

# Graduate NYC!

## Focus Group Research Project

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## METHODOLOGY

- GSG conducted eight focus groups in New York City on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> among parents of high school and college students, high school students, college students, and young adults ages 16 to 25 not currently attending high school or college. With the exception of the two parent groups, all other focus groups were segmented by gender.
- Focus groups were segmented as follows:
  - Parents of NYC public high school students
  - Parents of CUNY college students
  - NYC public high school students (one group of young women and one of young men)
  - College students who currently attend a CUNY school (one group of young women and one of young men)
  - High school and college-age young adults not currently attending high school or college (one group of young women and one of young men)
- Participants were recruited from all five boroughs and are demographically diverse with regards to socioeconomic status and ethnicity.
- Ethnicity:

Group	Caucasian	African American	Latino	Other
High School Parents	1	6	2	-
College Parents	3	5	-	1
High School Students	4	9	3	1
College Students	-	7	4	2
Non-Students	3	4	2	-
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4</b>

## STATEMENT OF LIMITATIONS

Because of the exploratory nature of qualitative research involving small samples drawn without use of statistical procedures, this report should be read as indicative of hypotheses that may need quantification. The research can provide clear directions on some issues, but it is designed primarily to provide insights into perceptions of the various elements of the issues in question.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Parents, high school students, CUNY students and young adults not currently enrolled in school unanimously agree: in today's competitive job market a college degree is essential for ensuring one's future financial success and security. Most college hopefuls say they are motivated by a combination of familial expectations, their own drive to learn, especially when it comes to learning skills that can help them secure a job, and a desire to overcome the challenge of obtaining a degree. Parents concur—many cite not only the sense of pride they feel at the thought of their child graduating from college, but also the opportunities a degree provides for their child's future.*

*Students and young adults all report that most information they receive about college comes primarily from teachers and family members, and the messages they receive are remarkably consistent. All communications around college underscore the importance of attending and of graduating on time with a degree that translates into increased job opportunities.*

*By far the greatest barrier to attending college is the financial burden imposed by tuition. For nearly all students and young adults, financial aid governs their college application process. And many report that family commitments, work responsibilities, and insufficient available aid further contribute to students' inability to afford college. However, a number of students also believe their own emotional and mental readiness for college is a potential barrier to enrolling. Many admit they haven't yet developed the maturity or discipline needed to succeed in college, while others are wary of enrolling and spending the money without possessing concrete plans for their major, course schedule, and future career.*

*Hindsight is twenty-twenty, and current CUNY students admit their initial impressions of the college experience bore little resemblance to the realities of freshman year. High school students and young adults who have not yet enrolled in college express both excitement and trepidation about their college careers.*

*Four year colleges and bachelor's degrees are universally favored—many suggest that two-year colleges are less rigorous and prestigious than their four-year competitors. And all believe that an associate's degree is less valuable than a bachelor's degree in the job market.*

*Parents, CUNY students, non-students and high school students all define college readiness as the acquisition of “life skills” or “common sense” skills. They believe being ready for college is about understanding time management, having a sense of discipline and responsibility, and possessing strong study skills. Few mention specific subject knowledge, such as math or writing, in the context of college readiness. While most (but not all) students and parents believe that New York City high schools are doing a decent job preparing students for college coursework in particular; few believe that high schools are imparting those study and time management skills that are considered crucial for college success.*

*When it comes to evaluating the supports colleges provide to ensure their students are thriving in their college careers, current CUNY students have generally negative opinions. While most say they are aware that support is available in the abstract, all report that accessing services such as financial aid assistance, class registration, or work study assistance is difficult.*

*Prospective college students and parents know little about what sort of support they can expect to receive in college—in fact, many high school students and young adults are apprehensive on the subject, expecting to find themselves mostly alone as they attempt to navigate school. In particular, many believe (and have heard from others) that professors and counselors offer little support to their students—making it even more important for freshmen to quickly mature and manage their own schedules and work.*

*High school students—not parents—report they drive the college application process. Most say they complete applications on their own, with occasional assistance from parents, teachers, counselors, and local community or non-profit organizations. High schools provide much of the information and paperwork needed throughout the college process, but students also do much of the research online by visiting college websites. Those students who have spent a considerable amount of time looking at different college sites believe they are generally useful, but all would like to see more schools provide information about popular majors and classes, samples of semester schedules, and concrete and easily understood data about graduation rates, available aid, and tuition costs.*

*But while university websites are the most cited sources of information about the application process and college experience, all groups agree that college students themselves are the most valuable resource for prospective students hoping to learn more about what to expect once they matriculate. Many suggest that colleges facilitate online interactions between current and future college students—allowing high school students and young adults to discuss both positive and negative aspects of potential schools, and to hear what skills are most needed to be truly ready to take on the challenges of college coursework from day one of freshmen year.*

## KEY FINDINGS

### **Importance of College**

- On the whole, parents, students, and young adults all believe attending college and graduating with a degree is essential to future success. Moreover, all groups strongly believe that a bachelor's degree—not an associate's degree, high school diploma, or GED—is a minimum requirement in today's competitive job market. For them, a college degree is an investment that leads to success and better socioeconomic opportunities for themselves and their families.

*For me, it's the job market. It's not really so appealing [going to college], but it's the job market. You have to stay competitive. (Male CUNY Student)*

*I've worked in law firms without a degree, but I want to have something else that I could put down on an application to show that I'm a little bit more diverse. (Male CUNY Student)*

*If you get a high school diploma, there's a salary range that you can make at your job. But once you go to college, the salary increases. It's kind of like you're paying for your future. (Female CUNY Student)*

*I'd like to get a secure job. I have a job right now, but I can't see myself staying a waiter 10 years from now. You need a job that's actually going to give you income, so you can support a family. (Male Non-Student)*

*In our society right now, a high school diploma is not enough. A bachelor's degree is not even enough. You need a Master's. (Male Non-Student)*

*It increases your chances. Most jobs [require] a college degree or higher. Now, you're competing with people from all over the world, so you have to be better. (CUNY Parent)*

- However, despite firmly believing in the importance of obtaining a college degree, parents and young adults all report weighing the benefits of a bachelor's degree against the cost of university. Most believe that a bachelor's degree can result in better career options and increased earnings, but everyone also knows someone with a degree who is unemployed or underemployed as a result of the economic downturn.

*I don't want to spend [money on tuition], then [if] I mess up, I have to look at my parents and say "sorry." You paid thousands and thousands of dollars towards college. (Male Non-Student)*

*But given where we are right now in society, [there are] plenty of people with Master's degrees and they are jobless. They are over-qualified for the jobs they want. (Male Non-Student)*

*[College] is getting so expensive these days. You have less and less so-called qualified applicants. So it's a double-edged sword. It's good to have a degree because you might be one of the few, but if you don't have one, work on your work ethic and work on your background. Build up your job history, so that way you can have a chance of getting a job. (Female Non-Student)*

*I have friends who got their four-year degree from SUNY Purchase and they paid all this money and they can't get a job at Subway. That's everyone's fear...spending all your money and getting into debt and can't get out. (Female Non-Student)*

*Nowadays people are getting fired; people who have worked in schools for 20 years. They have a Master's. (Female Non-Student)*

*She [my friend] got her degree. It's posted on the wall in her house. She said she's looking for a job, but she can't find a job. (Female Non-Student)*

*It's not just a question of completing an undergraduate degree. You must have a post-doctorate—even then, unless you're connected or you have a tremendous skill set, there are lots of bright people who are unemployed. (High School Parent)*

- Some non-students and high school students who are more skeptical as to whether college is a pathway to success and security tend to believe that finding a job is as much about your personal connections as it is about your level of education. They feel that finding a job is about knowing the right people, being lucky, and being able to market oneself.

*In order to remain marketable in this highly [competitive] market, you may not necessarily need the degree, because sometimes it's who you know and how you present yourself that gets you the job. (Male CUNY Student)*

*I believe there are as many negatives as positives. It depends on how [you] were brought up and how the economy's doing. Because they're saying, "People are going to school for these degrees, but when they get out, they have no job," and it's very hard. (Female CUNY Student)*

*I think that a degree definitely helps. But there is always a rare case where people who strive for something, [for instance] if they have a really good business idea or they're a really good athlete or musician or something, then they don't necessarily need it. (Male High School Student)*

*It's according to how you see yourself. If you think you're really good at [it] and you don't think you need to go to college for it; then you know you can pursue it. [You don't have to] say, "I graduated college. Now I'm good at this." But if you're already good at it, you don't have to.*  
(Female High School Student)

*Basically, if you know somebody that knows somebody, then you can get a [job]. But other than that, if you don't know someone that knows someone, then you better have a diploma.*  
(Female Non-Student)

*I think nowadays, it's not what you know it's who you know. You have to know somebody. I think nowadays that comes up often where you know the right person.* (Female Non-Student)

*Let's say they go to college, and something else comes along that looks like it can be a career. Maybe you invented something. I'm not going to discourage [you].* (High School Parent)

- Some of the most important motivators for attending college are friends and family. Many current or potential college students report that their parents, siblings, or other relatives pushed them to attend college—encouraging them to find greater success than prior family generations. Others say friends who are currently enrolled in university make a point of sharing their experiences and encouraging others to attend.

*I think I feel pressure from my friends to go to school. For example, my friends back home [from Africa] are finishing their doctorates... I really want to feel that sense of accomplishment.*  
(Male CUNY Student)

*I'm the first person to go to college in my family. So for me, I'm the first person to go. Let me be a good example for my sister.* (Female CUNY Student)

*I want to go to college for myself. I want to have a better [school] experience and have fun, but it also makes my parents happy if I go to a good college. They'd be proud.* (Male High School Student)

*My mother said it doesn't matter which college I go to, as long as I get an education.*  
(Male High School Student)

*Siblings are a motivation; maybe your brother or sister didn't make it. Now your parents are pressuring you to go to college.* (Female High School Student)

*If I went back, it wouldn't be for me, it would be for my parents. They want it.*  
(Female Non-Student)

*I had a lot of friends in high school and 90% of them went to college. They [were] like, "Come on, what's taking you so long?" I'm the only one who didn't go.* (Female Non-Student)



- For many students, the motivation to attend college also comes from within. Their drive to attend college is about accomplishing a desired goal, pursuing a love of learning, and often a desire to build skills necessary for particular jobs or careers. Nearly all students see a college degree as a way of bettering oneself and expanding future options—economic concerns about the future are crucial motivators for nearly all students and young adults.

*For me, it's the need for personal fulfillment. You realize you set a ceiling for yourself and unless you get a degree, you will not move beyond that point. (Male CUNY Student)*

*Honestly, for me, the initial motivation was pressure from family to go to college. But my motivation has changed. Now it's not their motivation, it's my motivation. Now it's to get my degree, go to grad school and teach. (Male CUNY Student)*

*I believe learning itself is a motivation - every class you walk into, you learn something new. (Female CUNY Student)*

*It's about me knowing what I want to do and about me making money. I want to be a forensic psychiatrist. (Female High School Student)*

*I [want] to learn more to better myself. There are certain college classes I've taken where I learned a lot. (Male Non-Student)*

- Parents' motivations for their children's educational future are very much in line with those of current high school and college students and young adults. Most parents report that their desire for their child to attend college is both emotionally and economically motivated. Along with the pride and sense of accomplishment that comes with seeing their child receive a degree, most parents strongly believe their child will need a college degree to be financially secure later on in life.

*She saw me struggling. I told her [if] you want better things, you have to go out there and get it. I can't do it for you. If I want something, I'm going for it. That's how I put it to them. (CUNY Parent)*

*I try to encourage her myself. The bottom line is if you're educated, it's going to open up a myriad of possibilities for you. (High School Parent)*

- A minority of parents—most frequently but not always those who did not attend college themselves—are somewhat more ambiguous about the value and importance of attending college. And at least a few students and young adults concur, reporting that their parents were less interested in the college process or less sold on the value of a degree.

*So [my mother] was kind of against me going to college because I already have a job, especially in this bad economic time. She said, "keep the job, forget about college." (Female CUNY Student)*

*My parents didn't care until 12th grade. I didn't know anything about college. That's why it's hard for me. I don't know that much about college and stuff like that because I didn't hear about it when I was younger. My parents didn't go. I have eight brothers and sisters and none of them went [to college].*  
(Female Non-Student)

### **Barriers to College Attendance**

- Despite widespread agreement on the importance of a college degree and the opportunities it can open, nearly all groups face barriers applying to and matriculating into college. Financial barriers are by far and away the most prevalent hurdles for these students, young adults, and parents. Nearly all report that financial aid is among the top factors in their college decision process—available aid not only determines where students can attend school, but whether many feel comfortable even applying to college.

*In terms of financial aid, I think I was ineligible because my dad's income was pretty high. Because of that, I did not receive any financial aid. That was a barrier.* (Male CUNY Student)

*My barrier was mostly financial because I didn't get any financial aid at all. I only have one parent. And people ask, "You're already earning a salary; why exactly do you want to go to college?"*  
(Female CUNY Student)

*There are loans, but I don't like loans. It takes years and years to pay.* (Female High School Student)

*FAFSA can [give] you a lot of support, but both my parents made a lot of money. So when I applied, I didn't get anything at all.* (Male Non-Student)

*They've cut financial aid.* (High School Parent)

- When it comes to navigating the financial aid process, both students' and parents' familiarity and comfort levels differs. Some families struggle to understand and complete the correct paperwork—a few students report that their parents are unable or unwilling to provide them with the necessary information to complete the FAFSA, while others say they their high schools failed to provide them with the guidance and assistance they needed.

*I hear [about] it [financial aid] at school. They [tell us] if you don't have enough money, you can apply for financial aid. They haven't explained what it is yet.* (Male High School Student)

*They would send [my sister's] financial aid to our house. It was a long process. You would have to get this and that.* (Female High School Student)

*The problem is that I don't have financial [aid information]. My parents have it. I can't get it from them.*  
(Male Non-Student)

*I feel like it's a lot of constant information. You lose track. You can't maintain. There's so much information.* (Female Non-Student)

- Some current students and young adults report receiving assistance with the FAFSA from their high school teachers and counselors. The amount of help students receive depends entirely on the high school they attend. A few students attend college application programs, meetings, or trips sponsored by local community or cultural organizations.

*They [high school] explained to me [that] I had to apply for FAFSA and [other] scholarships.  
(Male High School Student)*

*I'm still in contact with my old teachers, so if I need to, I can talk to them and get help.  
(Male High School Student)*

*The Kips Bay Boys and Girls Club of America. I took free classes there.  
(Female High School Student)*

*I could go back to my high school and they'll help me fill out the [application]. They have a College Board person, Mr. Smith, whose goal is "I want to help my brothers make it into college."  
(Male Non-Student)*

*They have seminars at school, after school and on weekends. They [students] can participate and get [help] as to how to do it, what's needed.... (High School Parent)*

- Additionally, some students believe that teachers and counselors informally select those students they feel they can help—those who show promise are given extra time and resources, while those who are not considered “college material” receive assistance above and beyond what overtaxed college counselors can provide.

*I think they'll [the school] help me only if you're really determined to get it. I think in my school, you can't just sit around and expect them to help you. (Male High School Student)*

*Teachers and counselors know who they think is going to college. (Male Non-Student)*

*They used to push us in my high school. One counselor use to say, "Come to my office. I'll help you with financial aid and everything; all you need is your mom's information." She really helped me with it. (Female Non-Student)*

*We were so blessed with [my son]. In middle school, he had great counselors. The educational system, it depends on the schools here in New York. Fortunately, his elementary/middle/high school had great advisors. (CUNY Parent)*

- Even those families and students who are able to submit the FAFSA often find that completed forms alone do not always guarantee that the necessary amount of aid will be forthcoming. Some students and parents note that despite disclosing their inability to pay for a college education, they did not receive the amount of aid needed to attend the college of their choice. Others wish to apply for aid as independent adults, but find they must wait. As a result, a number of students and parents express lingering confusion around how need is determined and aid is dispensed.

*It's not the [financial aid] form it's the process that kills you. (Male CUNY Student)*

*You cannot get financial aid on your own unless you're 25. So you have to wait to get independent financial aid. The process has to work around my school schedule, which means that I can't work as many days as I would like to work. And you also have to work and study. It's very hard to maintain. (Female CUNY Student)*

*They deny you [financial aid] a lot. (Female High School Student)*

*You could wait until you're 24, then you can file completely on your own. (Male Non-Student)*

*I want to go back. But at the time I couldn't because of financial issues; it was hard to figure out aid. When you have kids, it's hard. So I've got to straighten out my money situation and then go from there. (Female Non-Student)*

*If you work minimum wage, you do not get any aid. (High School Parent)*

- Financial barriers are the largest obstacle facing potential college enrollees, but many current students and young adults also worry about whether they are emotionally or mentally ready for college. Many report feeling that their own habits and mindsets create an additional barrier to college. Some feel they are not disciplined enough to succeed in a new and challenging academic environment, while others believe they should not enroll in classes until they have fully mapped out their college and career plans.

*The biggest hurdle was me. (Male CUNY Student)*

*I just don't feel ready. Four years of high school is enough learning. It's so hard for me to wake up, so I can't imagine going to college. The professors I had—they call it professors in college. They don't care. If you're too late, they fail you automatically. (Male Non-Student)*

*I want to go to college, but I want to go prepared. I don't want to go to college [not prepared]. I want to go there and be mentally prepared, knowing that when I get there, I'm going to [do the work]. I'm getting my money's worth. (Male Non-Student)*

*I think it's because I don't really know exactly what I want to do. But, I don't know what I want to do. (Male Non-Student)*

*I do want to work in the criminal justice field, but in high school I didn't do well academically. So I don't want to go to college, fail and not do well. (Female Non-Student)*

*Taking the steps and getting into college [is hard], but also academically I think. I don't like challenges. It's not for me. I can't sit there and think and open a book and read it and perform. (Female Non Student)*

- For young adults not currently enrolled in school, earning a college degree comes with additional and compounded barriers. A number of young adults take care of young children or are the primary income-earner for their household. These young adults worry about scheduling college courses around childcare or their current job. The significant cost of a degree, coupled with the responsibilities of work and family, make college an incredible challenge.

*For me, it's going to be hard because I'm having a kid. I can't just leave him with the family. (Male Non-Student)*

*When I started school, my daughter was 3-4 months old. I was working and going to night school. (Male Non-Student)*

*I've been working four jobs. I've been too busy trying to keep the roof over my head and everything else. I've been dealing with an illness, disability and all kinds of other things. (Female Non-Student)*

*I plan on enrolling [in school] in September next year. I just prefer starting in September. It's a little easier, because I do have a child as well. I tried to enroll when I was 19, but they gave me the whole runaround about having to wait until you're 23, it was a big mess. (Female Non-Student)*

### **Impressions & Opinions of College**

- Not surprisingly, current high school and college students differ on their impressions of college. While high school students express excitement, along with some trepidation, about college, current students who have real experiences to draw from have much more nuanced impressions. Likewise, those young adults who have not yet attended college express attitudes similar to current college students—many have already experienced challenges during their student careers, and so are understandably wary of the college experience.

*It's the more you realize that this is it. No one ever tells you, "I'm giving you independence". You come from a high school environment, where teachers make personal phone calls to your house. In college, your professor doesn't email you when you're absent. Everything is your responsibility. (Male CUNY Student)*

*It's so scary. In high school there was always somebody pushing you, besides your parents. (Female CUNY Student)*

*After high school, I went to a four-year college immediately. It's a complete wake-up call because before, I always had my parents waking me up & making sure I'm fine. (Male Non-Student)*

*They figure you're an adult. You're on your own. (Male Non-Student)*

- Many high school students believe that attending college will bring increased freedom and independence from family and teachers. Many are excited for the social elements of college—such as meeting new people, going to parties, and living away from home.

*I want to live in a dorm. I want to see if all the hard work that my teachers are talking about paying off is really true. (Male High School Student)*

*I think about upstate, just to [get] away. I'm so close. If I had a car, I could drive home on weekends or if I wanted to come to the city for something. (Male High School Student)*

*But if I had to choose a college in New York, I'd go to Syracuse. It's far away from home. (Male High School Student)*

*What you see on TV is what college feels like. It makes it look fun and everything. (Female High School Student)*

*It's the next best step to finally getting out of the house and being on your own. (Female High School Student)*

- Nearly all young adults and students believe that college faculty, unlike high school teachers and administrators, are less interested in answering student questions, or spending extra time with those students who may be struggling—either academically or emotionally. High school students generally believe college professors will be less willing or able to offer assistance or support outside of class.

*Teaching assistants are involved with a lot more students than the professors in a lot of colleges I visited. The teaching assistants teach smaller classes...a lot are current students. (Male High School Student)*

*[I wanted] the professor [to] let me know when I was messing up. "You're good at this, but I need you to perform better on this, because when the test comes, you're not going to be able to succeed if you don't do this." (Male Non-Student)*

*[Professors] don't care. As long as you turn in your paper. That's it. You're good to go. But if not, they don't want [to hear] any excuses. (Female Non-Student)*

- Students, young adults, and parents express a strong preference for four-year institutions outside New York City versus two-year institutions closer to home. There is a general perception among nearly all groups that four-year colleges offer a “fuller” experience than two-year colleges—an experience that might include dorm life, real campus space, and a greater degree of independence found living away from home.

*I want to get away too. Since I live in New York, I should have the ability to go somewhere else, so I can take responsibility for [myself] & live far away from my parents. It'll feel more like college if I go away.*  
(Male High School Student)

*I want to go to a different setting—if I went to the Midwest or a town school, it's a different lifestyle.* (Male High School Student)

*Now, I want to go to a four-year college. I want to get away.* (Female High School Student)

*I went to college. I lived in the dorm. I didn't go to a local college, it was an experience. I want her to have that experience. It wasn't close to home.*  
(High School Parent)

*There are some great institutions in New York City. But I don't want her to stay and commute every day; that's my main concern. I want her to live on campus and have a full college experience.*  
(High School Parent)

- Moreover, many parents and students (even those not currently enrolled in college) see two-year colleges as somewhat less legitimate than four-year schools. Many worry about the reputations of two-year universities, and believe that associate's degrees are generally seen as less demanding and less valuable than bachelor's degrees by employers.

*It depends on what you want to do, but I choose a four-year because I want to go. Two-year colleges are community colleges.* (Female High School Student)

*I feel like [after] two years [at a community college], you don't really have anything after that. After four years, at least you get a degree. [In] high school, you graduate.* (Male Non-Student)

*I feel that your degree is associated with your school. I go to class & I have a job. I have a degree from BCC. But someone else has a degree from Harvard. My credentials are way better than hers and I'm at BCC, but she gets the job because she has a degree from Harvard.* (Female Non-Student)

*I feel that employers will look at a four-year college more than they would at the two-year college.*  
(Female Non-Student)

- That said, parents and students agree that two-year colleges are much more affordable than four-year institutions. A number of students, young adults, and parents stress the value of starting at a two-year institution to obtain basic credits, then transferring to a four-year college to obtain a bachelor's degree.

*I'm thinking of going to a two-year first to see what it's like. I thought if I went to a two-year college nearby, it would be easier, and if I liked the experience, I'd go on.  
(Female High School Student)*

*When I was going to school, I was originally going to go to a two-year school because it's cheaper. It automatically cuts the cost almost in half. (Male Non-Student)*

*A lot of people will enroll in a two-year [school] to get their credits and go on to a four-year school. If you have a few college credits, a four-year school will start to look at you. If you [don't] have the high school grades or the SAT scores, go to a two-year. (Female Non-Student)*

*I'd follow up with a point: economically speaking; I want her to go to a junior college. But she has the grades to go to private school. (High School Parent)*

- Regardless, all groups perceive two-year colleges as a particularly appealing option for those students who may need to boost their grades or earn remedial credits before matriculating into a four-year college. Young adults with little or no college experience are much more open to two-year colleges than others, recognizing the value of those more affordable classes.

*I'm thinking, currently, my grades are low, but I'd like to go to NYU or Georgetown. I'm financially not fit for those colleges, so that's why I'd first go to a two-year. Then transfer to a four-year, so it'll be cheaper. (Male High School Student)*

*I want to experience a community college for two years. I want to get used to working [academically]. So when I eventually go away to school, I can do it quickly because I already completed two years. (Male Non-Student)*

*Let's say I get into a two-year CUNY school; I wouldn't mind going there because I feel like a degree's a degree. And the people that go to a two-year find it easier than going to a four-year school because of [your grades]. So people prefer Kingsborough, get their GPA up, and then transfer to a four-year school. (Female Non-Student)*



### **Perceptions of CUNY**

- Opinions of the CUNY system are decidedly mixed. A key factor driving impressions is a generally low-level of knowledge about CUNY's schools, requirements, and offerings. For example, most high school students and parents, along with non-student adults, believe the majority of CUNY schools are two-year colleges.

*I don't know (whether it's a two-year or four-year). (Male High School Student)*

*I think two-years. I never heard of four-years at CUNY. (Female High School Student)*

*Most of them are two-year schools. (Female High School Student)*

*Most CUNYs are two-year schools. People I've spoken to said that the amount of credits you need is not fulfilling the two years. It's surpassing the two years. You're doing three years worth of credits. And if you fail that [yearly] test, you will not graduate, even if you have all your credits.*

*And it's like, for what? (Female Non-Student)*

*[I see CUNY as] a downfall. (Female Non-Student)*

*From my research, 25% [of] CUNY schools are two-year schools. (Female Non-Student)*

- Positive impressions of the CUNY system are mostly driven by perceptions of CUNY schools as affordable and having easier admissions criteria. Positive impressions of four-year schools like Hunter, Baruch, and City College also weigh favorably on the CUNY system as a whole.

*The four-year colleges are prestigious, most of them. John Jay is a criminal justice school. Some schools are world-renowned. (Male Non-Student)*

*They are definitely less expensive, that's a good thing. (Female Non-Student)*

*I have good impressions. She's interested in business and law. But we looked at Baruch & Hunter because to me, those are top tier CUNY schools. If we're going to a CUNY, you should be going to the top tier. (High School Parent)*

- In general, high school students and young adults who feel somewhat underprepared for college tend to be more positive toward CUNY—many see CUNY as an affordable and welcoming stepping stone, or even alternative to more expensive and selective private schools.

*I think for some, CUNY colleges are better than private schools. Even if I had the money, I don't think I would want to go there. They're for rich people. They aren't like me. And CUNY schools are for people more like me. (Male Non-Student)*

*A lot of CUNYs have specialized areas like business schools. Hunter has nursing. Schools have a good reputation. (CUNY Parent)*

*There are also some community colleges that have some excellent programs, depending on what you want to do. Some programs are nationally recognized, specifically for nursing and teaching. They actually have great CUNY schools. (High School Parent)*

*I didn't even know CUNY had a law school. I was like, "Wow." I think CUNY schools are pretty good. I didn't go to a CUNY school for undergrad, but for my Master's Degree I went to a CUNY school. (High School Parent)*

- Parents who attended CUNY undergraduate or graduate programs also have more positive views of CUNY than other groups.

*I think they're great if you have to go there. I mean, I graduated from two of them and got two great degrees. (High School Parent)*

*I had two years of college there. And I had a very, very good experience. (High School Parent)*

- Those students, parents, and young adults who possess negative impressions of CUNY tend to cite their belief that the system's schools are generally less prestigious and easier to get into than competing institutions—those opinions are underscored by widespread assumptions that CUNY has few four-year colleges.

*They're less expensive. Mostly anybody can get into them. (Female High School Student)*

*CUNYs are last-minute schools, I think. People that applied late and didn't get in anywhere think they can go to a CUNY. Then transfer out. (Female High School Student)*

*I'm not a big fan of CUNY. (Female Non-Student)*

- A number of students, parents, and young adults also see CUNY's proximity to their current homes and schools as a negative. With their mostly urban campuses, many CUNY schools fail to impress those who associate the college experience with leaving home, living in a dorm, and experiencing a new city or region.

*My uncle went to Bronx Community College for a while, and he said it's like high school. You still go home, there's nothing college about it. (Male High School Student)*

*I went to a four-year school and decided to go back to a two-year. A two-year is the best way to start, but depending on the school. It also depends on the experience you get because I went to a community college. That community college was just high school all over again. (Male Non-Student)*

*It's limited. I'm not saying it's bad, but I'd like my daughter to broaden her horizons and to know there are other things out there. (High School Parent)*

*I want her to go away. I didn't go away. So we're looking at some SUNYs, upstate New York, so she can have the experience of being away. (High School Parent)*

- Along with a general lack of knowledge regarding the breadth of CUNY's school offerings, there is particularly little awareness of CUNY's entrance requirements and the assessment exams it uses to place newly enrolled students. While current high school students, along with parents of high school, and young adults know the least about the CUNY Assessment Tests, even some current CUNY students and parents admit that prior to taking the exams, they knew little about what to expect, or what purpose the tests serve.

*I know they have test preparation, but I thought the purpose of the test was to see where you are naturally, not to prepare you for it. (Male CUNY Student)*

*Yes, CUNY told you in advance. You have to find out what where you are in math and reading skills. (Male CUNY Student)*

*The orientation letter gave you a website where you can see a sample test and practice. They have videos too. (Male CUNY Student)*

*I was like, "What is this?" I wasn't prepared. I didn't bring anything. I think you have to have a dictionary or something. I had no information. If you fail, you have to take a remedial class, and it takes forever getting through those classes. (Female CUNY Student)*

*I think all the information's online when you're going to apply—they tell you have to take the placement exam. (Female CUNY Student)*

*I got a letter that said he was invited to take the test. But he ultimately didn't have to take the placement test. (CUNY Parent)*

- Those CUNY students and parents who were aware of the exams prior to matriculating at a CUNY school report hearing about them through their high schools. Those who were unaware of the Assessment Tests often report having little or no information about the exams from any institution—at least a few students report believing the exams were simply informal interviews, or would not be graded.

*When I received the letter, they said, "It's just an interview." I was like, "Okay, I'm not going to stress it, it's just an interview." Then they said, "You take this exam," and "I'm like, okay, I'm doing what I?" (Female CUNY Student)*

*Then they told me it's not a pass/fail. Yes, it was a pass/fail. Basically, if you have a low score, then you start with remedial courses. (Female CUNY Student)*

*First of all, I didn't transfer like a transfer student. So when I applied, they said, "You have to take an entrance exam." They didn't tell me what was going on. I got there the same day. The exam was three hours long. It was math, English, and then writing. (Female CUNY Student)*

*I remember my son getting a letter, and it stated that he's invited to take the COMPASS test. When he went in to take it, somebody told him he didn't have to take it, because he'd already taken the SAT. (CUNY Parent)*

- A small number of current CUNY students and parents, as well as a few high school students, are aware that high Regents, SAT, or ACT scores can be used in lieu of the CUNY Assessment Tests.

*My school told me about it. New York City is the only city that has Regents, but if you get a particular grade in the Regents exam, you still [might] have to take the CUNY math test.  
(Female CUNY Student)*

*My daughter didn't have to take it, because she placed out of it between her SAT scores and high school transcript. (CUNY Parent)*

*Same with my son; he didn't have to take any tests. He had his SAT score and he had some credits.  
(CUNY Parent)*

- For the most part, CUNY students believe the content of the CUNY Assessment Tests was generally in line with the content and difficulty level of their high schools courses. For the most part, students report feeling prepared for the tests, although a number admit their scores—particularly on the CUNY Assessment Test in Math—were low enough to require remedial coursework.

*The math was hard for me. But it was like high school classes, high school math. (Male CUNY Student)*

*I didn't pass the writing test. They placed me in what they call English 10 at BCC, which is, while I'm taking a regular English class, I have to take the tests during the semester. If I pass the test, then the next semester I can take a higher level English course, which I did. (Male CUNY Student)*

*It was really hard, but I remember there was a practice test on the website. So right before I took it, I read the practice test and the ideas were very similar to the test I took. (Male CUNY Student)*

*I heard about the placement exams because I didn't take the SAT. So I took it and I passed. The math I failed, so I have to take an intermediate class for math. Math is my weakest subject.  
(Female CUNY Student)*

*Basically, I had difficulty with the math. I love math, but it didn't help me. (Female CUNY Student)*

### College Readiness

- Nearly universally, students, young adults, and parents believe that college readiness hinges on one's emotional and mental maturity, along with self-discipline and personal responsibility. All groups concur that being ready for college means being ready to set boundaries, goals, and schedules in order to make the most of the independence and possibility college offers.

*[High school] sort of [prepared me], but then again, you've got to have your mind set. It's all up to you, [it's not like] high school. (Female CUNY Student)*

*[You have to be] responsible. You have to make sure you get to class on time, get all your notes, have to study, because the teacher's not going to come in after you to teach you stuff like that. (Male High School Student)*

*Yeah, it's something you're supposed to know. To be successful in life, you have to be focused, of course, and have determination and be motivated. That's just something you have to know. Colleges don't really tell you about that because they expect you to know that. (Female High School Student)*

*Patience. If you don't have patience to pick up a book, to read it, to focus on writing—you just need patience to go through everything. (Male Non-Student)*

*I'd say accountability. I make my daughter understand that her actions are all leading up to what's going to be the outcome of everything she's done. If you study, if you do what's right, you're going to do well. (High School Parent)*

*One of my son's teachers teaches them how to take notes on a laptop, because not every class you go to, are you going to need a paper and pencil. You're going to need to be able to type that up. (High School Parent)*

- Overall, very few students, non-students, or parents think of academic readiness when prompted with the phrase “college readiness.” While a few students and parents specifically mention the importance of being ready for college-level writing and math courses, many others do not think about academic skills or completed coursework when considering what's needed to enroll and succeed in college-level coursework.
  - An important note—the term “college readiness” generally means little to current students, young adults, or parents. Nearly all have never heard the terms used before and are unsure of what particular aspects of the college experience it applies to. Separating communications on “college readiness” into academic readiness and emotional/mental readiness may help to dispel confusion.

*Writing is important. I tutor some high school kids and some of their writing, I feel like they don't spend enough time on teaching kids how to write properly. (Male CUNY Student)*

*Be ready to give up everything. I've given up so much time to engineering, even this summer. I just took a mechanical engineering class, and even right now I'm still doing work. (Female CUNY Student)*

*I think high schools tell us, "You have to do this, you have to be like this; you have to have a certain grade or else you won't do as well here." Otherwise, college isn't right for you. (Female High School Student)*

*I'm not ready. I want to make sure I'm prepared. I don't know how to get prepared. If you're not a scholar, then getting prepared for college is difficult. Say you're good at math, but not writing; writing is big in college. You have to develop skills and do things you're not used to. The main thing is the money—whatever you spend your money on, is worth it? But you don't want to spend it and not cross that finish line. (Male Non-Student)*

*[You{ have to be a good writer. (High School Parent)*

*Reading comprehension [is a skill you need to have]. (High School Parent)*

- Most students (and those young adults with some college experience) believe their high school coursework was adequate preparation for the subject matter covered in college-level classes but that their high schools did not emphasize the importance of accountability, time-management, or personal discipline. Many college students point out that these skills were the most challenging to develop during their freshmen year. High school students and young adults believe that those skills will be the most important once they enroll.

*I feel like high school holds your hand and they treat you like babies the four years you're there. They teach you the subject matter, but they don't teach you the skills that are valuable to excel in college. (Male CUNY Student)*

*We really should have already learned skills like time management in high school. It's crucial in college. (Male CUNY Student)*

*High schools don't teach you time management. If you already knew it, you'll be fine, but if you have terrible time management, like I did, you're set up for failure. (Male CUNY Student)*

- Parents have more mixed impressions of the job their children's high schools did preparing them for college than students themselves. Some believe high school courses were adequate preparation for college courses, and note that their children made relatively smooth transitions from high school to college. Others felt that neither high schools courses or teachers and counselors readied their students for the very different challenges of college—from coursework to choosing a major to registering for classes.

*I felt my high school didn't prepare me for college because of the way the courses were [taught] and the way teachers reacted. Some teachers would give you the basic information. Other classes didn't [focus] on anything. That's what I took out of it. It wasn't preparation. (Male Non-Student)*

*I went to Stevenson. That school didn't do [anything] for me, but also if you try hard enough, you can make it there. It has a 98.2% rate of dropout. (Male Non-Student)*

*High school teaches you more life lessons than academics. I went to two high schools. I went to art and design the first time, didn't finish there because of things that were going on in my life, then I tried again at City. (Male Non-Student)*

*High school teachers are correcting essays that my daughter wrote, and the proofs and symbols that they used were incorrect. A lot of what the teachers suggested she was doing wrong was incorrect. Who's teaching these kids? (High School Parent)*

*All schools are doing is preparing kids to be ready to leave at the end of the day. That's it. (High School Parent)*

*There are a lot of teachers who just don't care. When they don't care, again, like you said, the teacher will just shove them out the door. After meeting my daughter's English teacher last year, I was disappointed with her relaxed attitude. (High School Parent)*

- Despite voicing complaints, a number of parents argue that it is ultimately the responsibility of parents like themselves to ready children for the next stage of their lives. Many suggest that teachers and high school can only do so much to prepare students—rather, parents need to instill their children with the sense of responsibility and accountability they'll need in college.

*I think that teaching doesn't stop. As a parent, you still teach your child, without question. Don't leave it all up to the teacher. I used to help my son study with flash cards and index cards and things like that. (High School Parent)*

*I like to push, "What kind of books are they reading?" Parent involvement is important. One thing you hear from teachers is that a lot of parents don't show up when it comes to parent-teacher night, so then they've got this lax attitude. "I got parents who don't care." And parents who do care feel it's disappointing. (High School Parent)*

### **Support in College**

- Nearly all students, young adults, and parents have a general sense that relatively little support will be available when they arrive in college. Even current college students express this view—noting that they expected to receive far less support than they did in high school.

*I think the resources are there. It's more a time management issue. Being able to go to those other courses and balance it between work and supporting the family. It's the setup sometimes that's kind of flawed. [It's] overcrowded, getting that help. (Male CUNY Student)*

*It's there—the resources; you just have to find them. (Male CUNY Student)*

*My son went to Baruch College for a semester. He was trying to get his classes and everything. He went to get his ID, but then he had to come back. They couldn't handle the amount of [freshmen] students they had. It's the size. You're a little fish in a big pond, but you have to make your way in life. That's different than high school. That's different for him to find his way around. (CUNY Parent)*

- In particular, all groups concentrate on the lack of individualized time and assistance with professors they believe students will encounter. For high school students and young adults, this is by far the most common worry they voice about the challenges of freshmen year.

*It's a hit or miss with professors. The good professors are really good. They genuinely really care for you. Once you reach out to them, they're more than happy to help. But you have to initiate it.*  
(Male CUNY Student)

*It's the staff. I've had teachers where I missed a class in college, and they ask, "Hey man, what happened?" Not like, "Why didn't you come to class," but, "Hey, is everything okay?" They are some that are genuinely interested in you, but not many.* (Male Non-Student)

*I don't want a professor that doesn't care. I want someone who's still concerned about the person.*  
(Male Non-Student)

- While nearly all college students are currently aware that numerous support systems exist to provide tutoring, along with financial aid support and general student advising, many stress that those systems are difficult to access and navigate. Almost every current college student can share a past experience of being shuttled from office to office looking for assistance, or having phone calls ignored by overworked advisors.

*They're all over the place. The resources are there. Everything you need is there, but you have to be independent and find your own.* (Male CUNY Student)

*Yes, it's harder [to get an appointment] because there are a lot of people on campus.*  
(Female CUNY Student)

*Since I'm not hearing any complaints from him, I think they set him up for this semester, I think it's good thing. Whether there's going to be continued support when he needs help in the second semester is yet to be seen.* (CUNY Parent)

*There are some things that are kind of clear—where the cafeteria is, obviously. Other things could have been communicated much better.* (CUNY Parent)

*I thought the lines of communications were sort of blurred, as far as what days to show up for particular classes. My daughter was like —I guess they're sliding through numbers, and whatever your number is, you go that day. That's the day you have to register. I was shocked it couldn't be done online.*  
(CUNY Parent)

- College students often report experiencing the most difficulty attempting to schedule meetings with advisors who can help them select a major and plan a thorough course schedule that will allow them to graduate on time.

*The counselors are really impersonal—except there are a few good counselors that are really [good] to have a conversation with. I don't want to say they're all bad. There are a handful of good counselors.*  
(Male CUNY Student)



*You [have to] schedule two weeks in advance [to see a counselor]. (Female CUNY Student)*

*As far as CUNY is concerned, he doesn't really think much of the school. He finds that the counselors are useless, because they don't counsel. Every time he has a problem, they have no answer or it's totally wrong. Last semester was a total disappointment. (CUNY Parent)*

- Most parents concur with current college students. Those who have children currently enrolled at CUNY report that their students have frequently had difficulty navigating a college bureaucracy, such as the registrar, career placement office, or advising office. A few believe their students have generally been able to find the support and resources they need, receiving comprehensive advising and guidance during their first year.

*There's also another issue at City Tech, it surprised me. It's not automated [registration]. You have to go in person to register. (CUNY Parent)*

*I think if they automated their system, when your child registers for any courses, if there's a duplicate, they should take it out instead of having them take it over again. That's nearly what happened to him. (CUNY Parent)*

- When it comes to assessing what CUNY and other schools could do to offer more support and resources to students, students, parents and young adults offer a variety of suggestions. Most frequently, they recommend colleges make navigating the different offices easier—while nearly all say they are aware that assistance (for issues including coursework, registration, and aid) is available to students, many believe it is incredibly difficult to obtain. Others suggest reworking advising services so that counselors can offer more personalized assistance to students regarding their college and career paths.

*Besides a guidance counselor, I would want a student-based organization, where you can get a student tutor to help you speed through the process. (Male Non-Student)*

*In New York, I know in SUNYs, there's EOP, and for CUNY there's SEEK, and for private HEOP. Those are basically, if you come from low-income housing families, they'll help you get through college. So there are programs there. But they aren't for everyone and if you need other help, where do you go? (Male Non-Student)*

- While high school students and young adults hope that adequate support will be available in college, the issue is of particular importance to those parents of high school parents. A number of high school parents note they are more drawn to colleges that talk to prospective students about their tutoring services and comprehensive orientation schedules—seeing those services as a sign that a school is committed to ensuring its students thrive in college.

*If a college talked about teaching skills, we'd take another look at that school. We'd put that school high on the list because I feel like they really want my daughter to succeed. (High School Parent)*

*Some schools at the college fairs told me about the freshman orientation. We have had that discussion. That's usually my question, "What's freshman orientation like? Do you have any classes to make sure she gets how to do this, this and this?" And they're like, "Yeah, we do. We have a study center, someplace that teaches how to take notes well." (High School Parent)*

*Because a lot of kids don't know how to take notes, it's little things like that that I've heard at some of the college fairs. Those are the ones I put a little star next to. (High School Parent)*

### **Sources of Information about College**

- Most students and young adults report that the main message they receive about college focused on the importance of simply attending. Many note that their parents, relatives, and teachers stressed that college was the correct next step after completing high school. Other messages about college heard frequently include the importance of studying hard in college and achieving a degree, and the importance of that degree when it comes to securing jobs and future career plans.
  - For the most part, college messages from different sources are relatively consistent—students and young adults report that both teachers and family members routinely emphasize the importance of attending and graduating from college.

*My dad is not in my life, so my mom always told me "If you graduate from college, you'll have [so much] potential." (Male Non-Student)*

*[My parents] never had a chance to go to college because their parents didn't let them. So they're telling me, we're giving you an opportunity, it's important. (Male Non-Student)*

*I graduate high school because of my sister. She made sure I got up. I got pregnant and I was afraid to tell my sister because she always expected more from me. (Female Non-Student)*

*I also think in the case of my daughter, there was a lot of word of mouth about college. Her biological mother has two other kids who graduated from college. So she had all these different influences. (CUNY Parent)*

- Additionally, those who discuss college with siblings and peers are also frequently exposed to messages that highlight the social aspects of college life.

*That's the biggest thing with my oldest son. He was talking to people to figure out where he was going to go and what he was going to take because he had a couple opportunities. My youngest son is talking to the oldest one now. They were talking before he left. I think is a big thing—talking to people or peers, people that they know that they feel they can trust. (High School Parent)*

*Yes. My daughter does talk to our neighbors who are in college. So every opportunity—they're into different things—she loves talking. They've given her good pointers as far as classes to take, what's more beneficial to her. (High School Parent)*

- Most students and young adults note that while they first heard about college from family members and friends, high school is the main source of information about the logistics of applying to schools. Most believe that the college process officially kicks off upon taking the PSAT and receiving their scores from teachers or college guidance counselors.

*As far back as I can remember, college stuff in high school started around PSAT time. There was a lot of pressure. Then I took SAT prep. (Male CUNY Student)*

*Middle school has the PSAT. When that comes into play, then you start preparing for the SAT, which means I'm preparing to go to college. (Female CUNY Student)*

*Teachers, counselors and students—they were all interested in college and talking about it at school. (Female CUNY Student)*

*And when you take the PSAT, you enter your email address and you start getting emails from the College Board. (Female High School Student)*

- For the most part, students—with the assistance of high school teachers and counselors—drive the college application process. They receive most materials sent from high school and prospective colleges directly, visit college websites at home, and handle much of the necessary paperwork themselves, with occasional assistance from parents and guidance counselors. Most materials are received via email, through the mail, or through school college guidance offices.

*I have a stack of mail [from colleges]. (Female High School Student)*

*My daughter and I looked at brochures, went online and looked at different schools. She sent for the brochures. She has gone to a college fair. (CUNY Parent)*

*We went on a lot of college trips. We spoke a lot about it, but then sometimes, "You need to sign this for me to go visit this college." Sometimes he'll talk, sometimes not. And he went online and did a lot of research. (CUNY Parent)*

*During this summer, every Friday by five, she has to turn in four schools. I need four schools, four scholarships or grants. Then I need the essay & the due date. (High School Parent)*

*My daughter, we have an Excel spreadsheet of all the schools she's interested in, and then we have the requirements for the schools listed. When she visits, she talks about it with me, you know, do you still want to go there, do you like the environment? She's making the choices, I'm there to help. (High School Parent)*

- Nearly all students prefer receiving college materials by email; a few suggest that college could also utilize social media sites in order to communicate more directly with interested candidates.

*Colleges should be using Facebook to contact us. (Male CUNY Student)*

*Email is fine. (Male CUNY Student)*

*I misplace letters all the time, email you can go back to. (Male CUNY Student)*

*We know that everybody's always on social websites. They need to get more in touch with that. A lot of times we don't want to go on their school websites. If we applied to a school, we should give them our Facebook name and they should contact us. Because a lot of people don't check their email, but everybody checks their Facebook. (Female CUNY Student)*

- While some parents are especially involved in assisting their children in applying to college, the majority of parents are happy to let their children shoulder the responsibilities of the process.

*In high school, I wanted to know how he was doing. College is up to him; it's his life now. We've done our job; go. (CUNY Parent)*

*I'd like to know a bit—my daughter might get an email about something, and it might go past her head, she might not think about it, but my wife and I or her mother may get it and say, "This may not be your cup of tea, but this is why you might look into that, because it gives you more options." (CUNY Parent)*

*More or less, I let college be her decision; just checked in time to time. She drove it, I checked in. It wasn't too crazy. [She has] stacks of brochures [from] every school in New York State. (CUNY Parent)*

*My brother's son, Junior, he was getting ready for the college application process. I bought the Princeton Review book, and my daughter's already looking at the in-depth nature of the book, filling out applications, specific things you need to do to format the essays... (High School Parent)*

- College and high school students, along with parents and young adults report that when it comes to financial aid information, such as the FAFSA or available scholarships and grants, high school counselors are the primary resource.
  - And while most students and parents believe they are well-aware of their financial aid options—including FAFSA, grants, loans & scholarships—there may be room for further

education. Many students report that despite filling out the necessary forms, they still do not receive sufficient aid from many schools.

*Counselors are passing along stuff—we can go to them when we need help with the forms.  
(Female High School Student)*

*The [college] passed some bill [which] gave me more money to go. Then when it was time for me to leave, I never left because I didn't have the car fare to get to St. Rose. (Female Non-Student)*

*The high school passes along the right forms to us. They set up the process for them and are pretty helpful with the aid questions. (High School Parent)*

- College websites are by far the most popular resource for students, young adults, and parents during the application process, as they research viable schools and the criteria for admission. In addition to that online research, potential college applicants and parents report reading college brochures, touring college campuses (both those locally and farther afield), attending college fairs (frequently hosted by their high schools), and discussing possible choices with high school counselors.

*I'm looking online mostly. And then you get sent home a ton of stuff the mail too.  
(Male High School Student)*

*I go online and look at schools. (Female High School Student)*

*They had colleges come in for the fair. That's how you narrow it down. (CUNY Parent)*

*We had admissions counselors from different schools come in during our junior night. We had financial aid people come in to tell us what needs to be done from different schools. So I've been fortunate that they've come to us. (High School Parent)*

- Additionally, a few students utilize college application programs provided by local neighborhood organizations and non-profits. Several students say they attended SAT prep courses sponsored by organizations like the Harlem Children's Zone or Boys & Girls Clubs of America.

*I go to this community center where I play ball and they also provide SAT tutoring.  
(Male High School Student)*

*I live in Harlem. There's an organization in Harlem. Whoever your advisor is, they'll help you [fill out application forms]. (Female High School Student)*

*I had her enroll in a summer program. During the year they prep her for the SATs and the Regents. They take them for the whole summer to live on a college campus. It's totally free, and she gets the on-hands experience. (High School Parent)*

*It's called Vanguard. They have college prep classes. The other program she's in enrolled, they also have college courses that they can take at John Jay School. So they refer her to places and we'll go and*

*we'll see schools. We've traveled to Maryland, down south, and we've been to a few places. (High School Parent)*

*In the community there's a pair of college prep programs. They take them to different states—Washington, Pennsylvania, Virginia—to see different colleges. (High School Parent)*

- While high schools and colleges tend to be the most prevalent sources of information about the college experience for prospective students, all students and young adults agree that their most trusted source of information about college are current or former students. Many say their siblings or friends who have some experience with college classes and life can offer the most relevant advice for selecting a college and about what to expect freshman year.

*Current students are going through the struggles. They're experiencing what I'm going to experience. It's firsthand knowledge. (Male High School Student)*

*Even the ones who didn't finish; I'd like to find out why they didn't. (Female CUNY Student)*

*So you can understand from a student's point of view, that's why you need to talk to them. (Male Non-Student)*

*I have friends who graduated from college; I talk to them when I want to know what it's like. (Female Non-Student)*

- Along these same lines, all groups suggest that colleges use current students to communicate with interested applicants. Many believe that colleges should offer integrated online communities—either on their own sites or on social media sites—that will allow high school students to interact with current college students and learn more of what they can actually expect from the first year of college life.

*College students are more trustworthy than representatives of a college. They're not going to tell you the bad stuff about it. You need the inside scoop. (Male High School Student)*

*I want to talk to someone that is not selected by the university, just a random person. They're going to ask their great students to come represent the school. And of course their best students are going to love the school. It's always good to get both perspectives. (Male Non-Student)*

*Yeah, you could bump into somebody that's doing great, but also somebody who is struggling. You can find out what resources the school has to help you. (Male Non-Student)*

- Such integrated online communities could be a major conduit for communicating to high school students about the academic and social skills needed to succeed in college. Current college students are seen as trusted and expert sources—high school students, young adults, and parents suggest that they can give honest and relatable accounts of their own experiences and what they wished they had known prior to starting college.

*Build an online community people are interested in joining. Students can communicate with each other about what to expect. (Male CUNY Student)*

*Maybe it's a site where you can type in what schools you want to go to, and it gives you a list of students that are willing to talk to you. (Male CUNY Student)*

*They're actually a part of it—[the students]. It's more realistic getting information from them, because that's somebody that's there. (Female CUNY Student)*

- Generally, prospective students want as much information about prospective colleges and freshmen year as they can get—and they want it to access it through colleges' websites. Many ask for more information about the coursework they'll encounter—they suggest that college websites include the most popular majors offered, along with what classes are available in a given semester and when they are offered. Additionally, students would like to see information online regarding graduation rates, financial aid availability, and the cost of tuition. A few also suggest offering virtual tours.

*If the college wants to help me, they should talk about available programs to help me figure out where I am. That's very critical to me, because I'm losing some credits now. (Male CUNY Student)*

*It would help having a list of classes that are going to be available in your major in the time slots that they're going to fall under. It was difficult for me to have four-hour gaps in my schedule. (Male CUNY Student)*

*They need to have financial aid information online. (Male Non-Student)*

*I want a college to tell me what majors are most popular at the school. Some schools have better programs than others. (Male Non-Student)*

*To me, most important is the graduation rate and how many students there are per class and stuff like that. (Female Non-Student)*

*I want information on tuition pricing. (Female Non-Student)*

*I want to know about options for childcare and things like extra support. I would like to know what options I have to help cut down the price. (Female Non-Student)*

## CONCLUSIONS

- **The importance of a college degree is well-understood.** Parents, students, and young adults alike all strongly believe in the importance of attending college and graduating with a bachelor's degree. For some, the drive to enroll in college comes from within, while others admit they are pushed to take on the challenge by friends and relatives. And while many note the cost of college is a very real deterrent, all stress the importance of a degree for ensuring future financial success.
- **More education is needed for students and parents.** The importance and value of a college degree may be well-established, but many current students, parents, and young adults still lack much of the information needed to successfully apply, enroll, and succeed in college. In particular, college hopefuls and their parents need more information about financial aid options and exam requirements for admission—particularly to CUNY schools. Arming parents and students with the information they need allows them to realistically shape their applications—saving time, money, and effort as they research options.
- The confusion surrounding financial aid—most crucially the forms and resources that comprise the financial aid system—is a key opportunity to expand the informational resources offered by both the Department of Education and CUNY. Many students who should qualify for full or major assistance are not unaware of the breadth of funding sources available. Increasing that awareness is key for breaking down the financial barriers many families and students face.
- Most students receive college information through their high schools or personal email. In order to ensure that information about aid and admission requirements reaches both students and young adults, communicate it through a number of channels—through mail sent home, email, via teachers and college counselors, and on CUNY's websites.



- **Continue to increase awareness of CUNY schools.** Providing additional education and information on CUNY is particularly important for New York City students and parents. While many will end up attending a CUNY school, relatively few are aware of CUNY’s admission requirements, and even fewer are knowledgeable about the breadth of institutions that comprise the CUNY system. Providing more information will boost CUNY’s reputation among this population, and allow students to find the right CUNY schools for them.
- **Expand the definition of college readiness.** While the term “college readiness” currently means little to students, parents, or young adults, all agree that in order to be ready to succeed in college, students need to possess maturity, discipline, a sense of accountability, and a strong set of study skills. Using these impressions as a starting point, CUNY and New York City high schools can start talking to students about the full range of skills they’ll need in college—from time management, to personal responsibility, to solid foundations in math and writing. Share this expanded definition of “college readiness” with prospective students and parents, but also with teachers and local neighborhood community organization and non-profits, so that communication on the topic is reinforced throughout the application process.
- **Provide emotional and academic support through college advising.** Students are aware that tutoring and advising is available in college, but few believe that accessing those resources is easy and effective. In particular, college students and young adults stress the need for comprehensive advising that can help those students struggling to select a major, plan a schedule, find work to support college expenses, and show students how their coursework is applicable to jobs and career paths so they can market their skills effectively.
  - Providing more comprehensive advising and counseling opportunities is crucial—equally crucial is educating students about how to access those services. Build time into orientation or even initial freshmen courses to show students where those services are, and how they can help.

- **Use your current students as resources and conduits.** Students, young adults, and parents agree—current college students are the most trust source of information about college. Students and young adults in particular stress the importance of hearing both the positive and negative aspects of college from relatable sources. Creating online communities where current and prospective CUNY students can chat—or even directly connecting high school students with college “mentors” through email—can help not only to demystify college to incoming students, but also educate them about the skills they’ll need to start succeeding in their coursework from day one.
- **Expand CUNY’s online resources and presence.** Most students and young adults report obtaining much of their information about the college application process and potential schools through online research. It is crucial, therefore, that students find the information they need on CUNY’s websites. Most notably, students and young adults ask that CUNY sites include information about popular majors and course offerings, graduation rates, financial aid offerings, and tuition costs.
- Additionally, CUNY should expand the online venues through which students can access this information. Use popular social media sites to reach students throughout the application process and to provide information. Using Twitter and Facebook alerts, along with regular email communications, to convey information on application requirements, necessary test scores, enrollment timelines, or even common advising questions can help inform students from the moment they begin their college search through their time at CUNY.

# APPENDIX

<b>PARTICIPANT GRIDS</b>
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**CUNY Girls – Monday, August 15<sup>th</sup>, 4pm**

Gender	Location	Neighborhood	Employed	Type of School	Name of School	Part of CUNY	Year	Major	College Planning*	Ethnicity	# in House-hold	Income
Female	Queens	Rockaway Beach	Student	2-year	Kingsboro	Yes	Freshman	Culinary Arts	A,B,C, D, E	African-American	4	\$51-55K
Female	Brooklyn	Bensonhurst	Student	4-year	BMCC	Yes	Sophomore	Business Ad.	A, C, D, E	Asian	7	\$10-20K
Female	Manhattan	Chelsea	Student	4-year	City College of NY	Yes	Sophomore	Biomedical Eng.	A, B, C, D	African-American	3	\$56-60K
Female	Brooklyn	East New York	Student	2-year	La Guardia	Yes	Sophomore	LMP	A, B, C, D, E	African-American	6	\$56-60K
Female	Queens	St. Albans	Student	4-year	Queens College	Yes	Sophomore	Accounting	B, C, D, E	African-American	2	\$10-20K
Female	Bronx	Interval	Student	2-year	Bronx Community College	Yes	Sophomore	Liberal Arts/ Chemistry	B, C	Hispanic	4	\$51-55K
Female	Brooklyn	New Utrecht	Student	4-year	Barouch College	Yes	Freshman	Accounting	A, B, C, D, E	Asian	4	\$21-30k

\*A=research schools online, B=spoke to college advisor, C=obtained brochures about schools, D=attended school fair, E=visited campuses/schools

<b>PARTICIPANT GRIDS</b>
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**CUNY Boys – Monday, August 15<sup>th</sup>, 5:30pm**

Gender	Location	Neighborhood	Employed	Type of School	Name of School	Part of CUNY	Year	Major	College Planning*	Ethnicity	# in House-hold	Income
Male	Manhattan	Hell's Kitchen	Part time employee/ full-time student	4-year	Baruch College	Yes	Sophomore	Accounting	A, C, E	African-American	1	Less than \$10K
Male	Brooklyn	Fort Greene	Student	2-year	Borough of Manhattan Community College	Yes	Sophomore	Comms.	A, B, C, D, E	Hispanic	3	\$21-30K
Male	Queens	Jackson Heights	Student	4-year	City College	Yes	Sophomore	Electrical Eng.	A, B, C, E	Hispanic	3	\$41-45K
Male	Brooklyn	Clinton Hill	Student	2-year	Kingsboro	Yes	Sophomore	Liberal Arts	A, B, C, D, E	African-American	4	\$86-95K
Male	Brooklyn	Prospect Heights	Student	4-year	City College	Yes	Sophomore	English	A, B, C, D, E	African-American	6	\$95+
Male	Brooklyn	Canarsie	Student	4-year	Brooklyn College	Yes	Sophomore	Undecided	A, C	Refused	4	\$61-65K
Male	Queens	Glendale	Student	4-year	NYCCT	Yes	Sophomore	Environ. Control	A, B, C, D, E	Hispanic	3	\$10-20K

\*A=research schools online, B=spoke to college advisor, C=obtained brochures about schools, D=attended school fair, E=visited campuses/schools

<b>PARTICIPANT GRIDS</b>
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### High School Parents – Thursday, August 18<sup>th</sup>, 5:30pm

Gender	Location	Neighborhood	Age of child	Gender of child	Grade of child	Industry	Influence in college decision	Type of High school	Name of school	Colleges would consider	Likely to stay in NYC	College Planning *	Education	Ethnicity	# in House-hold	Income
Female	Manhattan	Downtown	15	Female	11th	Finance	Some	Public	Norman Thomas High School	Private & Public 4-year	Somewhat Likely	Planning stages only	College	Hispanic	4	\$86-95
Female	Brooklyn	Flatbush	17	Female	12th	Finance	Great deal	Public	Pace High School	Private & Public 4-year	Somewhat Likely	A, B, C, D	College	African-American	4	\$71-75K
Female	Brooklyn	Midwood	17	Female	11th	Student	Great deal	Public	Midwood High School	Public 4-year	Very Likely	A, B, C	Post-graduate	African-American	4	31-40K
Female	Brooklyn	Bed-Stuy	16	Male	12th	Paralegal	Great deal	Public	Boys and Girls	Private & Public 4-year, Vocational	Very Likely	A, C, D, E	College	African-American	2	60-65K
Female	Queens	Ridge-wood	16	Female	12th	Retail	A great deal	Public	Forest Hills High School	Public & Private 4-year	Somewhat Likely	A, B, C, D, E	College	African-American	2	\$66-70
Female	Manhattan	UWS	16	Female	11th	Student	Great deal	Public	Vanguard High School	Public & Private 4-year	Will Definitely Stay in NY State	A, B, C, D, E	Some College	Hispanic	3	\$46-50K
Female	Manhattan	Morningside Heights	15	Female	10th	Business Consulting	A great deal	Public	PS 072	Public 4-year	Definitely likely	A		White	4	\$66-70
Male	Bronx	Pelham Parkway	16	Female	11th	IT	A great deal	Public	Bronx Theater High School	Community	Somewhat Likely	A, B, C, D, E	Some College	African-American	4	\$95K+
Male	Brooklyn	Crown Heights	15	Male	10th	Carpentry	Some	Public	Brooklyn Tech	Private & Public schools	Somewhat Likely	Planning stages only	High School	African-American	4	\$51-55

\*A=research schools online, B=spoke to college advisor, C=obtained brochures about schools, D=attended school fair, E=visited campuses/schools

<b>PARTICIPANT GRIDS</b>
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**CUNY College Parents – Thursday, August 18<sup>th</sup>, 7pm**

Gender	Location	Neighborhood	Age of child	Gender of child	Grade of child	Industry	Influence in college decision	Type of school	Name of school	Part of CUNY	College Planning*	Education	Ethnicity	# in Household	Income
Female	Brooklyn	East New York	20	Male	Fresh.	HR	Great deal	2-year	Queensboro college	Yes	A, B, C, D, E	Some college	African-American	3	\$51-55K
Female	Long Island	N/A	19	Male	Fresh.	Sales, admin assist	Great deal	4-year	Baruch	Yes	A, B, C, D, E	High school	White	4	\$86-95K
Female	Manhattan	Downtown	23	Male	Soph.	Retired	Great deal	4-year	City Tech	Yes	A, B, C, E	College Grad	Asian	3	\$41-45K
Female	Bronx	South Bronx	22	Female	Soph.	Food Services	Great deal	2-year	Hostos Community College	Yes	A, B, C, D, E	High school	African-American	5	\$21-30K
Male	Queens	Kew Gardens	17	Male	Fresh.	Energy Sales	Only a little	4-year	Hunter	Yes	A, B, C, D, E	Some college	White	2	\$31-40K
Female	Brooklyn	East New York	19	Male	Soph.	Nanny	Great deal	4-year	Brooklyn College	Yes	A, B, C, D, E	High school	African-American	3	\$10-20K
Male	Manhattan	Little Italy	18	Female	Fresh.	Shipping	Only a little	4-year	Baruch	Yes	A, B, C, D, E	Some college	White	4	\$95K+
Male	Bronx	South Bronx	19	Female	Soph.	Admn. services	Great deal	4-year	City College	Yes	A, B, C, D, E	Some college	African-American	4	\$51-55K
Male	Brooklyn	Flatbush	23	Female	Soph.	Security	Little Bit	4-year	Brooklyn College	Yes	A, B, C, D, E	Post Grad	African-American	3	\$70-75K

\*A=research schools online, B=spoke to college advisor, C=obtained brochures about schools, D=attended school fair, E=visited campuses/schools

## PARTICIPANT GRIDS

### Non-Student Girls – Monday, August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 5:30pm

Gender	Location	Neighbor-hood	Not in school	Last grade completed	GED Interest	College Interest	Likely to stay in NYC	Ethnicity	# in Household	Income
Female	Brooklyn	Bensonhurst	No	High school	n/a	Somewhat Interested	Somewhat likely to stay	African-American	5	\$71-75
Female	Bronx	Tilden	No	High school	n/a	Very interested	Definitely will stay	Hispanic	4	under \$10
Female	Bronx	South Bronx	No	High school	n/a	Very interested	Definitely will stay	Hispanic	2	\$31-40
Female	Bronx	Parkchester	No	Some College	n/a	Very interested	Definitely will stay	African-American	3	\$51-55K
Female	Bronx	Co-op City	No	High school	n/a	Very interested	Definitely will stay	African-American	4	\$31-40
Female	Bronx	Morris Park	No	High school	n/a	Not sure	Definitely will stay	African-American	2	\$61K
Female	Brooklyn	Sunset Park	No	High school	n/a	Somewhat Interested	Definitely will stay	White	6	\$71-75
Female	Queens	Laurleton	No	High school	n/a	Somewhat Interested	Definitely will stay	African-American	4	\$46-50



## PARTICIPANT GRIDS

### Non-Student Boys – Monday, August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 7pm

Gender	Location	Neighbor-hood	Not in school	Last grade completed	GED Interest	College Interest	Likely to stay in NYC	Ethnicity	# in Household	Income
Male	Bronx	Hunts Point	No	Some high school	Very interested	Very interested	Somewhat likely to stay	Hispanic	4	\$56-60k
Male	Queens	Queens Village	No	Some College	n/a	Very interested	Definitely will stay	Caribbean American	1	Less than \$10K
Male	Manhattan	East Harlem	No	Some College	n/a	Very interested	Definitely will stay	Hispanic	2	\$21-30K
Male	Bronx	Throgs Neck	No	High School	n/a	Not sure	Definitely will stay	Hispanic	5	\$95K +
Male	Manhattan	Harlem	No	High School	n/a	Very interested	May or may not stay	Hispanic	6	\$41-45K
Male	Queens	Jamaica	No	High School	n/a	Very interested	Definitely will stay	White	4	\$76-85K
Male	Bronx	Co-op City	No	High School	n/a	Somewhat Interested	Somewhat likely to stay	African-American	8	86-95K
Male	Brooklyn	Bensonhurst	No	High School	n/a	Very interested	Definitely will stay	White	5	\$76-85K
Male	Bronx	Co-op City	No	High School	n/a	Somewhat interested	Somewhat likely to stay	Hispanic	4	\$41-45K
Male	Bronx	East Chester	No	Some College	n/a	Very interested	Somewhat likely to stay	African-American	4	\$95+
Male	Brooklyn	Sheepshead Bay	No	High School	n/a	Not very interested	Definitely will stay	White	5	\$56-60K

## PARTICIPANT GRIDS

### High School Girls – Tuesday, August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 4pm

Gender	Location	Neighborhood	Age	Grade	Type of School	Name of School	Colleges Considered	Likely to stay in NYC	College Planning*	Ethnicity	# in Household	Income
Female	Brooklyn	Gravsen	17	12th	Public	John Duey	2- year, community	May or may not	A, B, C, E	White	4	\$10,000-20,000
Female	Manhattan	Harlem	17	12th	Public	Manhattan Center for Math & Science	Private 4-year, public 4-year	Definitely will stay	A, C, D, E	African-American	3	\$31-40k
Female	Queens	Queens Village	17	12th	Public	Frank Sinatra School of the Arts	Private 4year, Public 4-year	Likely to stay	A, E	African-American	2	\$41-45K
Female	Bronx	North East	17	11th	Public	Intl. Leadership Charter School	Private, Public schools	Definitely will stay	A,C,E	African-American	3	\$51-55K
Female	Brooklyn	Canarsie	15	11th	Public	John Dewey High School	Public schools	Somewhat likely to stay	A,C,E	African-American	2	\$56-60K
Female	Bronx	Throgs Neck	16	12th	Public	The Renaissance School	Private 4-year, Public 4-year	Somewhat likely to stay	A, B, C, D	Hispanic	2	\$51-55
Female	Bronx	Van Nest	17	12th	Public	Columbus High School	Private 4-year, Public 4-year	Somewhat likely to stay	A, B, C, D, E	Hispanic	7	\$76-85
Female	Brooklyn	East Flatbush	17	12th	Public	Edward R. Murrow High School	Public 4-year	Definitely will stay	B	African-American	6	\$76-85

\*A=research schools online, B=spoke to college advisor, C=obtained brochures about schools, D=attended school fair, E=visited campuses/schools

## PARTICIPANT GRIDS

### High School Boys – Tuesday, August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 5:30pm

Gender	Location	Neighborhood	Age	Grade	Type of School	Name of School	Colleges Considered	Likely to stay in NYC	College Planning*	Ethnicity	# in Household	Income
Male	Manhattan	East Village	15	10th	Public	NET+M	Public 4-year	Somewhat Likely	A	White	5	\$86-95
Male	Brooklyn	Bed-Stuy	17	12th	Public	Acorn Community High School	Private 4-year	Somewhat Likely	A,B,C,D,E	Hispanic/Latino	3	\$10-20
Male	Queens	Jamaica	16	11th	Public	Forrest Hills High School	Technical or Vocational	Somewhat Likely	A,C	African-American	4	\$76-85
Male	Manhattan	Harlem	16	11th	Public	Choir Academy of Harlem	Public, Technical schools	Somewhat Likely	B,C,E	African-American	5	\$21-30K
Male	Manhattan	Greenwich Village	16	12th	Public	Beacon School	Public schools	Somewhat Likely	A, B,C,D, E	White	3	\$95K+
Male	Bronx	Sound-view	16	10th	Public	Frederick Douglass Academy III	Technical school	Somewhat Likely	C,D,E	African-American	4	\$21-30
Male	Bronx	Co-op City	16	11th	Public	Eagle Academy for Young Men	Private 4-year	Somewhat Likely	A, C, D	African-American	8	\$86-95
Male	Brooklyn	Bay Ridge	15	11th	Public	Fort Hamilton High School	Private 4-year, Public 4-year	Definitely will stay	A, B, C, D, E	Middle Eastern	6	\$86-95
Male	Brooklyn	Dyker Heights	17	12th	Public	New Utrecht High School	Public 4-year	Definitely will stay	A, B, C	White	6	\$95+

\*A=research schools online, B=spoke to college advisor, C=obtained brochures about schools, D=attended school fair, E=visited campuses/schools