

Abstract Title Page

Title: Research-Practice Collaboration in NYC: Evaluating the Implementation and Impact of the Expanded Success Initiative

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Abstract Body

Background / Context:

The Research Alliance for New York City Schools is committed to conducting rigorous, non-partisan research studies on topics that matter to the city's public schools. One of the core functions of the Research Alliance is to conduct research in collaboration with other researchers at NYU, at other universities, and at other organizations across the city and country. Building diverse research teams enables us to conduct the highest quality studies with multi-disciplinary experts that reflect the complexity of challenges in education.

While independent of the New York City Department of Education (DOE), the Research Alliance also works with DOE to identify important questions for research and to provide valid and reliable evidence to help solve problems and build capacity in schools throughout NYC. Recently, we have begun collaborating with the Department on the evaluation of a district-wide led initiative designed to improve the college and career readiness for young men of color. This panel will highlight the opportunities and challenges of our partnership as well as the operational and political realities of working with the city's schools. By using this particular evaluation as an anchor, our research team and the project's director at the DOE will present our process for site selection and recruitment; data collection and analysis; as well as reporting and dissemination of results to inform the development of the initiative. Below is background information on the initiative itself:

In August, 2011, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg announced the launch of the Young Men's Initiative, a combination of new programs and policy reforms designed to mitigate the higher rates of poverty, incarceration, and unemployment among young Black and Latino men (Office of the Mayor, 2011). Of the \$127 million invested in this effort, the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) will oversee a three-year, \$30 million investment as part of the Expanded Success Initiative (ESI; NYCDOE, 2012). This program addresses a key goal of the larger initiative – reducing the achievement gap. In particular, the goal of the ESI is to invest deeply in a targeted group of schools to identify, implement, and learn from the best practices to close the gap between Black and Latino young men and their counterparts. The ESI intends to learn from schools that have demonstrated progress in closing the achievement gap in high school graduation rates and have these schools operate as laboratories to develop strategies that further close the gap in graduation and better prepare these young men for college and careers.

Purpose / Objective / Research Question / Focus of Study:

The Research Alliance for New York City Schools at New York University (Research Alliance) is undertaking a mixed-method, longitudinal evaluation of the Expanded Success Initiative (ESI). The Research Alliance's evaluation will assess the implementation and impacts of the ESI in the 40 schools that are selected for the initiative. The evaluation will address the following questions:

- **Implementation and Process Study.** What services and supports are planned and implemented under the ESI? What impacts do ESI services and supports have on the school's academic rigor, youth development practices, and culture? What challenges do schools confront as they implement the ESI services and supports and how do they address those challenges?

- **Impact Study.** What impacts do ESI services and supports have on attendance and absenteeism, academic performance, progress toward graduation and college readiness of Black and Latino young men? What impacts do ESI services and supports have on student social and emotional competencies, persistence, response to challenge, “grit,” and measures of “college knowledge” of Black and Latino young men?

Setting:

Both the implementation and impact studies will focus on the 40 ESI schools. In addition, the impact study will identify a group of equivalent comparison schools.

Population / Participants / Subjects:

Participants in ESI schools include principals and members of the ESI planning team. Participants in the comparison schools will include principals and staff members involved with programs that are similar to those intended to be provided through ESI. Students from both the ESI schools and comparison schools will participate in surveys.

Intervention / Program / Practice:

In the fall of 2011, the NYCDOE invited approximately 70 high schools that have shown success in graduating Black and Latino males to participate in a design challenge. The design challenge application asked schools to propose targeted supports in three inter-related areas: (1) academic coherence, (2) youth development, and (3) college and career access. From these proposals, the NYCDOE will select 40 schools to receive ESI resources to implement their plans starting in the fall of 2012 through the spring of 2016. Schools may propose and implement strategies and programs from each of the following areas:

- **Academic coherence** includes curricular and performance task alignment with the Common Core Learning Standards. In addition, the integration of the technical knowledge and academic skills (e.g., organization, study skills, time management, digital literacy) is essential to ensure that students graduate from high school ready for college and careers. Coherent implementation across grades and subject matter as well as a professional culture focused on inquiry ensures academic rigor and provides a system of academic supports to Black and Latino males.
- Promising **youth development** programs and advising strategies promote self-efficacy and self-esteem and assist students as they navigate college and career options. In addition, a focus on strategies that develop students’ skills in the area of course planning and career planning (such as high school course selection, goal setting, career exploration and planning, and postsecondary options) are part of youth development. Transition support services in the form of academic advising and mentoring programs inform students about postsecondary pathways and prepare students to persist and meet challenges ahead.
- **College and career access** focuses on strategies that build pathways from high school to college and careers. Collaboration between secondary and postsecondary institutions in course offerings and other programs help students transition to college and careers. Examples of such programs might include dual enrollment, programs that offer job shadowing opportunities and career-related field trips, or intentionally designed approaches that link articulated sequences of rigorous courses to on-site work opportunities and other forms of contextual learning opportunities.

Research Design:

Both the implementation and impact components will extend over four and a half years, beginning June 1, 2012 through December 31, 2016. This timeframe will enable the evaluation team to observe and measure the development, implementation, and refinement of the ESI over four school years. It will also allow us to follow and assess ESI impacts for at least one cohort of ninth grade students through their scheduled high school graduation in June 2016. We also plan to follow three additional cohorts of ninth grade students through the 2015-2016 school year.

Implementation Study

The implementation study design includes multiple qualitative data collections over the course of ESI funding and programming. Researchers will use schools' design challenge applications to create school portfolios focused on the three main components specified in the design challenge. Researchers will also conduct interviews, focus groups, and document collection to continue to build portfolios that describe ESI-related programs. The qualitative research and portfolios will provide rich information about implementation and process. In addition, researchers will design rubrics aligned with the three main components to score school portfolios. Rubrics will include ratings about the *level of evidence, quality, and frequency* as a way to quantify level of implementation fidelity to the schools' ESI-related programs. We will also construct portfolios for schools that applied to but did not receive ESI funding to provide a contrast of service availability and intensity for ESI and comparison schools.

Impact Study

We propose to employ two complementary research designs that can yield high quality comparison groups and valid impact estimates. First, we will use the High School Application and Placement (HSAP) process to identify individual students who enroll in ESI schools and comparison students who expressed interest in attending one of these schools but were matched with a non-ESI school. This approach has been used recently by MDRC in its widely cited evaluation of New York City's small high schools of choice. The viability of this approach will depend, in part, on whether the ESI schools are oversubscribed. Second, to ensure that the impact study includes valid comparison groups for all ESI schools we will use and adapt comparative interrupted time series (CITS) analyses to compare the performance of students in the ESI schools with that of their counterparts who were enrolled in the same schools prior to ESI. This design also includes a comparison with similar students in other similar non-ESI schools during the same time periods.

Data Collection and Analysis:***Implementation Study***

Preliminary data collection activities will begin in the summer and fall of 2012 before ESI programs have been fully implemented. These will include (1) a systematic review of ESI applications and school selection criteria, (2) interviews with principals and planning team members from selected ESI schools to learn about planning activities, and (3) visits to selected ESI schools to collect data on existing services, ESI planning and early implementation activities. In the spring semester of each year of the study, the research team will visit all 40 ESI schools to collect data on ESI implementation fidelity, service availability, and intensity. Each spring, we will also visit 40 comparison schools to collect data on availability and quality of services that may be similar to those intended to be provided through ESI. Field research will

include highly structured interviews with the principal and purposefully selected members of the ESI planning teams. We will examine data related to the three components that comprise the theory of action: academic coherence, youth development, and college and career access.

Impact Study

The student impact analysis will draw primarily on data from the administrative records archive that the Research Alliance for New York City compiles in collaboration with the DOE. Table 1 provides a list of the key data elements and measures that we will utilize for this evaluation (Please insert Table 1 here.)

- **Administrative records** will provide information about school enrollment status and academic performance throughout high school. Information from students' middle school years will account for differences in the achievement and performance that students bring into high school and construct subgroups that may benefit differentially from ESI. The Research Alliance's archive on administrative records will allow us to construct a range of college preparation outcomes based both on traditional measures such as credit accumulation and grade point averages, and on configurations of Regents examinations and Advanced Placement courses that may be stronger predictors of college-readiness.
- **National Student Clearinghouse records** on college enrollment and persistence and with the City University of New York (CUNY) to obtain access to the college transcripts of DOE students who enroll at 2- and 4-year CUNY schools.
- **Student surveys** in both ESI and non-ESI comparison schools at two points in their high school careers. Student surveys will cover four overarching measurement domains: (1) perceptions of school climate and emphasis on college and career preparation, (2) youth development and social-emotional competencies, (3) college knowledge, and (4) employment and career preparation. We will calculate mean scores for individual students as well as school-level scores to understand the context, climate, and initiatives at each of the schools. We can also examine differences in responses within schools (a measure of coherence) and between schools to understand more about the strategies at each of the 40 schools. (Please insert Table 2 here).

Findings / Results:

Because we will collect youth development, college knowledge, and career development measures for both students in ESI schools and students in the non-ESI comparison schools, we can determine whether the ESI is having an impact on individual student aspirations and pathways to college. These aspects provide a much-needed balance to the more traditional focus on academic preparation and achievement as well as the primary indicators of college readiness. In addition, and most importantly, because we will have this information for individual students we will be able to determine whether the ESI impacts are different for Black and Latino boys than they are for other groups. Preliminary results will be released following the first year of data collection in 2013.

The qualitative data in the implementation component of this evaluation will help us understand more about which strategies are successful, how they are implemented at the school level, the barriers to their success, and how these barriers might be addressed. These findings will allow us to make policy recommendations that will inform efforts to scale up best practices around college and career readiness across the system.

Appendices

Appendix A. References

- Banks, D. & Oliveira, A. (August 2011). Young Men's Initiative: Report to the Mayor from the Chair. Retrieved from http://www.nyc.gov/html/om/pdf/2011/young_mens_initiative_report.pdf
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Appendix B. Tables and Figures

Table 1

Expanded Success Initiative Evaluation: Administrative Records Data and Measures

Data Source	Measures
Administrative Records: Student background information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender • Race/Ethnicity • Home language • Immigrant status • Residence zip code, sub district or census block
Administrative Records: School enrollment/special service information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enrollment status (active, dropout, discharge, etc...) • School transfers (grades 6-12) • Daily attendance (grades 6-12) • English language learning services (grades 6-12) • Special education services (grades 6-12)
Administrative Records: Achievement data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New York State math and English language arts test scores (grades 6-8) • Regents Examination scores • PSAT, SAT or ACT test scores
Administrative Records: High school performance and graduation information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credit accumulation • Course grades and GPA • Graduation status and diploma type
National Student Clearinghouse (tentative)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual college enrollment status (covers approximately 95 percent of US 2- and 4-year colleges) • Degree attainment
City University of New York (tentative)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual college enrollment status • Remedial course taking • Credit accumulation • Course grades and grade point averages • Degree attainment • Financial aid qualifications and receipt

Table 2

Expanded Success Initiative: Student Survey Measures

Measurement Domain	Measures and Indicators
School climate and emphasis on college and career preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication with adults • Expectations • Peer relationships
Youth development, social-emotional competencies, and civic engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grit • Persistence • Response to challenge • Cooperation and communication • Empathy • Volunteer experiences
College knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarity with college application processes and financial aid • Knowledge of local postsecondary educational opportunities • Experience on college campuses
Employment and career development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High school work experiences • Participation in work-related learning activities • Exposure to “soft skills” development