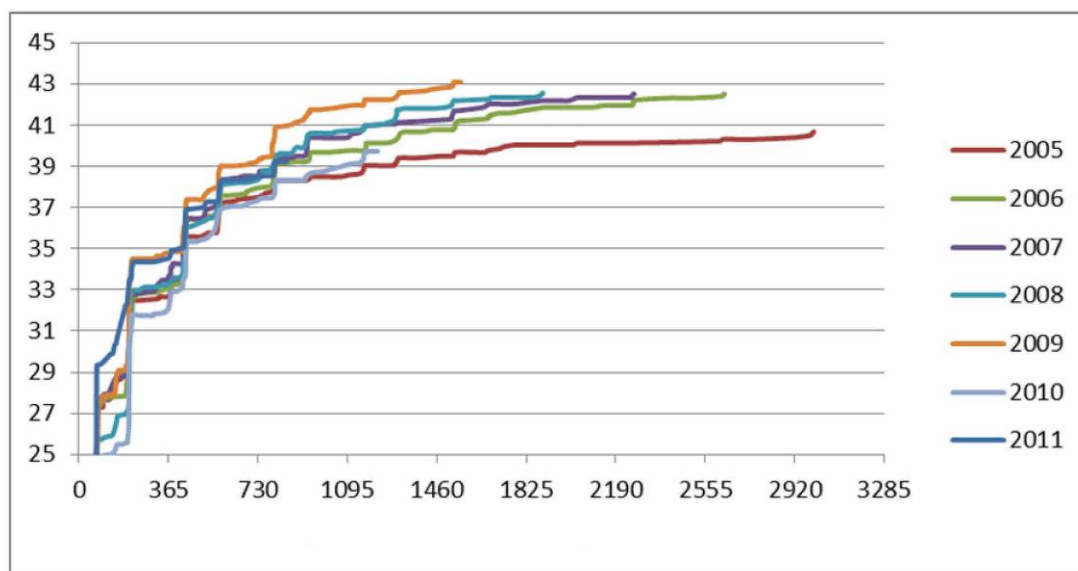


Figure 13. Student enrollment by year and number of days from high school graduation to enrollment in a 2-year postsecondary school. Source: *StudentTracker for High Schools*, by National Student Clearing House Research Center, (2014), retrieved from http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/high_schools/studenttracker/

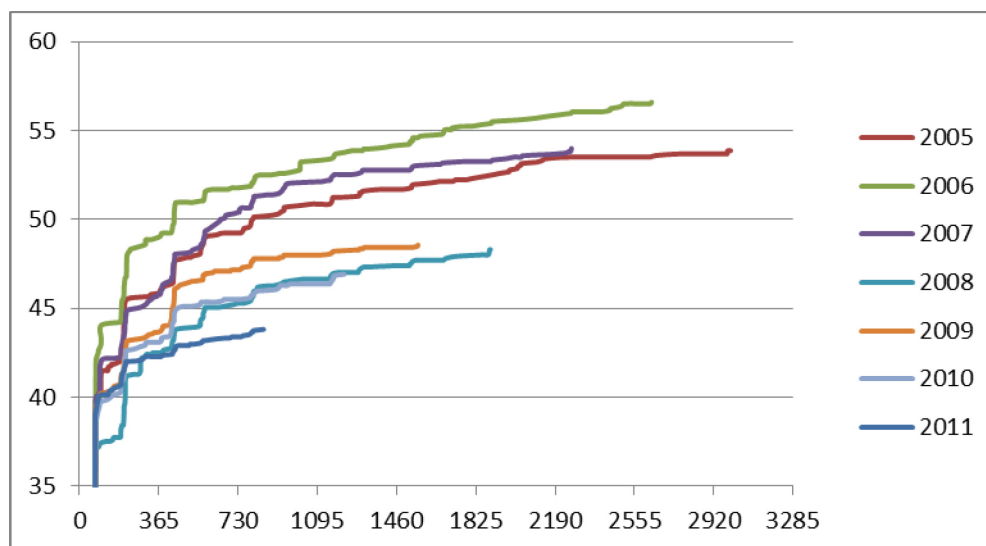


Figure 14. Student enrollment by year and number of days from high school graduation to enrollment in a 4-year postsecondary school. Source: *StudentTracker for High Schools*, by National Student Clearing House Research Center, (2014), retrieved from http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/high_schools/studenttracker/

2-year schools enrollment immediately following high school. The overall percentage of students enrolling in 4-year schools immediately following high school has risen only slightly in comparison with the percentage of students enrolling in 2-year schools immediately following high school. This could be due to an uncertain economy. It might also mean that graduates who normally would have opted out of college are now motivated to attend college but are opting for 2-year colleges for financial, academic, or personal reasons.

Table 15 shows the top five schools in which Yonkers graduates most often enroll. The five schools account for more than half of all enrollment by YPS graduates. All five schools are within a 25-minute drive from downtown Yonkers.

The majority of Yonkers graduates tend to stay close to home for college; more than 95% stay in the state. The top 15 school for enrollment by Yonkers graduates are all

Table 15

Colleges With Highest Enrollment of Yonkers Public Schools Graduates

College	<i>n</i>	% of enrollment
Westchester Community College	2,227	31.8
Mercy College	434	6.2
Lehman College	356	5.1
The College of Westchester	304	4.4
Monroe College	232	3.3

Source: *StudentTracker for High Schools*, by National Student Clearing House Research Center, (2014), retrieved from http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/high_schools/studenttracker/

within a 1-hour drive from downtown Yonkers. The out-of-state schools most frequently attended by Yonkers graduates are Johnson and Wales University in Rhode Island and the University of Bridgeport in Connecticut.

In a comparison of 2004-2010 YPS graduate enrollment between 2-year and 4-year colleges, data show that 47% of enrollers attended only a 4-year or senior college, 33.7% attended only a community or 2-year college, and 19.2% enrolled in both a 2-year college and a 4-year college at some point. These numbers do not indicate which way these changes in enrollment occurred, although most students start at a community college and transfer to a senior college. However, others start at a senior college and then, because of cost, difficulty of coursework, or some other issue, transfer to a community college.

Table 16 shows postsecondary enrollment by high school. As with the district numbers reported in Table 10, most of the high school enrollment numbers peak around 2007 and then quickly decline. This is also because earlier cohorts of students had a significantly longer period of time in which to enroll. Still, for most of the schools, the percentage of students who had enrolled from the class of 2011 was already near or above the percentage of students who had enrolled from the classes of 2004 and 2005.

Table 16

Postsecondary Enrollment of Yonkers Public Schools Graduates by High School and Class

Year	Gorton	Lincoln	Roosevelt	Saunders	Yonkers
2004 ^a	72.3	60.0	63.9	70.5	77.2
2005	74.7	60.5	62.9	75.9	81.1
2006	77.5	66.8	65.4	72.5	92.7
2007	75.1	65.9	64.8	77.4	89.4
2008	73.5	61.8	61.3	73.3	86.1
2009	69.6	66.7	64.7	78.9	86.7
2010	69.9	66.1	62.2	80.6	84.6
2011	70.5	64.1	59.7	82.9	87.4

Source: *StudentTracker for High Schools*, by National Student Clearing House Research Center, (2014), retrieved from http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/high_schools/studenttracker/

^aDate for 2004 data as of July 2012; all other data as of November 2013.

Riverside High School was not included in Table 16 because it had no graduating classes until 2011. Riverside's class of 2011 postsecondary enrollment was 79.9%. Riverside's enrollment rate for 2011 graduates is very promising, as it is one of highest numbers of students receiving free lunches, but a relatively high rate of first-year college enrollment. It is too early to make any assumptions about the school's program effectiveness, but it will be interesting to see whether they can sustain high enrollment rates in the future.

In general, enrollment data for each of the other high schools' graduates matches college intentions and is similarly inversely related to the number of students in each school receiving free or reduced-price lunches. YMHS students enroll in postsecondary schools at the highest rates and attend 4-year colleges at the highest rates in the district. More than 90% of YMHS graduates since 2004 have attended college, nearly all at a 4-year college at some point in their college career. Most of YMHS's graduates are enrolling in a postsecondary program quickly; nearly 85% of 2011 graduates enrolled during the first year following graduation. YMHS is also the most affluent school in the district with regard to student population; only 67% of the students qualify for free lunches, as opposed to the nearly 90% at Roosevelt, Gorton, and Lincoln.

Saunders High School graduates also tend to enroll in college immediately following high school graduation. Of 2011 graduates, nearly 81% enrolled in the first year after high school. Not surprisingly, Saunders has the second-lowest percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price lunches (80%). Saunders data are also noteworthy because of the impressive gains made in enrollment since 2004. It is the only school that did not experience the "bump and drop" in enrollment experienced by the

other schools and the district as a whole. Instead, Saunders saw a 10%+ gain between 2004 and 2011. Saunders is technically a vocational school and grants students vocational certificates as well as high school diplomas. It is encouraging to see high college attendance rates from these students; this could help to start a conversation about reviving vocational education and to refute claims that attending a vocational high school pushes low-income and minority students off the college-going path.

2010-2011 Graduate Outcomes

Demographic data were available only for the classes of 2010 and 2011. These data allowed deeper analysis of enrollment patterns. First-semester enrollment data by race/ethnicity and gender are shown in Figure 15. The figure compares local data to the national average reported by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Yonkers graduates enroll in postsecondary programs at rates comparable to the national average. Black/African American YPS graduates enroll in postsecondary programs nearly 3 percentage points above the national average. First-semester enrollment by White students is considerably higher than that of White students nationally.

As was the pattern with college intentions, females who graduate from YPS enroll in a postsecondary institution at higher rates than males, 79.4% versus 70.3%. While both attend 4-year year colleges at higher rates than they attend community colleges, the females' rate of senior college attendance is higher than that of their male counterparts. The majority of females have made it to a senior college within 3 years of high school graduation. Enrollment by gender is illustrated in Table 17.

Figure 16 shows the number of days taken to matriculate in a postsecondary school following high school graduation by gender. The majority of males and females

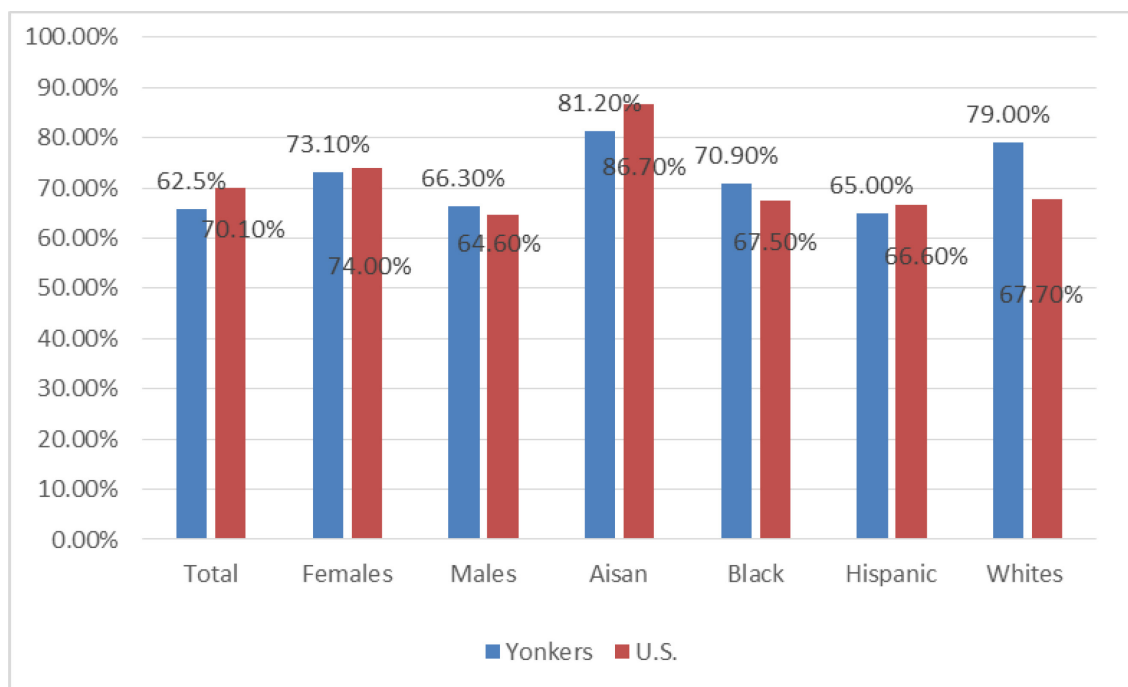


Figure 15. Enrollment by race/ethnicity and gender by October of graduation year 2011 versus U.S. percentages reported by the Bureau for Labor Statistics. Source: *StudentTracker for High Schools*, by National Student Clearing House Research Center, (2014), retrieved from http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/high_schools/studenttracker/

Table 17

Yonkers Public Schools Students: College Enrollment by Gender, 2010-2011

Gender	n	% enrolled in college		
		Any college	2-year college	4-year college
Female	919	79.4	32.2	54.2
Male	846	70.3	35.2	41.2

Source: *StudentTracker for High Schools*, by National Student Clearing House Research Center, (2014), retrieved from http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/high_schools/studenttracker/

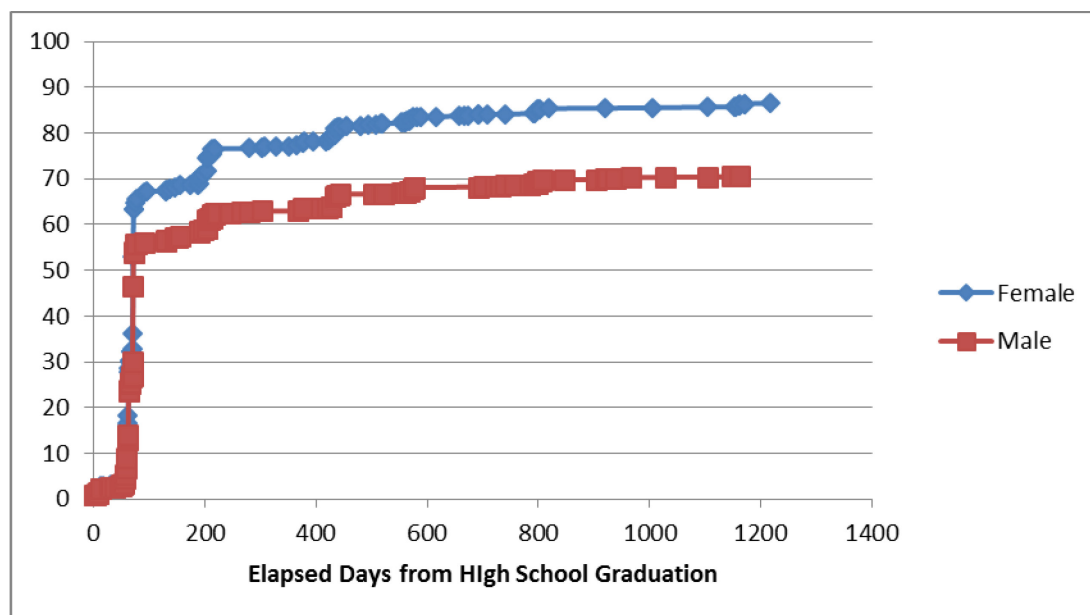


Figure 16. Time from high school graduation to postsecondary enrollment by gender, Yonkers high school students. Source: *StudentTracker for High Schools*, by National Student Clearing House Research Center, (2014), retrieved from http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/high_schools/studenttracker/

from the 2010-2011 classes enrolled during the first semester after high school but, as with earlier cohorts of students, continued to enroll 2 and 3 years post high school. Among students from the class of 2010, nearly 90% of the females had enrolled in at least one semester of college.

Table 18 shows enrollment by race/ethnicity and type of postsecondary school as of November 2013. Students of all groups enrolled in 4-year colleges at higher rates than at 2-year colleges, but most Asians enrolled in 4-year colleges. Many students enrolled at both 2-year and 4-year schools at some point in their postsecondary career, which accounts for the fact that 2-year and 4-year enrollment figures do not always equal the “any” enrollment figure.

Table 18

Type of Institution Attended by Yonkers Public Schools Graduates, by Race and Ethnicity (Percentages)

Institution	Asian (N = 186)	Black (N = 681)	Hispanic (N = 1,266)	White (N = 452)
2-year college	29.4	31.8	38.4	37.4
4-year college	60.1	49.5	46.9	51.2
Any	87.7	75.3	72.5	81.0

Source: *StudentTracker for High Schools*, by National Student Clearing House Research Center, (2014), retrieved from http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/high_schools/studenttracker/

Figure 17 shows time to enrollment in any postsecondary school by race/ethnicity, as well as the gap in overall enrollment between demographic groups. White and Asian students not only enrolled at higher rates than Black and Hispanic counterparts, but they enrolled more quickly as well. For both White and Asian students, there was less than a 10% difference in the number of students who enrolled by the end of their first year post high school and their third year post high school. For Black and Hispanic students, enrollment between the first and third years increased more than 20%. While students are generally thought to be “on their own” after high school, programs that reach out to students after graduation might bolster Black and Hispanic enrollment rates. YPIE might consider offering outreach to Black and Latino students after high school graduation.

Table 19 shows a Cox proportional-hazards model of the time to first matriculation in college. This model describes the rates at which YPS graduates

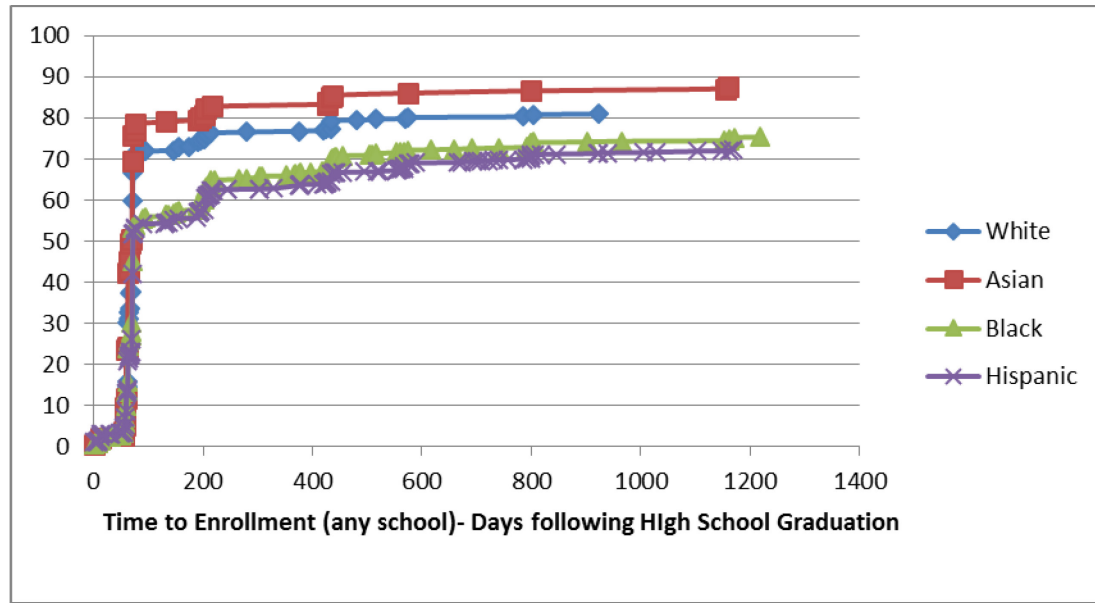


Figure 17. Time from high school graduation to enrollment in a postsecondary institution by Yonkers high school graduates, by race/ethnicity. Source: *StudentTracker for High Schools*, by National Student Clearing House Research Center, (2014), retrieved from http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/high_schools/studenttracker/

matriculate in college over the passage of time. The model is helpful when some cohorts are followed for longer periods of time than others, in this case 2010 versus 2011. Some students were not followed long enough to record their eventual enrollment in a postsecondary program. In Table 19, the hazard ratio (HR) indicates the rate at which enrolment occurs for one group of YPS graduates as compared to a reference group. Black females were selected as the reference group, so their HR is set to 1.0. The HR for Asian females is 1.25, meaning that Asian female graduates from Yonkers are 25% more likely to have enrolled in a postsecondary program sometime following their high school graduation than Black females. The HR for Hispanic and Black males is .90, indicating that these groups are about 10% less likely to enroll in a postsecondary program than Black females. The p values are $> .05$ and not statistically significant.

Table 19

Cox Proportional-Hazards Model of Time to Matriculation in Any Postsecondary Institution by Yonkers Public Schools Graduates

Group	Hazard ratio	95% CI	<i>p</i>
Black female (ref)	1.00	---	---
Asian female	1.25	.89–1.76	.198
Hispanic female	1.07	.89–1.30	.469
White female	1.15	.88–1.48	.307
Black male	0.90	.71–1.30	.897
Asian male	1.03	.74–1.40	.851
Hispanic male	0.90	.74–1.10	.320
White male	1.04	.82–1.30	.753

Students of all demographic groups from 2010-2011 attended 4-year institutions more often than 2-year institutions, although certain groups were more likely to attend a 4-year college. Nearly 3 times as many Asian graduates from YPS attend 4-year colleges than 2-year colleges, while the number of Hispanics attending 4-year colleges is only a few percentage points higher than that for attendance at 2-year colleges. Approximately 8% of 2010 college goers and 2% of 2011 college goers transferred between community and senior colleges. All demographic groups had between transfer rates between school types of 3% to 5%. Table 20 categorizes enrollment by institution type and race/ethnicity for all YPS graduates from the classes of 2010 and 2011. Considerable numbers of students attended both types of institutions.

Table 20

Yonkers Public Schools Enrollment, Class of 2010-2011, by High School and Race/Ethnicity, as of Fall 2013

High school	Race/ethnicity	<i>n</i>	% enrolled
Gorton High School	Asian	38	86.8
	Black	137	77.4
	Hispanic	180	77.7
	White	50	84.0
	Total	405	79.3
Lincoln High School	Asian	21	85.7
	Black	150	73.3
	Hispanic	273	65.9
	White	50	74.0
	Total	494	69.9
Riverside High School (2011 only)	Asian	16	93.4
	Black	40	82.5
	Hispanic	84	82.1
	White	14	92.9
	Total	154	84.4
Roosevelt High School	Asian	15	80.0
	Black	160	65.8
	Hispanic	299	58.5
	White	37	62.2
	Total	511	62.2
Saunders High School	Asian	32	87.5
	Black	90	88.8
	Hispanic	250	80.0
	White	136	75.7
	Total	518	82.2
Yonkers Middle High School	Asian	65	87.5
	Black	67	94.0
	Hispanic	170	81.0
	White	155	92.2
	Total	456	87.3

Source: *StudentTracker for High Schools*, by National Student Clearing House Research Center, (2014), retrieved from http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/high_schools/studenttracker/

Across all schools, postsecondary enrollment rates for Hispanic students are the lowest, especially for males. YPIE has taken several steps to address this situation. YPIE hosts workshops on college admissions and financial aid in Spanish several times a year. Biannually they host a Spanish-language Latino College Expo aimed at getting college information to the local Latino community. A YPIE staff member posts signs in Hispanic-owned businesses and attends Spanish church services at local parishes to recruit for this event. Parents are encouraged to sign up in person, online, or by telephone and are offered free transportation from one of several places in downtown Yonkers.

Figure 18 shows the length of time to enroll by high school attended. The data demonstrate that students from Yonkers and then Riverside and Saunders lead the district in college enrollment. While Lincoln and Roosevelt have far lower rates of enrollment than peer schools, their overall rates of enrollment make large increases over time. So while graduates may not enroll in college right away, many do so in the next 2 or 3 years. Enrollment rates for 2010 Roosevelt graduates rose from 42.1% in the first semester after graduation to 68.0% by October 2013. Lincoln enrollment rates rose from 45.3% to 69.8% over the same period.

YPIE staff and College Advisors reported that sometimes students who have graduated in previous years return to the school for guidance on entering college. One former advisor said,

They come back 3, 4 years later, students I never even knew would come see me. Some just to get transcripts, but some to get advice on going to college or transferring. Sometimes they're really intimidated by the whole process. It kind of makes me wonder if that's why they never enrolled before. Usually, they've worked a few years and realized they need more education. I think sometimes they're a little envious of their friends who've gone away.

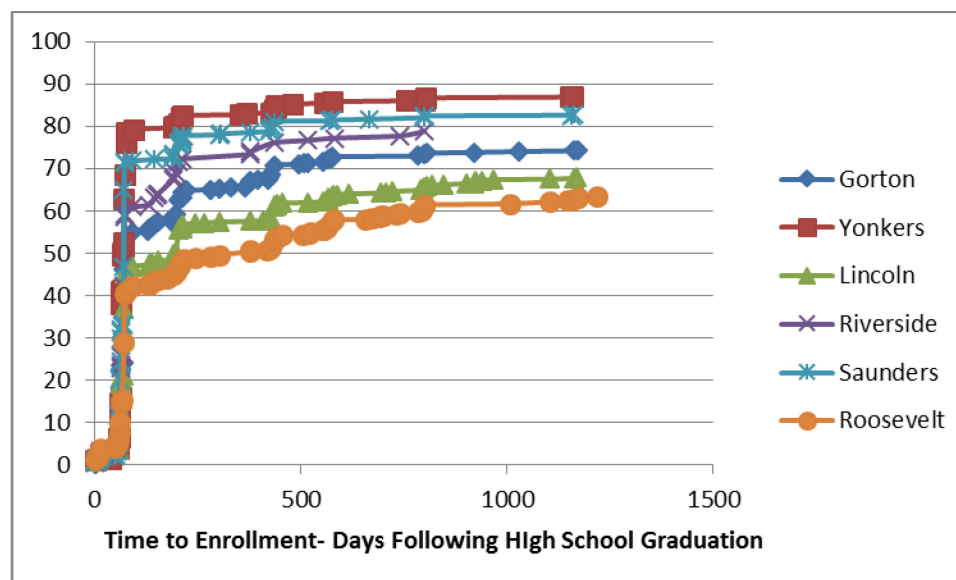


Figure 18. Number of days from high school graduate to enrollment in a postsecondary institution by high school attended, Yonkers high schools, 2010. Source: *StudentTracker for High Schools*, by National Student Clearing House Research Center, (2014), retrieved from http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/high_schools/studenttracker/

Persistence

Persistence into the second year of a postsecondary education is an important marker of potential postsecondary success. According to Skomsvold, Radford, and Berkner (2011), persistence into a second year of college is one of, if not the strongest, indicator of success, since most students who drop out are likely to do so in their first year (Skomsvold et al., 2011). Students who make it beyond the first year are more likely to earn a degree. In total, about 84% of YPS students from the classes of 2004-2010 who enrolled in 1 year of college persisted into the second academic year.

Generally speaking most YPS college goers enroll for a second academic year. Figure 19 shows second-year persistence by graduating cohort. Overall persistence rates into the second year have remained relatively steady for each graduating cohort.

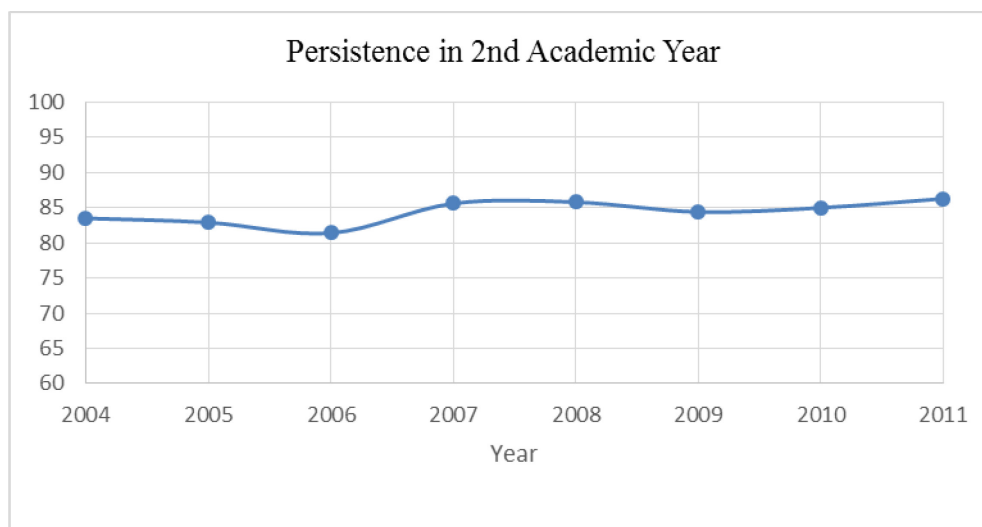


Figure 19. Second-year persistence in college by Yonkers high school graduates, by graduation year, 2004–2011. Source: *StudentTracker for High Schools*, by National Student Clearing House Research Center, (2014), retrieved from http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/high_schools/studenttracker/

As many YPS graduates go on to become nontraditional college students who enroll well after high school graduation, take longer to graduate, and sometimes stop out, that information is included in the rate at which each graduating cohort continues to be enrolled in a postsecondary program. This allows for a slightly different perspective on persistence. Table 21 shows enrollment of each graduating cohort of YPS students over time. As of the collection of these data, 18.4% of YPS graduates from the class of 2005 were still enrolled in a postsecondary institution 8 years after completing high school. It is unclear whether those students had stopped out at times, enrolled only part time and were therefore taking a long time to graduate, or had waited several years before enrolling. Also, graduates who are not counted in this figure may have already graduated.

Table 21

Yonkers Public Schools Students' Graduate Enrollment in Years Following High School (Percentages)

Year of graduation	N	Year of enrollment following high school			
		Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth
2004	1,039	52.45	45.72	42.54	33.49
2005	1,099	55.14	49.23	44.68	34.49
2006	1,099	56.73	52.00	49.18	39.45
2007	1,228	58.79	53.18	46.50	34.45
2008	1,325	55.17	48.96	43.52	33.45
2009	1,423	58.68	50.95	45.43	N/A
2010	1,280	59.30	51.9	N/A	N/A
2011	1,309	62.30	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: *StudentTracker for High Schools*, by National Student Clearing House Research Center, (2014), retrieved from http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/high_schools/studenttracker/

Degree Attainment

YPS graduates have had mixed success at earning postsecondary credentials. An NCES study of high school graduates nationwide who enrolled in a postsecondary program found that 49.5% had earned at least one type of certificate or degree within 6 years of high school graduation (NCES, 2011). Approximately one quarter (25.9%) of all Yonkers graduates and just less than one third of all college goers (31.9%) from the classes of 2005 through 2009 had earned some degree by fall 2013.

Determining which types of degrees YPS students have earned proved to be difficult, as colleges do not always report to the NSC the type of degree a student earns. Of the 1,610 postsecondary degrees and certificates awarded, 400 (24.8%) could not be categorized as a certificate, Associate degree, or bachelor's degree based on the data provided by NSC. Approximately 70% of these unclassifiable cases came from Monroe College and College of Westchester, both of which are for-profit colleges. This is unfortunate, as Monroe College graduates the second highest number of YPS alumni of all schools. It would be very helpful to know what degrees these students achieve or whether in fact they earned degrees instead of vocational certificates.

One of the most interesting findings is that, although nearly 900 YPS graduates from 2010 and 2011 enrolled in community college upon high school graduation, only 9 earned an Associate degree within 2 years of high school graduation. Only one of those degrees came from Westchester Community College, despite having more than 95% of Yonkers's community college enrollees. Table 22 shows 2- and 3-year community college graduation rates for classes 2005 through 2009. No class had a 2-year graduation rate above 3% and all 3-year graduation rates were below 10%. Despite being considered a 2-year degree, the U.S. Department of Education (NCES, 2009) reported that average time to an Associate degree is 39 months: 33 months if enrolled full time and 46 months if enrolled part time. Some community college students transferred to 4-year colleges before earning a degree, which likely happened with some YPS students. However, many low-income and traditionally underrepresented students take extra time in community college to earn a degree because they must take developmental skills or remedial classes for no credit before matriculating to credit-bearing courses.

Table 22

Two- and Three-Year Graduation Rates of Yonkers Public Schools Graduates From Community Colleges

Year of graduation	Community college enrollees	2-year graduation		3-year graduation	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
2004	297	2	0.7	9	3.0
2005	322	6	1.9	31	9.6
2006	324	8	2.4	16	4.9
2007	372	4	1.1	19	5.1
2008	435	4	0.9	13	3.9
2009	368	6	1.6	23	6.3
2010	407	1	0.2	10	2.5
2011	472	8	1.7	N/A	N/A

Source: *StudentTracker for High Schools*, by National Student Clearing House Research Center, (2014), retrieved from http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/high_schools/studenttracker/

Students from YPS who attend only 4-year colleges are more likely to persist and earn a degree than students who attend only community colleges or those who transfer between community colleges and 4-year colleges. Table 23 compares graduation rates by the type of school in which they matriculated and the school type from which they graduated. This is the best available information, since there is no way to know which type of degree was earned. Sixty-two percent of the students from the class of 2004 who enrolled in a 4-year college earned a degree as of July 2012. Of the students who enrolled

Table 23

Degree Earned by Yonkers Public Schools Graduates, by Type of Institution Attended

Year of graduation	Type of institution(s) attended			
	4-year only	Community and 4-year	Community and 2-year	2-year only
2004 ^a	62.8	33.6	28.1	11.2
2005	58.2	37.1	24.9	11.5
2006	58.2	27.4	25.3	11.9
2007	42.4	17.6	15.8	13.5
2008	11.4	2.7	14.2	6.8
2009	7.6	N/A	5.5	1.6
2010	N/A	N/A	0	0
2011	N/A	N/A/	0	0

Source: *StudentTracker for High Schools*, by National Student Clearing House Research Center, (2014), retrieved from http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/high_schools/studenttracker/

^aData for 2004 as of July 2012, all other data as of November 2013.

in both a community college and a 4-year college, only 33.6% earned a degree from a 4-year college. This finding is consistent with previous research that has shown that students who start in community colleges have lower rates of bachelor's degree attainment than students who begin their college career in a 4-year college (Brint & Karabel, 1989).

Several factors might explain the lower graduation rates of students who transfer between college types. Students who are able to enroll directly in 4-year colleges may be better prepared academically and therefore find completing a degree easier than those who were not accepted into or were otherwise not able to enroll in a 4-year college. Sometimes outside obligations play a factor in degree attainment; students who attend community colleges are often nontraditional college goers, may work full time, or may have children or family to care for. Also, students who transfer from community colleges to 4-year colleges can have difficulty in getting many of their credits transferred, especially if they changed schools with earning an Associate degree. Without direct articulation agreements or dual enrollment programs between community and 4-year colleges, students may lose credits, which will lengthen the time to degree attainment and/or will inhibit the ability to persist and graduate. This phenomenon could also be related to the nature of academics at the community colleges; it is possible that these schools are not preparing students to be successful upon transfer, and therefore the students become discouraged and drop out or stop out.

Occasionally, bachelor's degree-granting institutions also grant a small number of Associate degrees to students who have completed a core curriculum. These schools generally report these data to the NSC; 59 of the 330 (17.9%) reported Associate degrees granted were earned at a school traditionally recognized as a senior college.

As expected, graduates from each of Yonkers's high schools have varying rates of postsecondary degree attainment, as shown in Table 24. Riverside High school is excluded from this table because they had no graduating classes until 2011, and no degree completion rates are available for that year. These data are as of November 2013

Table 24

Percentages of Yonkers Public Schools College Goers Who Earned Any Postsecondary Credential, by High School Attended

Year	Gorton	Lincoln	Roosevelt	Saunders	Yonkers
2005	44.9	35.5	29.8	49.8	50.43
2006	46.2	26.9	29.9	42.4	64.1
2007	21.3	17.7	21.1	31.7	55.5
2008	6.9	4.7	10.5	14.7	15.8
2009	3.0	3.7	7.9	5.3	9.2
2010	0.0	1.1	0.0	3.8	1.6
2005–2008 ^a	31.8	22.6	25.5	39.3	46.0

Source: *StudentTracker for High Schools*, by National Student Clearing House Research Center, (2014), retrieved from http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/high_schools/studenttracker/

^aDegree completion by all 2005–2008 graduates who enrolled in college.

and the class of 2004 was not included in the query to NSC. Overall degree attainment patterns match college intentions and enrollment patterns. YMHS produces the highest numbers of young people who enroll in college and who earn degrees. Yonkers's degree attainment rates peak with the class of 2006, followed by a sharp decline. This is because so many fewer Yonkers students attend community colleges than senior colleges and potentially take longer to earn a degree. Therefore, most students who graduated high school in 2010 would not be expected to have earned any degree by the time this information was collected. The table shows the percentage of students who graduated

from each high school who went on to earn some type of postsecondary credential. It does not take into account the possibility of student mobility while enrolled in high school.

In certain years, a higher percentage of students from Saunders High School earned a degree than those from YMHS, but again that may be because YMHS students earn more Bachelor's degrees than Associate degrees and they earn more Bachelor's degrees than students from any other school in Yonkers.

As expected, based on overall enrollment, Westchester Community College has granted the largest number of degrees to YPS graduates. Westchester Community College accounts for 15.6% of all postsecondary degrees and 70% of all community college degrees reported. However, only 10.7% of YPS graduates who attend Westchester Community College earn a degree from there. Westchester Community College is the only community college of the top 10 degree grantors for YPS students; all other schools are bachelor's degree-granting institutions. The College of Westchester and Monroe College grant both Associate and bachelor's degrees.

Degree completion does not always match enrollment at the postsecondary schools attended by YPS graduates. Students appear to have better success at certain postsecondary schools than others. For example, Monroe College has had the fifth-highest number of YPS enrollees but the second-highest number of graduates, whereas Mercy College has the second-highest highest number of enrollees but graduates the fifth-highest number of students. Fordham University, Manhattan College, SUNY Albany, and St. John's University all account for a much higher share of graduates to

enrollees. Table 25 shows the top degree-granting postsecondary schools for YPS graduates and compares this list to each school's enrollment ranking.

Table 25

Top Degree-Granting Institutions for Yonkers Public School (YPS) Graduates

Rank	Institution	Degrees granted	% of all degrees awarded to YPS students	Enrollment rank
1	Westchester Community College	Associate, Certificate	13.7	1
2	Monroe College (all campuses)	Bachelor, Associate, Certificate	6.6	4
3	Lehman College	Bachelor	5.8	3
4	Iona College	Bachelor	5.4	7
5	Mercy College	Bachelor	5.2	2
6	The College of Westchester	Bachelor, Associate, Certificate	4.6	4
7	Fordham University	Bachelor	3.2	19
8	Manhattan College	Bachelor	2.6	13
8	State University of New York, Albany	Bachelor	2.6	11
10	St. Johns University	Bachelor	2.2	15

Source: *StudentTracker for High Schools*, by National Student Clearing House Research Center, (2014), retrieved from http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/high_schools/studenttracker/

Many students from Yonkers attend several for-profit colleges and postsecondary programs. Many of these are certificate-granting technical schools, others are similar to

traditional 4-year colleges and grant both undergraduate and graduate degrees. Not all of the trade schools that YPS graduates attend report to the NSC, so it is not possible to obtain information on their postsecondary outcomes. Yonkers graduates have widely varied degrees of success in diploma attainment from these schools. YPS graduates earn degrees often from Monroe College; about half of all enrollees earn some type of credential from the school. In contrast, about 14.8% of YPS students who enroll in Berkeley College earn a credential, and fewer than 5% of DeVry University enrollees from YPS have earned a degree. Of the 60 YPS alumni who have enrolled in 2-year or shorter for-profit technical/vocational certificate programs that report to NSC, only 4 have earned a certificate or job credential.

Many critics have expressed concern about the cost and quality of for-profit colleges, which they claim provide high-cost degree programs but fail to deliver chances of high-paying jobs for the students to repay student loans (Lynch, Engle, & Cruz, 210). College Advisors in Yonkers have expressed concern that students who attend these schools may not be taken seriously by employers once they graduate. However, interview and focus group participants who attended for-profit colleges reported that they were *confident* or *very confident* that they would be able to find work in their field when they graduate. YPIE Executive Director Wendy Nadel cautioned that not all for-profits are created equally and agreed that, while some may not serve the best interests of the students, at least one such school—Berkley College—offers an excellent job placement program and networking opportunities.

Yonkers and Newark: A Comparison

Newark, New Jersey, shares many similarities with Yonkers and serves as a good peer city to compare postsecondary outcomes. Newark is a post-industrial city of approximately 277,000 residents; like Yonkers, it is a medium-size city in its own right but also an outer-ring suburb of New York City. Both cities have struggled with poverty, crime, and political corruption, although Newark's crime rate is significantly higher than that of Yonkers (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2012). Newark has two major universities, two law schools, and a community college; Yonkers has one small liberal arts college and a satellite campus for Westchester Community College. Both cities have attempted to revitalize in recent years and have small arts communities and gentrifying waterfronts. Newark has a more corporate-oriented downtown and earns a great deal of revenue from the Port of Newark-Elizabeth. Yonkers has two major shopping centers and several strip malls that keep the city economically productive but a downtown business center that is not very productive. Both cities have high-need school districts where the majority of students are underrepresented minorities and qualify for FRPL. Table 26 summarizes a comparison of the two cities and their school districts.

Researchers at the Newark Schools Research Collaborative studied enrollment, persistence, and degree attainment patterns of students from 2004 through 2011. They had access to data as of June 2012. I isolated enrollment and persistence data from Yonkers as of July 2012 and compared the results for the two cities. Graduates from the two cities exhibit many of the same enrollment behaviors. Students who attend college tend to stay local; in both cases more than 90% stay within driving distance of their home cities for college.

Table 26

Comparison of Cities and Schools: Yonkers and Newark

Category	Yonkers	Newark
Population ^a	199,449	277,727
Persons under 18 years	22.8%	25.6%
White	55.8%	26.3%
Black/African American	18.7%	52.4%
Asian	5.9%	1.6%
Hispanic/Latino	34.7%	33.8%
Home ownership rate, 2008–2012	47.0%	23.5%
Median value of owner-occupied housing	\$416,000	\$264,400
Persons/ household, 2008–2012	2.63	2.85
Median household income	\$56,782	\$34,387
Persons living below poverty	16.60%	28.0%
Residents with high school diploma or higher	81.2%	70.1%
Residents with Bachelor's degree or higher	29.4%	12.5%
Public school information	YPS	NPS
Number of students	25,341	38,150 ^b
Graduation rate (2012)	68.0% ^c	61.0% ^d
% of students with free/reduced-price lunch	75.5%	51.0% ^e
Students with IEPs (special education) ^f	16.4%	13.3%

^aSource: City demographic and housing information from *State and City Quickfacts*, by U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a, retrieved from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/36/3684000.html>.

^bSource: *District Overview and Demographics*, by Newark Public Schools, (2013), retrieved from <http://www.nps.k12.nj.us/site/Default.aspx?PageID=5>.

^cSource: *Yonkers City School District Report Card 2011-2012*, by New York State Education Department, 2013c, retrieved from <https://reportcards.nysed.gov/files/2011-12/RC-2012-662300010000.pdf>.

^dSource: *Christie Administration Releases District and School Graduation Rates, Reinforcing Need for New Graduation Requirements*, by New Jersey Department of Education, 2013, retrieved from <http://www.state.nj.us/education/news/2012/0501grad.htm>.

^eAccording to *Superintendent's Report*, by Newark Public Schools School Advisory Board, 2013, retrieved from <http://www.nps.k12.nj.us/cms/lib7/NJ01001467/Centricity/domain/1/superintendents%20monthly%20reports/SABSuptReportDeckAugust2013.pdf> sources, nearly half of Newark students do not submit lunch forms.

Also, according to *Newark Kids Count: A Profile of Child Well-Being*, by Advocates for Children of New Jersey (2013), retrieved from <http://www.acnj.org/admin.asp?uri=2081&action=15&di=2386&ext=pdf&view=yes>, the number is closer to 70% qualifying for free or reduced-price lunches.

^f*Public School District Search*, by National Center for Education Statistics, 2014, retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/>

In both districts the local community college plays a significant role in the pathway to degree attainment. In Yonkers approximately one third of college enrollees attend Westchester Community College; in Newark about half of enrollees attend Essex County College. In both cities, some high schools have a greater percentage of their graduates attend college than others. In Newark this is based on magnet versus nonmagnet status of the high school. In Yonkers all high schools are considered magnets and the differences in enrollment are most evident by the overall level of poverty in each school. Also in both cases, students have exhibited college-going behaviors typical of students from families without a long family history of college attendance. They sometimes delay college enrollment by a year or more, they stop in and out of college, they transfer between 2-year and 4-year schools, and significant numbers of them remain enrolled in college for 5, 6, or even more years following high school graduation. In more recent years, students in both districts have started to enroll in school sooner than in previous years. In Newark almost half of graduates enroll within 1 year of high school graduation, compared to 68% in Yonkers.

There are also many differences between the two school districts in college-going behaviors. Eight of the top ten 4-year colleges attended by Newark students are public colleges; the other two are private nonprofit colleges, one offering mostly online courses. Graduates from Yonkers attend private colleges more often; only 4 of their top 10 most-selected colleges are public. The private colleges are a mix of small nonprofit Catholic and nonsectarian colleges, as well as for-profit colleges.

Yonkers graduates enroll in college at higher rates than Newark graduates and they enroll sooner after graduation. Table 27 shows enrollment for each city since 2004,

Table 27

Comparison of Enrollments: Newark and Yonkers, Summer 2012

Graduation class	Newark		Yonkers	
	<i>n</i>	% enrolled any institution	<i>n</i>	% enrolled any institution
2004	1,947	58.6	1039	68.4
2005	2,001	59.8	1099	70.6
2006	2,143	59.2	1099	72.1
2007	2,207	58.1	1228	73.4
2008	2,342	57.9	1325	70.6
2009	2,467	53.6	1423	72.7
2010	2,311	47.7	1280	70.8
2011	2,085	50.4	1438	70.7

Source: (a) Yonkers data from *StudentTracker for High Schools*, by National Student Clearing House Research Center, (2014), retrieved from http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/high_schools/studenttracker/; (b) Newark data from *Post-Secondary Outcomes of Newark Public School Graduates (2004-2011): College Matricualtion, Persistence, and Graduation*, by J. R. Backstrand, A. Roda, E. Rosenblum, L. Cohen, R. Coughlin, A., Keaton, & A. Sadovnik, 2014, Newark, NJ: Newark School Research Collaborative.

as of June 2012. Again, students from 2004 would have had 8 years to enroll and students from 2011 would have had only 1 year to enroll. In both cities there is a spike in enrollment rates for the classes of 2006 through 2008 but the decline from 2008 to 2011 is greater for Newark than for Yonkers, and in Yonkers there is a clear upward trajectory in enrollment which is not apparent in Newark.

Graduates from Yonkers also attend 4-year colleges at higher rates than Newark graduates. In a comparison of high school graduate enrollment in 2-year and 4-year colleges, the data from Yonkers show that 47% of enrollers attended only a 4-year or senior college, about 34% attended only a community college or 2-year school, and 19% enrolled in both a community college and a senior college at some point. In Newark, just over one third of enrollees enrolled in a 4-year college, about 40% enrolled in a 2-year college, and 16% enrolled in both a 2-year and a 4-year institution during the time they were enrolled in a postsecondary institution.

Degree attainment rates in both cities have been low, although Yonkers students have a bit more success than Newark students at earning a postsecondary degree. Table 28 shows degree attainment rates for all graduates from both districts as of summer 2012. Note that 2004 graduates have had many years to complete their degree, while 2011 graduates would have been out of high school for only 1 year. The table shows that Yonkers graduates earn degrees at nearly twice the rate of Newark graduates. In Newark, fewer than 2% of students earned any degree within 2 years of graduating high school. This is important because more than half of Newark graduates attend community college and Newark graduates may be having similar difficulties as Yonkers graduates in earning Associate degrees.

Chapter Summary

In response to the question that was posed in title of this chapter: Yes, Yonkers graduates actually do enroll in postsecondary programs. The data on enrollment and persistence appear promising and have improved in recent years. It is encouraging to see that students from Yonkers seem to be closing the gap in college enrollment between

Table 28

Comparison of Degrees Earned: Newark and Yonkers, Summer 2012

Graduation class	Newark		Yonkers	
	<i>n</i>	% any degree	<i>n</i>	% any degree
2004	1,947	15.1	1039	30.1
2005	2,001	14.0	1099	30.2
2006	2,139	10.8	1099	29.8
2007	2,207	7.4	1228	20.4
2008	2,342	1.8	1325	6.6
2009	2,422	1.0	1423	3.2
2010	2,219	0.0	1280	0.3
2011	1,947	0.0	1438	0.0

Source: (a) Yonkers data from *StudentTracker for High Schools*, by National Student Clearing House Research Center, (2014), retrieved from http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/high_schools/studenttracker/; (b) Newark data from *Post-Secondary Outcomes of Newark Public School Graduates (2004-2011): College Matriculation, Persistence, and Graduation*, by J. R. Backstrand, A. Roda, E. Rosenblum, L. Cohen, R. Coughlin, A., Keaton, & A. Sadovnik, 2014, Newark, NJ: Newark School Research Collaborative.

themselves and their peers nationally. Also, students from Yonkers are enrolling, persisting, and graduating from college at higher rates than students in Newark, a similar district with similar students and many of the same issues that impede or delay postsecondary success.

There are gaps in Yonkers between Asian students and their White, Black, and Latino counterparts. Rates of White and Black YPS graduate first-semester enrollment in

college are above the national average. While both sets of data are excellent, Black enrollment data are especially exciting. At some schools, 85% to 94% of Black students who graduate from high school enroll in college. At two schools, Black students out-enroll their White peers, a diversion from national norms. It is difficult to say why this occurs and the question warrants further investigation.

Black and Latino students from Yonkers take longer to enroll in college than their White and Asian peers, which may deter their ability to persist and earn a degree. Currently, YPIE and YPS stop providing services to Yonkers students as soon as they graduate. Perhaps YPIE could offer some type of continuation services to capture those students who fail to enroll in the first year following high school. Perhaps student who know that someone is still watching out for them will be motivated to take steps toward actual enrollment earlier.

Gaps in enrollment also exist based on the overall level of poverty in the individual feeder high school. YMHS and Saunders High School, the two high schools with the lowest percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price lunches have both the highest percentage of their students enrolling in postsecondary schools and the majority of those going to 4-year colleges. The schools with the higher levels of poverty have the lowest percentages of students attending college, with much larger proportions of them attending 2-year colleges. This finding supports previous research indicating that overall SES level in a school is as correlated to general student achievement as a student's SES is to that student's achievement (Harris, 2006; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). The one outlier in this pattern appears to be Riverside High School, which graduated its first class of students in 2011. Riverside has a very high percentage of

students receiving free or reduced-price lunches, but nearly 80% of 2011 graduates enrolled in a postsecondary program. It will be interesting to see whether Riverside can maintain this success in subsequent graduation years.

Unfortunately, evaluating the type of diplomas awarded was not possible for this project. It will be interesting to follow these cohorts through the next several years, if more data become available. Despite not knowing what types of degrees YPS graduates earn, this work demonstrates that there is still much to be done in terms of preparing YPS students for college. Currently, only about one third of all YPS graduates go on to earn any college degree within 6 years.

Students who go to 4-year colleges enjoy a considerably higher rate of success in earning a degree than those who attend community colleges. Graduation rates from community colleges are very low. YPIE would benefit from finding a way to encourage students with the ability and academic preparedness to choose 4-year schools over community colleges. Often, these students opt for community colleges because of cost; perhaps more could be done to find money for them to attend other schools.

CHAPTER 8

POSTSECONDARY PUSH-PULL FACTORS

Look, if you've been successful, you didn't get there on your own. I'm always struck by people who think, "Well, it must be because I was just so smart." There are a lot of smart people out there. "It must be because I worked harder than everybody else." Let me tell you something: There are a whole bunch of hard-working people out there. . . . If you were successful, somebody along the line gave you some help. (Obama, 2012, para. 83)

Personal and Social Support Systems

One purpose of this research project was to understand the factors in Yonkers students' lives that keep them motivated with regard to their education. Why do some students with similar socioeconomic and educational backgrounds enroll in, persist, and graduate from postsecondary institutions but others do not? All but one participant said that family/parents were the most important factor in keeping them motivated and focused on long-term goals. While all college-going participants acknowledged their own intelligence and hard work in some way, none of them emphasized personal "smarts" or self-efficacy as one of the top three reasons for enrolling in and remaining in college. The following is an exchange with the focus group of High Achievers.

Researcher: So let's talk a little about what keeps you motivated while in school. When things get hard and you have challenging coursework or are having a hard time balancing work, school, and a social life, what things, people, programs, or anything else keep you in school and at the top of your class?

Participant 3: Above all, it's my family. I see all the sacrifices they've made for me so that I can get here, so that I can be somebody successful. I don't do it for myself, I do it for my family.

Participant 2: Yes, my family definitely, too. Because of them, I think "First go to school, then worry about everything else later." Nothing will make me change my mind, I owe them too much.

Participant 5: Yes, family for me, too; well, mostly my mom. I see how hard she's worked to get me here. How could I do anything else but be successful? She

worked two jobs; she would have worked three to provide for me. I owe her so much. [tears forming]

Participant 1: Of course, for me, too, it's family. My mom came here with nothing and I have to take care of her. That, and also because I can really see the end here. [Researcher looks at participant inquisitively for clarification] I mean, I can visualize my future. I can see my dreams. So yeah, my family, but also just knowing that I'm actually going to be a professional one day, and one day kinda soon.

Participant 4: Yes, for me, too. I think they've said it all. For me, too, it's family.

Many of the respondents talked about “owing” their parents a debt of gratitude for the sacrifices that they had made over the years. This was especially true in the first-generation college goers and those whose parents were immigrants. For one young man, the future of his family “depended” on him. He said that, if he succeeded, he would help his “family really arrive here, and know that we are welcome to stay.” It is difficult to imagine the sense of responsibility that these young people must feel toward their families.

The one participant who did not list her family as the top motivating factor said that her family was very important in the decision to enroll in and eventually graduate from college. A college degree was not the mechanism by which her family was depending on moving into the middle class; both of her parents were very well-educated professionals. For her, college was a given, an expected outcome that was more about her “finding herself” and deciding what she wanted to do. She was in no way cavalier about her postsecondary experience, but certainly more relaxed about it. While she expressed gratitude for all that her parents had given her to prepare her for college, she accepted their cultural capital and their tuition payments as par for the course.

All interview and focus group participants who had enrolled in college and later withdrawn mentioned feeling that they had disappointed their parents in some way. One

said that she would “like to pay my mother back for the money she paid for my books and classes” but at the moment she could not afford to do so. Other respondents mentioned wanting reimburse their parents for the money paid toward education. While most portrayed this financial help positively, one respondent said that he wanted to make sure that he paid back the money his father had “wasted” on his tuition.

Non-enrollers were divided about their parents’ role in the choice not to attend college. Several indicated that their parents had wanted them to attend, and they talked about various levels of disappointment on their parents’ part. Others said that they were either not sure whether their parents were disappointed by the choice or their parents supported the choice not to attend. Either way, there was not the same sense of indebtedness on the part of these respondents.

These conversations about motivation and support systems garnered two unexpected findings. First, “family” was a widely cited response to questions about reasons for success, support systems, and keeping focused on school. Having been raised in a family with a long history of college attendance and a feeling of being somewhat entitled, I did not anticipate how strongly these respondents would feel about their parents’ role in their postsecondary careers. Instead, I expected them to talk about their own abilities, intelligence, and tenacity. While several mentioned those qualities, they did not stress them as top reasons for their postsecondary success.

The second unexpected finding was serendipitous. Coding focus group and interview data show that, typically, when a respondent mentioned a parent’s role in the choice to enroll, withdraw, or not enroll in college, the mention referred to the mother. Even though 21 of the 31 interview and focus groups participants lived with or had

regular contact with their fathers, only six mentioned speaking to their “father” or “parents” rather than just their “mother” about college and future career paths. The reason for this is not clear; it could be that all schooling, no matter the level, is considered a female domain in some families. It could also have something to do with the nature of conversations that children are willing have with each caregiver in the home. However, all of the respondents who mentioned their father’s involvement in their postsecondary career did so in a positive manner; all were college goers and predominantly High Achievers. The role of paternal relationships in college enrollment and persistence might serve as an interesting topic for future research.

The conversations with the interview and focus group participants about family supports led to questions about friends and peers as factors that encourage or deter from college success. Not quite as strongly as family but still quite often, participants who were attending or had attended college mentioned friends and peers as motivating factors in their postsecondary success. This was not entirely unexpected, as they are mostly teenagers, and friends are still very important to them. Respondents generally were in two categories concerning friends and college: (a) Their friends are also college goers and everyone in the peer group was expected to attend college, or (b) their friends were mostly not college goers but encouraged the respondent to be the peer group outlier and attend college. None of the participants said that they had non-college goer friends who discouraged their own college attendance.

Every participant in the first category were still enrolled in school or had completed their postsecondary program. In general, they said that their friends, both in and out of school, were major motivators. They rely on their friends for help with things

related to academics and find it easy to speak to them about school. However, a few said that having too many college-going friends in the same school sometimes served as a distraction from schoolwork.

Students in the second category were not as clear about the role of their friends in their postsecondary success. Two respondents said that they use their non college-going friends as motivation for what they do *not* want to be or do, which keeps them focused on their studies. The other four said that, despite their friends supporting their decision to stay in school, the friends did not always make it easy for them.

Respondent: My best friend always wants me to go out on Thursday night, like out to the club and drink. But I am like the only person in college who has had a Friday morning class every semester since I started. So, if I go out, I'm a mess the next day and I usually end up missing class. But she begs, and they always have so much fun and of course meet the hottest guys when I don't go. It's little things like that that make it hard. It's not something she's doing intentional, you know? She isn't saying to me, "Hey, stop going to class." But she's not really supporting me, either.

Researcher: So how does that make you feel? Do you get upset? Or, have you just come to accept that this is what happens with her . . . or them?

Respondent: No, it doesn't make me mad at them. [long pause] But you know, sometimes it makes me a little lonely. Like, I can talk to her about school, and she's smart, so she gets it. But does she really get that I have to take Calculus for Business for my Fashion Marketing major? No, and it is such a hard class. And when I'm stressed and confused, that makes me feel, well, not mad, but a little lonely.

Researcher: What about friends on campus? Do you have any friends there that you can talk about these things with?

Respondent: No, not really. Like I said before, nothing happens there, it's so freakin' boring.

This respondent and one other talked about feeling isolated and not having anyone to speak to about college-related issues or academics. Both also attend mostly commuter schools and said they have few or no friends on campus. Conversely, the other two

respondents who mentioned their non college-going friends being a distraction said that this was not an issue for them because they had made at least a few acquaintances/friends on campus with whom they spent time and could talk to about coursework and other school-related matters.

Institution-Based Support Systems

Literature on college retention cites institutional support systems and student engagement on campus as very important factors in determining a student's ability to persist (Tinto, 1993). Interview, focus group, and survey participants reported a varied set of experiences with in-college support systems and engagement in campus activities. However, very few suggested these to be a major factor in their success or lack thereof at a postsecondary institution. Only when asked probing questions did most respondents begin to talk openly about in-school support systems and their level of engagement on campus. It was not that the respondents did not think that these aspects of college life were important; in many cases, they were so accustomed to the presence of these factors that they did not even consider them to be a support system.

As an undergraduate student, the only time I saw an academic advisor was when I declared my major, just prior to graduation. Had I had a problem with a professor or another student, I would have complained to my mother or a friend and let the issue go. I likely would not have known where to go for help if I had been depressed, and I am not sure that I would have considered that something to be addressed by my school.

In the past two decades, colleges and universities have used support services such as advising, counseling, and student outreach programs to retain students and prevent attrition (Tinto, 1993). According to interview and focus group participants, college

students today are bombarded with information about academic tutoring, counseling services, student outreach, and career planning. Colleges now make students very aware that they have people to whom they can turn for help. Every participant in this study agreed. When asked who, if anyone, she could turn to for help while away at college, one participant who was attending an Ivy League schools, said the following.

Participant: They really watch out for us here. I mean, really, we can't even register for classes until three different people check over our schedules and make sure they think we're taking the right classes. Even the Dean has to sign off on my schedule before I can register. It's nice not having to worry that I've made the wrong choice.

Researcher: That's great. And what about for issues that aren't academic in nature? What if a student is having issues with depression or anxiety or some other issue and they need someone to talk to? Are there places for that student to turn?

Participant: Yes, there are places. There are mental health services right on campus, and I'm not sure, but I think it's free to go there and talk to someone. I don't know anyone who's using that service now, but I have heard that it's supposed to be really good.

Qualitative data indicate that these services are present on almost all campuses.

However, data from the Alumni Survey suggest that not all students have access to, know about, or are willing to use these types of services at their schools. Of those who are aware of these services, use is constant by race/ethnicity but varies by gender. Female students were more likely to know about these services on campus and to make use of them at least one time. Most colleges and universities now require that students see their academic advisor one time before being cleared for registration. Women sought guidance from this advisor beyond that requisite meeting more often did men. They also participated in clubs and campus activities more often. Males were more likely to seek support from someone other than academic advisors.

Participants acknowledged that having many student activities on campus was entertaining and helped to keep them engaged in school. This was more so for participants who lived on campus than for those who commuted. Those who attended commuter schools, such as Westchester Community College and Mercy College, lamented a lack of student engagement in extracurricular activities. One commuter student suggested that there were two separate classes of students at her school: those who live in dormitories those who commuted. She said that it was difficult to make friends with dormitory students, who tended to socialize among themselves, and that she was frustrated that other commuters never wanted to stay for events and parties. I asked whether this lack of friends and engagement on campus might prevent her from being successful there, or even lead her to withdraw or stop out. When she finished laughing she said,

Actually it's probably the one things that keeps me from partying all the time and being totally focused on boys! I go to school and I work, that's it. It's actually keeping me pretty focused. Do I wish there were more to do on campus? Definitely. Do I regret not going to a school that's more fun, or living on campus? Yeah, sometimes I do. But I go out with my outside friends all the time, and we have fun. So, school is just the place where I, well, go to school.

Two young men who were living in dormitories at their colleges mentioned the “party atmosphere” of dormitory life more as a distraction than being beneficial. One said, “It’s what got me to come here, but I know, it’s what could make me be here longer than I need to.”

Culture of College Going

I spent several weeks last spring working in the YMHS college center. In my first week in the office I felt somewhat like a castaway. The college center is a suite of two offices hidden in the back of the school’s library, a room guarded by two school staff

people who bar entry to students who are not having lunch or a free period. Nobody had been made aware of my presence, and I was starting to question my usefulness. In that first week, I met with only a handful of graduating seniors who had been making regular use of the office until the previous advisor had left, and came by to use the computers and noticed that the lights were on in the office.

In the following week I attended a College and Financial Aid information night coordinated by the school's guidance staff and YPIE. One of the frustrations often cited by College Advisors was the lack of parental involvement in the college process, and I have been to events that were very poorly attended. However, on that night more than 80 students and their families packed into the school's small library to get information, see presentations on the college process, and meet the new College Advisor.

In the following day and for the rest of the school year, the college center was filled with students. Parents called regularly to talk about setting up their child's Naviance accounts, college options, and YPIE's supplemental programs such as SAT tutoring or Essay Busters. YMHS is somewhat of an outlier from the other high schools in the district. The students there who are part of the IB program are proactive with regard to college searches. They seek information, readily apply for supplemental programs offered by YPIE and the school, and search for and apply for private scholarships. Their parents, most of them college educated themselves, are also eager for information about college. They attend programs and workshops and they encourage their children to participate in the supplemental programs. In an interview with very-high-achieving students at the school, I asked one student whether she thought that she worked harder, as hard as, or less hard than her peers in high school.

I surrounded myself with people who were like minded and wanted to go to college as much or more than I did. That's who I hung out with, and I continue to do that here [in her highly selective top-tier college]. We worked together in this group and we succeeded together, and I know they are so happy for me that I'm here now [in college]. . . . I know there were other students who were not as focused on college and their future as we were, but I felt at least most of the school wanted to go to college, so it felt safe for me there.

Not all of the students at YMHS are as proactive about their futures, but the overall culture of college going seems to permeate the student body. From 2010 to 2012, only 14 of the 731 students who graduated from this school did not apply to and plan to attend college. Ninety-seven percent of all students who graduated in those years planned to attend, and data show that almost 85% of these students actually enrolled during the first year after graduation.

Part of YMHS's success is its IB program, which offers students rigorous college-level courses. One of the cornerstones of the programs is IB classes' open access to the entire student body instead of a select few. One of the most important things the IB program has done for the school is not that it has helped the school to rank on national lists; rather, it is more about creating and maintaining a culture where students are expected to attend college. This expectation is key to developing a culture of college going. Even those with lower GPAs and whose SAT scores are in the lowest quartile see college as a necessity and plan to attend.

Respondent: I know everyone else you probably spoke to from Yonkers had like really good grades and SATs. I kind of barely graduated on time and my SAT scores were okay but not good. WCC [Westchester Community College] was really the only option for me. . . . Well, I could have gone to Monroe, too, because they don't care about SAT scores, but anyway, at least I knew there were still options for me.

Researcher: And how did you know that? How come you knew you had options when so many other students in that situation don't?

Respondent: Well, they tell us all the time. At school, I mean [high school]. The other kids talked about college all the time, my friends and stuff. And they helped me, and my girl made sure I applied.

Researcher: Would you say that the other students in the school expected you to go to college?

Respondent: Yes, definitely. Almost everyone thinks everyone is going to college. Not just the smart kids.

Researcher: You're not a smart kid?

Respondent: Yes, I'm smart, but I wasn't IB and all.

Researcher: What about the adults at school? Your principal and assistant principal? Did they expect you to go to college? What about your teachers?

Respondent: The principal yes and the assistant principals, too. They did. They were cool. . . . I don't know about all the teachers, but some of them definitely. Some, I don't think so. Maybe some thought I wasn't smart enough to go.

Other high schools in the district create their culture of college going in different ways. All of the schools have honors programs and offer AP courses, and there is certainly a conversation about college in the YPIE centers; beyond that, the culture of college going varies.

During one of the first YPIE events that I attended, I went to a college center Open House at Lincoln High School. I met the principal and several college-bound 12th graders. Lincoln has one of the lowest levels of college attendance in the district; however, I met students who were planning to go to Brown University and Barnard University. Here are my impressions of that day from my field notes.

I have never seen a principal so adamant about the need for his students to attend college. While I generally think such impassioned speeches about "all kids can and will go to college" are more about rhetoric and less about the realities of their lives, his students seem genuinely grateful for the role this man has played in their future. Every single student I met told me that, because of him, the teachers believe that all students are college bound, and because all the adults buy into this, the students themselves believe it, too. (May 2011)

This school leader, who has since moved on, was the backbone of this school's culture of college going. The YPIE college center in the school supplemented this culture and supported the growing number of college goers. When planning this dissertation, I intended to put this section on the "culture of college going" in the previous chapter. I thought at first that it had more to do with college application and intention behavior than actual enrollment. Then one respondent said this about Lincoln's principal:

He really cared about us going to college. He called my mom and told her that I had to go. He even said to her that she should let me go away. We're Dominican, and she said good girls in my country do not go away to college. My mom told him that, and that was supposed to be it . . . and I don't know what he said to her exactly, but when she got off the phone with him, she went to sleep without saying anything to me. She was tight [angry]. When I left for school the next day, though, there was a check for my deposit. Now it's like nothing for her, but she was really scared for me to go. And I have him to thank for that. [starting to shed tears]

When asked about the role of school administrators in the college application and planning process, Lincoln's former principal was cited by every student who attended that school as someone who was interested in their college plans. No other principal or school administrator was mentioned nearly so often. Of the 8 Lincoln graduates with whom I spoke, including one student who withdrew from college and two who never attended, agreed with the following statements: (a) When in high school, my principal and assistant principals expected me to go to college, and (b) When in high school, my principal and assistant principals expected all of the students in my school to go to college. Six of the eight respondents, all but one nonenroller and one "struggling" college goer, agreed with these statements: (a) My teachers expected me to go to college, and (b) The other students at my school expected me to go to college. No other alumni group had such a strong positive perception of the role of the non-YPIE or guidance-oriented adults in their school as did those at Lincoln. As one respondent put it, "Maybe not a lot of us

are going to college, I don't know, I guess you do [the researcher]. But if it weren't for him [principal], I think it would be even less people going."

Lincoln High School and YMHS serve well as a comparison pair. YMHS is clearly the district's outlier in terms of academics and college attendance. It is also the most affluent high school in the district and most of the students have one or more parents who have attended at least some college. A culture of college going is to be expected in a school such as this, especially given the high level of participation in their IB program. Lincoln is very different from Yonkers; SAT scores are lower, more students live in or near poverty, many are first-generation Americans, and only about one third have parents with a college degree. While far fewer Lincoln graduates actually enroll in college than do YMHS graduates, first-year enrollment rates have increased steadily. This has not been the case at Roosevelt High School, where, aside from the YPIE College Advisor and school-based guidance counselor, there was little perception of a culture of college going by graduate respondents.

Respondents from the other three high schools had far more mixed and nuanced perceptions of the culture of college going. Respondents from Saunders and Gorton spoke about the focus being on a select group of students and less on everyone, although the Saunders group acknowledged that the select group was more than half of the student body. Riverside participants acknowledged a strong culture of college going but attributed it almost entirely to their YPIE College Advisor. One Riverside student reported that the College Advisor had threatened to bar students from the senior prom if they did not complete and submit at least one college application. She and another student acknowledged the different expectations for students based on what they called

“the smart kids” and “everyone else.” None of the respondents from Gorton, Roosevelt, or Saunders indicated expectations by the adults or other students for all students to attend college.

Academic Preparedness

No discussion of postsecondary outcomes would be complete without at least some discussion of academic preparedness and YPS graduates. As demonstrated in previous chapters, many Yonkers high school graduates are not quite ready for college-level work upon graduation. Wendy Nadel acknowledged that this is an issue for YPS graduates. Because YPIE works closely with staff from Westchester Community College and CUNY, they know that many YPS students go on to college and are required to take developmental skills or remedial courses. Through this research, it was difficult to get a real sense of the number of students who are asked to enroll in these courses. YPIE staff members suspect that it is more than half of all college enrollees, which would make sense if only 15% of those graduating from high school and college and career ready as defined by the state. In the Alumni survey, 35% of respondents who had attended college reported that they taken one or more remedial course. However, this self-reported figure may be significantly lower than the real number and survey respondents are likely to be more successful students than typical students.

The only interview or focus group participants who reported taking remedial classes were three of the four participants who had withdrawn from college. It is possible that other participant also took remedial courses but did not admit to it during focus group sessions. One participant said the following.

Respondent: I had to take remedial math; well, the first remedial math class I passed easy. But then there was another one, and that one I failed. Actually, I

passed it, but at CUNY, you have to test out of remedial and take the CUNY placement test. And even though I was getting a B in the class, I failed and had to take the class two more times. After that I said, “Fuck this, I ain't with this, I'm not doing it anymore.”

Researcher: Is that when you decided to leave school?

Respondent: Yeah, I left then.

Researcher: And did you have to pay for that?

Respondent: Yeah, well, I paid half, financial aid pays the other half. So each time I took it, it was like \$500-600.

Researcher: Wow, that much?

Respondent: Yup, each one is no credits but like 6 hours. So you pay for 6 credits. No, matter of fact, I think the second time you take it, they don't make you pay. But the third time and fourth time, and tenth time you pay.

The other participant who reported having to take remedial courses had a similar experience. He passed the first remedial course, only to learn that there was another remedial course in the sequence. He passed both on the first try, then learned that he had to pass a general 100-level algebra or statistics course. This participant is an immigrant and English Language Learner; he also had to take a remedial writing course. He reported finding that course to be less frustrating and acknowledged that it improved his writing skills. However, he was not allowed to enroll in any classes for his major until those remedial courses were passed. So after 3 years in community college, he had earned only 8 credits: 2 in Art, 3 in Speech, and 3 in Spanish.

On the Alumni survey and in interviews and focus group sessions, YPS alumni did not indicate serious difficulty with coursework in college. In general, even those who had dropped out reported that they had felt ready for college-level work when they entered school. Several said that the amount of reading and written work was surprising and a few related that they had struggled to adjust to 2- to 4-hour classes.

Some interview/focus group participants indicated that they struggled with mathematics but the courses more “challenging” than “difficult” or “impossible.” One young woman said that she was surprised by how quickly the mathematics class progressed over the course of the semester: “much quicker than anything we did in high school.” Several students from all types of schools lamented that their mathematics teachers “did not speak any English” or had accents so heavy that understanding them was difficult.

Self-reported GPA by Alumni survey respondents followed a normal distribution, with the largest number of students having earned GPAs of 3.1 to 3.5. This is illustrated in Figure 20.

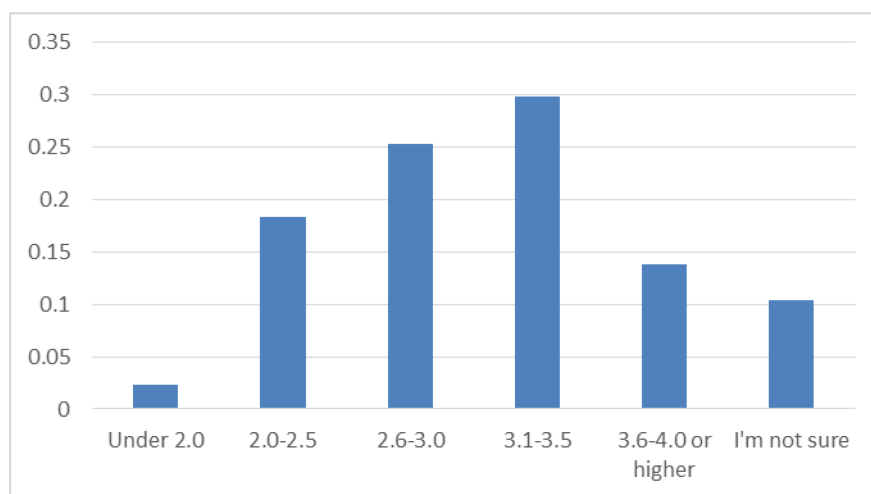


Figure 20. Self-reported college grade point average, Yonkers high school graduates.

Figure 21 illustrates students’ experiences with their first college mathematics course. It does not capture information about mathematics courses beyond the first one. Most students reported that their first mathematics course was neither easy nor difficult.

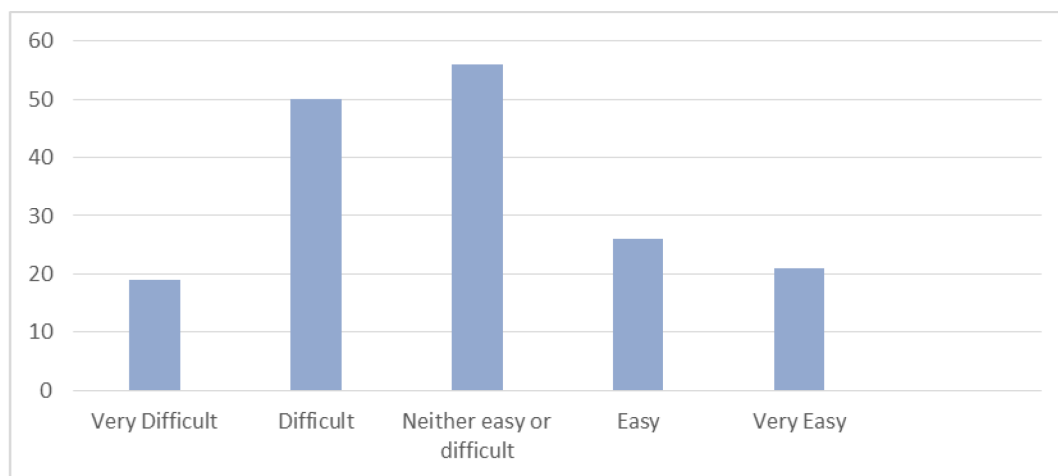


Figure 21. Yonkers high school graduates' ratings of the difficulty of their first college mathematics course.

Most respondents consider their college English courses to be easier than their mathematics courses. They also reported that the English courses were more enjoyable and that their English professors were far more friendly and approachable than their mathematics professors. Only two interview/focus group participants said that they enjoyed the mathematics courses more than the English courses. One said that she had had a very helpful professor to whom she felt she could reach out to and seek help. Figure 22 shows responses to the Alumni survey question about experiences in the first college English or writing course.

Show Me the Money

The college application process is exciting but sometimes stressful; not every student is accepted into the first choice of college. Thus, College Advisors and guidance counselors encourage students to apply to an array of schools in the following categories: Match, Reach, or Safety. A Match school is one where a student's academic credentials are well within the range for the average accepted freshman. Reach schools are usually

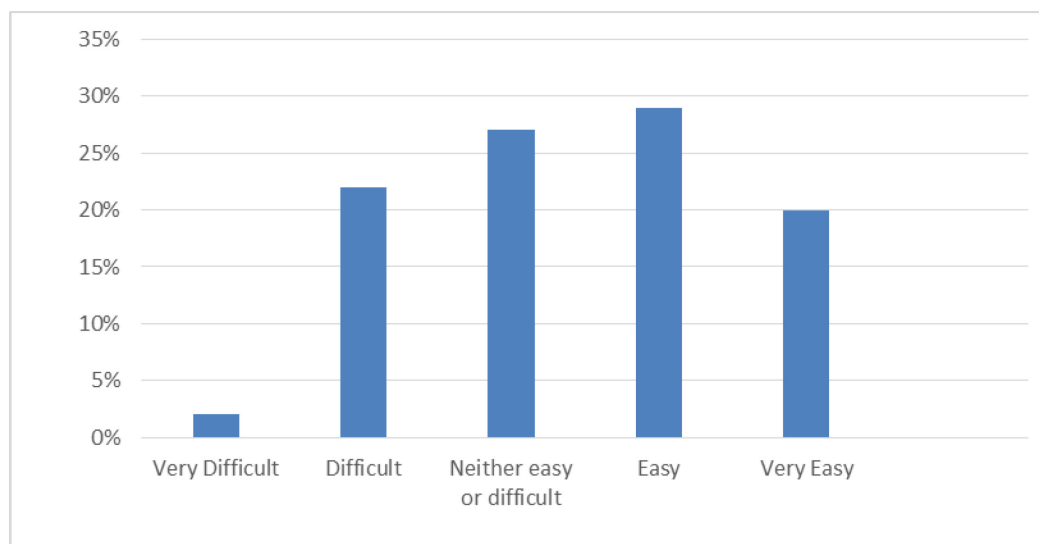


Figure 22. Yonkers high school graduates' ratings of the difficulty of their first college English or writing course.

top universities, where a student's academic credentials fall just at or slightly below the school's average accepted applicant. A Safety school is one that accepts a high percentage of applicants or one that is attractive to the student whose credentials are well above those of the average freshman.

At YMHS, most students heeded these warnings and applied to several colleges to keep their options open. However, some found themselves in a different predicament; they had been accepted to several schools but could not afford to go to any of them. Unfortunately, they did not get into the 4-year schools that they could afford and, because they had planned to go to a 4-year college, had not applied to a community college. As mentioned in chapter 6, CUNY and SUNY schools are among the most applied-to schools by Yonkers 12th graders. New York's public university systems are an excellent value; a 4-year SUNY school costs \$7,500 to \$8,500 per year, and a 4-year CUNY school costs about \$5,800 a year (in-state student, not including room and board). However,

these schools have been getting increasingly selective, especially since the increase in applications after the onset of the recession of 2008. According to *U.S. News and World Report*, Lehman College's acceptance rate is 23%, lower even than that of highly-sought-out New York University (*U.S. News and World Report*, 2013).

CUNY and SUNY 4-year colleges were once considered safety schools for the average New York 12th grader; this is no longer the case. Instead, most Yonkers students must choose local community colleges or private 4-year colleges as safety schools. Often, these private colleges are much more expensive than local public options. Table 29 lists the direct commuter costs of the private colleges to which Yonkers students most often apply, as well as the average debt at graduation, according to NCES and the College Board. Indirect costs such as books and transportation are not included; living expenses and dormitory fees are also not included.

Several of the most highly subscribed private schools offer generous financial aid packages. One focus group participant reported going to one of the above-listed schools at no cost.

I don't pay anything. In fact, they pay me to be there. Every semester, they cut me a check for like \$350, for books and other stuff I need. I don't know anyone at Lehman who's getting that.

However an interview participant had this to say about her financial aid experience at the same college.

I chose my school because they offered me a lot of financial aid, which was good because we don't have a lot of money. But every year they give me less and less grants and want me to take out more loans. And now I don't know what to do. It's getting real expensive, but if I transfer to a place like Lehman or CCNY or something, I'm gonna lose a lot of credits.

Table 29

Most Popular Private Colleges Attended by Yonkers Public Schools Graduates, Including Tuition and Financial Aid and Loan Information

School	Tuition	Acceptance rate	Average need-based scholarship or grant	Average grant-to-loan ratio	Average debt at graduation
Iona College	\$32,770	86%	\$6,659	68/32	\$31,960
Manhattan College	\$35,960	70%	\$14,551	66/34	\$34,189
Mercy College	\$17,556	65%	\$11,925	55/45	\$24,138
Monroe College ^a	\$13,236	59%	\$11,944	N/A	\$21,962
Pace University	\$36,732	77%	\$30,563	74/26	\$35,895
The College of Westchester ^b	\$19,710	74%	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: *Big Future: Financial Aid Breakdowns*, by The College Board, 2014, retrieved from www.bigfuture.collegeboard.org

^aMonroe College is a 4-year private for-profit institution that does not report enrollment and financial aid numbers to the College Board as nonprofit institutions do; therefore, some data are not available. ^bThe College of Westchester offers 2- and 4-year degrees. The private for-profit institution does not report enrollment and financial aid numbers to the College Board as nonprofit institutions do; therefore, some data are not available.

Many local private college options can be very expensive; some cost as much or more than the entire household income of some Yonkers families. Many students can simply not afford to pay high tuition costs, and some colleges are not worth their charge. If a degree from a college cannot all but guarantee a job in one's field, then it might not

be worth \$50,000 a year. There might be a similarly mediocre option for half the price, minus the fancy new dormitory or Division I basketball team.

It is important for students to go into the college planning process with a clear understanding of how much money their parents can and will pay for them to attend college. Unfortunately, this can be a difficult conversation for both parents and children, especially when the child has his or her heart set on attending a specific college and the parents little or no disposable income. While I was working as acting College Advisor at YMHS, several 12th-grade students came to the office asking for advice because they were faced with few or no affordable college options. I quickly realized that these conversations about cost and financing college might be taking place with College Advisors but not with parents. This prompted me to ask every 11th-grade student with whom I met with the same question as they embarked on their college search: “Have you had an honest conversation with your parents about how much money they are willing and able to spend each year on your college education?” The answer was almost always *no*. Even when the answer was *yes*, only two students could identify a specific dollar amount.

If parents and their children do not have conversations about college costs and financing and if all parties do not go into the college planning process with the same understanding of the family’s financial situation, the outcome can be heartbreaking. One focus group respondent said,

I was supposed to go to Seaton Hall in New Jersey; my cousin went there. I applied and got in. And before I applied, my dad said, “Apply wherever you want, we’ll take care of it.” But I don’t think he/they realized how expensive it was going to be. I got some money, but both my parents work and it’s a Catholic school, so they don’t give a lot of financial aid. Anyway, we couldn’t afford it and

they couldn't even take out that much money in private loans. . . . I was pretty bummed out about it.

Students must know exactly how much money their parents are able to contribute and how much they are willing to borrow. On the 12th grade survey, participants who said that they were not planning to attend college were asked why. The most frequent response was *not enough financial aid*. Respondents to the Alumni survey who either had not enrolled in a postsecondary program or who had enrolled and had since withdrawn also cited cost/lack of financial aid most often. Program Director Ellen Cutler Levy said,

Each year we have several students with sometimes thousands of dollars of unmet need. . . . We've been able to help some of them in the past, through scholarship programs and private donors, but we can't help everyone. We know that some students do not enroll because of this.

Financial aid programs are essential to the success of YPS students. Many of them rely almost entirely on school-based aid programs to fund their education. One YPS graduate in a focus group said, "I know we talked about financial aid and paying for college, but that's also a support system, right?" I was a caught off guard by this question and must have looked at him inquisitively.

Respondent: You asked us about support systems in school that help us stay or cause us to drop out.

Researcher: Yes, that's right.

Respondent: Because I think that's one. Financial aid. I mean, without it, well, it wouldn't matter how much I love my mother or how hard she worked to provide for me. We couldn't do any of this without financial aid. . . . Financial aid is as important to me and my family as any of those other things we talked about.

Respondent 2: Me, too. I guess I didn't think about it that way. But I pay for school, all of it, with financial aid. I never had a college savings account. I mean I did, but there was like \$1,100 in it. What good would that do? . . . Well, it pays for my books, or it has. It's all gone now.

The insight of young man and his fellow focus group members was impressive. Although I was keenly aware that YPS graduate relied heavily on financial aid programs to fund their educational endeavors, at no point had I thought about financial aid programs as a support system in the way that they do. Without adequate needs-based support, students in the middle—those who have the ability to go to college but maybe not the highest grades and certainly not the money—would miss the opportunity and languish in an ever-tightening job market.

Figure 23 reports data from the Alumni survey and demonstrates the graduates' reliance on financial aid programs to fund their education. More than 4 of every 5 students districtwide rely on institutional grants to help pay for college. About 98% of Black and Hispanic survey respondents were relying on these grants.

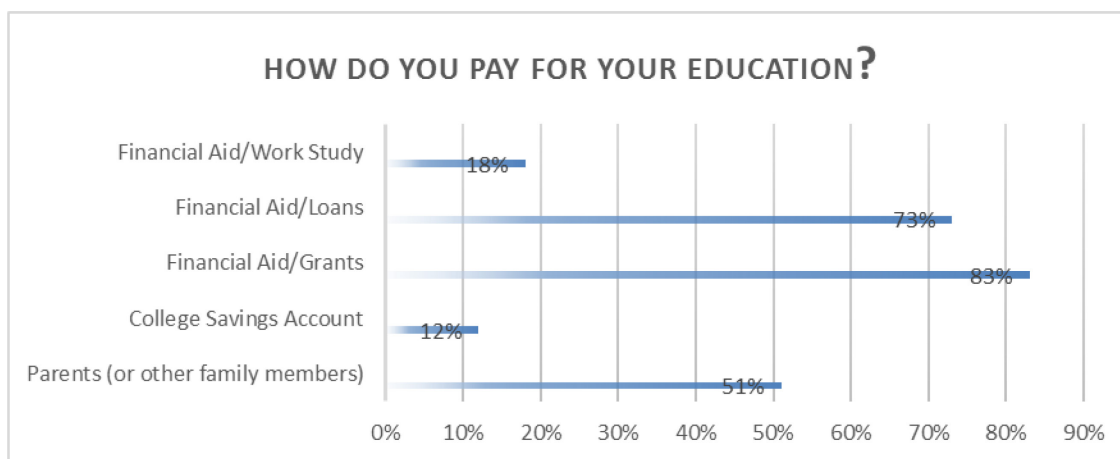


Figure 23. How Yonkers Public Schools graduates finance their postsecondary education.

Reliance on financial assistance from the government and institutions does not translate to awareness or deep understanding of these programs. Interview and focus group participants had a general lack of awareness about all things financial with regard

to college, including financial aid programs, college costs, and student loans. One participant said that he applied to community college only because he could not afford a 4-year school and knew that he would not qualify for financial aid. When asked during the interview whether he had applied for financial aid or had just assumed that he would not qualify, we had the following exchange.

Researcher: Did you complete a FAFSA form in order to see if you qualified for financial aid, or had you assumed that you wouldn't qualify?

Participant: No, I didn't bother to apply because my father didn't think we'd qualify. He thought he made too much money and he didn't want me to have to pay back all those loans when I graduate.

Researcher: Do both of your parents work, or is it just your dad?

Participant: No, my mom's been out of work for over a year . . . well, actually, over a year and a half now. That's why money's so tight, and why we thought it would just be better for me to go to a community college and transfer later.

Researcher: You mentioned not wanting to pay back loans earlier. Did you know that financial aid is not just loans, there are grants and scholarships, too, and you don't have to pay those back?

Participant: No, no, I guess we didn't know that.

It is not clear whether this participant would have qualified for financial aid at a 4-year institution. In high school, his average grade was more than 90 out of 100 and his SAT scores were near the national average, so it is reasonable to think that he would have got some kind of merit-based aid. He is cited here because he was particularly unhappy with the school that he was attending, noting that the curriculum was "uninspiring" and that he was tired of seeing the "same old people from high school." Situations like his, where students and parents assume that they will not qualify for financial aid and therefore do not apply, have been well documented in the literature (Hoxby & Avery, 2013; Perna, 2004).

This exchange also highlights poor understanding of the types of financial aid programs. This participant clearly misunderstood what programs were available and the nature of those programs (grant versus loan). This is not uncommon; students and families are often misinformed about types of aid packages, often thinking that all forms of federal aid must be repaid (Perna, 2004). Some of the College Advisors who were interviewed expressed frustration with this lack of understanding.

College Advisor participant: I often tell the students that they should apply to a particular school, whether it be public or private, but then they take one look at the sticker price and they tell me there is no way they can afford that. Then I tell them that they can apply for financial aid and see what happens. But then they tell me that there is no way their parents will ever let them borrow that much money. So I tell them, “You never know, you could get a grant or scholarships. You might not even need loans, or if you do, they might not be too high.” But they sometimes don’t believe me and they make me call their parents to tell them this. . . . This happens a lot, and I feel like, no matter what I say, until they see that financial aid package come in, they’re not going to believe me.

Although all but two alumni focus group and interview participants said that costs were either their top reason for choosing a college or within their top three choices, participants also had relatively low or no knowledge about actual college costs. I asked all participants who had enrolled in a postsecondary program for at least one semester to state their school charges in yearly tuition (and room/board if in a dormitory). Only four participants—two High Achievers, one Ivy Leaguer, and the participant who had gone to cosmetology school—could supply a number within 10% of the actual direct costs. Four students made guesses that were 20–25% too low; one student offered a number that was nearly 50% below actual direct cost, and one student overestimated his school’s costs by 25%. Two participants said that they did not know what their tuition was because they were getting full financial aid and cost was not a factor for them. They offered estimates that were approximately 15–20% below actual cost. Of the three participants in the focus

group who had enrolled in college and had since withdrawn, all cited costs as their primary reason for leaving. However, none of them could accurately state their actual costs. All other participants were not able to provide any estimate.

I asked participants about taking out loans, their willingness to take on debt to finance their education, and their overall debt. Participants' awareness about college loans was similarly vague. They were largely in two categories: those who adamantly refused to take on any debt and those who had taken on so much debt that they were reluctant to talk about it.

Participant: I chose Mercy because they gave me full financial aid and my mom didn't want me taking out any loans.

Researcher: If you don't mind me asking, where else had you gotten in?

Participant: I got into Fordham, but they only gave me like \$20,000 in grants and the rest loans, and I got into Temple. They gave me a little more, but then didn't offer me any loans, and there was no way my mom was going to be able to pay like \$12,000 a year for me to go.

Researcher: What about SUNY and CUNY? Did you apply to those?

Participant: I did, I wanted to go to Binghamton, it was my first choice, but I didn't get in. Oh, and Stony Brook too. I got into SUNY Plattsburgh though, but I didn't realize how far that was. It's almost near Vermont and, once you pay for room and board, it was going to get pretty expensive, too. Mercy was free. I really wanted to go away, but it's okay.

Researcher: Let's say you had applied to Harvard or Yale, or whatever college you think would be the most prestigious and best to go to. If you had gotten into a school like that, would you have taken out loans? Would your mother have been okay with that?

Participant: [smiles] Well, then I would have begged her. Who knows? I guess for Harvard she might have said "yes", but Lord knows I wasn't getting in there anyway.

The irony of this is that this student, had she been able to gain admittance, would likely have qualified for Harvard's no-loan program, which guarantees free tuition to any student whose parents make less than \$60,000.

Of the nine participants who had taken loans to finance their education, only four knew how much they owed currently, two knew what interest rate they were paying, and none knew what their final cost of their education would likely be when all coursework was finished. Several spoke about their debt with embarrassment or despair. A few indicated that the choice to take loans had been impulsive and that they now regretted the decision. One focus group participant said that he was not sure whether it was all "worth it," with regard to the cost and what he would be paying back. When he said this, his focus group counterparts who had also taken loans agreed.

Others were not so quick to come to that conclusion about loans. While several participants acknowledged that the loans would likely be a burden, they considered it to be well worth the effort and final cost. Perhaps the most enlightening of these conversations was one with an interview participant who was currently in her last year at a highly selective but also expensive college.

Researcher: Okay, let's talk a little about how you're financing your education. You're going to a great school; are you paying for it? Or should I say are you and your parents paying for it? Are you getting financial aid, loans?

Participant: Yes, I do get financial aid . . . but I am also taking out a lot of loans, too . . . more than I had planned to.

Researcher: Do you mind me asking about how much? How much are you taking out in loans? How much do you owe?

Participant: [Drops her head and laughs to herself]

Researcher: Uh oh, is it that bad?

Participant: I know it's bad. I just don't know *how* bad. This is my last year, and I know I have to start paying this money back soon. I don't really know how much I owe. When the email comes from Great Lakes [loan servicer], I won't even look at it. At the bill, I mean, the final number. I won't open the email and look at the number that I owe. I'm actually too scared to look.

Researcher: I don't want to make you uncomfortable, so feel free to tell me to mind my own business. But do you have an idea of how much you owe? You don't even have to give me a number, I just want to know if you know an approximate number.

Participant: I think [sighs it's like \$62,000.

Researcher: Oh. Yeah that's a lot, but I've heard worse. What do your parents think about you carrying that amount of debt?

Participant: [looks away, scrunches face] My mom, I haven't really told her how much I have borrowed. I mean, she knows it's a lot. She gets the letter in the spring, she must know, but we don't talk about it. It wasn't that much the first year, but altogether, it's adding up to a lot.

Researcher: If you had to do it all over again, would you? Would you still go to [school]? Or would you have picked somewhere else?

Participant: I'm not sure. If I get a job, then it will all be worth it. If I don't, then I'd say no. . . . But I had the best time at school and I feel like I learned so much. The professors are great and I met people who I will know forever. And I just love [city].

Researcher: What did you say you were majoring in again?

Participant: Communications. . . . I want to go into advertising.

Chapter Summary

In the literature on human migration, reasons for people to leave one area or nation for another are often referred to as “push-pull” factors (Geographic Alliance, 2011). Push factors—those that encourage one to leave the current location—generally include war, famine, lack of jobs, access to healthcare, and so forth. Pull factors are more favorable conditions that encourage one to settle in a new area and establish that as the new home. These include safety, good climate, access to employment and schools, adequate health care, and so forth. The data analysis and my experiences in working with

YPIE have prompted me to see college enrollment in a similar vein. Students are motivated by a series of push-pull factors that either enable or deter their enrollment and persistence in a postsecondary setting. For YPS students, college push-pull factors included school culture, institutional support systems, peers, perceptions of academic preparedness, and family and money. Figure 24 illustrates the push-pull factors affecting postsecondary outcomes as cited by YPS alumni.



Figure 24. Push-pull factors affecting postsecondary outcomes as cited by Yonkers Public Schools alumni.

Money is probably the single most influential factor, as it determines not only whether a student is able to enroll, but where a student chooses to enroll. If students make informed and grounded decisions about financing their college education, outcomes can potentially benefit the entire family. However, choices regarding college that are either

emotional or impulsive could put a significant burden on the students and their family for years to come.

Family financial circumstance is important in that it not only acts as its own push-pull factor but also determines the magnitude of the influence of many other push-pull factors in a student's decision to enroll in and stay in a postsecondary school. SES may determine where a student grows up and attends school. This will in turn determine the kinds of educational opportunities, what kinds of college-level and preparatory courses are available in high school, and even the overall level of expectation from school-based adults that the students can and should go to college. It seems that the best way for college-bound students to combat the disadvantage of growing up in poverty is to make need-based grants available to students to reduce costs.

High school seniors must be encouraged to apply to what some College Advisors call "financial safety" schools: schools to which a student will almost certainly be accepted and for which the student can afford to pay out of pocket or finance through modest loans. Some smaller colleges offer guaranteed scholarships to attract students who would normally attend a more prestigious school, which can help low-income families.

High-achieving students from Yonkers have many college options available to them. With the guidance provided by YPIE and school staff, they can find a good college match and go on to be quite successful. Some even gain entrance to top-tier schools even with grades and standardized test scores lower than those by other accepted freshman.

For borderline or struggling students, options are more limited. Under present conditions, for many disadvantaged students, "college choice" is really no choice at all.

Many of the students from Yonkers have made the lackluster choice between a for-profit college, incurring large student debt and a degree that might not be appreciated, and a community college and a degree that they may never earn.

CHAPTER 9

COLLEGE ACCESS: MOVING FORWARD

With regard to postsecondary access and enrollment, the students and school system in Yonkers, New York, have much to celebrate. Students in Yonkers strongly believe that a college education is essential to their success, and nearly 80% plan to attend college. Students who attend and graduate from YPS experience many of the same macro-level factors that boost or inhibit their chances for postsecondary success as those experienced by students in other high-poverty school districts. These include SES, race, quality of primary and secondary schools attended, and access to information about college, financial aid, and career.

Nearly 30 years following court-ordered desegregation, Yonkers and many of the public schools in Yonkers continue to be highly segregated by race and SES. YPS suffer from a terrible reputation problem that has meant that very few middle-class parents send their children to those schools, especially at the high school level. Despite what would seem to be a set of insurmountable barriers, Yonkers high school graduates have access to information about college and financial aid, they apply to college, and they enroll at impressive rates. This is possible because YPS students are supported by several key individuals in their homes, their communities, and their schools.

YPIE provides students valuable access to information about college, support in the application process, and other key services that help students to overcome hurdles that might normally prevent or delay enrollment. More important, the organization does this with mostly private funds and at little to no cost to the district. Part of the YPIE's success lies in its research-based, multifaceted approach to college access. In addition to college

information and planning services, YPIE offers students support with SATs and ACTs, essay writing, and financial aid applications. A key to YPIE's success is the organization's ability to assess its own limitations and address these quickly. When YPIE realized that college access meant more than establishing college offices, they moved quickly to start a middle school program, a graduation coach program, and support for students via interview skills training. Especially considering its size, YPIE is an extraordinarily well organized and highly effective organization, and it has made a significant contribution to the city of Yonkers and to the lives of countless young people.

YPIE does an excellent job of helping most students to negotiate the college and career planning process. The organization has filled gaps left by budget cuts and reductions in school-based personnel in several key areas: (a) providing access to information about college and careers to parents and students in both English and Spanish as early as the seventh grade; (b) exposing students to college campuses through bus trips and to college personnel during school visits and college fairs; (c) giving students tools to complete the college application process (access to computers, college books, applications, brochures, etc.); (d) dedicating a full-time staff member to the college center and issues related to college and career; (e) giving more students access to SAT preparation classes such as Princeton Review and one-on-one tutoring; (f) multiple methods to aid in creation and refining of college essays; and (g) help in completing and submitting FAFSA forms. All of this has helped to create a culture of college going in each of the city's high schools. As a result, students who attend YPS have high college intentions, meaning that they research and apply to one or more schools and report that they have intentions to attend one of these schools after graduation. Despite what other

research indicates about low-income students and potential first-generation college goers, Yonkers students are motivated to continue their education, earn some type of college degree, and gain meaningful employment.

When I began this work, I expected to find that YPIE had an immediate and outright effect on postsecondary outcomes of Yonkers students; in some sense, I found this to be so. Since YPIE was established, the number of seniors who have applied to college has increased by 59% and scholarship awards have increased by nearly \$30 million a year. However, most of the changes related to college enrollment and persistence for YPS students have been more subtle. College enrollment has increased steadily since 2004, but since 2009 this enrollment has happened sooner after graduation. Today, with the help of YPIE, students from Yonkers behave more like traditional college students, starting right after high school and staying for a second and third semester at higher rates.

First-semester matriculation rates for Yonkers graduates have risen from 48.9% in 2004 to 63.3% in 2011, and the gap in first-semester enrollment between Yonkers and the rest of the United States continues to close. This subtle change in enrollment behavior, along with the additional financial aid and scholarship dollars, may mean that newer cohorts of YPS will find it easier to persist and complete a degree. Some YPS graduates still take a short break before enrolling in a postsecondary school but matriculate at some point. Currently, nearly 75% of 2011 graduates have enrolled in college. This is particularly noteworthy in a district in which more than three fourths of all school children and more than 9 in 10 high school students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches.

The majority of Yonkers high school graduates who enroll in a postsecondary institution enroll in 4-year colleges (about 6 in 10). However, community colleges continue to play a vital role in the pathway to a degree. Westchester Community College accounts for nearly one third of all Yonkers graduates' enrollment. Many of the students who start at one of the community colleges eventually transfer to earn 4-year degrees. Regardless of school type, most Yonkers students stay close to home for college: More than 90% of all enrollment activity is within an hour's drive of Yonkers.

Race and Socioeconomic Status

Race and SES continue to play a major role in educational opportunity in Yonkers. Gaps exist between Black and Hispanic students and their White and Asian counterparts in college intentions, educational aspirations, college enrollment, types of college attended, and patterns of enrollment.

Similar to national trends, Asian and White students enroll in colleges, especially 4-year colleges, at higher rates than their Black and Hispanic counterparts, and girls enroll at higher rates than boys. However, Black students enroll in college immediately following high school at higher rates than they do nationwide: 70.9% in Yonkers versus 67.5% nationally. White students in Yonkers also enroll at higher rates than their counterparts nationally: 79% versus 68%. These statistics are very encouraging. Gaps in enrollment also remain with regard to family and school affluence. While individual student data on FRPL status was not available, there was a clear connection between overall poverty in each school and postsecondary enrollment. Yonkers High School has the most affluent student body of all high schools in the district, and its graduates' overall postsecondary enrollment and enrollment in 4-year colleges are higher, too. The three

poorest schools—Lincoln, Gorton, and Roosevelt—all have much lower levels of enrollment.

It is difficult to imagine that, in a school district where more than three quarters of the students live at or near poverty, there is a “rich get richer” cycle of advantage, but this definitely seems to exist. It is clear that students who attend Yonkers High School are getting many of the same types of educational advantages as are received by students who attend schools in more affluent school districts. They have access to more advanced and rigorous coursework and more educational opportunity, which translates to better postsecondary outcomes. Highly educated, affluent, and school-knowledgeable parents know this, consider it the only public high school option in the district, and overwhelmingly have their children apply there during the balloting period. If their children attend school there, they advocate for better resources, and this perpetuates the cycle.

Making a Path Toward Postsecondary Success

Yonkers graduates have not yet closed gaps in degree attainment. Only about a third of students earn any degree within six years of graduating. Students who only attend 4-year colleges have much more success than their peers who attend community colleges or transfer between community colleges and 4-year colleges. About two-thirds of enrollees who attend only 4-year colleges earn degrees within six years. Much of this may have to do with the lack of college readiness and the need to take remedial coursework when enrolled in college. The few students who I encountered who had taken remedial classes in college quickly became frustrated by lack of progress. This may be why graduation rates from the community colleges are low; 2-year graduation rates from

community colleges are about 1%. Of the nearly 900 students who enrolled in a community college from the classes of 2009 through 2011, only 9 graduated within 2 years. The 3-year graduation rate from community colleges is about 5%.

Coursework alone does not explain postsecondary success or lack thereof; several push-pull factors affect students' desire and ability to enroll in college. College enrollees cited several key factors in their own success, including friends, school-based support, financial aid, and guidance in high school from YPIE and school-based guidance staff. However, parents and family were cited most often as the key support system that kept them focused and motivated on school and the future. Almost all interview and focus group participants talked about wanting to succeed for their parents, either to take care of them in the future or to repay them for the sacrifices that they have made.

One expected finding in this research was the role of financial aid in a student's choice of college. Students often made choices based on the size of their financial aid packages from the school to which they had applied. Financing a college education has been difficult for many students and the reason that several have left postsecondary settings. Students who did not plan to or who had not enrolled in college cited lack of financial aid and cost as the top reasons for this decision.

However, financial aid plays a more nuanced role in college choices than expected. It became clear in my time in a YPIE college center and conducting interview and focus group sessions that study participants were either misinformed or misguided about financial aid and college costs and had little to no college finance awareness. Perna (2006) suggested in her college success gap model that students make rational choices about financing college based on a series of cost-benefits analyses. I argue that this is

likely not the case and that high school students must be armed with clearer information regarding financial aid in order to make sound choices. This is especially true for students who are the first or one of the first in their immediate families to go to college and whose families have not had much experience with making these types of investment choices. I argue that many of the choices regarding college financing come from a more emotional place, where students make choices based on “loving” a campus or name recognition, regardless of cost or affordability. Conversely, other students and their families unintentionally “undermatch” themselves to less prestigious and more rigorous schools than they could attend in favor of cheaper options. As suggested by Carnevale and Strohl (2013) and discussed in Chapter 3, this could significantly lessen their chances of earning a degree and gainful employment.

Much of the misinformation regarding financing a college education comes from a misunderstanding of student loans, including confusion about repayment terms, interest rates, and total amount borrowed. YPS graduates who contributed to this work generally were in two categories with regard to student loans: those who refused to take loans and those who had taken many loans. Many students stayed away from student loans due to fear of going into debt and not being able to repay the loans. Given the current state of the national economy and the high rate of recent graduate unemployment, this fear is not unfounded, but it can cause students to undermatch themselves to less selective colleges. Students in the other group took on a considerable, seemingly exorbitant amount of debt to pay for college. Many of them experienced anxiety over what they would owe in the future, some wondering whether it had all been “worth it.” Again, referring to Perna’s

success gap model, I question whether these choices were rational choices based on any real cost-benefit analysis.

One of the issues that faced students when choosing a college stemmed from the research that they were doing about the colleges to which they applied. Most participants talked about spending countless hours researching their colleges, perusing websites and brochures, even visiting campuses and speaking with current and former students. According to interviews, focus groups, and the 12th-Grade Survey, students picked schools that seemed like the “right fit” for them, based on type of major/academic program, type of school, location, and cost. These are all very important factors in choosing a college. However, students should also look at the college’s ability to move them toward graduation and help them to find a job. YPS graduates seemed unaware about the number of students at their specific institutions who go on to earn a degree. They also talked very little about the ability to turn a degree from a specific institution into an actual job as a factor in their decisions. While some participants mentioned excellent job placement programs or job placement rates at their schools, not one cited this as a factor in the actual decision to attend a particular school.

Building on a Framework

Perna’s success gap model (2006) proved to be very useful in framing current understanding of postsecondary success for students, especially with regard to low-income, minority, and other potential first-generation college goers. In some ways however, that model oversimplifies the process of college decision making, especially with regard to paying for college. Sometimes, decisions about how much to pay for college or how much to borrow come from an emotional place instead of a rational place.

In other instances, there is misinformation and misunderstanding about financial aid and student loans.

Figure 25 presents Perna's postsecondary success model and Figure 26 presents my postsecondary success model. In the new model, steps are situated so that they build on each other. In the "college achievement" box, "remediation" has been added as a subcategory, as this is an important part of many students' postsecondary story. Career participation has been added to the post-college attainment box, as well. It makes no sense to go through the steps of postsecondary education if the result is not a desired career.

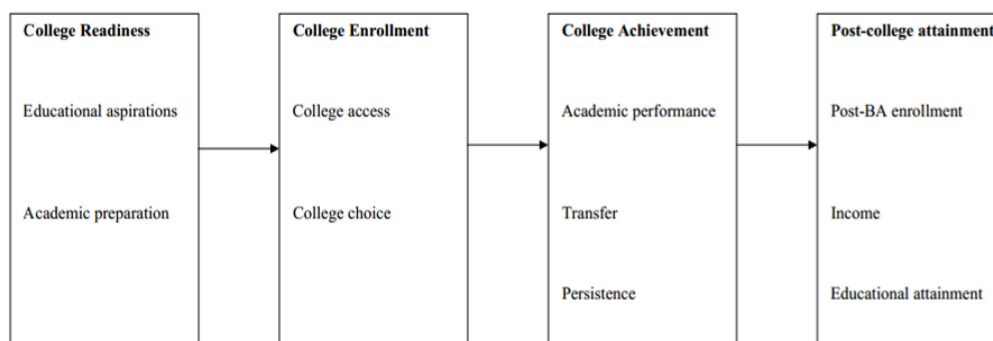


Figure 25. Perna's model of postsecondary success.

The main addition is an entirely new stage called "access to quality information." Access to quality information about college and career is highly valuable to all students. Middle-class and upper-middle-class students often get this type of information from school guidance counselors but also from parents or parents' social networks. Low-income students and others who are potential first-generation college goers are more likely to rely on school-based staff for this information and assistance. Students who go

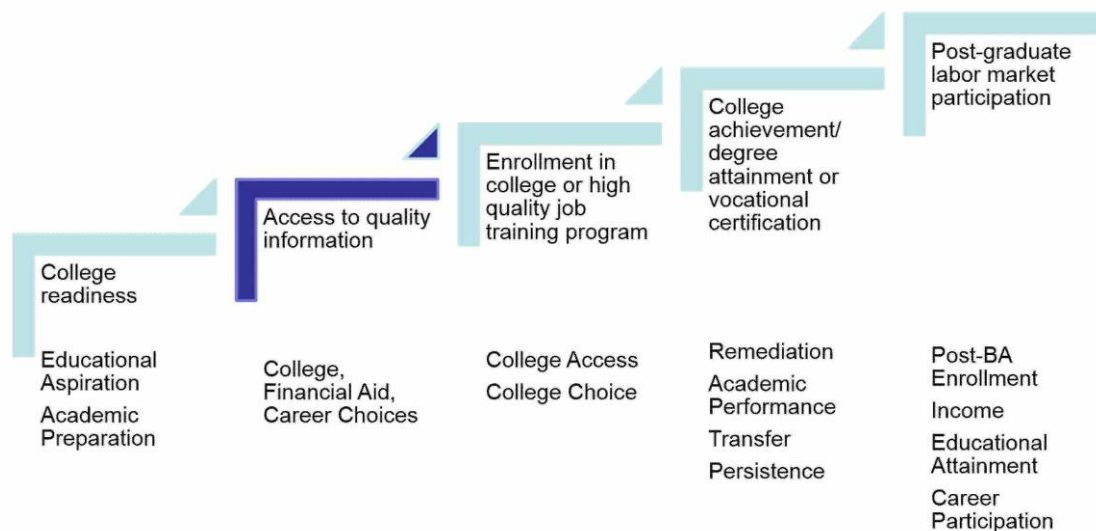


Figure 26. Suggested model of postsecondary success.

to schools with limited resources, where guidance counselor time is limited, and who come from homes without a strong family history of college attendance have very few college “experts” in their lives. Access to quality information is likely to be limited, which may have an impact on postsecondary outcomes. One of the reasons that college attendance is higher in Yonkers than in other highly challenged school districts is that YPIE provides what Yonkers parents and schools may not be able to provide in terms of information. In fact, the information and guidance provided to student by YPIE rivals that available to students in many far more affluent suburban districts.

As with the other stages in Perna’s model, this new second step has several substages: information about college, information about paying for college, and information about career options. All three of these substages were derived from the findings of this study. To make rational choices about whether and where to apply to or attend college, students and their parents need to be armed with high-quality information. However, the information that students have been receiving is not comprehensive and

may be simplistic, essentially a mentality of “just go, and you’ll be fine” regarding college attendance. For some students, this may actually do more harm than good.

Students must be supplied the tools to make responsible choices about career path, college major, costs, and quality of institution. They must learn that there is a difference between borrowing \$90,000 for a communications degree and borrowing the same sum for a degree in biomedical engineering. They must be warned about the pitfalls of designer label universities and they must be helped to resist the urge to undermatch themselves to a college that they perceive as easy or offering them more money.

Grades 11 and 12 are too late to provide access to information about college and careers. The majority of well-paying jobs of the future will be in the sciences, mathematics, and technology. For students to be able to pursue careers in these fields, they must take preparatory courses early in high school, which requires that they commit to a rigorous set of coursework by Grades 8 or 9.

The third substage, information about career, may prove to be more controversial than it first appears. Part of making a good postsecondary plan is to be armed with the most comprehensive information possible. For some students, the best postsecondary plan may not include college; rather, it may focus on a career that involves high-quality technical training. There are many well-paying and fulfilling jobs that do not or should not require a college degree but instead require good vocational training.

College is still a young person’s best chance for breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty, and anyone with the desire and willingness to apply himself or herself should be afforded an opportunity to attend. However, not everyone has the desire or the ability to attend college.

Attewell et al. (2009) found long-term, multigenerational positive effects of college attendance on disadvantaged young women who enrolled in CUNY in the 1970s. However, the current postsecondary world is very different from the world of the 1970s. In an effort to regain its former prestige, CUNY ended its open enrollment policy in 1999 (Lavin & Weininger, 2000). As a result, many disadvantaged students who would have been given a chance at CUNY's 4-year colleges have once again been relegated to the system's community colleges until they can complete requisite remedial courses and pass mathematics, reading, and writing examinations.

Research subjects in the Attewell et al. (2009) study attended public universities, and cost of education was far less a concern then than now. Many of the women in the study attended CUNY before the school instated tuition in 1976 or for very low tuition. These young women did not have to worry about accruing debt that they could potentially be paying for the rest of their lives. Today's college students, even public college and university students, are often burdened by debt. The sting of this debt is even worse if it is accrued without actually earning a degree. Despite high costs, many for-profit colleges proliferate because they are often seen as a better alternative to community colleges. Many for-profit colleges require fewer or no remedial courses. This must be very attractive to a student who could potentially have to pay for and take four or five 6-hour-per-week noncredit courses.

If researchers followed cohorts of young people who attend community colleges and for-profit colleges in their current incarnation, would the outcomes be as positive as they were for the Attewell cohort? While some of the positive effects would remain, the burden of debt and the frustration of lack of progress in college would limit the

intergenerational positive effects of college attendance for disadvantaged families. When high schools and college advisors offer students quality information about postsecondary life, high-quality vocational training should be one of the options. There is no shame in being a carpenter, an electrician, or mechanic; these are good jobs that can pay as much or more than jobs requiring a master's degree. There are also new technology sector jobs that can be staffed using vocation programs, such as nanotechnology facilities management and biotechnology machine repair.

Perna's model does not address the countless students who each year will not make it to college. The ultimate goal is to increase the number of students who enroll in and graduate from college, and vocational programs have been used to marginalize young people of color and steer them out of college preparatory programs. However, young people who are not college bound are also not given opportunities to learn trade skills. They are sent off into the world with no options, which can only perpetuate the cycle of poverty from which they have come.

Uninspiring "Choices"

For many high-achieving low-income students, the college choice and decision process is an exciting one, filled with the promise of opportunity to come. However, many moderate and lower achieving students have rather uninspiring choices with regard to pursuing a postsecondary education. With shrinking endowments and state aid, colleges are eager to position themselves as ever more selective in order to attract more funding for their research divisions. As a result, many are taking a smaller percentage of their applicants each year. Other colleges, in an effort to bolster their reputation, are no longer willing to take students which they perceive to need remedial coursework. Also,

many institutions are moving away from need-blind admissions policies in favor of “need-sensitive” policies, which favor more affluent applicants and limits the number of accepted low-income students. Furthermore, with only 16% of students graduating “college and career ready” as defined by the state of New York, many Yonkers graduates are not be able to attend 4-year public colleges, which generally provide high-quality education for a reasonable price. Policies like this severely limit educational opportunity for our most vulnerable young people and do the greater society a great disservice. Since and we are not currently offering young people a meaningful alternative to college and at present we are committed to telling students that they “need” to enroll, we ought to at the very least provide them a realistic opportunity for which to do so.

Instead of opportunity, many low-income young people will be faced with a set of lackluster or uninspiring postsecondary options. These options include (a) attending a community college, where they may have to take several semesters of expensive non-credit bearing remedial coursework. It may take these students several years to complete an associate’s degree, which generally do not lead to well-paying jobs. If they are eventually able to move onto a 4-year college, many of their credits will not be accepted and they will be forced to repeat some of the same coursework; (b) attending a potentially low quality for-profit college with a less than stellar reputation, and acquire a large amount of student debt in the process; (c) attending a high price, low selectivity private non-profit college and risk accruing high levels of debt or having to withdraw because of inability to pay tuition; (d) not attend college and have extreme limitations placed on their ability to find stable and well-paying work; (e) joining the military, which poses a threat to their life and emotional well-being. Again these choices are uninspiring at best,

and dangerous at worst. For many low-income students, the notion of “college choice” is really no choice at all.

Policy Implications

The findings from this research can be used to inform policy initiatives and changes at YPIE, in Yonkers, and in other cities across the country. Much of what is being done in Yonkers with regard to college access is replicable. Other cities (such as Newark, as discussed in Chapter 7) might benefit from a similar public-private partnership through a local education fund like YPIE. Having school-based personnel whose only job is to focus on postsecondary planning and success not only removes the pressure from guidance staff; it also creates a culture of college going that eventually permeates each school and the district. As students go to college and eventually earn degrees, they contribute to a more educated citizenry, they qualify for higher skill jobs, and they bolster the local economy. Also, college-only dedicated staff gives inner-city, low income students a rare benefit that even many of their wealthier suburban public school peers do not enjoy.

To broaden their impact in Yonkers and perhaps to serve as a model for other districts, YPIE might find it beneficial to address several issues. First, the organization does not enjoy the benefit of immediate name recognition with students or parents in Yonkers. There seems to be some confusion about the distinction between school-based traditional guidance counselors and the YPIE staff. YPIE sends out communications with the YPIE logo, has its own Facebook and Twitter pages, and pays for almost all of the college-themed programs in the district. Still, some students, parents, and community

members are confused or oblivious to the role of the organization in the community and in their lives. This confusion can only serve to limit the organization's success.

Despite YPIE efforts to be universally inclusive, some YPS students feel that either they or some of their peers are not afforded the optimal amount of time by YPIE staff. This may be inevitable, based on the volume of students, the high level of needs in each of the schools that YPIE serves, and the limited number of staff members that they can provide. Being aware of this fact and attempting to address this issue are imperative. As the organization grows, it should consider adding staff or volunteers to take on some of the advisor responsibilities. It is hoped that the YPIE new 9th-grade graduation coach program, YPIE Scholars, will help YPIE to focus on students who might not normally receive as much attention as high-achieving students.

While college attendance rates in Yonkers are noteworthy, it is sobering to think about the students who fail to graduate from high school or who graduate but have no postsecondary plan. If Yonkers' graduation rate is about 71% and about 70% of those graduates go on to college, only about half of students who enter Grade 9 in a Yonkers public school will enroll in college. In the past, YPIE has had little control over high school graduation rates; the YPIE Scholars Program may also help address this issue.

YPIE and YPS have done little to address the needs of students who do not make immediate postsecondary plans. Every year, 10% to 15% of all YPS students report not having any immediate plans for life after high school. This number is as high as 20% among males and Black and Hispanic students. Some of these young people will eventually make it to college; this research has demonstrated that these groups tend to enroll in college more slowly. Others will find their way into the military or gain

employment somewhere. However, it is unsettling to think that so many of these young people are thrown into the world without any sense of what they will do later in life and with very few skills that will allow them a comfortable existence.

Low degree attainment rates are another indication that college readiness may be more of an issue than access for YPS students. In the future, YPIE will need to reevaluate what has so far been a “college for all” model. To date, YPIE has done very little to encourage or help students who might be better suited to a job training or vocational program. In YPIE’s defense, they are not big enough, do not have the manpower, nor have the resources to do this effectively. Also, to step away from a college-for-all model would undoubtedly be difficult, as nobody wants to be seen as potentially limiting any student’s educational opportunities. However, if as many as 1 in 5 young men of color among students from Yonkers are graduating without a postsecondary plan, it is clear that their educational opportunities are already limited.

What would likely be the most help to the thousands of low-income students who graduate from YPS would be a pendulum swing away from federal loan programs back toward grants and work-study programs. The U.S. government does these students and itself a great injustice when it allows them to be weighed down with such high levels of debt at such a young age. Among the students who are forced to quit school because of financial reasons might be our next great technical, scientific, or political mind.

Until this pendulum swing comes, for the benefit of the young people served by YPIE and YPS, adults who work on the college process need better training and professional development regarding financial aid and financing college. They should reach consensus about which colleges are worth borrowing money for and which are not.

YPIE might consider conducting some type of “return on investment” analysis of the most-subscribed 4-year postsecondary schools and then establish partnerships with those schools that offer a good value. This might push more qualified students toward a 4-year college and a bachelor’s degree and reduce the amount of debt that they incur.

Although it may step beyond the role of a traditional college advisor, some conversation should take place about how much Yonkers young people and their parents should be encouraged to borrow toward education costs. It is important to help young people to negotiate the thin line between pragmatism and educational opportunity. This might prove to push more qualified students toward 4-year colleges and a bachelor’s degree and reduce the amount of debt that they incur. Students should not be discouraged students from using student loans to finance a high-quality education but they should not take on high levels of debt before they are old enough to drink legally or have a job to repay the loans.

Even when the choices regarding college are not emotional or are made for non goal-oriented reasons, many 12th-grade students are too confused or overwhelmed to make sound decisions about college. If their parents have not had to negotiate these life choices themselves, the students run the risk of being left to negotiate these choices alone. Students in Yonkers definitely would benefit from increased financial literacy and awareness. More high-quality financial planning and financial aid demystifying workshops and information sessions would be appropriate. YPIE or YPS might also consider engaging a volunteer who is informed about financial aid or a staff person to work in each school 1 or 2 days a week to help students and parents to decipher aid

package letters, make responsible choices about loans, and research scholarship opportunities.

In Yonkers there seems to be a misconception that the parents and families of YPS students are not interested in or focused on college at a level equivalent to that in other districts. This is especially true when people speak about the local Hispanic/Latino community. Granted that family participation and turnout at college events vary greatly and are sometime embarrassingly low, this should not be attributed to apathy about college. Parents are almost certainly confused about the college process, the types of colleges, and financial aid. This study provides assurance that these generalizations about parental apathy are mistaken. The best evidence to support this is in the way YPS alumni describe the sacrifices that their parents make to get them to attend and finish college.

It would be in the best interest of the City of Yonkers and YPS to use the findings from this study to bolster its public image. Yonkers may have its struggles but it offers disadvantaged students more education opportunity than they might find elsewhere. Enrollment, persistence, and degree attainment statistics may not yet be at national norms but are considerably more positive than those in similar cities such as Newark, New Jersey. As people become aware of these successes, the city will seem more attractive to young families who are looking for an affordable place to live close to New York City.

College enrollment and persistence data tell an excellent success story, but it is difficult to disentangle YPIE's influence from other factors that are bolstering student success. The district's superintendent, who served from 2005 to 2014 and won several awards, including New York State's Superintendent of the Year award in 2011, implemented many changes in classroom instruction, curriculum, and administrative

personnel that may have had an impact on college intentions and access. Also during this time, YPS, as with most schools districts in the nation, has been under pressure to raise standards, increase graduation rates, and prepare students for college and career. In 2001, No Child Left Behind incentivized schools to raise proficiency and graduation rates by holding them accountable for student success.

Yonkers implemented a free full-day Pre-K program in the late 1980s as part of its desegregation order. The number of students participating in this program rose steadily throughout the 1990s and became open to all 4-year-olds in 1999. The students from that first universal Pre-K cohort graduated in 2011. That graduating class had far higher immediate college enrollment rates than any previous cohort. In fact, increases in college enrollment seem to mirror increases in participation in Pre-K. While it is not possible to draw a direct relationship between Pre-K and college enrollment without more data and research, that extra time in a high-quality preschool classroom might have been very meaningful for those who participated. Unfortunately, due to budget cuts during the 2008 recession, Pre-K has been scaled back to a half-day program. It would behoove the district to study this connection and use the findings to make the case for restoration of those funds.

All of these possible elements of student success working in tandem highlight a very important point. As Perna argued in her college success gap model, college success is too complex to be explained by a single variable or factor. This is especially true for low-income and underrepresented students, who may have far more riding on their success than just themselves and who may be faced with more stressors than traditional college students. Yonkers students, like students everywhere, will likely see the greatest

college success if their schools, community groups such as YPIE, families, and the colleges that they attend work together to address the disparate issues that have so far led to educational stagnation in low-income districts. The key is to address college persistence through a dynamic and multifaceted approach.

Future Research

When I began this project two years ago, I tried to justify to anyone with whom I spoke why Yonkers should be studied. I talked about the vestiges of deindustrialization and segregation, the overall stagnation of the city's economy, and my desire to improve the reputation of the public schools. Yonkers still has many challenges ahead, but it is in many ways a success story. This research demonstrates that studying Yonkers can provide insight for researchers and policymakers who are interested in bolstering college access and attendance rates for low-income students, students of color, and first-generation college goers.

Future research will include helping YPIE and YPS to collect data to allow a closer examination of the early indicators of college success, as well the effect of disparate student characteristics on persistence and graduation. This study can serve as a springboard to a larger and longitudinal study in Yonkers. The research could follow the graduating classes and subjects studied here and assess the extent to which they have achieved postsecondary success and eventual job attainment, as well as which colleges were best matches for their particular needs. The most impressive finding in this study was the high rate of college enrollment of Black students from Yonkers. Further study of

the keys to this particular success could be meaningful for young people of color in urban schools throughout the nation.

YPIE is embarking on an entirely new set of programs aimed at providing younger students, as early as seventh grade, with access to information about jobs, college planning, financial aid, and financial literacy and helping them to negotiate a path toward high school graduation. These two programs, discussed briefly in Chapter 3, have the potential to improve high school graduation rates and perhaps the perception of the district as a whole. These programs would be exciting to document and evaluate.

It was not my intention to examine closely issues of student loan debt, financial aid awareness, and college costs. These topics arose through discussions with YPIE staff, while serving as a College Advisor, and during interviews and focus groups. Money has been shown to be instrumental in a student's decision to enroll in, abstain from, or withdraw from a postsecondary school. Because Yonkers graduates have enjoyed a postsecondary success, a study focusing on Yonkers students and their experiences with financing their education may be warranted.

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Curriculum Vitae: Cara Kronen**Personal**

Born October 27, 1979, New York, NY

Education

Bronx High School of Science, Bronx, NY (1997)

B.A., Latin American and Caribbean Studies, Hunter College, City University of New York (2002)

M.A., Secondary Education in Social Studies, City College, City University of New York (2004)

Ph.D., Urban Systems, Rutgers University

Professional Experience

2013–Present Instructor, Teacher Education Department, Borough of Manhattan Community College, New York, NY

2008–Present Adjunct Instructor, Department of Early Childhood and Childhood Education, Lehman College, Bronx, NY

2009-2012 Research Assistant/Instructor, Urban Teacher Education Program, Rutgers University, Newark, NJ

2002-2009 Teacher/College Advisor, New School for Arts and Sciences, Bronx, NY

APPENDIX A

Institutional Review Board Approval Notice

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
ASB III, 3 Rutgers Plaza, Cook Campus
New Brunswick, NJ 08901

December 3, 2012

P.I. Name: Kronen
Protocol #: 13-206Mc

Cara Kronen
82 Helena Avenue
Yonkers NY 10710

Dear Cara Kronen:

✓
(Initial / Amendment / Continuation / Continuation w/ Amendment)

Protocol Title: "Pathways to College and Postsecondary Outcomes of High School Graduates in Yonkers, NY"

This is to advise you that the above-referenced study has been presented to the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, and the following action was taken subject to the conditions and explanations provided below:

Approval Date: 11/5/2012
Expedited Category(s): 6,7

Expiration Date: 11/4/2013
Approved # of Subject(s): 2540

This approval is based on the assumption that the materials you submitted to the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP) contain a complete and accurate description of the ways in which human subjects are involved in your research. The following conditions apply:

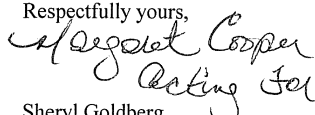
- **This Approval**-The research will be conducted according to the most recent version of the protocol that was submitted. **This approval is valid ONLY for the dates listed above;**
- **Reporting**-ORSP must be immediately informed of any injuries to subjects that occur and/or problems that arise, in the course of your research;
- **Modifications**-Any proposed changes **MUST** be submitted to the IRB as an amendment for review and approval prior to implementation;
- **Consent Form(s)**-Each person who signs a consent document will be given a copy of that document, if you are using such documents in your research. The Principal Investigator must retain all signed documents for at least three years after the conclusion of the research;
- **Continuing Review**-You should receive a courtesy e-mail renewal notice for a Request for Continuing Review before the expiration of this project's approval. However, it is your responsibility to ensure that an application for continuing review has been submitted to the IRB for review and approval prior to the expiration date to extend the approval period;

Additional Notes: Expedited Approval per 45 CFR 46.110
- IRB approval has been granted for the following: 9000 Student Data, 2500 Surveys, 40 Interviews and 2540 Subjects.

Failure to comply with these conditions will result in withdrawal of this approval.

Please note that the IRB has the authority to observe, or have a third party observe, the consent process or the research itself. The Federal-wide Assurance (FWA) number for the Rutgers University IRB is FWA00003913; this number may be requested on funding applications or by collaborators.

Respectfully yours,



Sheryl Goldberg
Director of Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
gibel@grants.rutgers.edu

cc: Alan R. Sadovnik

APPENDIX B**YPIE College Advisor Interview Protocol**

1. Can you briefly describe your job and responsibilities?
2. What are the most rewarding parts of your job?
3. What parts of your job, if any could you do without?
4. Do you help students complete FAFSA forms?
 - How do you feel about this part of your job?
 - Are you confident that you can do this successfully?
 - Why/or why don't you feel compelled to do this for your students.
5. When it comes to helping students plan for life after high school, what has surprised you most?
6. What have been your greatest successes?
And if any, your greatest frustrations or disappointments with regards to your job?
7. Do you speak to any of your former students?
What have they told you about life in college/career?
What challenges have they faced?
8. Describe briefly your relationship to the school in which you work. How is your relationship with the guidance staff based at the school? The administration?
9. In your opinion should we be sending all of our graduates to college? Is college for all the right mission for YPIE?
10. How do you feel about students taking out Student Loans to pay for college? Is there such thing as too much?
11. Is there anything else you wish to tell me about with regard to your job or helping students plan for college and or career?

APPENDIX C

YPIE Directors/Staff Interview Protocol

1. Can you briefly describe YPIE's goals/mission?
2. Why was YPIE established? Can you tell me a little about the organization's history?
3. Can you briefly describe YPIE's role in the city's schools?
4. What services does YPIE provide?
5. What exactly is your role in the organization?
6. Can you describe your responsibilities?
7. What are the most rewarding parts of your job?
8. What hurdles/challenges have you faced?
 - Internally
 - From the community
 - From the district
 - From other places
9. What progress has YPIE made toward its goal?
 - What have been the successes?
 - How do you measure these successes?
 - What role does data play in measuring your success?
10. Where do you see the organization in 5 years? 10?
11. Given the economy and poor job market for college graduates, do you still think a "College for All" model makes sense?
12. If not, what do you propose we do instead?
13. Last year the NYS Department of Education released a reports saying that the overwhelming majority of students in Yonkers and New York State were not academically ready for college.
 - How would you respond to this?
 - How, if at all, does this impact your mission?
14. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about YPIE, Yonkers, or College Planning that we have not already discussed?

APPENDIX D

Alumni Interview Protocol

Pre-Interview Questions

Age
 High School Attended
 Grad Date
 How would you describe your race/ethnicity?
 Do you live at home with your parents?

Interview Questions

Are you currently working?
 Where?
 Full time or part time?
 Are you currently enrolled in school?
 If so, which school?
 Full time or part time?
 Resident or commuter?
 How many colleges/vocational schools have you attended since high school?

Non-Attendees

If you are not attending school, had you been previously attended college?
 If so, where? How long? How many credits? Why did you leave? List any/all reasons. Do you plan on going back? When?
 If not, do you ever plan on attending college? Why are you not in school now? What barriers do you think keep you from going to college?
 What do you do for money?
 Did your parents want you to go to college?
 What do you think your parents feel about your choice not to go to college now/ever?

Planning for the future

Who would you say helped you plan for college/career while in high school? Think about people in school- but also people outside of school
 Did anyone talk to you about financial aid/ student loans while in high school?
 Do you feel as if you had enough help when planning for college/career?
 Do you think everyone in your school/grader had similar amounts of help? Let's talk about this some more
 Let's talk specifically about YPIE. Do you know YPIE? Do you know your YPIE advisor?
 Did you have a relationship with them? Explain
 Looking back, would you say you're the adults at your school expected you to go to college? Teachers, Principals, etc.
 What about the other students? Your friends outside of school?
 Did you hear adults at your school talk about college often? What about other students?
 When you were in high school, had you planned on attending college? What were you plans for life after high school?

When you were in high school, where did you think you would be right now? What did you think you would be doing?

What advice if any would you give high school students now that you have graduated?

Parents

When you were in high school, did you speak with your parents about college?

What goals, if any did your parents have for you after high school?

If you are in school now or have been in school since high school, how engaged, if at all were your parents in your college education?

Did either of your parents attend college?

Did they graduate?

From Where?

Degree?

In the 11th grade or start of the 12th grade have an honest conversation with your parents about how much they could and would pay for college?

Would you say your parents are proud of you?

College Experiences

How do/did you find the work in college? Hard, Challenging, Easy, etc?

Talk about all schools you have attended

What's been your favorite class?

What classes have been the most challenging?

How have your grades been so far?

What about the school keeps you engaged? Or are you bored there?

Is there anything about the school itself that you credit for keeping you on track/making you a successful student?

How do/did you pay for school?

Talk about all sources- parents, work, financial aid, scholarships, grants, etc.

Remember, you don't have to talk about this if you don't want to, but are you carrying student debt? Do you mind telling me how much?

How much is your tuition?

Future

Where do you see yourself in five years? Personally, Financially, etc.

What do you think you will need to do in order to make that happen?

What career would you like to pursue in the future? What is your dream job?

How likely would you say it is that you will eventually get your "dream job"

Is there anything else about college, career, or your future that you would like to share with me at this time?

APPENDIX E

Focus Group Outline: College Goers

First, let's talk a little about what you've been up to since you graduated from high school. What is your current education/employment status? Do you like school?

What keeps you focused and motivated to stay in school?

Discuss the main contributors to your success

What support systems do you have in place (family, friends, advisors, etc)

What would you say your support systems are?

Personal, family, school, friends, etc.

How engaged are you with campus activities?

Do you attend games, functions, parties, shows, etc?

Are you involved with student government, fraternities/sororities, clubs, honors societies, teams?

Do you have friends that live on campus?

Do you spend time on campus when you do not have classes?

Let's talk a little about the transition from high school to college?

What was easy/hard?

What challenges, if any did you face?

How did you handle your new levels of freedom and responsibility?

Do you feel like your high school had a "culture of college going"?

Was there a lot of discussion about college? Between adults and students, students and students

Did your teachers expect you to go to college? What about the other adults?

I want to ask you about how you chose the college you're attending?

How much was cost an issue for you?

How about location, size, geography?

What push/pull factors made the school your choice?

Without getting too personal, I want to ask you a little about how you deal with finances while at school

How are you paying for school? Talk about all sources- parents, work, financial aid, scholarships, grants, etc.

How often are you approached with credit card offers?

Do you know what the tuition is at your school?

How much is student loan debt on your radar? Yourself, friends, family member, etc.

Where do you see yourself in five years? Personally, Financially, etc.

What do you think you will need to do in order to make your goals a reality? I will give prompts and ask the respondents about

Skills

Support Systems

People

Looking back, who would you say was the most helpful in helping you plan for life after high school?

Who, if anyone spoke to you about college?

Who, if anyone spoke to you about career planning?

Who, if anyone did you turn to with questions about college and career?

Let's talk a little about YPIE. What was your relationship with YPIE? Did they help you?

Your friends? Everyone?

What advice if any would you give high school students now that you have graduated?

Finally let's talk about your parents/guardians.

What did they expect from you in high school?

Did they discuss college often with you while in high school?

Would you say your parents are proud of you?

APPENDIX F

Focus Group Outline: Non College Goers

First, let's talk a little about what you've been up to since you graduated from high school. What is your current education/employment status?

Do/Did you like school?

Was college ever on your radar? Had you planned on enrolling?

Do you feel like you got enough support when you were planning for life after high school? Was there enough help for you in the school?

Do you remember meeting working with or meeting your YPIE college advisor? What was that like?

Looking back, who would you say was the most helpful in helping you plan for life after high school?

Who, if anyone spoke to you about college?

Who, if anyone spoke to you about career planning?

Who, if anyone did you turn to with questions about college and career?

Do you feel like your high school had a "culture of college going"?

Was there a lot of discussion about college? Between adults and students, students and students

Did your teachers expect you to go to college? What about the other adults there?

Did your friends expect you to go to college?

Let's talk about your parents/guardians.

What did they expect from you in high school?

Did they discuss college often with you while in high school?

Would you say your parents are proud of you?

Where do you see yourself in five years? Personally, Financially, etc.

What do you think it will take for you to get there

College in your future? How much will that cost you

What do you think you will need to do in order to make your goals a reality? I will give prompts and ask the respondents about

Skills

Support Systems

People

What advice if any would you give high school students now that you have graduated?

Is there anything else you'd like to share with me about college or career?

APPENDIX G

Focus Group Outline: Withdrawn From College

First, let's talk a little about what you've been up to since you graduated from high school. What is your current education/employment status?

What factors led to your decision to leave school?

Did you like school? (high school and/or college)

How engaged were you with campus activities?

Do you attend games, functions, parties, shows, etc?

Are you involved with student government, fraternities/sororities, clubs, honors societies, teams?

Do you have friends that live on campus?

Do you spend time on campus when you do not have classes?

Let's talk a little about the transition from high school to college?

What was easy/hard?

What challenges, if any did you face?

How did you handle your new levels of freedom and responsibility?

Do you feel like your high school had a "culture of college going"?

Was there a lot of discussion about college? Between adults and students, students and students

Did your teachers expect you to go to college? What about the other adults?

Did your friends/classmates expect you to go to college?

I want to ask you about how you chose the college you're attending?

How much was cost an issue for you?

How about location, size, geography?

What push/pull factors made the school your choice?

Without getting too personal, I want to ask you a little about how you dealt with finances while at school

How did you paying for school? Talk about all sources- parents, work, financial aid, scholarships, grants, etc.

How often are you approached with credit card offers?

Do you know what the tuition is/was at your school?

How much is student loan debt on your radar? Yourself, friends, family member, etc.

Where do you see yourself in five years? Personally, Financially, etc.

Do you plan on returning to college soon? When?

What do you think you will need to do in order to make your goals a reality? I will give prompts and ask the respondents about

Skills

Support Systems

People

Looking back, who would you say was the most helpful in helping you plan for life after high school?

Who, if anyone spoke to you about college?

Who, if anyone spoke to you about career planning?

Who, if anyone did you turn to with questions about college and career?

Let's talk a little about YPIE. Were they helpful to you in the process? What was your relationship like with your college advisor?

What advice if any would you give high school students now that you have graduated?

Finally let's talk about your parents/guardians.

What did they expect from you in high school?

Did they discuss college often with you while in high school?

Would you say your parents are proud of you?

APPENDIX H**Alumni Interview and Focus Group Codes**

1. Academic preparedness
2. Access to information about career
3. Access to information about college
4. Access to information about financial aid
5. Career
6. College application process
7. College institutional supports
8. College Social Scene
9. Debt
10. Decision-making
11. Despair
12. Difficulty of coursework
13. Distractions (sub-codes: in-school, out-of-school)
14. Financing
15. Friend's Expectations
16. Friends
17. Future Plans (sub –codes: career, family, additional schooling, other)
18. Grades in College
19. Grades in High School
20. Grants and Scholarship
21. Helpers with the college application process (sub-codes: Parents, YPIE, Guidance Counselor, Teachers, Friends, other)
22. High School Adult Expectations (sub-codes Principal, Guidance Counselor, Teacher, YPIE Staff)
23. High School Culture of College Going

- 24. Owing debt to family (sub-code: financial debt, support debt, time debt)
- 25. Parental Expectations (sub-codes: mother, father)
- 26. Parental Support (sub-codes: mother, father)
- 27. Personal Expectations
- 28. Personal Potential
- 29. Pride/Embarrassment regarding outcomes
- 30. Remedial/Developmental skills courses
- 31. SAT's
- 32. Self- Efficacy
- 33. Sense of Belonging (at school)
- 34. Societal Expectations
- 35. Study habits
- 36. Working (sub-codes: while in school, while not in school)
- 37. Work-Study
- 38. Yonkers Partners in Education

APPENDIX I

Survey: Grade 12

*1. First Name

*2. Last Name

*3. Which best describes your race/ethnicity?

*4. What is your post-graduation plan?

5. If you do not plan on attending college or vocational school skip to question 11. What is the name of the college/vocational school you plan on attending? (this is the school to which you have committed, made a deposit AND where your FINAL High School Transcript will be sent):

6. For what reason(s) did you choose this college/vocational school (check all that apply):

- ☐ Academic area of interest (major)
☐ Academic reputation
☐ Size
☐ Location
☐ Financial aid provided
☐ Type of student body
☐ Student life/activities on campus
☐ Internship/job opportunities
☐ Job placement reputation
☐ I have friends/family members that attend this school
☐ Other:

7. Was this your first choice of schools?

☒ Yes ☐ No

8. When will you attend?

9. Do you plan on working while attending college or vocational school?

10. What is your intended major?

11. If you are not planning to attend college, what are the primary reasons (check all that apply):

- ☐ Did not get into the school(s) I wanted to attend
- ☐ Not enough financial aid
- ☐ Transportation too difficult or expensive
- ☐ Need to stay home to care for others
- ☐ Family does not want me to go
- ☐ Need to stay home and work
- ☐ Plan to enter the military
- ☐ Concerned I will not fit in
- ☐ Concerned I am not academically prepared
- ☐ English is not my first language
- ☐ Other:

12. What were the most challenging parts of the college application process (check all that apply):

- ☐ Taking the SAT/ACT
- ☐ Keeping up good grades
- ☐ Completing the college applications
- ☐ Completing the college essays
- ☐ Completing the financial aid forms
- ☐ Finding scholarships
- ☐ Applying for scholarships
- ☐ Discussing college plans with my family
- ☐ Other:

13. Which individuals were most helpful to you during the college search/application process (check all that apply):

- ☐ School Principal or Assistant Principal
- ☐ School Guidance Counselor
- ☐ YPIE College Advisor
- ☐ Teacher
- ☐ Parent
- ☐ Older Sibling
- ☐ Religious Leader

☐ Other adults in the community

☐ Friends

☐ Other:

*14. Did either of your parents/guardians ever attend college?

☐ Yes ☐ No

*15. Did either of your parents/guardians graduate from college?

☐ Yes ☐ No

*16. What language(s) do you speak most often at home?

*17. What is the highest level of education you plan on obtaining in the future?
(Please select exactly 1 choice(s).)

- ☐ High School Diploma
- ☐ Associate's Degree (AA)/ Vocational School Certificate
- ☐ Bachelor's Degree (BA/BS)
- ☐ Master's Degree (MA/MS)
- ☐ Medical Degree, Law Degree, or PhD

*18. Did you fill out a Federal Financial Aid form (FAFSA)?

☐ Yes ☐ No

*19. Think back to a year ago, when you were starting the college and career planning process. Did you at any point have an honest conversation with your parents about exactly how much money they were willing or able to spend on your college education each year.

20. What advice would you give to next year's seniors about the college application process?



*21. Please respond to the following statement. The YPIE College Advisor played a key role in my college process

*22. Please respond to the following statement. The YPIE College Center was a friendly and helpful place to visit.

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*23. Please respond to the following statement. Naviance was helpful during my college research and application process.

*24. Do you feel as if you've had enough counseling/support when planning for your future?

☒ Yes ☐ No

*25. How often have you heard adults in your school talk about college or career?

26. How often have you heard other students in your school discussing or talking about going to college?

*27. How often do your parents/guardians speak with you about college?

*28. How academically prepared do you feel you are to start college and do college level work?

*29. YPIE would like to stay in touch with you in the future. Is it okay for someone from YPIE to contact you regarding your progress in college and career?

☒ Yes ☐ No

30. If yes, please enter your contact information in the fields below.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Cell Phone	<input type="text"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Facebook Username	<input type="text"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Twitter Username	<input type="text"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Personal Email Address (Not your school email)	<input type="text"/>

APPENDIX J

Alumni Survey

Dear Yonkers Graduate, My name is Cara Kronen and I am a PhD student from Rutgers University in Newark, New Jersey. I am working with Yonkers Partners in Education to research the post- high school experiences of students who have graduated from the Yonkers Public Schools. I want to gain a better understanding of your experiences as a high school student, planning for college or career, and your experiences since leaving high school. I invite you to take part in my research by completing the short survey included with this letter. Participants who complete the survey by August 10, 2013, will be entered in a raffle to win an Apple iPad mini with Wi-Fi 16 GB (retail value \$329.99). Participation in the survey and study is completely voluntary, and you do not have to answer any questions that you are uncomfortable with. However, you must participate in order to be eligible for the raffle. If you do choose to participate, please complete the survey below. It should take no more than 10 minutes. This research is confidential. Confidential means that the research records will include some information about you and this information will be stored in such a manner that there is some linkage between your identity and the response in the research exists. Some of the information collected about you includes name, address, phone number, etc. Please note that we will keep this information confidential by limiting individual's access to the research data and keeping it in a secure location. You are not required to provide any identifying information (name, address, contact information) to me in order to participate in this survey, but you must provide contact information if you want to be included in the raffle. The Rutgers University Institutional Review Board, my faculty advisors, and I will be the only parties that will be allowed to see the data generated by this study, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, only group results will be stated. All data will be kept for five years. You may request a copy of any reports or articles generated from this material; my contact information and the contact information of my faculty advisor is listed below. There are no foreseeable risks to participation in this study. The benefits of taking part in this study may include: making it possible for more students to apply to and succeed in college and helping to guide policy and practice of the Yonkers Public Schools. If you have any questions about this study or study procedures, you may contact me or my faculty advisor.

Principal Investigator Cara Kronen 917-270-8366 carakronen@aol.com

Faculty Advisor Alan Sadovnik sadovnik@rutgers.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Rutgers IRB Administrator at :

Rutgers, The State University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 3 Rutgers Plaza New Brunswick, NJ 08901-2401
Tel: 848-932-0150 Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

Do you consent to participating in this survey?

- ☐ Yes- Please enter your first and last name. By entering your name below, you agree to participate in this study. (1) _____
- ☐ No (2)

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey

Q1 Which best describes your race/ethnicity?

- ☐ Asian (includes those from Indian sub-continent) (1)
- ☐ African American/Black (2)
- ☐ Latino/Hispanic (of any race) (3)
- ☐ Native American/Inuit/Eskimo (4)
- ☐ White/Caucasian (includes Middle Eastern, North African, and Europeans) (5)

Q2 Gender

- ☐ Male (1)
- ☐ Female (2)

Q3 From which high school did you graduate?

- ☐ Enter school name here (1) _____

Q4 High School Graduation Date

- ☐ January 2010 (1)
- ☐ June 2010 (2)
- ☐ August 2010 (3)
- ☐ January 2011 (4)
- ☐ June 2011 (5)
- ☐ August 2011 (6)
- ☐ January 2012 (7)
- ☐ June 2012 (8)
- ☐ August 2012 (9)
- ☐ Other (10) _____

Q5 Have you attended any college or vocational school since graduating from high school?

- ☐ Yes, I attended college the first semester following my high school graduation. (1)

- ☐ I attended college or vocational school, but waited one or more semesters after graduation. (2)
- ☐ No, I have not attended any college or vocational schools since graduation. (3)

If No, I have not attended any... Is Selected, Then Skip To Had you planned on attending college ...

Answer If Have you attended any college or vocational school since ... No, I have not attended any college or graduation. Is Selected

Q6 Had you planned on attending college when you graduated from high school?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

Answer If Have you attended any college or vocational school since ... No, I have not attended any college or graduation. Is Selected

Q7 Why did you not attend college or vocational school after graduating from high school?
(Check all that apply)

- ☐ I got a job/ I had to work (1)
- ☐ I couldn't afford it/ I didn't get enough financial aid (2)
- ☐ I was scared to go away (3)
- ☐ I didn't get into any colleges (4)
- ☐ I did not apply to enough colleges (5)
- ☐ I got married/ had a baby (6)
- ☐ I moved away (7)
- ☐ I was arrested or incarcerated (8)
- ☐ My parents needed me to stay home (9)
- ☐ Other (10) _____
- ☐ I changed my mind (11)
- ☐ I didn't want to leave my boyfriend/girlfriend (12)
- ☐ My parents did not want me to go (14)

Q8 After high school, what colleges, job programs, or postsecondary schools have you attended? List all that apply. If none, leave blank.

- ☐ List all below (1) _____

Q9 Are you CURRENTLY enrolled in college or vocational school?

- ☐ I never enrolled in college or vocational school (1)

- ☐ Vocational School/ Job training Program (2)
- ☐ 2 year college (3)
- ☐ 4 year college (4)
- ☐ Military (5)
- ☐ I have already graduated (6)
- ☐ I left or dropped out of school (7)
- ☐ Other (8) _____

If I never enrolled in college... Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Block

Answer If Are you currently enrolled in college or vocational school? I left or dropped out of school Is Selected

Q10 Why did you leave college or vocational school? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Too expensive/ not enough financial aid (1)
- ☐ The classes were too difficult (2)
- ☐ I got a job/ I had to work full time (3)
- ☐ I had a baby (4)
- ☐ I was asked to leave (5)
- ☐ I didn't fit in (6)
- ☐ I didn't fit in/ I found it hard making friends (7)
- ☐ I didn't like the campus (8)
- ☐ My professors didn't like me (9)
- ☐ It was too far (10)
- ☐ Other (11) _____

Q11 While in college, have you felt that you have been offered enough help and support with your classes and coursework? In other words, are there places where you can get help with difficult classes or subjects.

- ☐ Yes, and I sought out help and support at least one time. (1)
- ☐ Yes, but I never asked for help or support. (2)
- ☐ No, there was no help or support available to me. (3)

Q12 While in college, how many times did you/ do you meet with your academic advisor?

- ☐ Weekly (1)
- ☐ Monthly (2)
- ☐ Once a semester (3)
- ☐ Never (4)

Q13 Is/was there a person, other than your advisor on campus with whom you seek advice or support with academic or personal issues?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

Q14 While in college, do you/did you participate in campus activities? (Parties, Clubs, Honor Societies, Fraternities/Sororities, Student Government, etc.

- ☐ Often (1)
- ☐ Sometimes (2)
- ☐ Rarely (3)
- ☐ Never (4)

Q15 Are you currently attending the school that you planned on attending when you graduated high school?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

Answer If Are you currently attending the school that you planned o... No Is Selected

Q16 If no, what school had you planned on attending when you graduated high school?

- ☐ Enter school name below (1) _____

Answer If Are you currently attending the school that you planned o... No Is Selected

Q17 If you are not attending the school you had planned on attending when you graduated high school, please tell us why. Click all that apply.

- ☐ Cost/ Not enough financial aid (1)
- ☐ I got a job instead (2)
- ☐ I joined the military (3)
- ☐ I did not like that school (4)
- ☐ I did not fit in with the other students (5)
- ☐ My professors did not like me (6)
- ☐ The classes were too hard (7)
- ☐ I was asked to leave (8)
- ☐ I did not like the campus/ location (9)
- ☐ It was too far for me to travel (10)
- ☐ Other (11) _____

Q18 Which best describes your enrollment status while in school?

- ☐ Full Time (1)
- ☐ Part Time (2)

Q19 How did/do you pay for school? (includes school related living expenses and books)? Check all that apply

- ☐ Work/Salary (1)
- ☐ Parents (or other family members) (2)
- ☐ College Savings Account (3)
- ☐ Financial Aid/Grants (4)
- ☐ Work Study (5)
- ☐ Private Scholarship (6)
- ☐ Other (7) _____

Q20 When you began college were you placed in remedial classes?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

Q21 Please think back to the first math class you took after high school. Please rate how hard you think this class was for you.

- ☐ Very Difficult (1)
- ☐ Difficult (2)
- ☐ Neither easy or difficult (3)
- ☐ Easy (4)
- ☐ Very Easy (5)

Q22 Please think back to the first English or Writing class you took after high school. Please rate how hard you think this class was for you.

- ☐ Very Difficult (1)
- ☐ Difficult (2)
- ☐ Neither easy or difficult (3)
- ☐ Easy (4)
- ☐ Very Easy (5)

Q23 Overall my college classes were/are

- ☐ Very Difficult (1)
- ☐ Difficult (2)
- ☐ Neither easy or difficult (3)
- ☐ Easy (4)
- ☐ Very Easy (5)

Q24 What is/was your overall GPA in college?

- ☐ Under 2.0 (1)
- ☐ 2.0-2.5 (2)
- ☐ 2.6-3.0 (3)
- ☐ 3.1-3.5 (4)
- ☐ 3.6-4.0 or higher (5)
- ☐ I'm not sure (6)

Q25 Are you currently working?

- ☐ Yes, part time (1)
- ☐ Yes, full time (2)
- ☐ No (3)

Answer If Are you currently working? No Is Not Selected

Q26 If yes, what type of work do you do?

- ☐ List type of work or business below (1) _____

Q27 How important is a college education in YOUR life?

- ☐ Somewhat important (1)
- ☐ Very important (2)
- ☐ Not important (3)

Q28 In your opinion, how important is a college education in today's society?

- ☐ Somewhat important (1)
- ☐ Very important (2)
- ☐ Not very important (3)

Q29 How far do you plan on going in school?

- ☐ I've gone far enough (1)
- ☐ I would like to get a professional certificate (dental assistant, mechanic, medical billing, cosmetology, etc.) (2)
- ☐ Associates Degree (2 year) (3)
- ☐ Bachelor's Degree (4 year) (4)
- ☐ Master's Degree (5)
- ☐ Terminal Degree (PhD, MD, JD, etc) (6)

Q30 When you graduated from high school, did you feel prepared to do college level schoolwork?

- ☐ Not at all prepared (1)
- ☐ Somewhat prepared (2)
- ☐ Very prepared (3)

Q31 What is your mother's highest level of education?

- ☐ 8th grade or less (1)
- ☐ Some high school (2)
- ☐ High school diploma/GED (3)
- ☐ Some College (4)
- ☐ Associates Degree/ Job Certificate (5)
- ☐ Bachelor's Degree (6)
- ☐ Graduate Degree (MA, MS, PhD, JD, MD, etc.) (7)
- ☐ Not Sure (8)

Q32 What is your father's highest level of education?

- ☐ 8th grade or less (1)
- ☐ Some high school (2)
- ☐ High school diploma/GED (3)
- ☐ Some college (4)
- ☐ Associates Degree or Job Certificate (5)
- ☐ Bachelor's Degree (6)
- ☐ Graduate Degree (MA, MS, PhD, JD, MD, etc.) (7)
- ☐ Not Sure (8)

Q33 Have any of your siblings enrolled in or graduated from college?

- ☐ Yes (1)

- ☐ No (2)
- ☐ I don't know (3)
- ☐ I have no siblings (4)

Q34 When you were in high school, who provided you with help with planning for your future?
(check all that apply)

- ☐ Parents (1)
- ☐ Siblings (2)
- ☐ Teacher (3)
- ☐ Guidance Counselor (4)
- ☐ YPIE College Advisor (5)
- ☐ Someone Else (6)
- ☐ Not Sure (7)
- ☐ I received no help (8)

Q35 Do you feel that you had enough help when choosing a college or career path?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

Q36 As mentioned above, completing this survey qualifies you for one entry into a drawing for an Apple iPad mini. If you would like to be entered into the drawing, you must provide your contact information below.

- ☐ Name (First, Last) (1) _____
- ☐ Address (2) _____
- ☐ Address 2 (3) _____
- ☐ Phone Number (4) _____
- ☐ Email (5) _____

Q37 How did you hear about this survey?

- ☐ Mailer (1)
- ☐ Email (2)
- ☐ Someone told me to fill it out. (Please tell me who) (3) _____
- ☐ I got a phone call (4)

Q38 I (the researcher) am looking for Yonkers alumni who are willing to participate in a short interview. I am hoping to get a deeper understanding of the factors that help or prevent

students from finishing college or a career training program. Like this survey, the information I gather from these interviews will remain confidential. You do not have to participate in the interview to qualify for the Apple Ipad Mini drawing. Would you be willing to participate in a follow up interview (either in person or by phone) at your convenience in the next few weeks?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)