New York City's Strategy for Improving High Schools

An Overview

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As the nation has embraced the need to graduate every student ready for college and careers, high school reform has emerged at the top of the education agenda. Many local and state leaders are implementing strategies to address low performance and close achievement gaps. As federal policymakers look ahead to opportunities to support this work—including through the upcoming reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)—they are eagerly looking to districts that have been engaged in major reform to understand the implications for supporting and encouraging these reforms at scale.

One extremely relevant case study is New York City (NYC)—the nation's largest and most diverse school district—where Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Schools Chancellor Joel Klein have prioritized redesigning high schools and improving outcomes as part of a districtwide reform effort. Children First, as the reforms are collectively known, has caught the attention of advocates, policymakers, and educators across the country for the breadth of the changes implemented as well as for its preliminary indications of success in improving student outcomes and closing achievement gaps. Most promising is the steady increase of four-year graduation rates by as much as 15 points since 2002, after a decade of stagnation.

Given its size, demographics, and history, NYC faces some of the greatest challenges that federal policy seeks to address, including high-risk and diverse student populations, chronic low performance, stubborn inequities, a history of entrenched bureaucracy, and some community resistance to change. In addition, the city has implemented many of the reform practices that have dominated federal policy discussions, including turning around or replacing low-performing high schools, using data to inform instruction, and improving education options for at-risk students.

Given the parallels between the NYC experience and the federal policy conversation, the Alliance for Excellent Education has undertaken a project to explore New York City's efforts to improve high school outcomes and identify recommendations for federal policy that emerge from that experience. This work will culminate in three publications:

- This brief, the first in a series, will set the stage, describing the theory of action underlying the efforts of the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) and some of the specific strategies it has employed to improve high schools. It will not seek to detail the implementation of those strategies or explore results or related criticisms, all of which will be covered in the second and third publications.

- The second publication, *Addressing the Lowest-Performing High Schools: Learning from NYC's Approach*, will concentrate on efforts to address the lowest-performing high schools—an issue at the top of the federal education agenda and central to the NYCDOE's strategy for reform. The brief will explore the NYCDOE's approach to closing its lowest-performing high schools and the mechanisms in place to support improved teaching and learning in the schools that have replaced them. It will draw on this experience to provide recommendations for federal policymakers.

- The third publication, *Helping Students Get Back on Track: Learning from NYC's Multiple Pathways to Graduation Initiative*, will focus on the challenge of providing educational options for the students most at risk of dropping out—a critical issue for systemically addressing the dropout crisis, and an area in which NYC has demonstrated some success. The brief will discuss the city's approach, implementation challenges, and the policy implications that emerge from NYC's experience with the Multiple Pathways to Graduation initiative.

NYC's Improved High School Graduation Rates

There are dozens of methods in place for calculating high school graduation rates; they differ on details such as who is included in the formula and who counts the graduates. Depending on the methodology used, NYC's current four-year graduation rate ranges from 47 percent to 66 percent. However, *regardless* of the calculation used—calculated by the city, the state, or independently—the city's graduation rates have improved significantly, with the bulk of the increase—as much as 15 points—occurring since 2002, when Bloomberg and Klein took control of the schools.[1]

Official Calculations

◆**NYC Calculated:** Calculated by the city, this rate does not include students with disabilities who are educated in self-contained classrooms or served by District 75, which provides citywide educational, vocational, and behavior support programs for students who are on the autism spectrum, severely emotionally challenged, and/or multiply disabled. This rate counts as graduates all students receiving Local and Regents Diplomas, GEDs, and special education diplomas, as well as students graduating in August.[2]

● **NYS Calculated:** Calculated by the state, this rate does include students with disabilities who are educated in self-contained classrooms or served by District 75. This rate counts as graduates only students receiving Local and Regents Diplomas. It does not include as graduates students who receive GEDs or special education certificates. As of the 2008, the calculation does include students graduating in August.[3]

Independent Calculations

■ **Adjusted:** Calculated by researchers Jennifer Jennings and Leonie Haimson, this rate includes students who were discharged and does not count GED recipients as graduates. They indicate that these figures likely underestimate the actual graduation rate, as an unknown number of discharges were rightly excluded.[4]

✱ **EPE:** Calculated by researchers at the Education Week Research Center, this estimate compares the number of diploma recipients to the number of ninth graders four years earlier.[5]

Note: In late 2008, the U.S. Department of Education released new regulations for calculating graduation rates. The New York State rate formula described above is most similar to the formula required by the regulations, but it remains to be seen how federal and state policymakers will interpret and implement the law.

New York City's Four-Year Graduation Rates
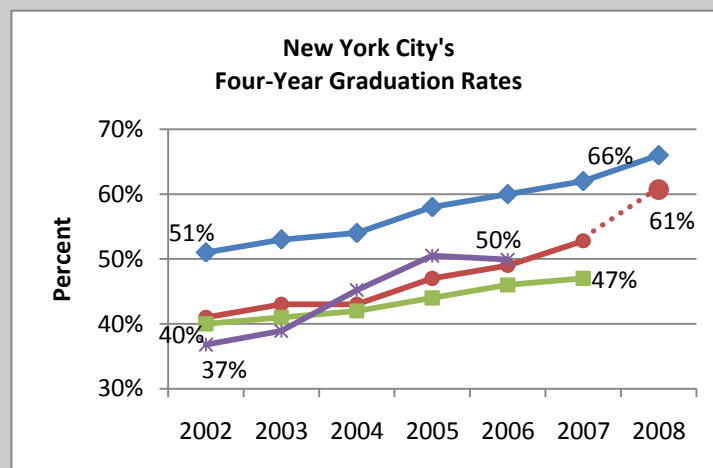
The Bloomberg Administration's Vision for Change: Creating a System of Great Schools

NYC is the largest school district in the nation, serving more students than all but twelve of the nation's states. In 2002, it was comprised of more than 1,200 schools, including 230 high schools. It currently consists of more than 1,630 schools (including charter schools), has 136,000 employees, and runs a $21 billion budget. Of its 1.1 million students, more than 80 percent are minorities and 14 percent are English language learners. And almost 74 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, a common measure of student poverty.[a] For decades, the NYC school system, like many large, high-poverty, high-minority urban districts, struggled with low graduation rates and achievement levels, an inequitable distribution of the best teachers across schools, and inequitable and inadequate school funding. In school year (SY) 2001–02, according to state estimates, only 41 percent of all students, and even fewer black and Hispanic students, graduated in four years.

These statistics are particularly sobering when put in the context of what this means for students' futures. High school dropouts nationwide are more likely to be unemployed, earn lower wages, become teenage parents, be unhealthy, die early, rely on public welfare systems, and go to jail at some point in their lives. The following statistics affect not just high school dropouts themselves, but also their larger communities.

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[a] Interestingly, the reported free and reduced-price lunch rate for high school students—50 percent—is about 20 percent lower than the overall rate. This difference is likely due to the fact that a significant number of poor students have dropped out of school by high school and that this self-reported poverty indicator is often underreported at the high school level.

- NYC dropouts are less likely to work than their more educated peers. Between 2005 and 2007, NYC high school dropouts, on average, were less likely to work at all (60 percent compared to 73 percent of high school graduates), and worked less steadily (26 weeks per year total compared to 33 weeks) and for fewer hours (24 hours per week compared to 29 hours).

- The expected lifetime earnings of an NYC high school dropout are just over $625,000—40 percent less than a high school graduate's expected earnings and 75 percent less than the expected earnings of a graduate with a bachelor's degree. This difference has increased substantially in the past thirty years.

- Recent estimates indicate that, in the New York City region,[b] decreasing the number of dropouts by 50 percent could pump $480 million per year in increased spending and investment levels into the region's economy, creating more than $92 million per year in additional state and local tax revenue and eventually supporting over 3,000 new jobs.[6]

In 2001, Michael Bloomberg was elected mayor of New York City in an election during which—prior to the events of September 11—education was a top agenda item for candidates and voters. The education platform of Bloomberg's campaign focused on increasing mayoral control, reducing teacher turnover, and increasing principals' autonomy. He inherited a decentralized school system in which authority was dispersed among a central board, community school district superintendents, and elected school boards. Most operational, instructional, and supervisory decisions were made at the district level, including budgeting, curriculum, and principal hiring and evaluation. As Chancellor Joel Klein noted at a state hearing, "there was divided authority, a school system in distress, lots of finger pointing and blame passing, and a new chancellor every two or three years." Many stakeholders believe this structure was a significant contributor to a system of schools varying vastly in quality. A *New York Times* article from 1996 found that "a close look at several troubled districts around the city shows clearly the debilitating toll that pervasive political infighting, patronage and favoritism can take on children in classrooms."

In June 2002, the New York State legislature granted the mayor control over the schools, providing Bloomberg with unprecedented authority to make sweeping changes. With this authority, the mayor appointed the chancellor and a majority of members to the Panel for Education Policy, the body that replaced the Board of Education, and consolidated many policy and administrative functions into the hands of the chancellor. Bloomberg and Klein then reorganized the districts to redistribute operational, instructional, and supervisory functions; provide school leaders with options for accessing support; and streamline administrative costs. In July 2002, he appointed Klein—a former assistant U.S. attorney general in the antitrust division, deputy counsel in the Clinton Administration, business executive, and onetime sixth-grade math teacher—as chancellor of schools. The two men worked closely together on the city's education efforts, meeting weekly and often making public announcements jointly—a relationship that has been simultaneously criticized and praised for creating a unilateral decisionmaking structure that facilitates action and change.

Over the next seven years, Bloomberg and Klein implemented sweeping changes that affect nearly every aspect of the school system. These changes were based on the underlying principle that, as Klein has stated, "The school is the unit that matters." With that in mind, their "goal [wa]s to create a system of great schools, not a great school system." The key measurable outcome Bloomberg and Klein would use to gauge their progress, and later demonstrate their success, was improved high school graduation rates. Michele Cahill, who served as senior counselor to the chancellor for education policy, with responsibility for the high school reform strategy from 2002 until early 2007, described the emphasis on high schools this way: "Addressing high school reform was critical to the Children First strategy of creating a system of good schools—both as a pathway to success and also to focus people's attention on the responsibility to all students, regardless of age, and to drive innovation to accelerate student learning. Creating schools with new designs that incorporated new expectations, personalization, innovative instructional models, and more rigorous curriculum was a key strategy from day one to generate higher expectations, proof points of what can be achieved by underprepared adolescents in good schools."

As NYCDOE's Chief Schools Officer Eric Nadelstern notes, it is no coincidence that Bloomberg put an antitrust lawyer in charge of NYC schools. Administration leaders felt strongly that elements of the NYC school system were not only corrupt but also protected a

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[b] Projections are based on the U.S. Census–defined New York–New Jersey–Long Island, New York–New Jersey–Pennsylvania metropolitan statistical area.

decades-old bureaucracy, resulting in incoherent policies and a system that failed its students. If they were going to make real changes in this large and complex city, they believed they needed to bring coherence to the system through the implementation of controversial reforms. This would require beginning with comprehensive reforms affecting schools' most basic operations and reorganizing the system around the needs of students rather than adults. This notion—fundamental to the Administration's approach to reform—is symbolized by the name given to the overall education reform agenda: Children First. Though they recognized that these changes would be difficult, officials intended to establish coherence and stability, eliminate dysfunction, and prepare the system to move forward with long-term reform efforts.

The Bloomberg Administration[c] implemented several systemwide strategies that affect all schools and students: 1) bringing coherence to the system; 2) shifting decisionmaking to the schools; 3) developing and supporting effective teachers and leaders; and 4) holding educators responsible for results. The district also focused on ensuring that high school students and their parents had equitable access to an extensive portfolio of high-performing schools with safe, engaging, and relevant environments that would meet students' wide-ranging academic, social-emotional, and cultural needs.

The following pages will describe the Administration's theory of action in these five areas, and sidebars will illustrate some of the specific strategies implemented. Subsequent papers in this series will explore some of these issues in greater depth and discuss implementation, challenges, and the lessons they provide for federal policy.

1. Bringing coherence to the system.

The Bloomberg Administration made a number of governance, organizational, and funding changes intended to bring stability and coherence to the way the system was managed and operated. Prior to mayoral control, the mayor, chancellor, central board, and thirty-two community school districts (led by local school boards and superintendents) shared accountability with unclear and conflicting roles and responsibilities. High schools were governed by the central Board of Education and organized into seven districts, resulting in an accountability gap between the K–8 and high school parts of the system. An additional community school district—District 75—provides citywide educational, vocational, and behavior support programs for students who are on the autism spectrum, severely emotionally challenged, or multiply disabled. Most operational, instructional, and supervisory decisions were made at the community district level, including budgeting, curriculum, and principal hiring and evaluation. With the newly enacted mayoral authority, Bloomberg replaced the Board of Education with the appointed Panel of Education Policy and consolidated many policy and administrative functions into the hands of the chancellor. Bloomberg and Klein then reorganized the districts to redistribute operational, instructional, and supervisory functions, provide school leaders with options for accessing support, and stream-line administrative costs. The resulting governance structure was a compromise between the Administration, community leaders, and state lawmakers: the current hybrid structure retains the community districts (with reduced authority, staffing, and resources), leaves much decisionmaking to school leaders, and redistributes business and academic support services to a range of network entities within and outside of the district (described later in this brief).

The governance changes were accompanied by efforts to trim the bureaucracy and secure more funding for schools. The NYCDOE has eliminated more than 550 administrative jobs from the system since 2006. The district reports that central and district office cuts have resulted in $350 million being redirected to schools since 2002. The Administration has directed more city funding to its schools, with city support of schools rising from $5.9 billion in 2002 to $10.5 billion in 2009. The NYCDOE has also worked to increase funding from a variety of external sources, including private entities. Since 2003, the Fund for Public Schools—a nonprofit organization established by the Administration—has raised more than $230 million from private organizations and individuals for school reform in NYC.

The city's previous school funding system perpetuated an inequitable distribution of funding within the district, with some schools receiving up to $1 million more per year compared to other schools of similar size serving similar students. Funding formulas granted schools money largely based on the number and salaries of teachers instead of student characteristics. This type of funding system

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[c] Unless otherwise specified, the "Administration" refers to the Bloomberg/Klein Administration and the "DOE" refers to the New York City Department of Education.

resulted, as Deputy Chief Schools Officer for Academics Josh Thomases noted, in "high-poverty schools … effectively subsidizing wealthier schools"[7] and the existence of incentives to avoid serving students who were more expensive to serve, such as students with disabilities and limited English proficiency.

The Administration revised the district's funding system to make the budgeting system easier to understand, ensure that funding to schools was more equitable, and give leaders more flexibility and authority over how to spend their budgets. During SY 2007–08, NYC began transitioning to the Fair Student Funding formula, becoming the largest district in the country to use a system of weighted student funding, in which money follows a student to whichever school he or she attends. Schools receive additional funds for students with special needs based on income, English proficiency, disability, or previous achievement levels.

The Administration also sought to bring coherence and alignment to the district's instructional approach and promotion policies to ensure that students received the instruction and support necessary for success throughout their career. Officials believed that the district's policy of socially promoting students—moving them to the next grade level regardless of academic performance—was a harmful practice that set students up to fail in both higher grades and the real world. As a result, the Administration implemented an end to social promotion in grades 3–8 and developed new promotion policies for these grades.

While the policies have drawn criticism from both stakeholders who support social promotion and those who believe the promotion policies are not rigorous enough, the Administration remains committed to its approach of establishing higher standards and providing extra support. To ensure that students in all schools were receiving instruction aligned with these high expectations, the district adopted uniform districtwide elementary and middle school curriculum in reading and math and instituted a number of professional development strategies to support teachers. Also, students have multiple opportunities to retake tests and earn promotion over the summer, and repeating students received mandated intervention services. A recent study by the RAND corporation found improved long-term performance for retained students and a reduction in overall retention rates.[8]

Additionally, district leadership recognized that literacy skills significantly influence adolescent students' success, and that it was necessary to address the abysmal literacy skills of the city's secondary students. As noted in a recent report by Carnegie Corporation of New York, "the expectation became that 4–12 English language arts (ELA) teachers would be responsible for teaching not just literature, but literacy, as had long been the case with teachers in the lower grades." To support effective literacy instruction, the district adopted a single literacy curriculum focused on accelerated learning, eventually implemented for all sixth through ninth graders who had scored at the lowest two levels on the state's ELA assessment. Classrooms using the curriculum were supplied with new classroom libraries, and the district developed a network of specialists and coaches to support schools' efforts to address students' literacy needs and improve instruction in both literacy and mathematics. While the curricular mandates were phased out over time, the district continues to support a focus on adolescent literacy.

2. Shift decisionmaking to the school level.

Administration officials believed that the most rational, efficient, and effective way to create wide-scale, long-term improvement was through a school-centered approach that provided principals and educators with the freedom to design educational strategies tailored to their students. After the initial reforms took hold and they observed increased stability and coherence, the NYCDOE implemented strategies to move the system steadily toward decentralized, school-based management, where school leaders are given the resources and flexibility to make key decisions about hiring, scheduling, budgeting, curriculum, professional development, and other school support.

Several districts around the country are embracing a similar approach to drive authority and accountability to school leaders. Most of these districts are taking an "earned autonomy" approach, in which increased authority and flexibility are reserved for a set of leaders who have been preselected, and even specially trained, to operate schools at extreme ends of the performance spectrum: very high-performing schools, or schools needing extreme intervention. However, the NYCDOE has taken the opposite approach of universal autonomy, steadily expanding autonomy from a small pilot project in 2004 with the Autonomy Zone to a districtwide policy described

as "empowerment" in SY 2007–08 in which all principals—regardless of their experience or track record—must assume increased authority, with a range of support available to them all. Principals have control over which support option they select. (See box at right describing the support options.)

Administration officials have pointed to at least three reasons for taking this approach. First, they say autonomy helps in the recruitment and retention of innovative and successful self-starters—exactly the kind of leaders they think are necessary to turn around and lead the city's schools. Second, they believe there is no single right way to operate a school; rather, decisions about the strategies that will be most effective at a particular school—with its unique character, challenges, and student population—are best determined by the professionals most familiar with it. Klein recently described this as follows: "Schools can get from terrible to mediocre with mandated curriculum and top-down rules. But to get from mediocre to great, teams need the latitude to innovate and invent. That has to happen at the school level."

Third, and perhaps most telling, is the Administration's belief that autonomy removes excuses for poor performance. Josh Thomases, the NYCDOE's deputy chief schools officer for academics, notes that it is difficult to hold principals accountable for the results in their schools if all the most important decisions related to how schools operate are made by the central office. As Chief Schools Officer Eric Nadelstern said, "The only thing you succeed in doing if you tell [principals] how to [run their schools]—from the vantage point of the school district central office, state department of education office, or federal Department of Education—is you let everyone else off the hook because now it's your plan that's being tested and not the principal's best professional judgment." In essence, the NYCDOE has created a new deal with principals: they make the decisions, and they take responsibility for the results.

In providing autonomy to every school leader, the Administration essentially inverted the traditional organizational structure of the school system. Nadelstern sums up this new configuration of relationships and expectations as follows: "[This is a] different set of school management strategies … that assume[s] that the relationship between kids and teachers in classrooms [i]s the central work of the school system, and that everyone and everything else

Principals' Choice: Academic, Instructional, and Operational Support Options

Academic/Instructional Support: To ensure that schools have the tools and capacity they need to be successful with the new environment of autonomy and independence, each school leader is required to partner with a school support organization (SSO). There are twelve SSOs, six of which are run by external nonprofits, six of which are run by the DOE. Each principal selects the SSO and support package he or she believes will work best for the school's students and staff. A majority of high schools and secondary schools have chosen learning or partnership support organizations.[9]

Externally run:

- Partnership support organization (PSO): PSOs are external organizations with specialties that include middle school reform, postsecondary preparation, professional development, and targeted improvement planning. The NYCDOE screens these organizations before offering them as SSO choices for schools. They provide services such as data support for planning and assessment, professional education on adolescent development, and support in creating collaborative teaching and learning environments. Partnership support organizations include the Academy for Educational Development, the Center for Educational Innovation–Public Education Association, City University of New York, Fordham University, New Visions for Public Schools, and Replications, Inc. The cost for these PSOs ranges from $25,107 to $146,575 per school.

DOE run:

- Empowerment support organization (ESO): Schools opting for this type of support form self-affiliated networks with other schools that have similar priorities and visions. For example, one ESO network is a group of high schools that had already been partnering with the Institute for Student Achievement, a successful high school reform model. ESO networks hire teams that provide instructional and operational support services. Teams are comprised of a network leader; an achievement coach, who assists schools with data systems and accountability measures; a business services manager, who provides assistance with budgets, purchasing, grants, and other business services; a special services manager, who coordinates programs for special education students and English language learners; and a lead instruction mentor, who provides assistance to principals in coordinating professional education and new teacher mentoring programs. The cost for schools to join ESO networks is $27,000 annually.
- Learning support organization (LSO): The four LSOs were created by former NYCDOE regional superintendents, who provide instructional, programming, and youth and staff development support. Options include the Community Learning and Support Organization, the Integrated Curriculum and Instruction Learning Support Organization, the Knowledge Network Learning Support Organization, and the Leadership Learning Support Organization. The cost for these LSOs ranges from $24,900 to $59,900 per school.

Operational Support: School leaders now also have choices about how to access business and operations support.

- Integrated service center (ISC): ISCs, located in each of the city's five boroughs, are run by NYCDOE staff and provide assistance to schools with payroll, human resources, food services, facilities, and transportation. According to the NYCDOE's 2009 Principal Satisfaction Survey, 92 percent of principals said they were satisfied with the overall quality of support provided by their ISC.[10]

- Children First Network: Seeking to personalize further the business and operational support provided by ISCs, the NYCDOE created a pilot where several networks—groups of about twenty schools using the same SSO—were excused from using the ISC for support. Instead, they were assigned staff from the Children First Network, which provide services only to assigned schools. Due to positive feedback from participating schools, the NYCDOE expanded the Children First Network to an additional twenty networks of about twenty schools each in the fall of 2009.[11] The NYCDOE increasingly considers networks of twenty to thirty schools as the building blocks of their reforms.

Tools to Support Coherent Data-Driven School Improvement

Periodic Assessments: To complement annual student performance data coming from high-stakes tests, in SY 2007–08 the NYCDOE implemented Periodic Assessments—no-stakes assessments linked to state standards and designed to provide rapid feedback so teachers can better align instruction with students' needs and measure students' preparedness for high-stakes exams. The NYCDOE provides schools with a menu of assessments that the chancellor has described as "quicker and more accurate" than what was previously being used in classrooms.[12] High schools use a combination of multiple assessment options, or an approved alternate design, to assess students who have yet to pass their corresponding Regents exams in English Language Arts and Integrated Algebra several times a year.[13] The NYCDOE provides teachers with professional development on these periodic assessments and on how to utilize the data that they yield. Schools receive results online immediately from computer-based assessments, and within five days from paper assessments that are graded externally by the DOE's exam vendor, with extended response and essay portions graded by teachers. It is still too early to know the impact of the Periodic Assessments on teaching and learning.

Achievement Reporting and Innovation System (ARIS): In 2007, the NYCDOE announced an $80 million contract with IBM to build ARIS—a sophisticated Web-based data and information system that would consolidate preexisting systems and make data more transparent, accessible, and usable. ARIS houses a wide range of student-level data—including demographic information, credit accumulation, attendance, yearly testing scores (state Regents exams, high school admission tests, and the PSAT), information about students' previous teachers and schools, and other information collected through classroom-based instructional assessments. It also includes school-level information garnered from the School Progress Reports and Quality Reviews—accountability tools described on the next page. Every stakeholder in the system—parents, teachers, the school leadership team, external support staff, and district leadership—can access information in the system to analyze data, create custom reports, and put the information to good use. These various portals have been rolled out steadily over time. In addition, ARIS includes a "Knowledge Management" function that fosters collaboration by allowing schools and teachers to share innovations and successful strategies.

Inquiry teams: In SY 2007–08, the NYCDOE began requiring schools to form inquiry teams to ensure that educators use data to address school challenges and drive improvement. Schools establish small teams of educators to examine performance data of a selected group of low-performing students, monitor their learning, and make recommendations for how to help these students. Through this process, the team members should become experts in the diagnostic and inquiry process and help spread this kind of data-driven decisionmaking throughout the school in a way that stimulates instructional changes and improves teaching and learning schoolwide.[14] In 2009–10 the NYCDOE expanded the inquiry team approach to encourage teams of leaders across subject areas and grade levels to examine teaching strategies and student work to improve student performance at all levels. As of January 1, 2010, there were 7,476 inquiry teams across the city, making teacher teams a core school reform strategy.[15]

Senior achievement facilitators: An assessment of the NYCDOE's implementation of inquiry teams determined that while teams were successful in influencing the targeted group of students and those who taught them, many teams had difficulty broadening their impact throughout their schools. The study suggested that teams need more support from their districts and support organizations to mobilize all teachers in the building to affect broader school-level results.[16] To address this concern, and build capacity for data-driven improvement, the NYCDOE has created the Children First Intensive program to support inquiry teams. Senior achievement facilitators (SAFs) act as schools' liaisons to both inquiry teams and SSOs, helping them incorporate data tools into schools' instructional practices and developing and delivering specific training related to identified needs, such as differentiating classroom instruction. The SAFs also work districtwide to identify and disseminate promising practices. According to the NYCDOE's spring 2009 Principal Satisfaction Survey, 88 percent of principals said they were satisfied with the overall quality of support provided by their SAFs.[17]

* These tools and processes will be discussed in more detail in a subsequent publication in this series, *Addressing the Lowest-Performing High Schools: Learning from NYC's Approach.*

exist[s] in support of that relationship and [i]s subservient to the work that principals and teachers do in schools." The central office now views supporting schools as its primary role, just as the principal's main job is supporting teachers, and the teacher's role is supporting students. Interim Acting Chief Accountability Officer Shael Polakow-Suransky recently said in an interview, "My job is not to intervene at an individual school level and suggest a change, but to provide rich, data-based portraits and qualitative portraits … so that the folks that are supporting schools can help the school go to its next step."

This approach has repositioned the NYCDOE as a provider of support services and a facilitator of school improvement. The central office has been reorganized into distinct teams and networks that provide specialized support to school leaders. To help ensure that school leaders—with their autonomy, authority, and flexibility—are making sound decisions that result in coherent and effective programs and practices at their schools, the NYCDOE has provided leaders with a range of tools to aid data-driven decisionmaking, including a knowledge and data management system, new periodic assessments, and school planning tools. NYCDOE staff have been repurposed to support this work. With this shift toward a client-consultant relationship between schools and NYCDOE offices, administration leaders have worked to introduce a customer service mentality into the NYCDOE's daily work and purpose. Specific strategies used to support data-driven school improvement are described in more detail in the box at the left and in a subsequent publication in this series, *Addressing the Lowest-Performing High Schools: Learning from NYC's Approach.*

Administration officials often note that it is not fair to hold principals accountable for results without also providing them with adequate resources to do their jobs. In their view, the district's former complex budgeting process restricted how principals could use their funds based on strict rules from the central office. In addition to granting principals more freedom to choose the support services their schools need, beginning in SY 2007–08 principals were afforded more authority to create their own budgets. Klein stripped most requirements on how dollars must be spent, allowing principals discretion in spending within their own schools not just on the type of support organization they wish to use, but also on decisions related to staffing, enrichment opportunities, and supplies.

3. Develop and support effective teachers and leaders.

These new roles and responsibilities, and the pace and scale of the reform efforts, placed significant demands on the system. Administration officials acknowledged that building human capital was critical for their strategy. Chris Cerf, former deputy chancellor for strategy and innovation, believes that the steps the NYCDOE has taken to recruit, train, and retain highly effective teachers and principals are crucial to the Administration's theory of action. Normally, he says, "'people' are the last frontier of school reform that no one wants to touch."[18] The NYCDOE has secured historic agreements with teachers' and principals' unions that have allowed the district to implement innovative policies that officials believe promote teaching, learning, and student outcomes rather than adults' interests. Lastly, the NYCDOE has opened up the system to external partners of all kinds that provide expert technical assistance and services necessary to support reforms. This includes management consultants who conduct milestone data analyses, intermediaries who help create new schools, various organizations providing academic and instructional support as school support organizations, and community-based organizations that provide nonacademic and youth development support to schools and programs that are part of the Multiple Pathways to Graduation Initiative. (Specific strategies related to educators are described in more detail in the box below.)

Recruiting, Retaining, and Rewarding Effective Teachers and Leaders

Teachers: The NYCDOE has worked to build a force of highly effective teachers. The percentage of certified teachers increased to 100 percent in SY 2007–08.[19] According to the state, the percent of full-time equivalent teaching assignments held by teachers who did not have the appropriate certification decreased from 19 percent in SY 2004–05 to 11 percent in SY 2006–07.[20] In addition to implementing a number of recruitment and retention strategies, the NYCDOE and the local teachers' union, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), reached several historic agreements that include a mix of incentives and policy reforms to help professionalize the field.

Financial incentives: The NYCDOE offers financial incentives both to recruit candidates and to encourage high performance. The Administration has raised starting teacher salaries by 43 percent since 2003. The lead teacher program provides veteran teachers with $10,000 salary bonuses to teach in high-need schools and serve as mentors to less-experienced teachers. In addition, teachers in high-need schools that have improved by meeting performance targets receive bonuses through a schoolwide performance bonus program.

Tenure reform: As part of its efforts to put children's needs first, the Administration has sought to ensure that only effective teachers receive tenure. The UFT contract includes a Peer Intervention-Plus Program, which pairs struggling tenured teachers with expert classroom teachers who serve as mentors. It also created the Labor Support Unit, comprised of education consultants including former principals, which works with ineffective tenured teachers to develop support plans that include intensive professional development. When these other measures do not improve a tenured teacher's effectiveness, the Teacher Performance Unit—a team of attorneys—builds a case against the ineffective teacher to support principals in the removal process.[21]

Staffing decisions: The Administration contends that, to empower principals fully to make decisions that promote students' interests, principals must have the authority to choose their own staff. The UFT agreement made significant changes to the old system, creating instead a system of "mutual consent," as described here by the New Teacher Project:

First, [the system] protected the right of schools to choose which teachers they hired, regardless of seniority. Second, it ended the "bumping" of novice teachers out of their positions by senior teachers who claimed these positions based on seniority and without input from principals or school staffs. Finally, it established a more open hiring process for "excessed" teachers (those displaced from their positions because of falling school enrollments, budget declines, programmatic changes, or school closures). In short, the 2005 contract saw New York City transition from a system in which teachers and principals often had no input over teacher assignments to a system of "mutual consent," in which both teachers and principals had to agree on all teacher placements. This policy shift brought to a halt the pervasive forcing of teachers on schools and of schools on teachers, trends that had tarnished the city's staffing system.[22]

The decision to halt forced placements of teachers has created a financial drain on the district. Teachers who have lost their positions—who are transferred to an "absent teacher reserve" (ATR) pool—continue to receive a salary and benefits. The New Teacher Project estimated that between 2006 and 2008, the city paid $81 million to support the 665 ATRs,[23] and would pay roughly $74 million to 1,000 ATRs in SY 2008–09.[24] As of July 2009, 2,300 ATRs remained unemployed. To maintain principals' authority over staffing decisions, the NYCDOE has had to institute hiring freezes under which only teachers within the system can be hired, and now the NYCDOE offers principals financial incentives to hire teachers from the ATR pool. While the department does not consider this situation ideal, it ensures that principals, rather than being forced to hire and retain certain teachers, can choose the instructors that meet the needs of their students.

Principals: The NYCDOE's empowerment strategy rests upon the belief that schools succeed when principals and their teams—who know students best—enjoy the freedom to design educational strategies and budgets tailored to their students. To succeed, this means that the district's more than 1,600 principals must be capable of effectively leading schools with increased authority, autonomy, and flexibility. The Administration has taken a number of steps designed both to improve existing principals' leadership skills and to recruit and prepare new leaders to succeed.

Financial incentives: Principals' salaries have increased 23 percent since 2002, and principals can now receive annual performance bonuses of up to $25,000. In January 2008, the Administration also launched the Executive Principals Program, which, for a $25,000 bonus, places principals with successful track records in the city's lowest-performing schools, reducing the inequitable distribution of effective leaders.

Leadership Academy for Principals: The district launched the NYC Leadership Academy —which later became an independent organization—to help current and aspiring principals develop as effective school leaders. It offers an Aspiring Principals Program (APP) and a New School Intensive Program for those principals who will lead the city's new small schools. Currently academy graduates make up 15 percent of the district's principals, including seventy-two principals serving in high schools for SY 2009–10.[25]

4. Hold educators accountable for their performance.

As the NYCDOE changed and clarified the roles of central office staff and provided school leaders with increased flexibility and autonomy, it steadily introduced a number of new accountability tools that provide quantitative and qualitative data to better understand the performance of all the players in the system—teachers, principals, external service providers, and internal service providers. This information influences decisions about rewards and consequences based on performance. It also reflects the idea behind Thomases' point about empowerment noted above: the NYCDOE intended to grant all of the adults in the system the authority, flexibility, and information they needed to make their best professional judgments, accept responsibility for their performance, and be judged accordingly so that decisions could be made to benefit students. (See more about these tools below.)

Establishing Accountability and Incentives for Results

Like many district leaders, the NYCDOE sought to develop a comprehensive school evaluation system that would prove useful as a measurement for accountability purposes that would directly influence school improvement efforts. After two years of development, the NYCDOE introduced a variety of tools designed to measure the performance of a school quantitatively, qualitatively, and comparatively, and to drive improvements in teaching and learning.

- **School Progress Reports:** Since SY 2006–07, each school has received an annual *School Progress Report* containing a letter grade—from A through F—that summarizes its performance. These letter grades are determined by a variety of factors, including student performance (25 percent of the overall score), student progress (60 percent), and school environment (15 percent). *Student performance* and *student progress* in elementary and middle schools are measured using scores on state exams. For high schools, *student performance* is based on graduation rates and types of diplomas awarded, and *student progress* is measured by credit accumulation and Regents exam pass rates. For all schools, *school environment* is assessed using annual Learning Environment Surveys completed by teachers, parents, and students. A school's scores are then compared to similar schools in the NYC school system to determine a letter grade.

- **Quality Reviews:** Each school also receives a *Quality Review*. Each school is visited by experienced educators who spend at least two days talking to principals, teachers, students, and parents to observe how the school uses a data-driven approach to build instructional and organizational coherence and to develop goals, individualizes instructional approaches, and improves teaching and learning. Schools are deemed "Well Developed," "Proficient," "Undeveloped with Proficient Features," or "Underdeveloped."

Though not a factor in determining a school's state or federal accountability status, Progress Report and Quality Review results have consequences for schools, principals, teachers, and support organizations.

- **Schools:** Poor Progress Report scores result in negative consequences. Schools earning three Cs in a row, Ds, or Fs, will "be subject to school improvement measures and target setting and, if no progress is made over time, possible leadership change (subject to contractual obligations), restructuring, or closure."[26] In these cases, both Progress Reports and Quality Reviews factor into the decision about what will happen to the school.

- **Principals:** In 2007, the NYCDOE and the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators, the union representing NYC principals, agreed on a contract awarding principals bonuses based on their schools' Progress Report scores. Bonuses range from $25,000 for principals leading the top 1 percent of schools to $7,000 for those principals whose schools score in the top 11–20 percent.[27] The union also renegotiated the Principal Performance Review. Under the 2007 agreement, a principal's review is based on a combination of components, including a school's Progress Report, Quality Review, and progress toward certain achievement and school environment goals agreed upon by the principal and superintendent.

- **Teachers:** An agreement with the teachers' union limits the NYCDOE's use of information gathered from School Progress Reports so that findings can have only positive consequences for teachers. In the fall of 2007, the NYCDOE launched a foundation-funded pilot program to award bonuses to educators based on their schools' progress reports for SY 2007–08. Schools that either received an A on their Progress Reports or met 75–100 percent of performance targets on the reports for SY 2007–08 received awards ranging from $1,500 to $3,000 per full-time UFT staff member. Each school independently determined the manner in which the bonuses were distributed.

- **Support organizations:** Initially, accountability for the SSOs was informal: it came through the market as principals made their annual selections. In 2009, the NYCDOE's accountability office began formally and publicly comparing SSOs based on their schools' Progress Reports and Quality Reviews in addition to principal satisfaction surveys. These grades will not result in disqualifications of SSOs, but will allow principals to make more informed decisions when choosing support organizations.[28] In 2009, most schools chose to stay with their current service providers.[29] NYCDOE officials have taken this as a sign that schools are happy with the level of service they are receiving, which also reflects the results of the 2009 Principal Satisfaction Survey, in which 96 percent of principals said they were satisfied with the overall quality of support provided by their school support organizations.[30]

- **DOE offices:** Inside the central office—from integrated service centers that provide operational support to network leaders—staff members use school performance data as well as principal satisfaction surveys to understand and evaluate their own performance and adjust their strategies for providing services to schools.

* These tools and process will be discussed in more detail in a subsequent publication in this series, *Addressing the Lowest-Performing High Schools: Learning from NYC's Approach*.

Reforming New York City's High Schools

For decades, zip code was the deciding factor in whether a student had access to a good high school. Moreover, principals in the city's academically screened schools had the ability to request that students be transferred to their local zoned high school, offering a way for institutions to avoid enrolling students they deemed harder to teach. As a result, too many students—particularly poor, minority, disabled, and limited English proficient students—were stuck in chronically low-performing high schools with no options for a quality education.

Under Joel Klein's leadership, the NYCDOE took a number of steps to help ensure that high school students and their parents had equitable access to an extensive portfolio of high-performing schools with safe, engaging, and relevant environments that would meet students' wide-ranging academic, social-emotional, and cultural needs. The districtwide reforms described in the earlier pages were supplemented with two specific high school initiatives intended to quickly improve high school graduation rates. First, the NYCDOE aggressively closed the lowest-performing high schools and replaced them with higher-quality options for students. Second, the NYCDOE created new targeted programs and schools to address the needs of overage and undercredited high school–aged youth. These strategies are summarized here and will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent papers in this series.

Closing and replacing the lowest-performing high schools

The NYCDOE aggressively took on the challenge of improving the city's chronically dysfunctional high schools. The NYCDOE has closed or is in the process of phasing out more than ninety schools (including thirty-four high schools) since 2002.[31]

Klein sees the decision to close schools as one of the toughest that administrators face. To determine which schools will be closed, the NYCDOE reviews a variety of data to identify the schools that had made the least amount of progress with their students. Initially, officials looked at graduation rates, test scores, and student demand. Since the development of the new accountability tools, the NYCDOE uses Progress Reports, Quality Reviews, and a range of other qualitative criteria to determine if the school has the capacity to improve in the immediate future. Since 2009–10, per new state regulations, the NYCDOE also holds public hearings about each proposed school closure before making a final closure determination.

Thomases notes, "The failure of a school organization is not the fault of a single principal, teacher, or educator. In many cases, the structure of the school—the relationship between its size and the concentration of underprepared or high-need students—sets the school up for failure." Research by the Parthenon Group has shown that smaller high schools are much more likely to succeed with underprepared students than large high schools with similar demographics.[32]

The NYCDOE does not close schools in their entirety, but rather phases them out by not accepting an incoming class. As schools are phased out, new small schools are phased in, often sharing the same campus as the large comprehensive high school they replaced. For instance, the approximately 3,000-student Evander Childs High School in the Bronx has been replaced by six smaller, higher-performing schools. Each has a different instructional theme, staff, and dedicated space while sharing facilities such as the gym and cafeteria. The new schools, able to grow slowly over time, implement dramatically different instructional programs that have led to the impressive outcomes in NYC's new smaller schools across the city. Officials view this phase-in approach as a critical step to ensure stability. The NYCDOE has seen gains in both the schools being phased out—as schools shrink, students benefit from increased attention from teachers and administrators—and the new schools being phased in.

Developing this portfolio of high school options included the implementation of several key strategies:

Reforming the high school admissions process: The NYCDOE overhauled the admissions process to infuse more choice and equity into the system, and implemented a number of strategies to help students and parents navigate the admissions and program selection process.

Maximizing the expertise of partners: Unlike other districts that recruit external partners to take full responsibility for new school creation or school turnaround, in order to take full advantage of the social capital available in communities throughout the city the NYCDOE has created a range of entry points for partners to participate with schools. For example, the NYCDOE worked with more than a dozen intermediary partners, nonprofit organizations funded in part by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, to bring innovation and external expertise to the new school start-up effort; charter management organizations fully develop and operate groups of charter schools throughout the city; and many community-based organizations partner with a single school to provide afterschool and youth development opportunities.

Supporting new school development: The new school reform strategy was designed to foster innovation. Klein considers these new schools "the canaries in the coal mine," demonstrating where the school system itself needed to change in order to create an organization in which schools could succeed. Many of the replacement schools were developed in partnership with a nonprofit intermediary organization through a public-private partnership. Each has a different instructional theme, staff, and dedicated space, while sharing facilities such as the gym and cafeteria. To ensure that the replacement schools were not only new but better, the NYCDOE developed a strategic school development process to support school leaders in creating rigorous, relevant, and successful school designs.

New school applicants participated in NYCDOE-facilitated new school development sessions, designed to teach applicants the most effective innovations in developing new small schools. The NYCDOE partnered with the NYC Leadership Academy to support new school principals prior to and during the first years of the new school: through the New School Intensive, new school leaders participated received trainings and one-on-one coaching focused on leading and managing change in new small schools. This was designed to attract bright and innovative new leaders to the system. The district also reorganized its central office functions to operate a cross-functional team to manage this complex restructuring and new school development process.

The DOE's new small high schools serve higher percentages of students scoring on the lowest two levels of the state exams, black, and Latino students and similar percentages of ELL and special education students as the rest of the City. With a similar population, these schools have greater success: a graduation rate of over 75 percent since their first graduating class in 2002.[33] This is about 15 percentage points higher than the city's average and nearly double the graduation rates of the phased-out schools they were designed to replace.

Addressing the Lowest-Performing High Schools: Learning from NYC's Approach will describe in further detail the strategies implemented to close the lowest-performing high schools and open new schools, as well as provide details about the performance of these schools, demographics of the students they serve, and implications for federal policy.

Programs for overage, undercredited youth

A key component of the NYCDOE's strategy for high school reform is the focus on the creation of schools and programs designed to serve overage and undercredited (OA-UC) students. In 2005, the NYCDOE established the Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation (OMPG) to analyze the dropout crisis in the city, with the goal of significantly increasing graduation rates and expanding postsecondary opportunities for OA-UC students. With the insight provided by an independent longitudinal data analysis, the NYCDOE implemented a range of recuperative options for OA-UC students—differentiated educational models designed to help these students meet state graduation standards and graduate prepared for meaningful postsecondary opportunities.

- *Transfer school model:* Small, academically rigorous, full-time high schools designed for the younger, lower-credited segment of the OA-UC population. Prior to 2005, OA-UC students enrolled in transfer schools had graduated at a rate of 56 percent as compared to a 19 percent graduation rate for OA-UC students that remain in New York's comprehensive high schools. Since 2005, sixteen additional transfer schools have opened.

- *Young Adult Borough Centers (YABCs):* Evening programs designed for the older, higher-credited segment of the OA-UC population. YABCs offer a focused curriculum centered on the credits needed for individual students to graduate. OA-UC students enrolled in YABCs graduate with high school diplomas at a rate of 39 percent. Since 2005, seventeen additional YABCs have opened.

- *GED programs:* Programs prepare students for the GED and support students in developing meaningful postsecondary connections. Historically, the graduation rate for OA-UC students enrolled in the GED program was 17 percent. In 2006, the NYCDOE opened its first full-time GED program, Access GED.

- *Learning to Work (LTW):* Students have the opportunity to participate in intensive employability skills development workshops, subsidized internships, college and career counseling, and job placement. LTW services are provided by community-based organizations and are integrated across the transfer school, YABC, and GED programs described above.

Since 2005, New York City has dramatically expanded and refined the recuperative portfolio, increasing the number of students served by recuperative schools and programs and developing new pathways to graduation. Vanda Belusic-Vollor, executive director of OMPG said, "The knowledge we gained from the longitudinal study provided us with the tools we needed to successfully expand

these school models designed to address the various needs of our students. While our expansion of these models has helped thousands of additional high-needs students graduate prepared for college and careers, we will continue developing more options for these students."

A subsequent publication in this series, *Helping Students Get Back on Track: Learning from NYC's Multiple Pathways to Graduation Initiative*, will explore this work in further detail

Transforming the high school landscape

In addition to the replacement strategy and the recuperative options, the Administration sought to create more high-quality choices for students by opening new schools in nonclosure settings in new buildings and in available space in other existing school buildings. These new options include new small schools, charter schools, and schools and programs with a career and technical education focus. Since 2002, the city has opened 335 new schools (in addition to eighty-four charter schools), including 175 high schools and fifty-eight secondary schools serving grades 6–12.[34] These changes to the high school landscape mean that the NYCDOE has increased the number of high school options from 230 in 2002–03 to more than 691 programs in 392 schools in 2009–10.[35]

For SY 2009–10, the high school landscape includes the following:[36]

School type[d]	Description
Large high schools *SY 2009–10:* 168 schools	The majority of NYC high school students attend larger high schools serving more than 500 students.[37] Often these schools provide opportunities for greater electives and program options.
Small high schools *SY 2009–10:* 314 schools	Small schools serve fewer than 500 students and provide greater personalization. Many of these schools were created since 2002 through partnerships with intermediaries or community-based organizations.
Large high schools with small learning communities *SY 2009–10:* 19 schools	To help mitigate the challenges large traditional high schools face, nineteen such schools are organized into small learning communities (SLCs). Each of these schools has one principal; each individual SLC is led by an assistant principal and serves 250 to 450 students who work with the same group of teachers and staff until graduation. The SLC's assistant principal and team have considerable decisionmaking authority related to budgeting, staffing, and professional development. Each SLC must design a coherent program focused on a theme, and educators collaborate during common planning times to develop cross-curricular lessons that draw from the theme. SLCs focus on building relationships with students, using data to assess student performance, and individualizing instruction and interventions. School principals use data to hold assistant principals accountable for student outcomes and to inform adjustments in programming and staffing.
Alternative settings *SY 2009–10:* 179 sites	The district offers a range of alternative settings, including those for students who are in the juvenile justice system, pregnant, or parenting, and off track to graduation. To support students who are off track to graduate on time or who have already dropped out in earning a diploma, the NYCDOE expanded and improved its recuperative options through the Multiple Pathways to Graduation initiative. The MPG initiative is the subject of the third paper in this series, *Helping Students Get Back on Track: Learning from NYC's Multiple Pathways to Graduation Initiative.*
Specialized high schools *SY 2009–10:* 9 schools	Nine specialized high schools require a special admissions exam or audition to be eligible for admission. These schools allow students to pursue special interests and develop particular talents, such as engineering or performing arts. In the summer of 2009, the NYCDOE implemented a three-year pilot program that provides fifty seventh- and eighth-grade students who score below grade level on state reading and math exams additional support and instruction to prepare them for the specialized exam necessary to gain entrance to these highly respected schools.[38]
Career and Technical Education schools *SY 2009–10:* 30 CTE-designated schools	High schools with CTE programs integrate rigorous academic study with workforce skills in specific career pathways relevant for the twenty-first century. Students receive instruction in an industry-related area and have the opportunity to graduate from high school with industry-specific competencies and skills that lead to postsecondary education, further industry training, and/or entry into the workforce. In addition to the thirty CTE-designated schools where the entire institution is dedicated to a CTE-focused education, an additional 307 schools offer CTE courses or programs. In 2009, the Administration announced that four CTE schools would serve as demonstration sites innovating new rigorous models of CTE education to prepare students for twenty-first-century careers.
Charters *SY 2009–10*: 99 schools	Charter schools are publicly funded and open to all students, who are admitted through a lottery if demands exceed capacity. Charters are each governed by a nonprofit board of trustees that has the flexibility to make its own policies and develop innovative instructional programs and is held accountable for student performance under a five-year contract. State legislation has permitted charters since 1998, but the NYCDOE has encouraged the increased development of charter schools: the hallmarks of charters—autonomy and accountability—parallel the underlying theories behind Children First.

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[d] Offerings are based on school and program options for the 2009–10 school year known at time of publication. Some settings qualify for more than one category.

Key Outcomes

The widespread interest in the NYC experience has researchers, policymakers, advocates, and educators eager for analysis of the Children First initiatives and their impact on teaching, learning, and student outcomes. As a result, various entities—funders, external organizations, independent researchers, and the NYCDOE itself—are researching and evaluating various components of the reforms.

Efforts to draw any solid conclusions are complicated by several factors. First, most of the initiatives have only recently been implemented and some impact data is not yet available. Second, many of the efforts are interwoven, and the impacts of individual initiatives cannot be isolated. Third, the implementation of Children First coincides with that of other policies from the state level and with the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Lastly, the NYCDOE's commitment to a continuous improvement process has led the Administration to reevaluate and adjust its strategies and programs.

A promising future source of analysis is the newly established Research Alliance for NYC Schools housed within New York University's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. The Research Alliance is designed to serve as an independent body providing objective research on the NYC school system based on information obtained through a data-sharing agreement with the NYCDOE. Modeled after the respected Consortium on Chicago School Research, the Research Alliance is supported by local universities, businesses, and foundations. To maintain its independence, it will receive no financial support from the NYCDOE—initial funds are provided by private foundations—but will collaborate with the department to identify research priorities with the goal of improving policy and practice.[39]

In the meantime, below is a summary of some preliminary student performance and school progress from the NYCDOE:

- **Graduation rates:** As noted at the outset of this paper, NYC's four-year high school graduation rates have improved by as much as 15 points since 2002. Moreover, since 2005 the black-white and Hispanic-white gaps have narrowed by 16 percent and 14 percent respectively.[40] The 2008 results were particularly promising because a new high of 41 percent of NYC students earned Regents diplomas. Future graduation rates are likely to be affected by changes in state policy eliminating the local diploma option and new federal policy requirements regarding the calculation of graduation rates.

- **State assessments:** NYC high school students take the state's Regents exams in a number of subjects; the minimum proficiency score for NCLB purposes in English and math is 65. Since 2002, the percentage of NYC students scoring proficient or higher has increased more than 24 percentage points in math[e] and more than 13 percentage points in English.[41]

- **College admissions:** The number of NYC public school graduates attending City University of New York (CUNY) community or four-year colleges has increased by 50 percent since 2002. The number of Hispanic students attending CUNY is up 74 percent.

- **Attendance rates:** Overall, attendance rates have remained steady. According to the DOE, in SY 2003–04 high school attendance rates stood at 82 percent. In SY 2007–08, that rate had climbed just slightly, to 83 percent.[42]

- **Advanced Placement exams:** Students taking AP courses must receive a minimum score of 3 (out of 5) on the AP exam to pass. Since 2002, the number of AP test takers has risen 39 percent, and the number of students passing an AP exam has risen 32 percent. The percent of minority students who took and passed at least one AP exam has also increased, by 43 percent for black students and by 24 percent for Hispanic students.[43]

- **State "Schools Under Registration Review" (SURR) list:** Under the state accountability system, schools farthest from meeting the state standards are placed "under registration review." Despite an increase in the total number of schools in the system, the number of NYC schools on the SURR list has declined from seventy-seven schools in SY 2001–02 to twenty schools in SY 2008–09. Thirteen NYC schools improved enough to be removed from the list. Of the four schools added to the list, two are new small schools created during Children First. An additional three high schools that would have been on the SURR list are already being closed by the city.

- **Federal Adequate Yearly Progress:** Under the federal accountability system, high schools that fail to meet continually rising state-set assessment and graduation rate goals—known as Adequate Yearly Progress, or AYP—for two consecutive years are considered "in need of improvement." In SY 2008–09, sixty high schools failed AYP and sixty-six high schools remained on the federal school improvement list.[44]

The interaction between these various accountability systems will be explored in greater detail in subsequent papers.

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[e] In 2008, the state began phasing out the Math A exam and introduced the Algebra Regents exam. Passing rates for the two exams were 60.0 percent and 60.2 percent respectively.

New York City and Children First:
Providing Insight for Federal Policy

Federal policymakers can learn from New York City's experiences in education reform. This does not mean that policymakers should seek simply to replicate the NYCDOE's approach across the country. First, as the country's largest school district, NYC faces challenges and boasts opportunities other localities do not. Few districts or even states have to address the issues of size and scope that NYC does; even fewer have access to the pool of external partners and community resources present in the city. Second, many of the specific strategies employed by the NYCDOE remain controversial or experimental. Lastly, many of these strategies are part of local policy decisions over which the federal government has no legal authority.

However, federal policy must acknowledge the practices and policies being implemented at the local level to ensure that federal and local policies are not unintentionally inconsistent, conflicting, or incoherent. Moreover, federal policy should draw from lessons learned at the local level to incorporate strategies into federal policy to spread practices to other districts and states, or to put provisions in place to help address loopholes or challenges and to incentivize innovation where promising practices suggest new solutions to intractable problems.

Future publications in this series will further explore aspects of the NYC experience that are most relevant to these discussions and will offer specific policy recommendations for federal policymakers to consider as they move forward with NCLB reauthorization.

About the Alliance for Excellent Education

The mission of the Alliance for Excellent Education is to promote high school transformation to make it possible for every child to graduate prepared for postsecondary learning and success in life.

The Alliance for Excellent Education is a national policy and advocacy organization, based in Washington, DC, working to improve national and federal policy so that all students can achieve at high academic levels and graduate high school ready for success in college, work, and citizenship in the twenty-first century.

The Alliance has developed a "Framework for Action to Improve Secondary Schools" that informs a set of federal policy recommendations based on the growing consensus of researchers, practitioners, and advocates about the challenges and solutions for improving secondary student learning.

The framework, shown graphically here, encompasses seven policy areas that represent key leverage points in ensuring a comprehensive, systematic approach to improving secondary education. The framework also captures three guiding principles that apply to all of the policy areas. Although the appropriate federal role varies from one issue area to another, they are all critically important to reducing dropouts and increasing college and career readiness.
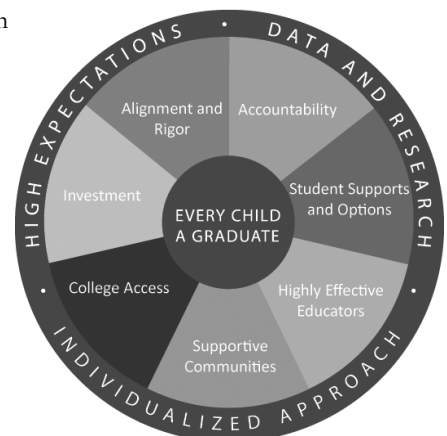
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39 Research Alliance for New York City Schools, "About Us," available at http://nycresearchpartnership.ssrc.org/about/ (accessed October 23, 2008).

40 See http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/Reports/Data/Graduation/Grad_Rate_2008_HIGHLIGHTS.pdf

41 Data provided by the NYCDOE, October 2009. These statistics are based on the number of students taking a given Regents exam in the academic year reported and the number and percentage of those students who scored 65 or above on the exam. The January, June, and August administration periods are included. NYC totals were calculated by adding results for all districts, including District 79.

42 New York City Department of Education, "Mayor's Management Report: New York City Department of Education," available at http://www.nyc.gov/html/ops/downloads/pdf/_mmr/doe.pdf (accessed November 24, 2008).

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44 Information provided by the NYCDOE, January 19, 2010.