



CUNY Prep

CUNY Preparatory Transitional High School

2004 - 2006

A Comprehensive School Report
&
History of the Project

June 2007



Collaborative Programs
Research and Evaluation
Office of Academic Affairs

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Derrick Griffith
Principal and Director

Preface

From the moment when the design for CUNY Prep was originally conceived in the early months of 2003, it was intended to represent a significant break from business as usual in programming for out-of-school youth. At some risk of overstating the shortcomings, business as usual consists of relatively short-term and academically undemanding programs that place a priority on the short-term goals of enabling participants to obtain a passing score on the GED tests and/or placement in a job.

In part because of its location within The City University of New York, CUNY Prep has more ambitious goals. The program has an explicit emphasis on preparing students for entry into and success in college. On the basis of many years of work with pre-college populations, the staff responsible for developing CUNY Prep at the University's Office of Academic Affairs was convinced that the depth and breadth of academic knowledge and skill were the most essential elements in high quality preparation for college.

It deserves emphasis that conviction led us to design a full-time program with what might be considered a fairly traditional focus on the humanities, math and science. The actual development of the program, as described in this report, reveals both the power of the original idea and the essential ways in which that idea has been adapted by a talented leadership and dedicated staff.

CUNY Prep was developed as an integral part of the University's collaborative programs with the New York City Department of Education. Those programs are intended to increase the likelihood that students in the public schools graduate from high school, enter and succeed in college. CUNY Prep's students inspire all of us to work harder and achieve more.

John Garvey
Dean of the Teacher Academy & Collaborative Programs

Introduction

Three and a half years ago, I was hired by The City University of New York to be the founding principal and director of CUNY Preparatory Transitional High School. The school, which opened its doors in October 2003, was begun by CUNY in a collaborative effort with the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development and the New York City Department of Education as a full-time, year-round college preparatory academic program serving out-of-school low-income youth, primarily in the Bronx, between the ages of 16 – 18.

Our first year was marked with all of the expected and unexpected events associated with starting a new school. We were inundated with kids who wanted to return to school but did not want to be held accountable for their actions, behaviors and often poor work habits. We made some staffing decisions that we soon realized would violate our creed to try something different but do no harm. We also realized that our initial school location in borrowed space was not conducive to building the type of school culture and climate that would optimize the chances of our students' success.

Midway through the year, a team of colleagues from collaborative programs was assembled to help me determine the need for immediate and long-term corrective actions. We reviewed every aspect of the program's planning and actual operations. Together we discovered that we had not done some of what we had said and that we had done other things that we had not intended. Shortly after their work was completed, I enacted a series of reforms and changes to help us realize the full potential of this important new initiative for out-of-school youth. By the end of that first year, we had made substantial progress, but it was not until 2004 - 2005 that we were able to consolidate our successes and establish the program we had always wanted. We also secured our own facility and I quickly learned that space matters. Almost immediately, I saw changes in staff and student morale as well as a marked decrease in disruptive behaviors.

2004–2005, therefore, was a turning point, and this report is an attempt to document the experiences and outcomes of the cohorts of students who first entered our school in that academic year (AY) and the next. The first section, drawing from our Student handbook, describes the culture of CUNY Prep, which is based on the principles of resilience, reflection, and success for all members of our school community. Section Two gives details on the program, including curriculum and instruction. Section Three presents descriptive statistics on the students who entered CUNY Prep during AY 2004–2005 and AY 2005–2006. In the Conclusion we bring our story up to the present, discuss some lessons learned, and look to our future, including ways this program can serve as a model. In the Retrospective (Appendix), I take a personal look at the history of CUNY Prep.

We believe an examination of what we did and what our students accomplished will be valuable for many others who are attempting to provide new opportunities to those who most certainly need them. We invite you to read and respond to this report as we work to bring the promise of higher education to out-of school youth.

Derrick Griffith
Principal and Director

Section One

The Culture

CUNY Prep is committed to developing life-long learners who have the academic, personal, and social skills necessary for higher education, expanded life opportunities, and active participation in community and civic affairs. We work to create a school culture that values resilience, reflection and success in both principle and practice. Students receive a handbook that explicitly describes why and how our school works to be different from other schools and introduces new students to the culture of CUNY Prep.¹ What follows is a section from that handbook, entitled:

Resilience Reflection Success

Why are you here?

Having met with each of you during our selection process, we know that there are as many different answers to this question as there are students in this school. Perhaps you're here because personal situations kept you from doing as well in school as you had hoped. Maybe you're here because you never thought of school as a place to build success. You might be here because you were unhappy with your previous school for personal or academic reasons. Or maybe you just never found the right school to meet *your* individual needs. The fact that you are here today reveals *resilience* – your ability to adapt to the challenges and obstacles that have come your way – and willingness to *reflect* on yourself and your learning as you move forward to achieve *success*. Whatever your path to CUNY Prep, the fact that you are here today illustrates that you have made the commitment to starting fresh and building a future for yourself.

We are glad you are here and we welcome you to the CUNY Prep community.

CUNY Prep is a unique high school program for over-age and/or under-credited youth. We serve students between the ages of 16 and 18. Our aim is to provide our students with the skills, knowledge, and confidence needed to:

Why are we here?

- pass the GED exam with a high score;
- apply to and be accepted at an appropriate post-secondary institution (college);
- set and accomplish both academic and personal goals.

**Our school is proud to partner with CUNY college campuses
to ensure a smooth transition for those of you who choose to attend one of its colleges.**

¹ <http://www.cunyprep.org/handbook.html>

Resilience

(ri-'zil-yen(t)s) *noun* 1: an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.

"My effort in school and my effort in my home life has become very positive. I've made a complete turnaround since making the decision to come back to school. My anger problems and laziness have changed into something good that makes me want to reach my goals." Jenna, 16

At CUNY Prep, we view ourselves (and ask students to view themselves) as resilient, or “able to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.” So what does that mean? What does it look like to be resilient as a student? As a teacher? Why do we value resilience within our school community? Being resilient opens us to new ways of thinking and being – whether in math class or in our personal lives. When we are resilient, we are able to envision ourselves differently... and more importantly, we are able to make decisions and take actions that enable us to make our visions a reality. For the staff and partners of CUNY Prep, it was resiliency that inspired us to create the school the way we did. From our past experiences in education, as teachers, administrators, case managers, and parents, we have learned a great deal—and the mistakes we made and obstacles we overcame have strengthened our commitment to change the power of learning.

In what ways have you been resilient in your life? How has it made you who you are today or who you wish to be tomorrow? What talents and strengths do you bring with you to our school and how will you use them to make decisions and shape your future?

Reflection

(ri-'flek-shun) *noun* 1: a thought, idea, or opinion formed or a remark made as a result of meditation.

"I needed a second chance for my future. All the time before in my old schools I was bad and I used to cut. I never even wanted to go to school. Now I know that everything I thought about myself before was wrong. Here, I feel like I have hope for something better." Christopher, 17

In order to answer questions like these, you need to reflect on the way things are and might be. At CUNY Prep, we are “reflective practitioners,” which is a fancy way of saying that we stop, pause, and think about what we’re doing and learning along the way. You’ll be asked to reflect during your first week at CUNY Prep as you write your autobiography. This story about your life serves two purposes: First, it gets you thinking about who you are, how you got here, and what you hope to achieve. Second, it gets us thinking about who you are and how we can best meet your needs as a learner and young adult.

A good example of how reflective practice has had an effect on the school can be found in our curricula and instruction. All students at CUNY Prep are required to take courses in the key discipline areas: humanities, math, and science. Rather than teaching you just sets of facts, dates and formulas, teachers have designed their classes to engage you in activities that help you to think scientifically, mathematically, and historically about phenomena that surround you everyday as well as events that may occur in distant lands or times. We developed this method of instruction by reflecting on our students, their ways of learning, and our own beliefs about good teaching and successful schools.

But being reflective practitioners doesn’t just apply to instruction and textbooks. Perhaps most importantly, it influences how we interact as a community made up of individuals. It is essential that we examine and discuss the language we use when we communicate with one another, the manner in which we let others know that we care, and the consequences that we face when, either with or without reflection, we make poor decisions.

Success

suk-'ses) *noun* 1: favorable or desired outcome; 2: one that succeeds.

"I've been doing good. I'm not paying attention to negative stuff. I always do my work and write notes. At first it was hard for me in school, but now I'm trying my best to succeed. I think I'm getting smarter!" Yadhira, 17

Success at CUNY Prep comes in many forms. We expect you to put forth your best effort to achieve not only the requirements for graduation but also the goals you set for yourself. The school is structured to support each student's path to success by providing opportunities for academic and personal guidance, such as tutoring, math and writing labs that offer specialized support using computer programs, opportunities for peer counseling, leadership training, college visits, and health and wellness workshops.

The CUNY Prep mission states that our goal is to "inspire students to become life-long learners." So what does that mean? Success is more than just obtaining a diploma. Students who graduate from CUNY Prep are able to take their education to "the next level," whether this means pursuing college, securing a good career, or finding continuous opportunities throughout your life to learn and grow. At CUNY Prep we show you the options that are available to you after high school, and work with you to strive for the very best future possible. We encourage you to commit your time, energy, and determination in an effort to achieve success as a student, a young adult, and a member of the larger community.

Resilience, reflection and success are our constant points of reference and the principles that inform our work together. Students, teachers and staff alike navigate by them day by day.

Section Two

The Program

CUNY Prep is located at 2122 White Plains Road in the Pelham Parkway section of the Bronx, with easy access to major train and bus routes. The space, which is wheel chair accessible, includes twelve classrooms (three of which are equipped as science labs), a multi-purpose room (used for meals and assemblies), a guidance suite, a library and administrative offices. We have twenty-five networked computers connected to the Internet by a high speed T1 line. Classes are held Monday through Friday, from 9:00 AM to 2:30 PM. The regular weekly class schedule for each student provides 7-10 hours of humanities and enhanced literacy instruction, 7-10 hours of math and science instruction, and 3 hours of college and career advisory.

There are thirty-four staff and faculty at CUNY Prep. In addition to the principal, there are three assistant directors (for administration, student support services, and staffing and curriculum), ten full-time teachers (three in each of the major disciplines of science, mathematics, and humanities), one full-time health/physical education teacher, and a drama/writing teacher. There are five case managers and one case worker in student support services, and until August 2006, two social workers from a community-based organization partner. The director of information technology oversees one assistant. The school also employs a fiscal administrator, facilities manager, and an assistant to the principal. Three CUNY public safety officers provide security to the school during and after school hours.

Outreach and Recruitment, and Initial Assessment

At open houses, prospective students receive a thorough description of the program's structure, expectations and school culture from the principal and have an opportunity to ask questions and to participate in a discussion with currently enrolled students. Open houses are typically scheduled approximately one month prior to the beginning of each instructional cycle (September, January, and April). In addition to general outreach efforts to recruit students, we made special efforts during 2004 - 2006, in cooperation with the Office of Youth Development of the Administration for Children's Services, to engage young people aging out of foster care. In addition, our then partner agencies—the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development, the New York City Department of Education, and Good Shepherd Services—were major sources of student referrals.

We screen prospective students to determine if they possess the minimal reading skills (equivalent to eighth grade) necessary for successful participation in the program. The tests are scored immediately and there is no other academic screening. However, applicants are required to demonstrate an interest in achieving goals consistent with CUNY Prep's and a commitment to participate according to its established rules. Applicants who meet the reading standard are interviewed individually. Following the interview, applicants are scheduled to attend a panel discussion of currently enrolled students and to participate in a small group activity with other applicants. Decisions concerning acceptance into the program are made at the conclusion of this process. Whenever possible, decisions are communicated to applicants on the same day. Over the course of three years, we have found that approximately 60% of applicants will meet the required reading level standard and that most of them will successfully complete the interview and participation activities. Those individuals who do not meet the required reading standard are referred to other programs that serve students who read below the 8th grade level.

Overview of Instruction

The instructional program has four phases organized on a cycle basis, each lasting approximately 12 weeks: I) Basic Education/College & Career Awareness, II) GED Prep/College & Career Studies 1, III) College Prep/College & Career Studies 2, and IV) College Enrollment/Work. New students are only admitted to the program at the beginning of a cycle. Students move through the phases in cohorts; however, students who do not successfully complete a course within a cycle must repeat courses as necessary. Students with excessive absences are asked to re-enter and resume their studies at the beginning of the next cycle to minimize disruption to their fellow students. Staff works to identify struggling students early in their first cycle of enrollment to maximize student success. Students who, for a variety of reasons, do not appear to be on the right road are given the opportunity to start anew at the next cycle.

All of the classes at CUNY Prep are stand-alone courses that can accommodate both new and returning students. Throughout the first three phases, the program provides a consistent core of academic instruction. Students take classes in humanities, math and science. Rather than treating these subjects as primarily consisting of sets of facts, dates and formulas, instruction is designed to help students to think scientifically, mathematically, and historically about everyday phenomena. For example, in a forensics science class, students work with each other in groups using microscopes, centrifuges, and fingerprinting devices to examine a staged crime scene and discover a victim's identity. In environmental science, they design a survey and then conduct a community education campaign on common health problems. A humanities team organizes moot courts and re-enacts Supreme Court cases. Students have filmed their own episode of "People's Court" and conducted a voter education fair for the community. And a mathematics team has taken students on "shopping" trips to local stores and banks to calculate interest and sales tax and practice percentage conversions. Students discuss financial literacy such as how to avoid debt and learn how the stock market works.

In addition to the three subject-area classes, students also take a literacy enhancement course. Although students accepted into the program must read well enough to prepare for the GED test, their reading and writing skills are not, in most cases, sufficient for the kinds of reading and writing they will be expected to do in college or in many workplaces. The literacy enhancement classes focus on strengthening a wide range of skills through extensive reading and writing. During each cycle, all enrolled students are required to read several full-length books and a variety of other texts and participate in seminar-type discussions about their reading.

During its first two and a half years, grades at CUNY Prep followed a standard letter and numeric format (A through F with equivalent grade points for each letter). The rationale for implementing a traditional grading structure was linked to the necessary accreditation of courses by the New York City Department of Education in the event students chose to return to high school after a year at CUNY Prep or apply to a college or university outside the CUNY system. We learned very early in our development as a school that most CUNY Prep students prefer to take the GED tests and matriculate directly into college. Nevertheless, we maintain a letter grading system for transcript purposes and to communicate with students and parents, who are familiar with this traditional approach. (As noted in Appendix A, we have recently moved to a competency-based assessment model which does not use traditional letter and numeric grading.)

Grading norms were established departmentally and across the curriculum through a series of workshops, discussions, and resources from which teachers and administration drew. These included examining standards and assessment tools, as well as teachers' previous experience. The Assistant Director for Curriculum and Instruction, as well as the Principal, oversaw all grading development and implementation, and worked closely with teachers to guide and monitor the process.

Grades were communicated to students and parents in a variety of ways. First, all students received a course outline/syllabus for every class that included a breakdown of the individual teacher's grading process. Teachers reviewed the course outline during the first week of class and each student received a copy for his/her records. Second, the grading system was described in the Student Handbook, which each student received during orientation. The Handbook includes a page for students and their parent/guardian to sign acknowledging their receipt and understanding of the contents therein. Lastly, during parent-teacher nights, which are held once per semester, teachers made available copies of the course outline and used them as a guide to discuss with parents their student's performance in his/her classroom.

The recent transition to competency-based assessment utilized a similar process for both development and implementation, as well as communication.

Cycle I

Upon enrollment in Cycle I, students are introduced to the routines and expectations of the different classes. Course content focuses on the acquisition of the skills and knowledge that are essential pre-conditions for successful preparation for the GED. The humanities classes combine the study of topics and issues covered in high school level social studies and English classes, including the causes and consequences of pivotal events in global and American history, the relationship between the individual and society at different times and in different cultures, and the significance of perspective in interpreting information and arguments. Students are expected to do a great deal of reading and writing inside and outside of the classroom. Science classes explore many of the fundamental aspects of scientific inquiry in the biology and the physical sciences. Students are expected to actively participate in genuine lab investigations, to record data and make presentations on findings. Mathematics instruction is customized to reflect the prior knowledge and skills of entering students. For those who lack proficiency in the essential skills of whole number operations, fractions, decimals and arithmetic-based word problems, instruction is focused on the discovery of misunderstandings and misconceptions as well as extended practice. For those who demonstrate mastery of those skills, the instruction is geared toward a deeper understanding of key topics in the areas of probability, statistics, algebra and geometry.

Cycle II--GED Prep

During the second cycle, instruction shifts to a more explicit focus on the skills and knowledge covered in the five subject-area GED tests. Instruction, however, is not be limited to test preparation. In light of our goal that students obtain high scores on the GED and thereby increase the likelihood that they can enter college without need for remediation, academic classes continue to engage students in rigorous college preparatory course-work. In each subject, course content is designed to build upon and expand the lessons of the first phase. In the humanities

classes, for example, students are expected to respond effectively in writing to complex readings, develop coherent accounts of complex social phenomena and undertake and complete independent research projects. In science, students are expected to demonstrate understanding of essential scientific concepts, complete multi-step investigations and to present their findings in multiple format written reports, poster boards, and oral presentations. In math, students are expected to develop a conceptual understanding of algebraic and geometric theorems and to complete calculations and other procedures efficiently. In most cases, students are scheduled to take the GED at the end of Cycle II.

Cycle III--College Prep

During the third cycle, the academic emphasis shifts to the more explicit preparation of students for entry into college. This includes preparation for the City University's freshman skills assessment tests that are used to determine if entering students need remediation in reading, writing and math.² Once again, the instructional model is not narrowly limited to test preparation but is instead informed by an understanding of the demands students encounter in their introductory academic and career-oriented courses in higher education. Extensive use of actual materials and assignments from college courses is a key feature of this phase. As students complete assignments, they are provided feedback on the ways in which their completed work does or does not meet college-level expectations.

At the same time, students are introduced to the vocabulary of college. They learn to understand the difference between associate and baccalaureate degrees; between general education courses and a major; between a required course and an elective; between an "A" and a "C." They also explore the ways in which a college's organization, instructional feedback, and student support services may be quite different than other schools they have attended, especially CUNY Prep. And finally, they explore how well one needs to read, write and do math in order to succeed in college courses. Students who do not pass the GED exam on the first sitting receive additional instruction and remain enrolled in the program until they pass the exam.

Cycle IV—College / Summer School

During the fourth cycle, our approach is two-fold. We make every effort to encourage students who have passed the GED to matriculate into the college of their choice. For those students who have not passed the GED, we offer intensive GED preparation to prepare them to re-test at the next earliest available date. We have also begun to offer college immersion experiences during this cycle to familiarize students with the expectations, language and culture of colleges and universities.

The following chart list the courses that were or are currently being offered at CUNY Prep. As described in the preceding paragraphs you will note that each course is centered on a central theme that gives students the opportunity to strengthen their content area knowledge, and skills.

²Freshman skills are assessed for CUNY applicants using the CUNY/ACT exam. To qualify for admission to CUNY Baccalaureate and Associate programs without remediation, an applicant needs a score of 7 or more on the writing exam and 27 or more on the math exam. Additionally, a score of 65 on the reading exam was required for students who enrolled at CUNY prior to the spring 2006 semester. As of spring 2006, new students have to score at least 70 on the reading exam.

Core Curricula

Exhibit 1

Discipline	Course Offered	When Offered
Humanities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democracy in the United States and the Study of Government • The Civil Rights Movement, Reconstruction, and the 1960s • Colonialism and Colonial America 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • October through December 2003 • January 2004 – present • January 2004 – present • January 2004 – present
Discipline	Course Offered	When Offered
Mathematics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connected Mathematics series • Basic Mathematics and Problem Solving • Geometry and Elementary Algebra • Data Analysis • Problem Solving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • October 2003 through May 2004 • Summer 2004 – present • Summer 2004 – present • April 2005 – present • April 2005 – present
Discipline	Course Offered	When Offered
Science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Living Environment • Chemistry • Forensic Science • Forensics and Physics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • October 2003 – present • October 2003, September 2005-present • September 2004 – present • September 2005 - present
Discipline	Course Offered	When Offered
Health	---	January 2004 – present
Physical Education	---	October 2003 – present
Discipline	Course Offered	When Offered
Drama Workshop	---	September 2005 – present

Elective Curricula

Discipline	Course Offered	When Offered
Computers/Typing	---	October 2003 through May 2004
Art	---	October through June 2003
GED Preparation	---	December 2003 – present
Literacy	---	October 2003 – present
ACT Preparation	---	Summer 2004, Summer 2005
Advisory	---	October 2003 – present
Student Support	---	September 2005 – present
Portfolio Development	---	January 2005 – present
Integrative Seminar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Topics • Exploring Hip Hop • The 1920s 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • September through December 2004 • January through April 2005 • April through June 2005

Student Support Services

The support services staff work to ensure that students attend regularly, remain up to date in the completion of assignments and homework, participate in all activities in ways consistent with the program’s policies and procedures, manage the challenges of their lives and circumstances that might interfere with their regular participation and performance, access additional resources to address various issues, and engage in appropriate planning for various aspects of their educational and career futures.

College Access Counselors: Academic Planning & Social Development

College access counselors oversee the academic planning and psychosocial supports for approximately 50 students each. They monitor attendance, review academic records, standing and progress throughout the program year, and encourage each student's achievement. Counselors also coordinate and oversee all aspects of the GED Testing application process, applications to CUNY and/or other colleges, and applications for financial aid. In addition, the counselors teach a college survival skills class three times a week. This forty-five minute class introduces students to the language, culture, and expectations of college life. Students attend college fairs and make campus visits regularly throughout the year. College access counselors meet with parents and conduct workshops on all aspects of the college application process during scheduled parent evening conferences.

College access counselors also conduct or arrange life skills workshops and provide individual and group counseling on issues identified by students or staff members. The counselors consult with teachers and work collaboratively with them to promote adherence to program policies. For the past two years, CUNY's Creative Arts Team (CAT) has worked with students during advisory periods, using participatory drama workshops to introduce them to the issues and skills needed for conflict resolution, healthy living, relationships and sexuality.

Student Activities

Students are provided ongoing opportunities to shape and participate in activities outside the classroom. For example, CUNY Prep students have planned and conducted Voter Education Carnivals for members of the community and worked with the American Red Cross to host a school and community blood drive. Each year the faculty and students plan and host several dances and special events. Graduating students also plan and host their own prom and graduation week activities. The program has developed a traveling basketball team and intramural sports teams among the faculty and students in an effort to build community inside and outside of school. Finally, students also participate in two weekly club meetings. Each cycle students are given the opportunity to choose a club of interest to promote optimum youth development. The most popular clubs include student government, digital filmmaking, chess, fashion, spoken word, debate, French, and the student newspaper.

Services for Alumni

All CUNY Prep graduates are informed of the services available to them and detailed plans are made for when and how they will remain in communication with the program during the follow-up year. College access counselors monitor their progress through regular phone calls and in-person conversations when graduates visit the school. We have also worked to establish strong relationships with essential staff members at the colleges where CUNY Prep graduates matriculate. To the extent that students' college choices permit, we encourage students to matriculate as cohorts for mutual support and success. Finally, we have worked to cultivate the resources and talents of the participants themselves. Regular alumni meetings are held monthly to allow individuals to share their successes and to discuss how they have handled various challenges. In addition, we have hired graduates to serve as mentors and tutors to students at CUNY Prep and in college.

Professional Development

Professional development at CUNY Prep reflects our belief in the three pillars that drive our school culture: Resilience, Reflection, and Success. We believe that, like our students, our staff brings to the school experiences and expectations that shape their attitudes toward learning and producing outcomes. As such, professional development is designed from a staff-focused perspective that addresses the unique needs and challenges of each individual person, while keeping in perspective (and at the forefront) the goals of the school and how our community as a whole must work together to achieve our mission.

Professional development opportunities take place at regularly scheduled times throughout the school year: at the end of each cycle for 3-5 days; during monthly in-house professional development days (when the school is closed to students); during the week at short whole-staff and department workshops; and just before the start of each new school year in the fall. Moving forward, we anticipate that teachers and other staff will attend regional and national conferences hosted by organizations associated with their discipline.

Student Voice Matters: Professional Development Based on Students' Feedback

One of the most successful professional development tools we have designed and implemented is a teacher "report card" survey that students complete at the mid-point and end of each cycle beginning in the fall of 2005. The survey asks a range of questions about each teacher's professionalism, engagement, commitment to students, and classroom management abilities. Students provide every teacher in every class anonymous feedback. At a professional development workshop shortly following the initial administration of the surveys, teachers conduct individual and department-wide assessment of the feedback. Then, as a whole group, we examine the "warm" and "cool" feedback we received and look for patterns, surprises, and revealing information about our practice, pedagogy and personal teaching styles. Concrete action plans are created to address the students' feedback, and the surveys are administered again at the end of the cycle, at which time we repeat the process of assessment and look for areas in which we've improved or continue to receive feedback.

Differentiated Supervision: Professional Development Based on Our Individual Needs

We implement many methods for offering teachers and staff feedback and professional development. Previously, the Assistant Director for Staffing & Curriculum and the Director/Principal conducted teacher observations (both formative and evaluative), assessment meetings, and general workshops around teacher-related issues of pedagogy and instruction. However, we recognize that our staff possesses unique strengths and challenges that perhaps require a more individual approach to professional development. Because we are a small school, we are able to work more carefully to address each person's professional development needs.

As we entered the 2006 - 2007 year, we implemented a "differentiated" approach to supervision. The staff (particularly teaching staff) will work one-on-one with the Assistant Director to identify an area or two of challenge for which s/he would like professional development. The Assistant Director will construct a calendar unique to each teacher that is comprised of administrative observations, meetings, peer support, and external professional development opportunities. To further support these efforts, teachers will be required to videotape one of their classes each semester and provide a written reflection on what s/he observes. We believe that a

differentiated approach to professional development more aptly mirrors the pillars of our school culture, and that “resilience” and “reflection” as directed by individuals leads to a higher rate of “success.”

Departmental and all-staff professional development takes place throughout the year, in addition to these thematic workshops, which are shaped by examining key questions:

Exhibit 2

CUNY Prep Professional Development

Workshop Topic	Essential Questions
Community Building	“Who are we and what do we bring to CUNY Prep as individuals and as a group?” “How does who we are shape our school community and culture?”
Discussion of School Culture and Mission	“What kind of climate and culture do we envision and what will we do individually and as a whole team to get us there?” “What can and must we do to address positively the issues we face with students?” “How do our student handbook and policies reflect the mission and the kind of culture we want to create?”
Understanding Our Student Population	“Who are our students?” “What expectations and assumptions do we bring to the table?” “What do best practices tell us about our students and their learning?” “What hopes and fears do we have for our work with students?”
Using Data to Drive School Instruction	“What kind of data do we need to inform our teaching, administrative policies, professional development?” “In/for what other areas might we need to collect data?” “What training will we need in the future to accurately capture, process, and implement data?”
Curriculum Development: Examining Key Questions	“What are our instructional goals?” “What are our experiences with curriculum and teaching? How might we implement best practices and our expertise in an interdisciplinary fashion that informs all course offerings ?” “How do we design curriculum that addresses state standards and our instructional goals?” “What role do youth development practices play in our curriculum design?”
Looking at Student Work	“What is the purpose of looking at student work?” “How do we look at student work and what do we look for?” “What tools can we develop to document what we see?” “What will we do with the information?”
College Survival/Success	“What does it mean to be college ready?” “What supports (now and after graduation) must we establish for students to ensure success in college and graduation?” “How can we incorporate our alumni in this process?”

Section Three

The Students: 2004 - 2006

Student Enrollments

As noted in the Introduction, 2004 – 2005 represented a turn-around year in the history of CUNY Prep. This section will present statistics on students who entered CUNY Prep during the 2004 – 2005 and the 2005 – 2006 academic years. The academic year (AY) at CUNY Prep begins on July 1 and ends on June 30. Students are enrolled in cohorts in cycles that begin in the summer, fall, winter and spring. Exhibit 3 provides the unduplicated count of students at CUNY Prep from its inception in October 2003 through the most recent admission cycle in January 2007. Cohort numbers refer to the cycle (fall, winter, spring) in which students were first enrolled. As a total we note the count of students who were active at the school at some point during the academic year, including students who first entered in cohorts that year and students who continued from a prior academic year. Since a certain number of those continuing students graduated in the summer at the beginning of the AY or did not persist beyond the summer, we note those counts at the bottom of the table.

Exhibit 3

CUNY Prep Student Counts						
AY July 1 – June 30						
Academic Year (AY)	Cohort First Entered				Continuing (Prior AY cohorts)	TOTAL
	Summer	Fall	Winter	Spring		
2003-2004	--	C1= 212	C2 = 85	C3 = 61	--	358
2004-2005	C3a= 48	C4 = 125	C5 = 81	C6 = 52	243*	549
2005-2006	--	C7 = 111	C8 = 115	C9 = 68	170**	464
2006-2007	C10=50	C11= 47	C12 = 88	C13 = 46	139***	370

* This count includes 39 students from C1-3 who graduated in the summer of 2004 and 98 students from C1-3 who did not persist in the academic year at CUNY Prep beyond the summer.

** This count includes 51 students from C2-6 who graduated in the summer 2005 and 13 students from C2-6 who did not persist in the academic year beyond the summer.

*** This count includes 3 students from C4-9 who graduated in the summer 2006 and 40 students from C4-9 who did not persist in the academic year beyond the summer.

In AY 2004-2005, the second academic year at CUNY Prep, 48 students entered for the first time in the summer of 2004 (C3a), joined by another 125 students in the fall 2004 (C4), 81 new students in the winter (C5), and 52 students in spring 2005 (C6). In addition, 243 students continued in AY 2004-2005 who originally entered in C1-3 in the previous year. Of those students, 39 graduated in the summer 2004 and 98 students did not persist beyond that summer. A total of 549 students were therefore active at some point in AY 2004 – 2005.

In AY 2005-2006 academic year, 111 students entered in fall 2005 (C7), followed by another 115 students in the winter (C8) and 68 students in the spring 2006 (C9). One hundred seventy continued at CUNY Prep in AY 2005 – 2006 who first entered in prior cohorts, for a total of 464 active students in year three.

In the current AY 2006 – 2007 still in progress, a total of 185 new students entered in Cohorts 10-12. They joined 139 students who had continued from prior years, for a total of 324. Still more students will soon be added in the spring 2007 admission cycle.

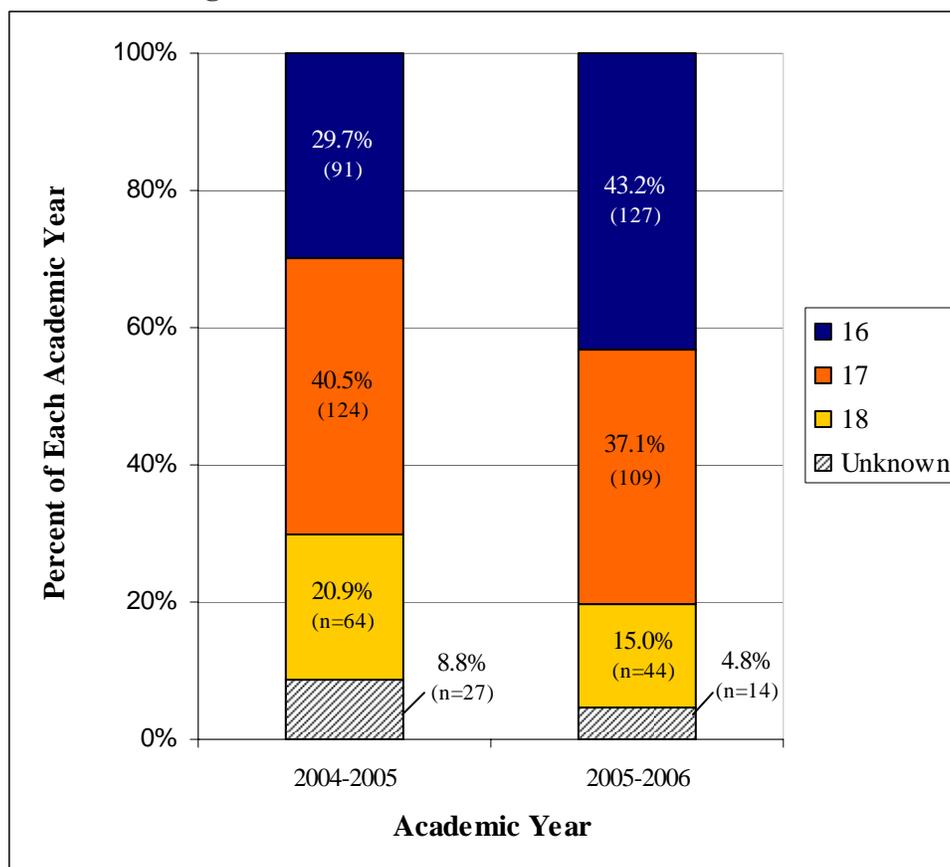
Characteristics of CUNY Prep Students

Age

Students enrolled at CUNY Prep range in age from 16-18 at the time of entry. As shown in Exhibit 4, a plurality of the students in AY 2004-2005 (C3a-6) were age 17 when they first entered, whereas a plurality of students in AY 2005-2006 (C7-9) were age 16 when they first entered.

Exhibit 4

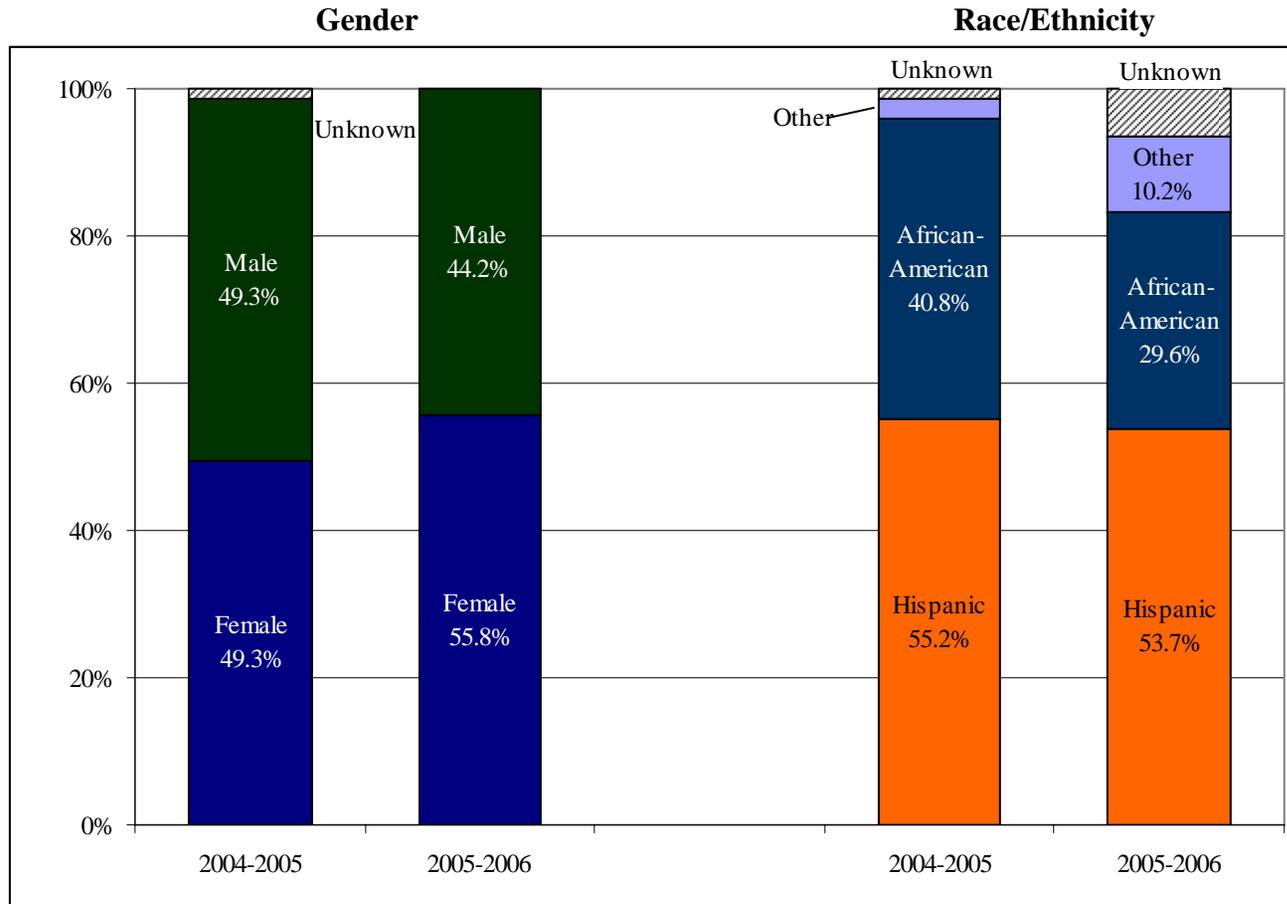
**Age of Students Who Entered CUNY Prep
During the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 Academic Years**



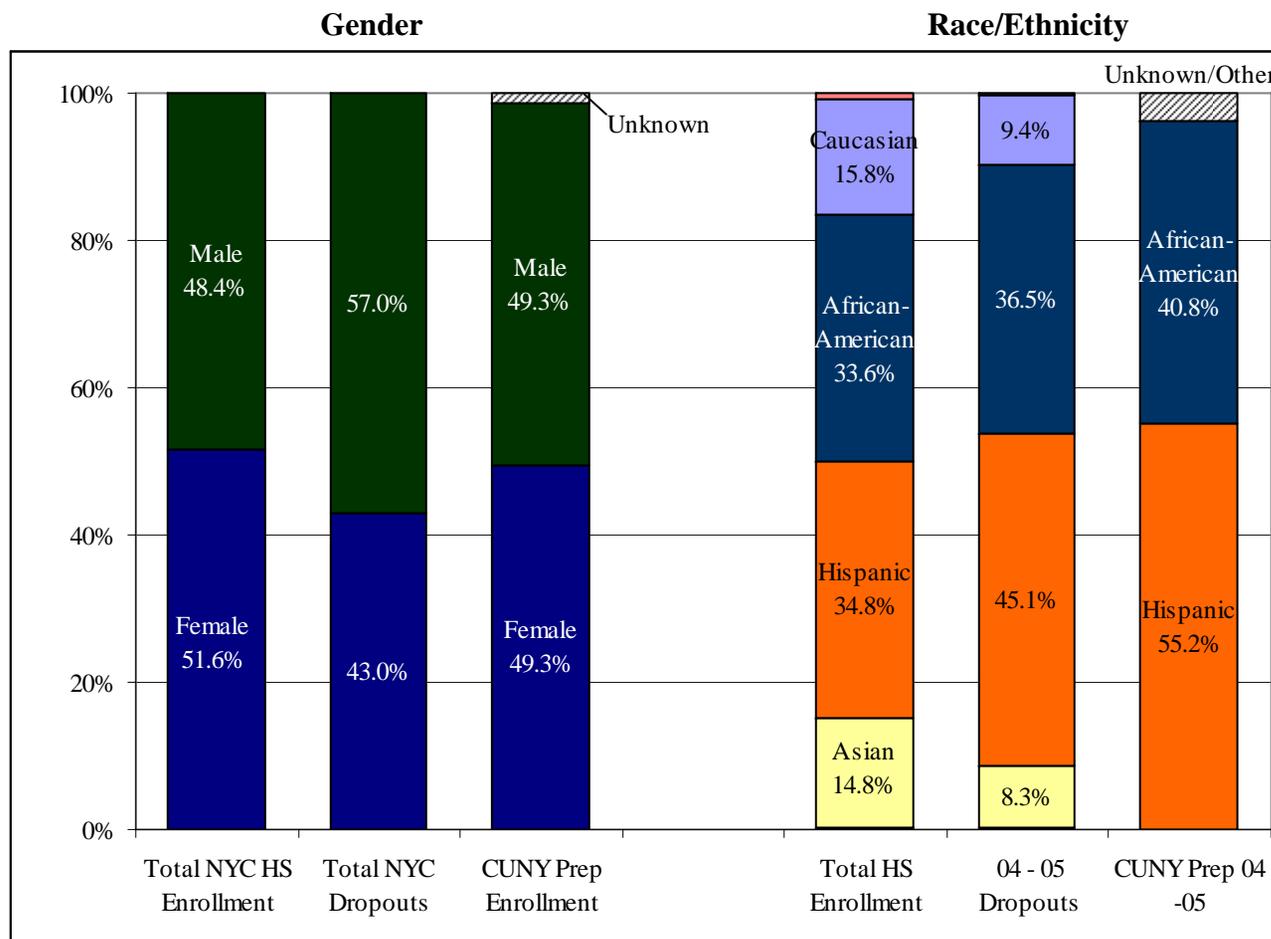
Gender & Race/Ethnicity

Exhibit 5 shows the gender and race/ethnicity of students who entered CUNY Prep in AY 2004—2005 and 2005—2006. Exhibit 6 shows this demographic information for AY 2004-2005 relative to the total New York City high school enrollment and the 2004—2005 dropouts.

**Gender & Race/Ethnicity of CUNY Prep Students
During the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 Academic Years**



**Demographics of NYC High School Students, NYC High School Dropouts, and CUNY Prep Students
During the 2004-2005 Academic Year**



Data on New York City high school students from the *New York City DOE Multiple Pathways Strategy: Summary Findings, October 22, 2006*. Used with permission.

As shown in Exhibit 5, CUNY Prep enrolled the same number and percent of male and female students (151) in 2004—2005 (with 1.3% unknown in our data). The following AY 2005-2006, more females students enrolled than male (164 females and 130 males). CUNY Prep students in 2004—2005 map closely to the proportion of total NYC high school population by sex, although more females than males were enrolled compared to the dropout population.

Most of the students who enrolled at CUNY Prep in AY 2004—2005 year were either Latino/a (55.2%) or African American (40.8%), with a small percentage (2.6%) of students who identified themselves as either Asian/Pacific Islander, white/non-Hispanic, or other (Ex. 5). In AY 2005-2006, a small majority of students were once again Latino/a (53.7%), but the percentage of African American students declined to just under thirty, and more students identified themselves as either Asian/Pacific Islander, white/non-Hispanic, or other (10.2%).

When compared to the New York City population (Ex. 6) in 2004—2005, there were more African American and Latino/a students at CUNY Prep than in either the total or dropout high school population. It should be noted that students who did not self-identify as either African American or Hispanic are grouped together as “Other.”

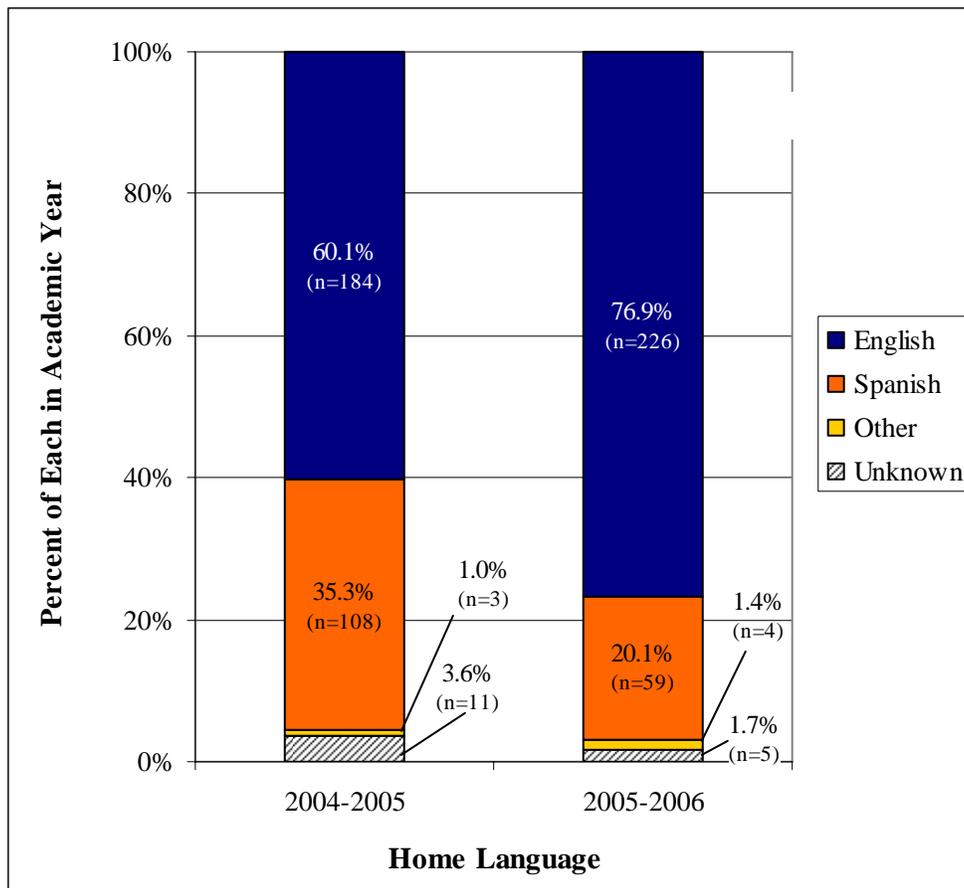
An analysis of students by both sex and race/ethnicity reveals that in AY 2004-2005, 90 Latino students (29.4%) and 79 Latina students (25.8%), and 59 African American male students (19.3%) and 66 African American female students (21.6%) entered CUNY Prep. Two male and six female students self-identified as either Asian/Pacific Islander, white, of mixed or another ethnicity. In AY 2005-2006, 69 Latino students entered CUNY Prep (23.5%) along with 89 Latina students (30.3%), 37 African American male students (12.6%), and 50 African American female students (17.0%). Sixteen males and fourteen females indicated that they were Asian/Pacific Islander, white, mixed or another ethnicity. The proportion of Latino, African American male and African American female students was higher in AY 2004 – 2005, therefore, than in AY 2005 – 2006. In contrast, the proportion of Latina students and students who identified themselves as “other” (both males and females) was greater in AY 2005 – 2006 than in AY 2004 – 2005.

Home Language

The majority of students who entered CUNY Prep during AY 2004-2005 spoke English at home (60.1%), followed by Spanish (35.3%). In the following AY 2005 – 2006, an even larger majority of students spoke English at home (76.9%) followed by Spanish (20.1%).

Exhibit 7

Home Language of Students Who Entered CUNY Prep During the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 Academic Years



Initial Skill Levels

All applicants to CUNY Prep take a test of their reading and mathematics ability, and to be admitted a student must have at least an eighth grade reading level (there is no minimum proficiency level required in math). Prior to September 2005, the Stanford Achievement Test Tenth Edition (2004) was used. This exam is a commercially available standardized test intended for students in grades K-12 and is designed to reflect the content and curricula set forth by different professional associations in documents such as the Standards for the English Language Arts and the Principles and Standards for School Mathematics. Additionally, academic standards set by several states are considered in the development of the exam. The majority of the items are written by practicing teachers and approximately half of the items are designed to test content knowledge while the other half are written to test higher order thinking.³

In September 2005, CUNY Prep changed its initial assessment to comply with federal regulations concerning eligible tests. Since then, prospective CUNY Prep students have taken the ABLE—Adult Basic Learning Examination. As with the Stanford 10, the ABLE exam is a commercially available standardized test, but unlike the Stanford 10, the ABLE exam is intended for an adult-learner population. The reading comprehension portion of the test asks test-takers to read passages and answer questions designed to assess inference skills. The mathematics portion (referred to as number operations by the test publisher) asks test-takers questions about the concepts of numbers and to complete mathematical computations.⁴

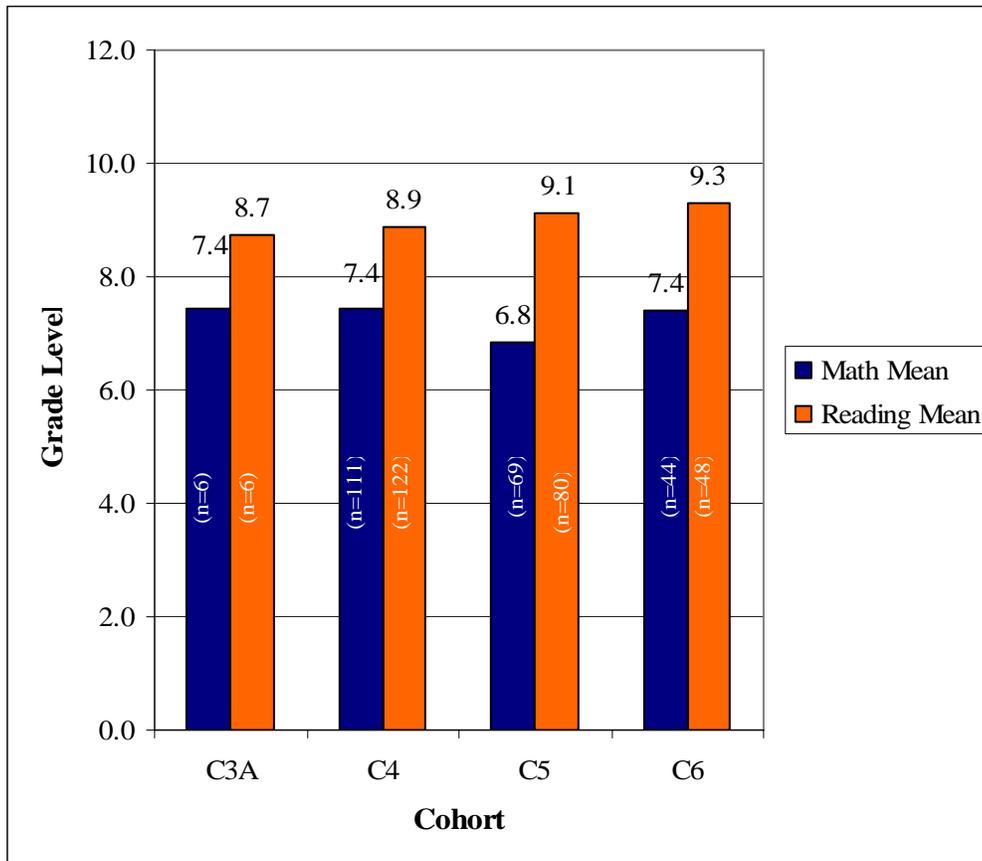
Exhibits 8 and 9 below show the mean initial skill levels by grade for students who enrolled in AY 2004-2005 and AY 2005-2006. The scores reported for the Stanford 10 and the ABLE tests are reported as grade levels. These grade levels are determined from raw scores scaled through the use of a conversion table provided by the test-maker for each test. As a result, comparisons can be made between students who took different instances of the same test. We have no basis, however, to equate the grade level determinations of the Stanford 10 and ABLE tests, and so caution the reader in comparing the initial skills of students in AY 2004-2005 and AY 2005-2006.

It should also be noted that during the transition from one test to the other in fall 2005, a small number of students (n=16) who first entered in cohort 7 took only the Stanford 10 exam and were therefore excluded from the determination of mean grade levels in Ex. 9b. Beginning with initial skill levels, we will at times throughout the rest of Section 3 report descriptive statistics by cohort, the primary unit of analysis, in addition to or in lieu of academic year.

³ The Stanford Achievement Test Tenth Edition (2004). In the Sixteenth Mental Measurements Yearbook. Retrieved June 6th, 2006. from OVID Mental Measurements Yearbook database.

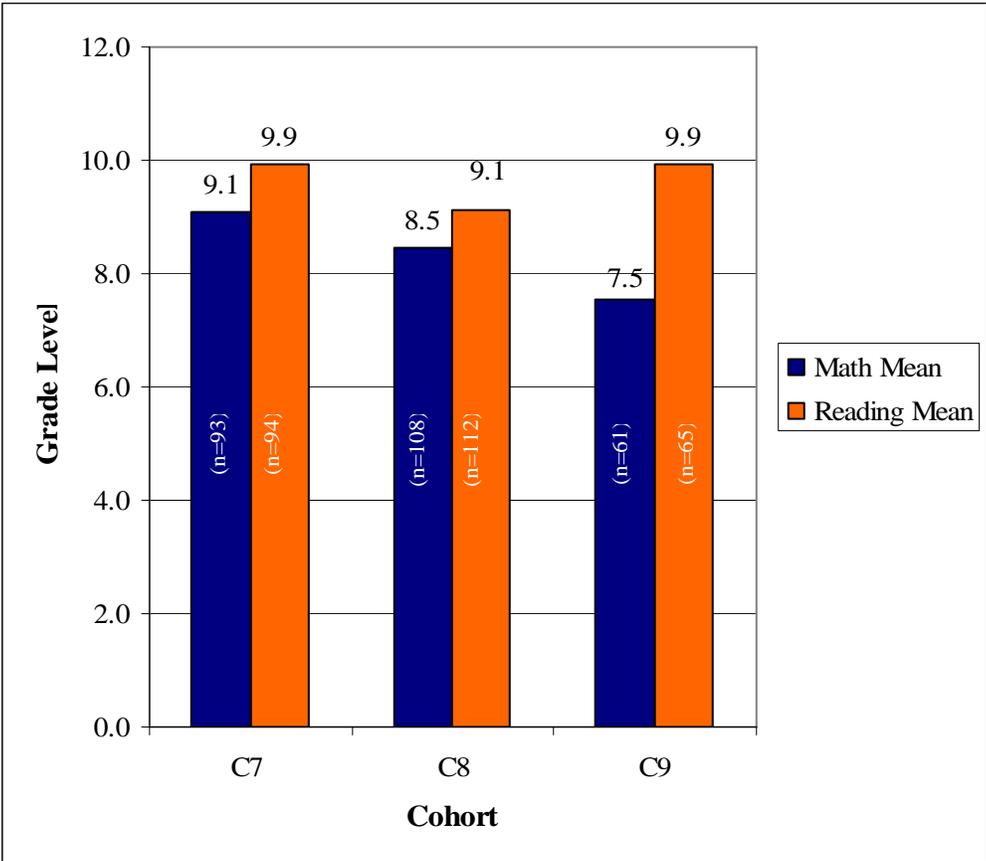
⁴ The Adult Basic Learning Examination Second Edition (1986-1987). In the Sixteenth Mental Measurements Yearbook. Retrieved June 6th, 2006. from OVID Mental Measurements Yearbook database.

**Initial Grade Level for Academic Skills
During the 2004-2005 Academic Year
Based on the Stanford Achievement Test Tenth Edition (2004)**



Note: n is the number of test-takers used to calculate the mean scores.

**Initial Grade Level for Academic Skills
During the 2005-2006 Academic Year
Based on the Adult Basic Learning Examination (ABLE)**



Note: n is the number of test-takers used to calculate the mean scores. 16 Students in Cohort 7 who took the Stanford 10 and not the ABLE exam were excluded from this analysis.

How CUNY Prep Students Performed

CUNY Prep is dedicated to helping students take and pass the GED tests with as high a score as possible, apply to and be accepted at a postsecondary institution, and develop and implement a career plan that includes part or full-time employment integrated with collegiate studies. The emphasis of the program—both culturally and academically—is not, therefore, on GED test prep but rather on helping students reconnect with themselves as life-long learners. As they work through a rigorous curriculum, they relearn or perhaps in some cases for the first time learn how to be effective students. By encouraging the habitual practices of good students, CUNY Prep strives to enhance their self-efficacy in ways that will lead to success in higher education.

The tests of General Educational Development (GED) include five subjects: Language Arts Writing and Language Arts Reading, Social Studies, Science and Mathematics. The tests focus on test-takers' ability to read and process information, solve problems, and communicate effectively, rather than knowing all of the content taught in high school. To pass the exam, test-takers need to score a minimum of 410 points on each subject test and a minimum of 2250 for the battery of tests overall. In New York State, a person can take the test three times in a twelve month period.⁵

Exhibit 10 (p. 24) details the GED outcomes for students in AY 2003 – 2006.⁶ It should be noted that only GED tests through March 2007 are reflected in this table.

Of the 358 students who first entered CUNY Prep during the AY 2003 – 2004 (C1-3), 152 (42.5%) took the GED, of whom 102 (67.1%) passed. In AY 2004 - 2005 (C3a-6), 131 (42.8%) students out of a total cohort of 306 took the GED tests, of whom 96 students (73.3%) passed. Of the 131 test-takers, we have a complete set of subject and total test scores for 120 students. For those students with a complete set of GED scores, 93 passed and 27 did not pass.

For the 2005 – 2006 academic year, 125 students (42.5%) out of a total cohort of 294 took the GED and of those students, 97 (77.6%) passed the exam. For the 125 students who took the exam, we have a complete set of subtest and total GED scores for 95 students, of whom 78 passed and 17 did not pass the GED tests.

Exhibits 11 and 12 (p. 25) give details of the GED test outcomes for students by cohort for whom we have complete test data.

⁵ New York State Education Department GED Testing Office (n.d.) Retrieved June 6th, 2006 from <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ged/>.

⁶ As of December 2006, 310 CUNY Prep students in total had taken and passed the GED exam.

**GED Outcomes for Students at CUNY Prep by Cohort
(Through March 23, 2007 Test Administration Date)**

	AY 2003 - 2004									
	Fall 2003		Winter 2003		Spring 2004		Total			
	Cohort 1 (n=212)		Cohort 2 (n=85)		Cohort 3 (n=81)		Total (n=358)			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
Took GED*	85	40.1	40	47.1	27	33.3	152	42.5		
Passed**	52	61.2	29	72.5	21	77.8	102	67.1		
	AY 2004 - 2005									
	Summer 2004		Fall 2004		Winter 2004		Spring 2005		Total	
	Cohort 3a (n=48)		Cohort 4 (n=125)		Cohort 5 (n=81)		Cohort 6 (n=52)		Total (n=306)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
Took GED*	4	8.3	56	44.8	40	49.4	31	59.6	131	42.8
Passed**	4	100.0	43	76.8	27	67.5	22	71.0	95	72.5
	AY 2005 - 2006									
	Fall 2005		Winter 2005		Spring 2006		Total			
	Cohort 7 (n=111)		Cohort 8 (n=115)		Cohort 9 (n=68)		Total (n=294)			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
Took GED*	51	45.9	43	37.4	31	45.6	119	40.5		
Passed**	40	78.4	32	74.4	25	80.6	92	77.3		

* Percent of the cohort taking the GED.

** Percent of those taking the GED who passed.

For the purposes of comparing GED outcomes by cohort, it should be kept in mind that students were enrolled at the school for different lengths of time depending on when they were first admitted and if they were continuously enrolled.

Exhibit 11 shows the average best total scores earned by students on the GED tests.

Exhibit 11

**Average GED Total Test Scores for CUNY Prep Students by Cohort
During Academic Years 2003-2004, 2004-2005, and 2005-2006**

Cohort	Number of Test Scores	Average Best Total Scores
AY 2003-2004 (C1-3)	142	2468
AY 2004-2005 (C3A-6)	120	2440
3A	4	2828
4	52	2433
5	39	2421
6	25	2423
AY 2005-2006 (C7-9)	95	2473
7	44	2431
8	30	2526
9	21	2485

Exhibit 12 indicates the average best subject test scores. Each subject test score is on a scale of 1 – 800 with 410 the passing score. CUNY Prep students tended to score highest on the reading portion of the exam and lowest on the math portion of the exam.

Exhibit 12

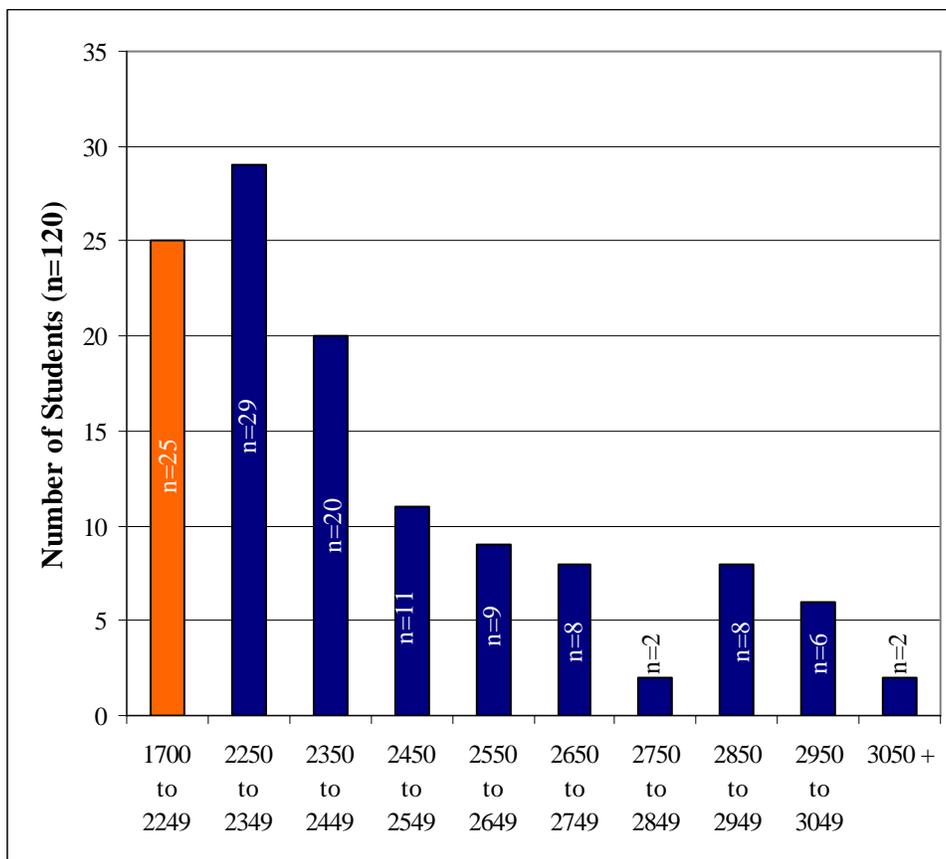
**Average GED Subtest Scores for CUNY Prep Students by Cohort
During Academic Years 2003-2004, 2004-2005, and 2005-2006**

Cohort	Number of Test Scores	Average Best Writing Scores	Average Best Reading Scores	Average Best Social Studies Scores	Average Best Science Scores	Average Best Math Scores
AY 2003-2004 (C1-3)	142	473.3	534.7	506.5	490.1	462.7
AY 2004-2005 (C3A-6)	120	470.4	518.5	496.5	485.3	465.9
3A	4	507.5	600.0	620.0	560.0	540.0
4	52	471.3	517.7	491.3	477.3	468.1
5	39	470.3	511.5	492.8	490.5	454.6
6	25	462.8	518.0	493.2	481.6	467.2
AY 2005-2006 (C7-9)	95	479.8	508.2	494.3	504.5	486.4
7	44	479.5	496.1	484.1	493.9	477.7
8	30	483.7	532.7	504.0	509.7	496.3
9	21	474.8	498.6	501.9	519.5	490.5

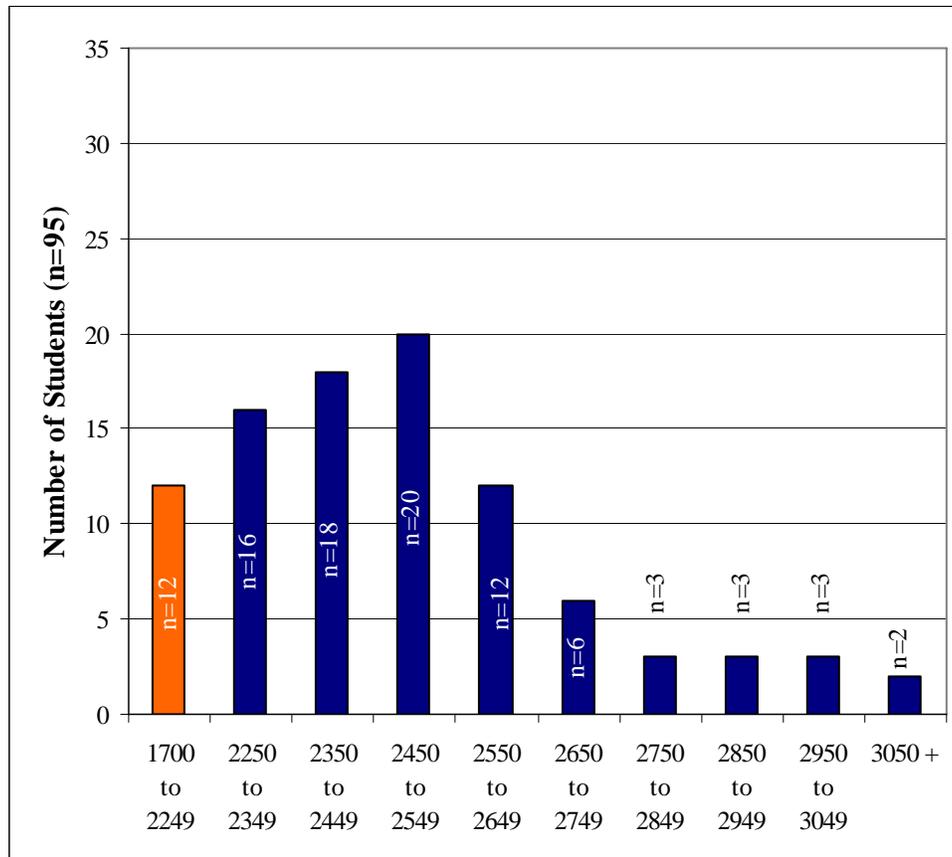
As illustrated in Exhibits 13 and 14, the range of best scores on the exams for students with a complete set of GED scores (n=215) is quite large. The orange bar represents the 25 students from AY 2004 - 2005 and the 12 students from AY 2005 - 2006 who had a failing total test score.

Exhibit 13

Distribution of Best Total GED Scores for Students Who Entered CUNY Prep During the 2004 - 2005 Academic Year



**Distribution of Best Total GED Scores for Students Who Entered CUNY Prep
During the 2005 - 2006 Academic Year**



CUNY Prep Students Who Enter CUNY Colleges

One of the expectations at CUNY Prep that distinguishes it from many GED programs is the goal of preparing all of its students to enter college.

From its inception through spring 2007, 169 CUNY Prep students out of 304 graduates have entered CUNY colleges. Of the students at CUNY Prep in its first academic year 2003 – 2004 (cohorts 1-3), 60 students have entered CUNY. Sixty-six students from cohorts in AY 2004-2005 and 36 students in AY 2005-2006 cohorts have entered CUNY, and another 7 students in the current 2006-2007 AY entered CUNY this past spring. Exhibit 15 below shows the numbers of students passing the GED tests and entering CUNY by cohort for AY 2004-2005 and AY 2005-2006. Exhibit 16 shows the rates of reenrollment to a second semester.

Exhibit 15

CUNY Prep Students Who Entered CUNY Colleges by CUNY Prep Cohort

	AY 2004 – 2005			
	Summer 2004 Cohort 3A (n=48)	Fall 2004 Cohort 4 (n=125)	Winter 2004 Cohort 5 (n=81)	Spring 2005 Cohort 6 (n=52)
Number of Students Who Passed the GED*	3	43	27	22
Number entering CUNY	3	34	18	11
% GED Passers**	100	79.1	66.7	50.0
	AY 2005 - 2006			
		Fall 2005 Cohort 7 (n=111)	Winter 2005 Cohort 8 (n=115)	Spring 2006 Cohort 9 (n=68)
Number of Students Who Passed the GED*		40	32	25
Number entering CUNY		19	9	8
% GED Passers**		47.5	28.1	32.0

* See Exhibit 10

** Percent entering CUNY of those students who passed the GED.

*** Percent entering CUNY of the total number of students in the cohort.

**Persistence of CUNY PREP Students in CUNY Colleges
Who Entered as First-time Freshman Fall 2004 to Fall 2006**

CUNY First-time Freshman Cohort	Percentage of Original Cohort Reenrollment					
	Fall 2004	Spring 2005	Fall 2005	Spring 2006	Fall 2006	Spring 2007
Fall 2004 (n=18*)		61.1 (11)	38.9 (7)	22.2 (4)	22.2 (4)	27.8 (5)
Spring 2005 (4*)			0 (0)	25.0 (1)	25.0 (1)	0 (0)
Fall 2005 (50)				62.0 (31)	34.0 (17)	22.0 (11)
Spring 2006 (26**)					38.5 (10)	30.8 (8)
Fall 2006 (39)						51.3 (20)
Spring 2007 (32)						
Total = 169						

* One additional student enrolled in each of the fall 2004 and spring 2005 semesters, but neither are included in CUNY's headcount for those semesters due to non-attendance. Neither student returned to CUNY subsequently in any following semester for which data is available.

** This count includes one student who officially enrolled as a first-time freshman in the fall 2005 semester but was not included in CUNY's headcount for that semester due to non-attendance. This student enrolled again in the spring 2006 semester as a first-time freshman and is, therefore, included in this cohort count.

The first year performance of our students in CUNY underscores the challenges they and our postsecondary institutions face. It would be all too easy to conclude that, having dropped out once before, GED students somehow lack motivation to persist in their education. But to the contrary, a recent study by *Jobs for the Future* confirms our experience that “Most dropouts are remarkably persistent in their drive to complete a secondary education.” This study, however, also finds that although many students do earn their GED and begin college, “despite their persistence few earn degrees.”⁷

Based on what they learn in our program, we believe that our students leave CUNY Prep with the knowledge, understanding, ability and desire to succeed in college. It would seem, therefore, that we must look to other factors to explain why students do not persist in college, including the ways they experience institutions of higher education and roadblocks to successful completion of their degrees.

Students Who Did Not Complete the Program at CUNY Prep

Most of the students who began studies at CUNY Prep during AYs 2004 – 2006 but did not complete the program and take the GED tests left or were asked to leave because of excessive absenteeism. The statistics reflected in Exhibit 17, which show the attrition of CUNY Prep students by cohort in five major categories, should be understood in light of an intentional decision to preserve a viable academic climate and school culture with a strict attendance policy.

Exhibit 17

Reasons Why Students Neither Completed the Program Nor Took the GED Test

	AY 2004-2005			
	Summer 2004 Cohort 3A (n=48)	Fall 2004 Cohort 4 (n=125)	Winter 2004 Cohort 5 (n=81)	Spring 2005 Cohort 6 (n=52)
Behavior Expulsion	0	4	1	0
Excessive Absences	44	53	35	18
Returned to HS/Other Program	0	1	1	0
Chose to Leave	0	10	0	1
No Code	0	0	2	2
	AY 2005-2006			
		Fall 2005 Cohort 7 (n=111)	Winter 2005 Cohort 8 (n=115)	Spring 2005 Cohort 9 (n=68)
Behavior Expulsion		1	1	0
Excessive Absences		42	42	7
Returned to HS/Other Program		3	0	0
Chose to Leave		0	3	1
No Code		1	0	0

⁷ “Making Good on a Promise: What Policymakers Can Do to Support the Educational Persistence of Dropouts” by Cheryl A. Almeida, Cassius O. Johnson, and Adria Steinberg (2006). Available at: <http://www.jff.org/index.php>

Conclusion

Successes Achieved

We enrolled our target population.

In October of 2003, we launched our recruitment drive with print and television ads and a key article in the *New York Post* titled “CUNY’s Come Back Kids.” In addition to those efforts we sent out mailings to over 150 social service organizations announcing the start of this exciting new school for out-of-school youth. Finally, we distributed flyers in the community stores and shopping malls along Fordham Road. While there were many who claimed that our effort to engage 200 out-of-school youth in a full time GED-to-college program would be for naught, we were surprised and unprepared for what we experienced. On October 13, 2003, we were inundated with young people who had “heard” about the school—from friends, guidance counselors and even some school officials (a few students told us, “my principal kicked me out!”). We had over 250 young people all trying to get into this “new school.” After multiple assessments and holding to school policy on issues like attendance, lateness, and prohibited behaviors, we eventually had a roster of 212 students, with roughly equal numbers of boys and girls. Notwithstanding the initial confusion and difficulties, we have steadily built a solid referral network that is primarily driven by former students, guidance counselors, and partnerships with social service and city agencies. The young people we serve have demonstrated that they are interested in, and will seek out, opportunities to complete their education. Although we would strive to engage approximately the same number of boys and girls, we have had some fluctuations from one academic year to the next. While boys and girls score about the same on the reading exam, our boys tend to be motivated more by the peer factor particularly when they come to Open Houses as a group. Additionally, boys tend to be more persistent in completing all phases of the admission process.

We established a high functioning school.

When visitors walk through our front door they can hear the “sounds” of effective and engaging instruction. The school environment, often compared to a private school, is an essential ingredient to our success. Our school leaders will say that it is a combination of many factors including high expectations for faculty, staff, and students, a committed instructional staff that choose to work with out-of-school youth, and a talented group of out-of-school youth with amazing strengths. Our teachers will say that the school has a strong leadership team that supports students and staff equally, a supportive and effective approach to the professional development of teachers who in turn offer a hands-on and out-of-the box approach to delivering instructional goals and objectives. Finally, we have a zero-tolerance approach that encourages appropriate behaviors conducive to effective teaching and learning, such as classroom behaviors, attendance, and personal development.

We established college prep as the educational norm.

While CUNY Prep was designed from the beginning to prepare students for college, our emphasis on college preparation (and not the GED tests themselves) has had a remarkable impact on student performance, faculty activity and interaction, and ultimately school culture. The importance of college preparedness is stressed from the moment a prospective student enters our doors for an open house. They are not really given the option of attending CUNY Prep if college is not a goal, or at minimum, a prospect they feel is worth exploring. Teachers develop curriculum, assessment, and dialogue that help students make the transition from a high school to college mentality. College access counselors drive students' motivation toward an understanding of college life and the challenges and success that await our graduates. Even our physical space, with its college posters and displays, and college and career resources throughout the building, fosters students' awareness of and interest in college. Because our building is saturated with the idea of college matriculation and graduation, students are able to re-envision themselves as young adults who are capable and worthy of a college education. College becomes less an "idea" or something that "other people do and get" and more an impending, clearly defined, reality for our students.

Our success rates are comparatively high.

We have had good success rates for those students who take the GED tests and pass, as well as those students who having passed the GED enter CUNY colleges. While data reveals little correlation between students' performance in classes at CUNY Prep and their performance on the GED exam, many students have attributed their success rate to the confidence and skills learned at our school, as well as the small school environment, caring teachers, and psychosocial support mechanisms we have put in place.

Our culture supports the development of a college-going identity.

Our rate of college enrollment can be attributed to the academic and personal support mechanisms our model has established, most notably the college survival classes. These classes, conducted by college access counselors in partnership with teachers, meet three times per week and introduce students to all aspects of college life, including the application and financial aid process, debunking myths about college life, exploring careers and majors, and preparation for the college entrance placement exams and SATs. The small group format of these classes enables students to discuss frankly their questions and concerns about life after CUNY Prep. These classes have also included very successful field trips to CUNY college fairs and campuses. We involve CUNY Prep alumni who are attending various CUNY colleges in the college enrollment process for current students. Acting as "college liaisons," these alumni have led our students on campus tours, fielded questions during college survival classes, addressed the entire student body during annual events like CUNY Prep Week and Thanksgiving, and served as a support for our graduates as they enter their first semester in college. They have also provided teachers with very direct feedback about coursework on the college level and how CUNY Prep teachers might better develop students' academic skills so that they are fully prepared for college-level work. We are encouraged at our success in creating and sustaining a college-going mindset among our students, even as we develop a deeper understanding of the barriers and stressors associated with their going to and staying in college.

Remaining Challenges

Attendance

Attendance has been, and will continue to be, a challenge we face at every turn. While we anticipated initially that students would come to us ready to work, be present, and always motivated given that this was their “second chance” to complete a high school education and matriculate to college, we quickly learned two important lessons. First, they are still adolescents and therefore are susceptible to some general patterns in behavior and attitude that aren’t always beneficial to their level of engagement in school. Secondly, they face a myriad of obstacles that continue to obstruct their presence at school, such as open court cases, family issues, teen parenting, and health and/or learning impairments.

We have responded to these issues with increasingly positive results. Foremost, we implemented a case management approach, which employs a trained staff of guidance counselors to address students’ personal challenges and needs. Next, we developed and implemented a policy that allows students to be absent no more than six times per cycle, with the understanding that a student will be dropped from the program at the seventh absence and asked to return at the beginning of the next cycle. Additionally with this policy, we have an arrival cut-off time of 9:20 in the morning, after which students are sent home for the day and marked absent. Because this counts as one of their six absences for the cycle, we have seen an increase in the number of students who arrive on time each morning, particularly among those “repeat offenders” who are frequently late.

Lastly, our program emphasis on going to college weighs heavily as a factor in our approach to attendance, how we enforce our policy, and how we articulated it both to students and parents. Across the board, all teachers and faculty constantly reinforce the long-term importance of attendance in college, particularly the effect absences (and subsequent dismissal from a class) have on a student’s financial aid, transcript, and matriculation. Our explicitness in this regard, coupled with our development of a school culture that aims to remediate and accelerate students toward college readiness, has encouraged students to stay on top of their attendance. Over the past four months, for example, we have seen an increase in the number of students making phone calls directly to school administration and teachers when they think they might be late, as well as students staying after school to make up missed work.

We know CUNY Prep students have complicated lives that might lead to disengagement even from a program specifically designed to reengage out-of-school youth. But we are not satisfied with our rates of attrition and have instituted entry and exit surveys beginning with cohort 12 to help us better understand and design supports and interventions that will enable us to work even more effectively with all our students.

College Persistence & Success

During our first two years we were consumed with building the day-to-day instructional, evaluative, data management, school policies and procedures to support students in the school. Toward the end of the second year we began to hear from our alumni who attended CUNY colleges and learned a great deal from them about what we needed to do differently to promote not only college access, but also readiness and retention. In our 3rd year we literally walked students through every step of the admission process. This almost always included actual trips to the campus with students to complete admission and registration processes. What we found, however, is that a hand-holding approach did not help students navigate the colleges after the

semester began. Students reported their academic difficulties to us much too late to help, others withdrew unofficially from classes, and still others became frustrated with the number of remedial classes that they were required to take. Although we must situate CUNY Prep student persistence in CUNY in the larger context of GED recipients' overall persistence in college, we are nevertheless determined to improve our rates of postsecondary success and are taking new steps to do so.

Lessons Learned

Our program design is based on integrating academic instruction, career education, college planning, work-place readiness and youth development principles to empower participants to become independent and successful participants in New York City's social, economic and political life. For out-of-school youth to complete such an ambitious program, we must be fully aware of the barriers that can interfere with their participation and success. Specifically:

Although our students understand and value high school completion and access to college, they are frequently unprepared to invest the consistent effort and productive habits that are essential for success.

Our students are a diverse group racially, ethnically, and economically, but they all have one thing in common—the desire to cast off the many labels associated with out-of-school youth. Our students will tell you that they did not leave school because they were dumb; they left because the school was not meeting their needs or, in some cases, the school prevented them from getting the education they wanted.

Many of our students tell us that they left school because they were being told “what to think” and “how to think.” Some students were entangled in the courts and foster care systems; some felt too beaten down to get up for school. Others were forced to work, translate, care for a sibling or elder, saw the absences piling up and soon realized that the prospect of passing the class, much less the Regents, was very slim. And finally there are other students who succumbed to the adolescent pressures of peers, drugs, and the need to belong (or not), and thus school became a distant afterthought. Needless to say, it has been a challenge to develop a program and school for young people who “know” exactly what they need out of school, but still confront many of the challenges described above.

Since the moment CUNY Prep began recruiting for its first class of students, it has been overwhelmed by the interest and response of students, parents, counselors, and other youth advocates. The program accepts students three times a year and, without any recruitment activities, it has maintained an active waiting list of over 200 students for each cycle. However, the program's staff learned early on that it would need to develop a carefully crafted admissions process that would ensure that prospective students were aware of the program's expectations and culture. Perhaps the most essential matters include issues related to explicitness and consistency. Students must clearly understand what they are being asked to do, why it is important, what the positive benefits will be and what the consequences will be if they do not do so. And then the entire staff must hold themselves and the students responsible for acting accordingly.

Our students have complicated lives and require multiple supports and interventions to attain their educational goals.

Many out-of-school youth are parents and often struggle to balance child-rearing responsibilities with those of school. Other individuals have become major contributors to their households by earning money in part-time jobs and helping out with family tasks—such as caring for younger siblings and serving as interpreters for parents with limited English language skills. And beyond that, they oftentimes find themselves in difficult relationships with parents, boyfriends, girlfriends, ex-boyfriends and ex-girlfriends. It is not unusual for far too many complications to occur more or less at the same time and the young people don't know what to do or where to turn.

In response to these needs, an effective program must develop and implement comprehensive guidance and student support systems that work to identify and alleviate barriers early on before they become obstacles that prevent students from completing the program. In addition, programs must have an extensive array of appropriate and effective referral sources to support a student in crisis, or to connect a student to a variety of social service supports including temporary housing, health insurance, and clothing. Finally, an effective program must be able to assist students in finding secure part-time employment while they attend classes.

Out-of-school youth have many strengths but often engage in harmful behaviors. An effective program must provide an engaging learning community designed to harness strengths while challenging and questioning harmful behaviors and attitudes.

Out-of-school youth usually possess strong survival skills that they have honed during their time out of school. A blend of sound youth development and educational principles can enable a school community to speak directly to youth with care and concern. Students must be able to speak openly of their use of drugs and alcohol, their sexual habits, and their experiences with many forms of abuse. Students must be able to interrogate the patterns they have become accustomed to and re-imagine their adolescent identities.

Since success in college and in the workplace frequently requires an ability to handle unexpected difficulties and solve problems, an effective program must provide graduates with on-going support services.

Most significant transitions pose unexpected challenges. The unarticulated expectations of people in different institutions and workplaces often place newcomers in confusing situations. Their initial efforts to work through the confusions might only make things worse. Far too often, failure leads to frustration and frustration can lead to despair. We maintain contact with CUNY colleges and CUNY Central Office administrators to work directly with our students to ease the transition from CUNY Prep to college. We also establish on-going contacts with supervisors and human resources staffs at the places where graduates become employed. In part, we want to ensure that initial placements are successful so that the workplaces will welcome additional ones.

CUNY Prep has developed considerable expertise in working with out-of-school youth between the ages of 16 and 18 years of age. As we look to strengthen our current program and consider replicating our model we will continue to:

- Develop, research, and, implement best practice pedagogies that engage out-of-school youth in rigorous college preparatory activities.
- Work to understand better the interplay of factors that will most likely lead a student to stop attending CUNY Prep so that we can intervene more effectively to engage these students.
- Create bridge programs with CUNY colleges and faculties to explore new pedagogies for engaging non-traditional freshmen in college-level studies.
- Collaborate with CUNY student affairs staff to strengthen college access and supports available to non-traditional freshmen.
- Work with internal and external groups to support research, evaluation and policymaking that promote college access for out-of-school youth.

Finally, we have developed a systematic approach to running the school and addressing issues that affect the school community. Each of the phases below represents a step in a process that helps us to be a reflective, data driven, and goal-oriented school program.

- Be explicit about our goals and expected outcomes for students, staff, and our school's role in the larger community.
- Create opportunities for students, staff administrators and faculty to have an active voice in decision-making and in building school culture while holding everyone to the highest standards.
- Speak with a unified voice not only in words but with action, particularly around pedagogies, supports, policies and procedures.
- Support reflection throughout everything we do, and modeling good reflective practices for students as they learn to undertake their own reflection.
- Implement effective and ongoing professional development opportunities for all staff.
- Evaluate outcomes and plans throughout the year and respond to evaluations and assessments, both internal and external.

APPENDIX

In Retrospect: CUNY Prep 2003-Present Derrick Griffith

2003: An Idea

Three years ago, CUNY's central office of Academic Affairs set out on a journey to change the landscape of opportunities available to out-of-school youth by creating CUNY Prep. When we began, we were acting on a set of ideas, experiences, and collective knowledge about the importance of literacy and college access to young people who had disconnected from education. At the beginning of this ambitious undertaking, we vowed to act always in the best interest of our students, and to be a transparent, reflective, and living organization as we struggled with the challenges and changes that would inevitably accompany building a school and fostering successful graduates.

For me, transparency has meant being public and explicit about the decisions we make in building, running and managing the school. We have always believed that revealing our process to others, including our students, both invites comment and critique and provides a model for our students as they develop their own decision-making skills. Feedback from others has only helped us improve our practice, from curriculum and instruction, to policy and budgeting.

At the same time, we recognized the need to be reflective about every aspect of our work as we strove to develop the very best of "best practices" for meeting the needs of our students and faculty. We have structured ongoing opportunities for reflection as a staff, and with our students, again modeling the impact of reflection on our daily lives as educators and learners.

As a living organization we have not been afraid to be responsive to our funders, students, parents, faculty and staff, and the City University of New York. We have conducted quantitative and qualitative reviews of our program and have been subjected to internal and external audits. These reviews have led us to question our own assumptions and practices and to adapt our program to maximize our effectiveness and outcomes. We did, however, promise to never abandon a practice, policy or procedure without giving ourselves enough time to explore and evaluate its purpose.

The process of writing and editing this report has, in itself, provided yet another opportunity to articulate our collective experiences, observations, and reflections. I share in the sections that follow some of the key decisions, challenges, and program improvements that have made CUNY Prep what it is today.

2003 – 2004: A Difficult Start

I was hired in June 2003 to launch CUNY Prep. Working with John Garvey, at that time the Director of Collaborative Programs at CUNY, we labored intensely to open the program with an anticipated start in September of 2003. At the same time, CUNY learned that management of youth programs funded through the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) would be transferred from the New York City Department of Employment to the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). We found ourselves in a tenuous position as negotiations over an MOU would have to begin again. We encountered considerable doubt about the ways in

which our model reflected the goals and spirit of WIA. Specifically, we were proposing a college preparatory program that would not, by design, isolate and teach workforce readiness with job placement outcomes, as did most WIA-funded programs. This difference in focus had numerous consequences for our start up. First, we had no agreement and hence no budget. We had interviewed and made verbal hiring offers to teachers in early August, but could not offer official letters of employment. In addition, we could not purchase the essential school data and management software that we would immediately need to schedule students, and most importantly, monitor student attendance. Finally, we could not pursue lease options to secure a stand-alone facility for the school. After months of negotiation, we signed an MOU in early September. As a testament to the commitment of our founding teachers, all but one person accepted the position we offered them after being in limbo for up to two months in some cases.

The Facility

As we planned for opening, we decided co-locate at CUNY on the Concourse (COTC), an adult learning center operated by Lehman College which functioned primarily in the evenings. We were allocated exclusive use of ten classrooms and some administrative space. Each of the classrooms was equipped with computer workstations recessed into the desks, projectors, and a whiteboard. As attractive as the technology seemed in theory, we soon began to question the usefulness of wired classrooms. Many of our teachers struggled with classroom management issues and were not easily persuaded to use the technology to engage students in a way that would reduce disruptive behaviors. Secondly, the students soon discovered that the computers could be used inappropriately during instructional time. Lastly, we were required to preserve the generic nature of the classrooms, given that the building was intended for adult education, and were therefore unable to hang any educational or student-created materials on the walls. This greatly diminished the “feel” of the school and limited the presentation of teaching and learning materials. Eventually we were allowed to purchase a bulletin board that enabled us to display some students’ work.

Because the facility also lacked a space for a physical lunchroom (and students were not allowed to bring food into the facility because each classroom was indeed a computer room), we were unable to offer students breakfast and lunch in a traditional school setting. Having to let students leave the building for lunch created additional challenges and further detracted from the school culture we were striving to build.

Outreach and Recruitment

Our initial efforts to recruit students came in the form of print advertisements, appearances on cable access shows, local guidance counselors, and flyers distributed to community-based organizations. The *New York Post* published an article, and TV channels 12, 7 and BronxNet ran segments announcing our open house dates. These initial ads yielded an applicant pool of over 300 students. At the open houses, each applicant was given a reading test, required to participate in a collaborative activity, and had to submit a writing sample. We only screened out students who did not read at or above the 8th grade level, although we later discovered that there were students who were admitted who did not read at the 8th grade level because one or more staff members felt that the student “really needed to be in our school program.”

Enrollment and Scheduling

We opened our doors for the first day of instruction on October 29, 2003. I remember arriving at the building around 6:30 feeling as prepared as could be—given our accelerated start-up. We

had accepted about 200 students and anticipated many no-shows. By 8:30, there were more than 250 students lined up waiting to get into the school. As we worked to assess what had gone wrong, we discovered that there were students and parents who thought that we were one of the new small high schools and had arrived for registration. At the end of the first week, there were 285 students on our roster. Our records indicate that approximately 181 of them had been “officially enrolled” during an earlier open house. Many of the kids were sent to us by their guidance counselor or school principal. Others had never attended a high school and thought we would be a good place for them to start. Still others came to us “to get a GED.” After our first week, we knew we needed to spend time assessing each student and his or her capacity to participate in, and contribute to, our school community. After two weeks, we began the laborious process of manually scheduling each student, since our school management software had not arrived.

School Culture

To set the stage for a successful school, we all believed that it was important to work to build a culture that reflected our mission statement and values. We wanted to be a premier college preparatory GED program that inspired students to become lifelong learners equipped with the academic, personal, and social skills necessary for higher education, expanded life opportunities, and active participation in community and civic affairs. We wanted our students to experience their education at CUNY Prep in new ways. As one of our former teachers said, even more than most “these kids will vote with their feet” and leave if CUNY Prep is just another traditional school. Combating this perception among our students would require setting a tone that showed we meant business and had expectations of them that exceeded those at their previous high schools.

First, we reinforced the idea that CUNY Prep was a place of learning and that learning involved the active engagement of our entire school community. As such, students who refused to do in-class work, homework, or other learning activities were sent home for the day and, in cases of multiple occurrences, dismissed from the program. Additionally, our teachers were expected to be prepared for every class as well. As had always been our aim, the focus was not on learning to be “right” but rather on working towards strengthening students’ academic, personal and social skills. For example, one student who said that she came to school to get her GED, not to “work in groups,” was dismissed from the program but eventually returned during a later cycle when she was ready to participate more positively in her education.

Next, we decided that students who engaged in physical and/or verbal abuse on the premises or in the immediate vicinity of the school would be expelled. Given the perception of our students among our landlord, the CUNY on the Concourse staff, and members of the larger community, we simply could not jeopardize the school because of student inability to resolve their differences. We asked that students be pro-active and report to the school staff any conflict that might be brewing so that we could offer mediation and work to resolve the conflicts. We knew that this would be difficult because many of our students believed that we were asking them to “snitch” and that was a violation of the street codes to which far too many of them were beholden. At the end of the day we did not prevent every fight inside or outside of the school, but we did expel every single student who was involved in fighting.

While things began to settle down during the first year, a palpable tension started to arise between different groups of students. This came to a head one morning when one of our students arrived in the lobby keeled over and clutching his side. As an LPN (from a former life), I quickly

assessed the situation to learn that he was stabbed in his arm and leg by a group of gang members while on his way to school. Word of the incident began to spread through the school. We soon heard rumblings of some plans to retaliate, so we held an all-school assembly. I discussed the incident and offered amnesty to every student who, as a member of a gang, would self-identify. I invited each student to an after school meeting where we eventually agreed that our school would become a neutral space. Those students who did not self-identify but were later determined to hold membership in a gang would be dismissed from the program. In the meantime we called in the SAFE Team (a special unit of CUNY's Public Safety Division) to attend the meeting and provide additional support. After this meeting, we began to see a decrease in the level of posturing before, during, and after school that led to many of our earlier incidents.

We recognized that one cause of the incidents or tensions in the school was the transition time between classes and students' leaving for lunch. During the first twelve weeks we were open, there was almost a daily occurrence of students "grilling" or staring disrespectfully at one another, stepping on each other's shoes, or exhibiting gang signs and hand shakes.

Our response to this problem involved another all-school assembly and an "all hands on deck" approach while students were changing classes. All staff were required to leave their post to assist with hallway monitoring and to oversee students' arrival/departure from the building in the morning and afternoon. We used the passing times to get to know our students, prevent and/or mediate any potential conflicts, and finally to discern if there were young people who did not have the emotional or psychosocial readiness necessary for success in our program and college. During an all-school assembly, we asked students to educate us on the ways in which "grilling, flashing gang signs, and shoe-scuffing" contribute to hallway altercations. Their involvement in the assembly was animated and at times heated. As a policy, we informed students that anyone who was involved in an altercation stemming from the aforementioned issues would be expelled.

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

In an effort to plan curriculum during the summer months, we researched a number of curriculum "packages" created by external developers. In addition, we held a curriculum planning conference to harness the experience and curriculum resources of the staff developers, teachers, coordinators, and directors working in collaborative programs and adult and continuing education. Both the curriculum packages and the planning conference influenced our thinking and helped us to select broad themes to set the foundation for our instructional focus. First, reading and writing would be incorporated across the disciplines. Second, each course would focus on developing ways of knowing as opposed simply to "covering" the content. Third, we would offer a variety of elective courses including health and physical education to address issues related to wellness. Within the major disciplines (mathematics, science, humanities), we looked for constructivist approaches that would enable students to build upon knowledge while practicing content.

In mathematics, we knew that our students' math levels would vary greatly, that most would compute at the seventh grade level, and most (if not all) would have some degree of math phobia—so we selected the "Connected Mathematics" series. Students would move through the series at their own pace using a curriculum that was designed to illustrate everyday connections to math, as well as math and reading literacy.

We chose a science curriculum based on the NYS Living Environment supplemented by the GLOBE (Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment) curriculum developed by colleagues at Queens College (http://qcpages.qc.cuny.edu/qcglobe/wh_gl.htm). The GLOBE component would allow students to conduct field experiments and analyze the data using centralized computers to compare their findings against other schools using the GLOBE program.

For the humanities, our interdisciplinary curricula focused thematically on the study of Africa, as a way to strengthen students' reading and writing skills, global history knowledge, and engage them in a topic relevant to current society and to themselves.

Pedagogically, we believed that teachers needed to create extremely engaging courses that emphasized their roles as facilitators rather than lecturers. During the first cycle, it became clear that student behaviors such as challenging teachers and authority figures made adopting non-traditional teaching methods difficult. It was not until January, when classroom management issues were more under control, that teachers started to practice different pedagogical approaches more successfully.

As already mentioned, we also learned that the fixed desk and technologically sophisticated classrooms were often huge obstacles to our preferred teaching practices and were a distraction to students' learning. With teachers unable to reconfigure desks out of stationary rows, classrooms took on the look and feel of the traditional high schools our students had left, which impacted all of us in negative ways.

Assessment during our first year consisted mainly of in-class exams, mirroring the methods used in traditional schools. However, several teachers adopted project-based assessments that proved to be highly engaging for students and useful metrics of learning for teachers. The excitement and high level of participation in those projects provided the foundation for much of the curricula and activities that were designed during year two and beyond. Formally, we attempted to re-administer the Stanford 10 during the spring to capture end-of-year data on our students' progress. While the results we gathered were revealing and often encouraging, nearly half the original students from October had left (to take the GED tests) so data were scarce. As a result, we instituted a policy that students would take the predictor and the post-Stanford 10 prior to taking the GED and exiting from the program. We also moved toward implementing pre-assessments in each of the disciplines during the first weeks of school in order to assess students' prior knowledge and strengthen curriculum and instruction.

In May of 2004 our first class of students sat for the GED tests. Of the fifty-eight students who took the tests, forty passed. We were encouraged by the distribution of scores on the subject tests, since many students scored above 2250 and six students scored above 3000.

2004-2005: A Turn-Around

In the fall of 2004, we moved into a new facility in the Pelham Parkway section of the Bronx with ten classrooms, a cafeteria, and office space to accommodate our needs. Building on our experiences, we made major changes to the program in the areas of staffing, data management, student support and criteria for taking the GED tests.

We began the year with several new teachers in the mathematics, humanities, and science departments. We also hired two part-time teachers in order to offer students additional electives such as computers, drama and writing, and intensive math support.

During the summer, we revamped our student handbook to be more explicit about our approach, expectations, and consequences for student conduct. The handbook focused on the youth development principles of resilience, reflection and success. We began the school year by instituting a uniform policy for all students in an effort to limit the amount of gang-related paraphernalia that students wore. We also wanted to be able to distinguish our students from students attending other area high schools. While students were initially up in arms, they eventually understood our reasoning for the policy.

The new building enabled us to create our own T1 powered computer and phone network, which enormously boosted our ability to run the school management software, monitor attendance, manage student data and document students' behavioral and academic outcomes.

Another major change came in the area of student support services. We realized early in the year that the tracking and reporting necessary for WIA-funded programs was too much for two school counselors to handle. We hired four case managers to be responsible primarily for managing students per DYCD requirements. The two original school counselors worked with students who were already in college and assisted with managing the GED/college application process.

Finally, we created a policy that required students to be here for at least two consecutive cycles before we allowed them to take the GED tests. Our rationale was two-fold: first, we found that our pass rates were declining, although very few students failed more than two subsections of the test; second, we found that while some of the students may have been academically ready, many did not have the maturity level necessary to succeed in college.

2005 - Present: New Challenges

The implementation of new policies and practices throughout our first and second years, most significantly, led to accomplishments and successes across the board. As such, we approached 2006-07 with the freedom to think more creatively and widely about pedagogy, data, and student outcomes. We made several large-scale changes to the school structure informed through a series of all-staff professional development workshops, discussion, and decision-making processes.

Foremost, we recognized the following about our students based on our expertise and experience:

- *all learning is rooted in prior knowledge*, and therefore we need to assess where students are before we can expect them to move forward;
- *all learning is situational and contextual*, so instruction must be activity- and experientially-based in order to guide students toward becoming what it is they are learning rather than just mastering facts and data; and
- *our focus is to remediate and accelerate the development of students' skills and attitudes*, so they could enter college and attain a degree.

This last bullet—a renewed emphasis on college, rather than the GED tests—reflected a recommitment to CUNY Prep’s original mission.

Instructionally, teachers spent the summer writing their own curricula based on their interests and expertise in each discipline. All instruction moved toward using a competency-based assessment, modeled after the Diploma Plus program.⁸ Each teacher wrote competencies for individual courses that covered content-related skills and knowledge as well as reading and writing. With this method students would be assessed with both letter grades and written or articulated reviews of where they were in terms of mastering the competencies.

To support students’ readiness for college and to center our entire culture on college graduation, Student Support Case Managers became College Access Counselors whose roles included teaching a college-readiness class three times a week with the assistance of CUNY Prep teachers based on a designated curriculum anchored in their youth development expertise. Since we recognized that early college experience can be an important factor in determining college matriculation and persistence, we entered into a partnership with Hostos Community College in spring 2007 to offer College Now classes to students who had taken the GED tests. During the pilot year we offered Introduction to Criminal Justice, Introduction to Sociology, and a developmental math workshop to prepare for the CUNY Skills Assessment Exam.

New administrative procedures were implemented to strengthen our ability to capture and record data, including students’ academic and psychosocial development. We installed the ScholarChip software system that enabled students to ‘swipe’ in and out of the building, classrooms, and restrooms using a special photo-ID tag. Staff were required to swipe in and out each workday as well. This system gathered student attendance data more quickly than the one it replaced and provided teachers more time to spend on instruction.

Lastly, we articulated to applicants during orientation the process by which a student successfully moves through our program and on to college. A flowchart entitled “Pathways to Successful Outcomes at CUNY Prep” (see below) was added to the Handbook and shared with the entire school community. This graphic included the requirements for moving through each step, such as the academic and personal development accomplishments that were expected of students, and the consequences if these expectations were not met.

This flowchart perhaps best captures where we are now on the journey that began when we first opened our doors in October 2003. Reflected on it are the policies and academic components that grew directly from our struggles, challenges, and successes over the years. The “Pathways” emphasizes the importance of college and the college experience while illustrating (both literally

⁸ The Diploma Plus model combines “high expectations, individualized, self-paced learning, a small, personalized learning environment, and connections between the school and the world beyond the classroom.” Teachers build ongoing assessment into all work and help young people recommit to school, achieve academically, and make the transition to college or the workplace.” Diploma Plus schools were developed through The Center for Youth Development and Education (CYDE), a division of the Massachusetts-based Commonwealth Corporation, and have been cited by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation as model schools for at-risk students.

(<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/UnitedStates/Education/TransformingHighSchools/Schools/ModelSchools/DiplomaPlus.htm>).

and figuratively) our commitment to being a “transitional” program—an environment in which we work together to guide students toward achieving a college diploma. And it articulates for students *their* role and responsibilities toward becoming productive members of the community, within the walls of CUNY Prep and beyond.

PATHWAY TO SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES at CUNY PREP

Step 1: Attend an Open House

- Reading Exam
- Math Exam
- Interview
- Have required documentation



Step 2: Accepted to Orientation as a Student



Step 3: Attend Orientation

- Perfect attendance is mandatory
- Complete all written assignments
- Participate actively and positively in all aspects of orientation
- Compliance with Handbook (such as on time/in uniform/no use of cell phone/etc.)



Step 4: End of Orientation

- Individual Assessment
- Upon passing, receive Metrocard, ID, class schedule



Step 5: Cycle One Classes Begin

- No more than 6 absences
- No more than 5 written referrals
- Fail no more than 2 classes



Academic and College Survival
(Math, Science, Humanities,
Writing, Literacy and
College Survival)



Accomplish the above and are at the “proficient” level of all competencies (academic and college survival) you will progress to Cycle 2 classes to continue developing your skills and college readiness, and will be considered eligible to take the predictor exams for the GED and possibly the exam itself. Students are also eligible to participate in the College Now program.

If you accomplish the above but are not at the “proficient” level of all competencies (academic, college survival, and school) you will progress to Cycle 2 classes to continue developing your competency level and working toward college readiness.

CUNY Preparatory Transitional High School

2122 White Plains Road
Bronx, New York 10462
718-839-8862



Ms. Melissa Almeida, Valetorian, CUNY Prep Graduating Class 2004

Photo credit: Peter Wang