

Why College Access?

Some facts

95% of all high school students have college aspirations

55% of high school graduates from low-income families enroll in college in comparison to 84% from high-income families (NCES, Condition of Education, 2011);

8% of 24 year olds from low-income backgrounds have attained a Bachelors Degree in comparison to 82% of 24 year olds from high-income backgrounds (Postsecondary Opportunity, 2010)

Understanding the gap

CARA is aware of the many challenges low-income students and their families encounter as they try to realize their college aspirations.

Among them:

- Lack of guidance and support in many schools that serve first generation college-bound students;
- Inadequate access to knowledge about the landscape of college and the application and financial aid processes;
- The growing complexity of the college application and enrollment process;
- The difficulty of paying for college;
- The overwhelming nature of the financial aid process, and families' fears about taking on extensive debt in an uncertain economy;
- Insufficient access to coursework that prepares students for the academic challenges of college.

CARA was founded to support the college access work of schools, community-based organizations, and universities. Using **educational reform** and **youth leadership** strategies, CARA works with a variety of partners to create responsive and effective programs. Our partners include young people, schools, educators, community organizers, parents, community-based organizations, funders and other allies. By bringing this range of people, institutions and perspectives together, CARA leverages best practices, young peoples' lived experiences, and existing resources to develop programs that help students from low-income backgrounds explore post-secondary options and navigate the multiple obstacles to college acceptance, matriculation and success.

At CARA, we take what we learn through our *programs* to inform both *policy* and *research*. We work to improve the systems, structures, and practices that guide young people to successful and satisfying post-secondary educational outcomes, particularly in our home city of New York.

Youth Leadership

CARA works with individual schools and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) interested in integrating youth leadership into their college access programming. It does this through both training the youth leaders, providing coaching to adult-staff to integrate youth leader work into the structures and practices of a school or CBO, and connecting sites to one another to share best practices. Youth Leader trainings are done in partnership with Goddard Riverside's Options Institute, an organization that provides training to college counselors throughout New York City.

College Inquiry

Drawing on CARA expertise in school reform and curriculum development, we work with schools and school-support organizations to develop whole-school inquiry-driven college access programs. We believe that in order to meet students' post-secondary planning needs, teachers, counselors and administrators have to develop shared understandings about college access work. Thus, the College Inquiry program works with school-based committees representative of these different staff positions. Through the College Inquiry approach, CARA offers coaching to schools, a comprehensive 9-12 curriculum, resources for professional development, and resources for college counselors.

The Bridge to College Program

A collaboration between The Urban Assembly, CUNY At Home in College, and CARA, the Bridge to College Program is designed to support first-generation college-bound students in the summer between high school graduation and college matriculation. By training and supporting current college students to work as "college coaches" in high schools throughout NYC, the Bridge to College program supports graduating seniors as they navigate the many obstacles that arise during this summer transitional time.