



# Peer-Led College Access Programming

A PROFILE OF STUDENT  
SUCCESS CENTERS IN  
NEW YORK CITY

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past year conversations have proliferated about how to achieve racial equity in New York City: What characterizes policies that are anti-racist? How can we ensure Black and Latinx leadership across multiple realms (government, business, non-profits, schools, etc.)? What are the best routes toward change, and how can we learn from past movements to progress forward?

These conversations are not new to the city; they began decades before the murder of George Floyd and the growth of the Black Lives Matter movement, but they have been elevated over this past year.

At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a parallel set of discussions about the needs of young people and their access to resources. Remote schooling has underscored and exacerbated existing inequities across NYC public schools and institutions of higher education. Specifically, the pandemic has highlighted the impact of differential access to stable internet, space for learning, quality teaching, rigorous coursework, mental health services, and guidance and support through the K–16 educational pipeline. These inequities are also not new to our city; they have been with us since the founding of the public school system, as have the voices calling for change.

One powerful voice emerged in 2004 when a group of New York City public high school students, all from low-income Black and Latinx communities, identified the ways in which racist policies and funding structures were disenfranchising young people in their communities. These youth organizers, part of the **Urban Youth Collaborative** (UYC), were keenly aware of the inequities in the system and were dedicated to fighting them. One of their greatest concerns was that their peers—the majority of whom said they wanted to go to college—were not getting the support they needed from their schools to achieve their college aspirations. To address this issue, UYC organizers broadened their circle of young people to bring in more voices, and then called in allies from community-based organizations (CBOs) they trusted. Together they envisioned a program model, which they called *Student Success Centers* (SSCs), that would put the leadership of young people



front and center: trusted CBOs would create spaces inside of schools that were staffed by both adult counselors and young people trained to help students through all aspects of post-secondary planning.

The UYC organizers took the next step to advocate for public funding and, through their leadership, their vision came to fruition. The first two SSCs were founded in 2007 in Brooklyn at the Bushwick Educational Campus and Franklin K. Lane High School Campus, in partnership with **Make the Road NY** and **Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation**, respectively. Together, these two SSCs served eight high schools and employed 16 high school students trained as *Youth Leaders* who, under the supervision of adult counselors, supported approximately 3,000 students. Over the past 13+ years since these initial SSCs were founded, **College Access: Research & Action (CARA)** and a host of CBOs,<sup>1</sup> supported by public and private funds, have exponentially expanded SSCs throughout NYC. In the 2019–2020 school year, SSCs could be found in 34 high schools across four boroughs, with 120 Youth Leaders serving upwards of 14,000 students across NYC.

Qualitative and quantitative data make clear that the vision the young people originally developed, believed in, and implemented more than 13 years ago has worked effectively to narrow the college guidance gap. Graduation rates in schools with SSCs have increased an average of 26% over six years and post-secondary enrollment by 17%. This progress was made possible because SSCs significantly expanded advisement capacity: while the typical counselor-to-student ratio in NYC schools of 1:221<sup>2</sup>, in schools served by SSCs it is, on average, 1:53.

It is important to note that there have been a host of interventions over the past ten years aimed at improving both high school graduation rates and college enrollment in NYC<sup>3</sup>, with a steady increase in public and private dollars directed toward schools and CBOs for college access programming citywide. SSCs have ensured that opportunities reach the students with the least access to those supports. Schools with SSCs, on average, serve more students with economic need, who are overage and undercredited, who are English language learners, living in temporary housing, and struggling with chronic absenteeism as compared to citywide averages.

Despite the growth and success of SSCs, and despite the persistent need for them, this report comes at a time when the future of SSCs in NYC is gravely threatened. Cuts in public funding resulted in the closing of four Student Success Centers in 2020–2021 and reduced programming in other SSCs.

## SCHOOLS

WITH STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS

↑ 26%

GRADUATION RATE INCREASE

↑ 17%

POST-SECONDARY  
ENROLLMENT RATE INCREASE



***Peer-Led College Access Programming: A Profile of Student Success Centers in New York City*** documents the development, evolution, and impact of Student Success Centers in NYC, showing how they have been a critical component in the progress made over the past two decades to improve graduation and post-secondary enrollment rates citywide.

The report contains the following:

### **Section 1 Introduction**

provides a framing of the SSC movement and the overall report.

### **Section 2 The Student Success Center Movement: Origins, Evolution, and Impact**

documents the history of SSCs across two key waves of development, 2006–2016 and 2017–2019, and demonstrates impact through qualitative and quantitative data.

### **Section 3 Peer-to-Peer Programming: The Elements Needed to Make it Work**

contextualizes SSCs as part of a larger movement for peer-to-peer college access and persistence programming catalyzed by UYC, presenting CARA's theory of change for peer-led programs and the elements needed for effective programming.

### **Section 4 Guiding Principles for Effective Student Success Center Implementation**

reflects across the 25+ SSCs launched over the past 13+ years, some that were sustained and others that were not. The section presents a set of four guiding principles that have emerged for effective SSC development, including:

- > CBO-School Partnerships: CBO Matters
- > Peer Leaders: Trained, Supervised, & Paid Youth Leaders Are Essential

- > Integration of College Access Programming into School Programming: The More Developed the College Access Infrastructure, the More the SSC Can Do
- > Data Tracking: A Shared Data System Improves Programming

### **Section 5 Profile: The Rise and Fall of a Student Success Center**

provides a case study of a school whose college access programming was greatly improved by the implementation of an SSC and then tremendously challenged when the SSC was closed due to budget cuts that coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Section 6 Conclusion**

calls for continued investment to sustain and spread the SSC model.

The fight of young people to demand their fair share of support to reach their goals is far from over—young people continue to face the same inequities that youth organizers named at the beginning of the 21st century, inequities that have widened since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. SSCs have been and continue to be a critical component to an economically and racially just NYC. They are successfully providing people from systematically oppressed communities with the support they need to be the future leaders our city needs. The young people who envisioned SSCs and who have sustained them for 13+ years have taken on the “meaningful and purposeful roles” that Alicia Garza, co-creator of **#BlackLivesMatter** and principal at the **Black Futures Lab**, argues are needed to create “communities of change<sup>4</sup>.” Those young people figured out something that works and made it happen; it is now their city’s responsibility to keep it going.



“[Student Success Centers are] the manifestation of young people becoming the very resources we did not have for ourselves.”

– Christine Rodriguez, Youth Leader and Youth Organizer

Student Success Centers (SSCs) are physical spaces in New York City public high schools dedicated to supporting students through the post-secondary planning process. These centers are run as collaborations between schools and partner community-based organizations (CBOs), which hire and manage the centers’ adult staff and student peer advisors, known as *Youth Leaders*. SSCs have proliferated across New York City and have shifted the post-secondary pathways of thousands of low-income students of color. SSCs emerged in the early 2000s from the vision of the **Urban Youth Collaborative** (UYC) for a peer-to-peer college guidance model.

**College Access: Research & Action (CARA)** and a host of CBOs<sup>5</sup> have nurtured this vision into an established program model which, in the 2019–2020 school year, served upwards of 14,000 students across NYC.

Fifteen years ago, youth organizers from UYC set out to rectify a system that had consistently underserved their communities by failing to provide students with the

opportunities and supports needed to realize their college aspirations. UYC organizers saw the national statistics reflected in their own communities: 95% of high school students want to go to college, but only 67% of those from low-income families enroll directly after high school compared to 83% from high-income families (NCES, May 2018); and 16% of 24-year-olds from low-income backgrounds attain a BA in comparison to 62% from high-income families (Pell Institute, 2020). UYC organizers recognized that the root of this disparity could be found in schools that did not provide the critical resources that middle-class students had access to: opportunities to learn about and explore different types of colleges and post-secondary pathways; one-on-one guidance through the many steps of the application and matriculation process; and the financial resources to support the college process.

UYC organizers wanted to confront the fact that most public high schools serving students who are the first in their family to

attend college<sup>6</sup> and/or low-income<sup>7</sup> do not have the resources to meet the many and varied needs of their students. According to the **Education Trust**, only one in five high school students attends a school with sufficient college counselors, highlighting how it is often low-income students and students of color who have the least access to individualized college advising<sup>8</sup>. Without that dedicated school-based support, many low-income students do not apply, or under-apply to college<sup>9</sup>, and/or do not complete the FAFSA<sup>10</sup> process.

To close this persistent college guidance gap, UYC student organizers were inspired by a model being used in Philadelphia called *Student Success Centers*. Started by the **Philadelphia Student Union**, an organization committed to building the power of young people to demand high-quality public education, Philadelphia's *Student Success Centers* were "a one-stop-shop for college, career and social and emotional supports for students."<sup>11</sup> UYC organizers' vision was to have the neighborhood-based CBOs they trusted create the same type of one-stop shop in their high schools *and* to train high school students (to be called *Youth Leaders*) to partner with CBO staff to work in the SSCs. Together, Youth Leaders and CBO staff would plan and implement post-secondary programming and deliver one-on-one support, reducing the college guidance gap and specifically addressing the needs of low-income students.

UYC envisioned Student Success Centers in NYC that would be school-based but that would not rely solely on the resources or leadership of the school system. Instead, UYC organizers decided the SSCs would be led by the two stakeholders they *did* trust: local

CBOs and young people. As youth organizers themselves, UYC's visionaries wanted to further harness the power of young people, positioning them to address the challenges facing their own communities. They believed peer leaders, who were trained in the content and skills needed to navigate the college process, would be uniquely positioned to support other students because they would be accessible, relatable, and understandable in ways adult counselors were not.

After several years of advocacy, the first two SSCs were launched with public funds in 2007–2008, serving eight high schools on two multi-school campuses in Brooklyn. During the next 13 years, CARA implemented and expanded UYC's vision. By 2019–2020, CARA had helped to develop 17 SSCs serving 34 high schools across four boroughs.

Years of development and programming have made clear the effectiveness of the SSC model that UYC envisioned. With the articulated goal of increasing advisement capacity, ***CBO staff and trained peer leaders create a college-counselor-to-student ratio of 1:53, on average, per school. In turn, graduation rates have increased an average of 26% over six years and post-secondary***

AVERAGE COUNSELOR-TO-STUDENT

**RATIO**  
**WITH SSCs**  
**1:53**

School Staff + CBO Staff + Trained Youth Leaders



**enrollment by 17%.** While it is not possible to say exactly what the ratio would have been in the absence of SSCs, because leadership might have allocated staffing differently, if the SSCs were to be removed and not replaced with something else, the average ratio would be 1:174.

The impact of UYC's vision has extended beyond the realm of the SSCs; their vision has catalyzed peer-to-peer college access, enrollment, and persistence programming across NYC. Following the launch of the first two SSCs, CARA developed additional peer-led programs: **College Bridge**, which trains college students to work in their alma mater high schools supporting seniors through the college application and matriculation process; and **College Allies**, which trains college students to help their peers in college navigate the obstacles to college persistence. Beyond CARA, across NYC peer-to-peer and near-peer models have taken root, with a host of school-support organizations, community-based organizations, CUNY-based programs, and the NYC Department of Education (DoE) launching their own programs. While not the focus of this report, it is important to recognize the widespread implementation of UYC's vision.

And yet, despite the success and growth of the work, the future of SSCs in NYC – and the tireless work of the UYC organizers and the more than 660 Youth Leaders who have worked in SSCs during the past 13+ years – is gravely threatened. DoE budget cuts resulted in four Student Success Centers closing in 2020–2021 and reduced programming in other SSCs.<sup>12</sup>

At a “Save the Student Success Centers” rally on September 15th, 2020, Christine Rodriguez, an organizer and former Youth Leader, testified:

*“Young people in this city have fought for college access and Student Success Centers for way too long for the city to now defund it. We have Student Success Centers now because of the resilience of [the] young people in this city who go to schools that lack the staff, resources, and support we need...We need to be honest and real about what we are prioritizing...We need to close the guidance gap. We want to believe that education is the great equalizer and that social mobility is possible. But what we see in our lived experience for those in under-resourced communities, in the Black and Brown communities that we live in, is that is not the case at all...We need the city to protect Student Success Centers. Our livelihood depends on it. This was the manifestation of young people becoming the very resources we did not have for ourselves...I, as a young person, am tired and disappointed. We have been neglected for too long and we need you to invest in our wellness by providing safe and supportive schools. Real safety to us is guidance and support. It is defunding the school-to-prison pipeline and investing in a pipeline to college and careers. More guidance counselors and SSCs are the key to making this happen.”*

This report serves as a testimony to the arguments made by UYC organizers in the early 2000s and to the voices of everyone who has worked in or with SSCs in the time since. It documents the evolution of the SSC movement in NYC, explaining the model, sharing best practices, and highlighting challenges to implementation. This report adds to and amplifies the growing recognition that young people are a critical part of becoming the solution to the inequities and injustices that shape their lives – their voices should be listened to and heeded.

# THE STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER MOVEMENT

## ORIGINS, EVOLUTION, AND IMPACT

## 2 SECTION

“Having Youth Leaders...going through and changing [the] minds of teachers and the way they view the students in our building, is something so powerful and so strong that it can only come through the youth that we service. I entered DeWitt Clinton High School at a point where they were supposed to close down...They were going to shut it down, send it packing because those students weren’t worth it. The SSC started here in 2015. And in these last five years, the amount of joy and hope that these students now have, the way that our teachers now look at our students differently. The way that going to a community college is celebrated because they didn’t even know that was something they could do, has completely changed the culture of our school.”

— Cynthia Perez, Good Shepherd Services, Student Success Center Director at DeWitt Clinton High School

### The Early Years: 2006–2016

The Urban Youth Collaborative (UYC) was launched in 2004 by young people who knew what needed to change in schools that had consistently short changed their communities, but also witnessed a wave of school change happening around them that did not make space for their ideas and input. From its inception, UYC was led by students with the mission to “fight for real education reform that puts students first. Demanding a high quality education for all students, our young people struggle for social, economic, and racial justice in our schools and communities.”<sup>13</sup>

#### UYC’s Core Beliefs<sup>14</sup>

**We believe in the transformative power of youth organizing.**

**We believe in movement building to heal our communities.**

**We believe in the power of young people to shift structural systems and policy.**

Soon after its formation, UYC prioritized the issue of college access.<sup>15</sup> In 2005, UYC organizers administered a survey to more than 400 students from 27 high schools. It showed that while 90% of their peers wanted to go to college, the majority did not feel encouraged or supported to do so. Most reported that “never, rarely or only sometimes” could they see a guidance counselor or get help at their school with college-related questions.<sup>16</sup> While the survey was not citywide in distribution, it reflected a widespread reality that the vast majority of high school students had college aspirations, but the ratio of counselors to students, and the lack of college expertise across guidance counselors, made it very difficult for first-generation college students to realize those aspirations.

These youth organizers recognized that, while more of their peers wanted to go to college than ever before – largely because of a shifting economy that demanded a post-secondary degree – their high schools had not changed enough to support them to get there. The schools were still operating on the outdated assumption that only the top 10–20% of students would apply to and enroll in college.

UYC student organizers turned their attention to the college guidance gap, developing the *College Pathways* campaign. As the organizers explained:

*“We realized that, in many of our communities, students were being pushed into GED programs and into the military, rather than being helped to realize their dreams for college. We believe that every NYC high school student has the fundamental right to obtain the counseling and academic support necessary for him or her to succeed in high school and go to college.”<sup>17</sup>*

Among their initial demands was to have counseling and academic support that would prepare students for college pathways. As noted in the Introduction, UYC members learned about and adapted the Student Success Center approach being used in Philadelphia through organizing efforts by the Philadelphia Student Union (PSU). In 2003–2004 there were SSCs in ten high schools in Philadelphia, providing public school students with a range of guidance supports. UYC called for a similar model in NYC, and, following their core beliefs about the transformative power of young people, they added to it students who would be trained to partner with adult staff to further reduce the college guidance gap and build programming in the schools.

Through a series of youth-led organizing efforts during the 2005–2006 school year, including meetings with top officials at the NYC Department of Education (DoE), New York City’s first Student Success Center was approved and provided state funds to open for the 2007–2008 school year on the Bushwick Campus, in partnership with Make the Road New York. The second SSC was approved soon after, a partnership between the Franklin K. Lane Campus and Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation. Each of these SSCs was a centrally located space serving four small schools on their respective campuses, employing two Youth Leaders per school. Youth Leaders were supervised by the CBO employees who staffed the SSC, and worked in partnership with school-based counselors and administrators to create campus-wide programming and one-on-one support for students. What emerged was a model that would define the work of SSCs across NYC for years to come.



## The Student Success Center Model

**CBO-Campus Partnership** focused on college and career programming

**Trained, Supervised, and Paid High School Students** who support college access programming and provide individualized peer-to-peer guidance support at their school

**Integration of College Access Programming into School Programming** in the form of college visits, post-secondary exploration workshops and events, and one-on-one student support

**Shared Data Tracking** to enable a collaborative approach to college counseling

From the outset, the model began to do just what the youth organizers had envisioned. At a presentation to the DoE in 2009, school-based counselors provided testimony on the ways in which SSCs expanded support to students. One explained:

*“The SSC is really a great resource – I lean on them for things like workshops or being able to work one-on-one on the computer with a student. I can’t sit with 100 kids and read personal statements...I have three very different and busy jobs – I can’t do it all!”*

Another counselor, who was at first reticent to put this type of work in the hands of students, acknowledged just how valuable their voice and role was:

*“Lots of times when I am explaining something, I am not understanding why it is not connecting, but when a student explains it in a different terminology, the kid instantly gets it...College is something that becomes attainable to them.”*

This counselor noted that the SSC goes beyond supporting individual students; it shifts the culture of the school. While it had always been challenging to get students to stay after school, she was finding the SSC packed with seniors working on college applications when she was leaving the building at the end of her day. She could overhear the students talking about their applications, comparing how many schools they were applying to, and getting support on all aspects of their process.

In 2011, when the DoE began to evaluate schools based on a set of college readiness indicators, including the percentage of graduates who enrolled in college within six months of graduation, UYC recognized this as an unfunded mandate and increased their focus on expanding peer-to-peer college access programs. UYC organizers argued that raising the standard without providing adequate support was unfair and cited persistent student complaints and a counseling ratio ranging between 1:400 and 1:600 in many schools.<sup>18</sup> UYC shifted its *College Pathways* campaign to its *Get Us to College* campaign, making a set of concrete demands, including the spread of SSCs and College Bridge programs which used college students to support high school seniors through the college matriculation process.

### The Get Us to College Campaign

UYC is calling for the following well-researched and cost-effective proposals to ensure that schools get the support they need to meet these higher standards, and to significantly increase the numbers of first-generation and Black and Latino students enrolling in college:

- > A **system-wide survey** of what supports schools currently offer students, and sharing that and other college access data with the public
- > **Adequate numbers of counselors** to alert and help students when they are off track for graduation or college, and to help students learn about and apply to college
- > Scaling up and supporting college access programs that work – **Student Success Centers**
- > Providing support to students between high school graduation and **college enrollment** [i.e., College Bridge programs]<sup>19</sup>

The Get Us to College campaign led to real growth in peer-led college access programming:

- > **SSC Growth:** With a mix of public and private funding, between 2012 and 2016 13<sup>20</sup> new SSCs were launched as CBO-school partnerships, and another two schools – attracted to reducing the counselor:student ratio with a peer-to-

peer model – implemented the Youth Leader model without a CBO partner. This brought the total count of individual schools with SSCs to 26 and brought a set of new CBOs into the SSC model.

- > **College Bridge Growth:** With a mix of public and private funding, between 2011 – when CARA first launched a College Bridge program along with CUNY K–16 and Urban Assembly – and summer 2019, there were 130 high schools with near-peer matriculation support. By 2020, with emergency funding from private sources, College Bridge programming expanded to provide some level of programming to all 428 high schools across NYC.

### Ready for Growth: The Next Wave: 2017–2019

In 2016, the DoE, which had provided some yearly funding to the SSCs since 2013, approached CARA with a request to expand the SSC model to more campuses across NYC. Through the Mayor's *College Access for All* initiative, the DoE provided funds to schools and CBOs to develop and run SSCs and to CARA to support the implementation of the model. The goal of this expansion was to increase the number of struggling schools served by the model, establish it as cost-effective for multi-school campuses, and further develop the capacity of well-positioned CBOs to expand its reach. While it was recognized that all schools could benefit from an SSC, especially because *no* NYC public school had sufficient funding to support students within its standard DoE budget, the new target sites would serve underperforming schools enrolling majority low-income, high-needs students. Because too many other urgent and competing demands take priority over post-secondary planning,

these schools are typically most in need of resources to increase college support and ensure that there is expertise in the building. Once the target schools were identified, CBO partners that were intimately familiar with those school communities were selected.

Between 2017 and 2019, another six SSCs were launched as CBO-school partnerships<sup>21</sup> on struggling school campuses. In 2019–2020, 70% of the SSCs were located in districts with the highest concentrations of vulnerable students (**Research Alliance for NYC Schools**); and, as Chart 2.1 shows, schools with SSCs, on average, served more students with economic need, who are overage and undercredited, living in temporary housing, struggling with chronic absenteeism, and English language learners as compared to citywide averages.

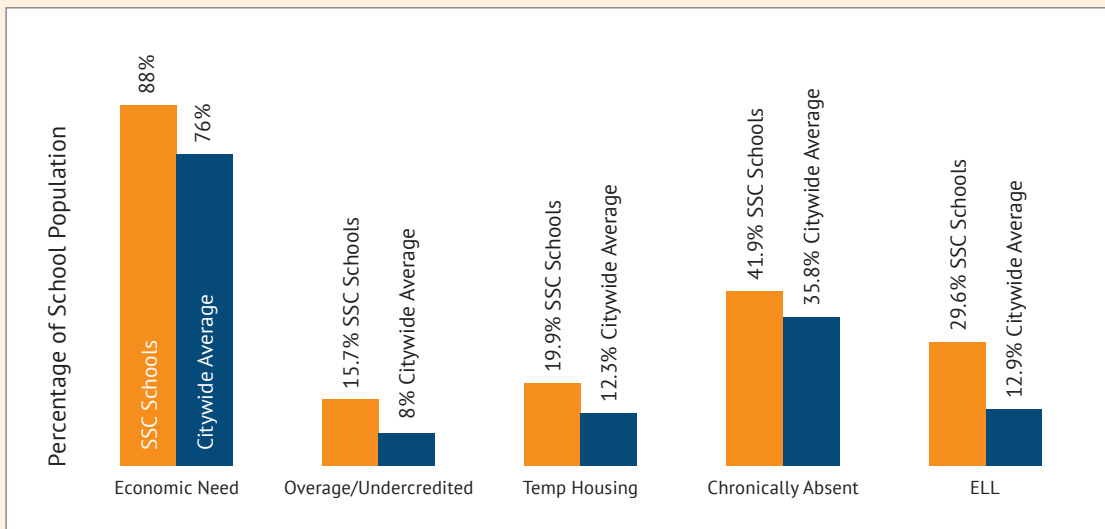
With this expansion came more widespread recognition of the model. SSCs were now being positioned as a viable approach to

college access not only by UYC, CARA, and those on the ground, but also by the DoE, City Council, and citywide CBO leaders.

In April 2017, then-Assemblyman Michael Blake from the Bronx was one of the many council members to make a statement about the importance and need for the model, commenting:

*“I am convinced that our Bronx students have remarkable talent, skill, or intelligence but too often equally have insufficient opportunity and awareness. Therefore, I thank Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Fariña for selecting our district as one of the sites for a Student Success Center so that our local scholars can empower other future leaders so they aspire for college and a better livelihood. Ensuring equity in excellence through this partnership of community and academic partners continues to demonstrate how we are all #BuildingABetterBronx.”*

**Chart 2.1 Demographic Characteristics of SSC Schools vs. Citywide Average in 2018-2019**





Schools Chancellor for New York City at the time, Carmen Fariña, declared:

*“These new Student Success Centers are an important, common-sense tool on our path to College Access for All. They offer a number of innovative approaches to leverage resources within our schools and communities – collaboration among co-located schools, partnership with community-based organizations, and student mentoring and leadership.”*

**Good Shepherd Services**, a lead CBO in the expansion, saw SSCs as highly mission consistent for the agency. Sister Paulette LoMonaco, then-Executive Director of Good Shepherd Services, and a prominent leader for CBOs across the boroughs, argued:

*“Good Shepherd Services is proud to operate Student Success Centers; they provide students with the resources and support to reach their academic goals and make their college aspirations a reality. Investments in programs like these – and in organizations like us who provide them – are a down payment on the future of New York. It is an investment that will assuredly yield great dividends.”*

Sr. LoMonaco was not alone in her faith in the model. In 2018, the seven organizations that partnered with schools across NYC to run SSCs formed the *SSC Coalition* to ensure the city would continue its investment. Having come together for several years already to fight for continued funding from the DoE, these CBOs decided to formalize their partnership and collectively fight for the future of SSCs in NYC. By this point, the coalition had years of collective programming and quantitative and qualitative data that demonstrated the impact of the SSC model. Having seen how SSCs fostered a culture among students where they came to see themselves as *belonging* in college, and

how they provided a host of young people with meaningful career development and jobs, the SSC Coalition members committed themselves to continue the fight that the Urban Youth Collaborative had begun so many years before.

### SSC Coalition Members

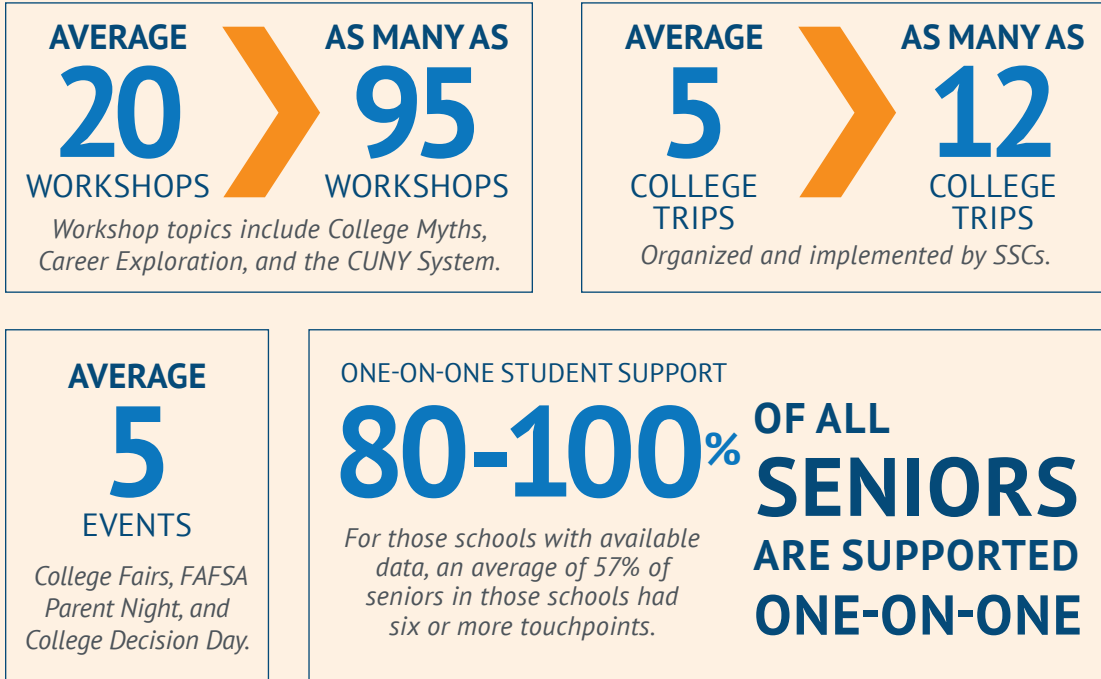
- > Asian Americans for Equality
- > Cypress Hills LDC
- > East Side House Settlement
- > Good Shepherd Services
- > Kingsbridge Heights Community Center
- > Make the Road New York
- > New Settlement

### Demonstrating Impact Over Time: Increasing Graduation and Post-Secondary Enrollment Rates

When SSCs were first established in 2007-2008, schools and the DoE did very little tracking or collection of college-related outcomes. By 2020, however, there had been a shift in availability of both school-level and system-wide data that allowed the impact of the SSCs to be observed, specifically related to college application completion, FAFSA completion, and post-secondary enrollment. 21 schools served by SSCs (64% of the total schools served) had a median of four to six years of programming to report on. The outcomes presented below support what makes logical sense: deploying more trained people to support students through the college process strengthens a school's college-going culture and improves outcomes for students.

## SSCs Have Expanded College Exploration Opportunities and College-Process Support

Each Year SSCs offer:

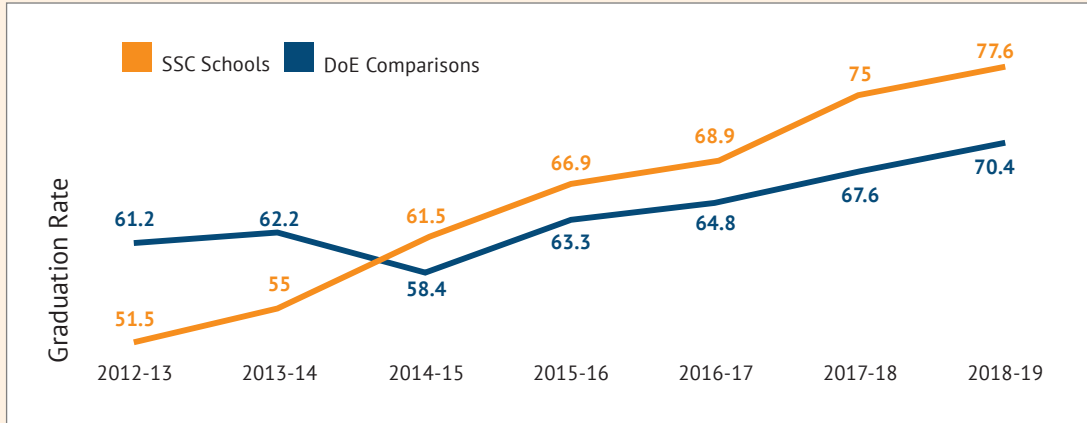


Subsequent outcome data show how these increased opportunities impact indicators related to college-application completion, FAFSA completion, and post-secondary enrollment. Looking at the 21 schools with a median of four to six years of SSC programming, more than **80% of seniors completed a CUNY application in 2018–2019, with 13 of those 21 schools achieving between 90 and 100% completion. Schools also, on average, increased FAFSA completion by 7% over three years**, and some of the schools outperformed district-wide completion rates by an average of 15 percentage points, according to **US Department of Education Federal Student Aid FAFSA** reporting.

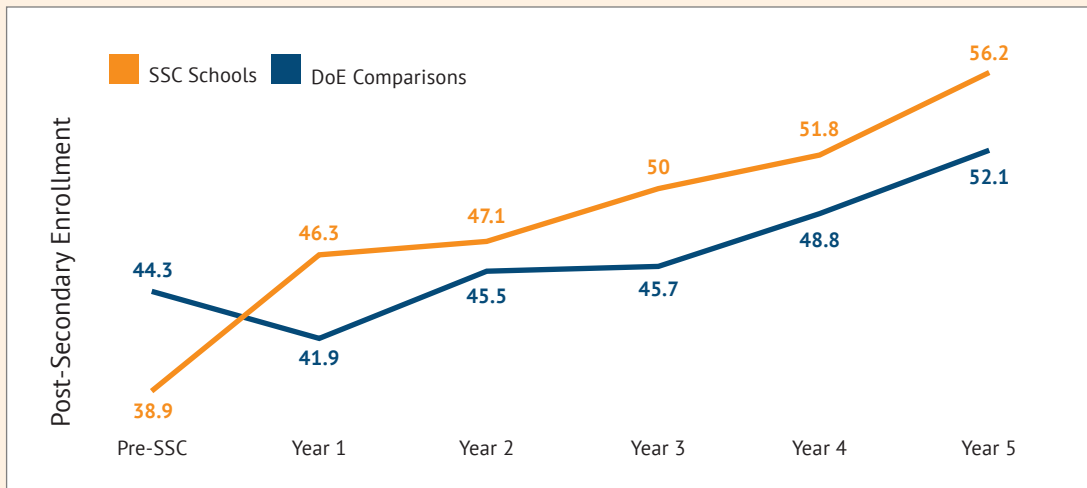
These 21 schools also show significant gains in both high school graduation and post-secondary enrollment. For schools with SSCs that opened in 2012 or earlier,<sup>22</sup> from the time the SSC was launched, **graduation rates increased by 26 percentage points** over six years; this rate is 16.8 percentage points higher than DoE comparison schools for the same time period.

These same schools increased post-secondary enrollment by 17.2% over six years, a rate 9.4 percentage points higher than DoE comparison schools for the same time period, despite starting with *lower* post-secondary enrollment rates.

## Chart 2.2 High School Graduation Rates at SSC Schools vs DoE



## Chart 2.3 Post-Secondary Enrollment at SSC Schools vs DoE



Schools with fewer years of data show strong gains as well: in those that opened in 2013–2014, **post-secondary enrollment increased 17.2% percentage points; and in those that opened in 2015–2016, post-secondary enrollment increased by 11.4% percentage points.** These rates are 9 percentage points higher than DoE comparison schools. SSCs were changing the college-going culture of the schools they served.

When looking at the data for individual sites, variation can be explained in large

part through understanding specifics about program implementation. With 13 years of trial and error in program development, CARA has learned what it takes to do effective peer-to-peer college access programming. Specifically, CARA has identified a set of best practices that can be used to help make sense of differential outcomes, to improve outcomes for sites, and to guide new SSC development. These learnings and best practices are outlined in the following two sections.



# PEER-TO-PEER PROGRAMMING

## THE ELEMENTS NEEDED TO MAKE IT WORK

3  
SECTION

“CARA’s [Peer Leader] model has been honed and developed over the last decade to enhance adult capacity with youth leadership. CARA’s work in training [Peer Leaders] has allowed the college work on the Franklin K. Lane Campus to continue to evolve, expand, and deepen every year.”

— Lisa LoFaso, Student Success Center Director, Franklin K. Lane High School Campus

### Peer-to-Peer College Access and Success Programming

Since the Urban Youth Collaborative first advocated for a peer-to-peer model for college access in the early 2000s, there has been a proliferation of peer-led programming. In New York City alone, 200 high schools use college students to support seniors through the college application and/or enrollment process, and several national organizations have incorporated a role for students in their model.<sup>23</sup> CARA’s own peer-to-peer work has expanded considerably in these years, having since developed two additional programs using a peer-to-peer or near-peer approach to expand advisement capacity at public institutions. As noted in the Introduction, **CARA’s College Bridge** program trains and supports current college students to work in their alma mater high schools. These *College Bridge Coaches* assist students during their senior year and over

2019-2020  
**CARA TRAINED**

**170+**  
**PEER LEADERS**



WHO REACHED  
**20,000+**  
**STUDENTS**

the summer between high school graduation and college matriculation, when up to one-third of low-income students abandon their college plans. **CARA's College Allies** program trains and supports college students to work with their peers through the myriad obstacles to graduation and college success, including registering for courses, securing needed services, navigating financial aid, sifting through majors and career pathways, and transferring from two- to four-year institutions, among others. Across all of its programs, in 2019–2020 alone CARA trained more than 170 Peer Leaders who reached more than 20,000 students.

Through extensive multi-year program implementation, CARA has come to identify and clearly define what it takes to run effective peer-to-peer college access and success programming, including the importance of paying Peer Leaders.<sup>24</sup> While many organizations and schools recognize the importance of peer mentoring and want to position young people in these roles, CARA's work in this arena has illustrated that if they are looking for real change in both school culture and student outcomes, there are several things that need to be in place to implement this model effectively.



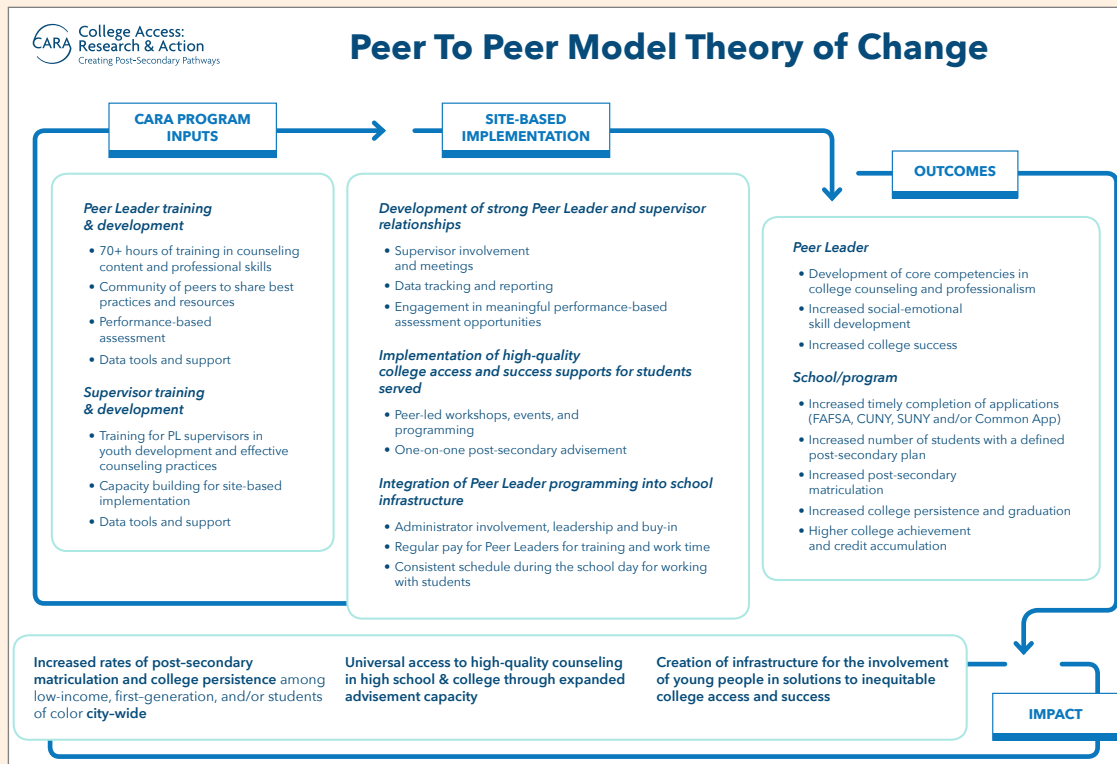
Through trial and error, observing sites that attempted peer-to-peer programs both successfully and unsuccessfully, CARA developed a *theory of change* (click [here](#) to see Figure 3.1) to guide peer-to-peer college access and persistence programming. As depicted in Figure 3.1, the key factors include:

- > **Comprehensive Peer Leader Training:** Peer Leaders need comprehensive training, guided by a set of counseling competencies and professional capacities, to prepare them to support their peers through all aspects of the college process;
- > **Consistent Peer Leader Supervision and Support:** The school and/or community-based organization need to have the capacity to provide on-going support and supervision to Peer Leaders, guided by youth development practices;
- > **Integration of College Access Programming and Supports into Existing Structures:** The school needs to have the financial resources to pay Peer Leaders and structures through which Peer Leaders can implement programming for students, including one-on-one support to students, workshops, and events.

Together these components help Peer Leaders develop the skills needed to support their peers and increase completion of college-process benchmarks. The ultimate impact is three-fold:

- > Increased rates of post-secondary matriculation or college persistence;
- > Universal access to high-quality counseling through expanded advisement capacity;
- > Creation of infrastructure for the involving young people in solutions to inequitable college access and success.

### Figure 3.1 Peer-to-Peer Model Theory of Change



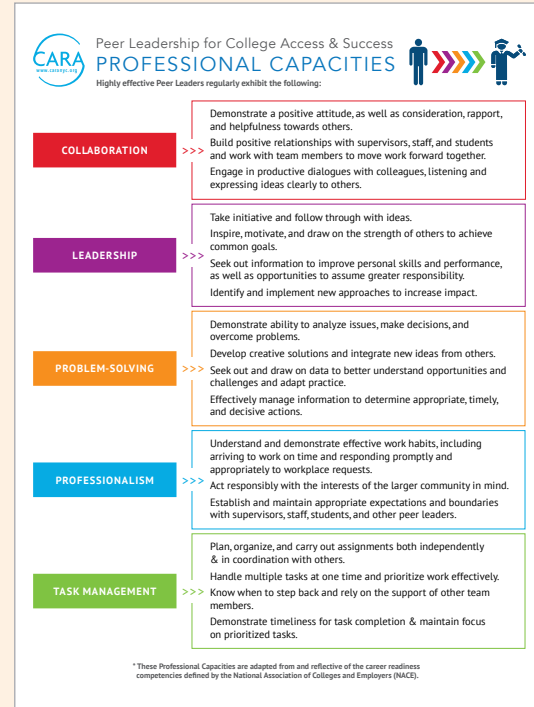
In order to provide *comprehensive Peer Leader training* that can effectively expand college advisement capacity, CARA's training is guided by our **Peer Leadership for College Access & Success Core Competencies** (see Figure 3.2) to ensure understanding and skills in a variety of areas. These competencies were developed in consultation with college access providers across NYC to ensure that they encapsulate all components needed to effectively support students through the college planning and persistence process. Training sessions are aligned to these competencies, and CARA has developed a three-pronged assessment to evaluate the effectiveness of that training. The system consists of

written assessments, an oral presentation, and a supervisor evaluation based on site-based observations. The written and oral assessments ask students to demonstrate how they would use their knowledge to support students through the range of tasks required in the college process. CARA compiles student performance and reports back to site supervisors so they can provide additional training and support to their Youth Leaders. The supervisor evaluation asks supervisors to rate both the Core Competencies and CARA's set of Peer Leadership for College Access & Success Professional Capacities (see Figure 3.3) for the Peer Leaders.

## Figure 3.2



## Figure 3.3



This training, coupled with pay and ample supervision by an adult with college expertise, allows Peer Leaders to do more than cheerlead and lend advice based on their own relevant experiences or understanding of the process. Furthermore, for *consistent Peer Leader supervision and support*, CARA ensures sites have a dedicated supervisor who has the time to meet with Peer Leaders on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, track Peer Leader work, and provide additional training. CARA supports Peer Leader supervisors, ensuring that they are familiar with and use youth development principles to guide their work, have up-to-date information about changes in the college process, and have a set of tools to support peer leader programming and its integration into school structures.

Finally, CARA provides technical assistance to Peer Leader supervisors and school/program leadership to use and/or create the structures needed for Peer Leaders to effectively do their work.

This theory of change cuts across all of CARA's Peer Leader programs. In order to address the specific needs of each specific program, CARA has developed more fine-grained rubrics for each one. The rubrics lay out the types of activities, structures, and indicators that sites need in order to achieve the intended outcomes. They are used as both goal-setting and evaluation tools with sites. Below (Figure 3.4) is **CARA's Right to College Evaluation Rubric** which guides SSC development.



## Figure 3.4 Right to College Evaluation Rubric

	Highly Developed	Developed	Developing	Not Yet Developed
<b>PEER LEADER DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT</b>				
<b>Regular Supervision of Youth Leaders</b>	Weekly	Bi-Weekly	Monthly	Occasional
<b>Consistent Engagement in Peer Leader Performance Assessment Activities</b>	Participation in all assessment activities; consistent utilization of feedback	Participation in some assessment activities; some utilization of feedback	Participation in some assessment activities; limited utilization of feedback	No participation in assessment activities; very little utilization of feedback
<b>Development of Core Competencies via Performance Assessments</b>	Youth Leaders receive highly developed score	Youth Leaders receive developed score	Youth Leaders receive developing score	Youth Leaders receive not yet developed score
<b>EXPANDED INDIVIDUAL COUNSELING</b>				
<b>College Counseling Staff to Senior Student Ratio *FT employee = 1; 10 hour/week YL = .2</b>	> 1:80	1:81 to 1:100	1:101 to 1:124	1:125 or more
<b>Peer Leader 1:1 Meetings with Students</b>	Daily	Weekly	Bi-Weekly	Monthly
<b>Data Tracking and Reporting</b>	SSC consistently uses shared data tracking system to strategize student progress and program development	SSC consistently records student progress in data tracking system	Data tracking system exists but is used irregularly or is not easily shareable	Data tracking system is non-existent or rudimentary
<b>INTEGRATION OF PEER LEADER PROGRAMMING INTO PROGRAM INFRASTRUCTURE</b>				
<b>Peer Led College Access Workshops</b>	Classroom based in 3-4 grades	Classroom based in 1-2 grades	Non-classroom based (after school or lunch workshops)	None
<b>SSC Planned College Trips</b>	4+	2-3	1	No college trips
<b>Peer Led College and Career Exploration Events</b>	3-4 school day events	1-2 school day events	After school or weekend events	None
<b>Meetings with School Administration</b>	Monthly	Quarterly	Twice a year	Not regularly scheduled
<b>Youth Leader Supervisor Meetings with School-based Counselor</b>	Scheduled weekly/bi-weekly	Scheduled monthly	Scheduled quarterly	Not regularly scheduled
<b>YL Payment for Training and Academic Year</b>	Yls are paid minimum wage for training and academic year	Yls are paid minimum wage for training and/or academic year	Yls are paid a stipend	Yls are not paid
<b>SCHOOL/PROGRAM OUTCOMES:</b>				
Over time, investments in peer-led access programming should manifest in improving leading indicators and ultimately matriculation outcomes.				
<b>% of Seniors Completing CUNY application by January 1</b>	80–100%	65–79%	50–64%	Less than 50%
<b>% of Seniors Completing SUNY/Private Applications by January 1</b>	50–100%	35–49%	21–34%	Less than 20%
<b>% of Seniors Completing FAFSA by March 1</b>	80–100%	65–79%	50–64%	Less than 50%
<b>% of Seniors Committing to a Postsecondary Plan by June 1</b>	80–100%	65–79%	50–64%	Less than 50%
<b>% of Graduating Seniors Matriculating into College or Alternative Postsecondary Destination within Six Months</b>	80–100%	65–79%	50–64%	Less than 50%

As the rubric illustrates, there are a host of components critical to the success of an SSC. Over the course of 13+ years of developing SSCs, alongside its more general peer-to-peer program model, CARA established a more nuanced understanding of the work, arriving at four guiding principles that align to the components of the model, and maximize a site's potential to expand opportunities and support students. The following section explains these principles.

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

## EFFECTIVE STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER IMPLEMENTATION

### 4 SECTION

“The Student Success Center accentuates our ability, through its resources and personnel on campus, to ensure post-secondary access and equity for all students, making the college experience and opportunities in high school even more achievable. They are true partners with each school and we embrace their commitment to our students and families and their passion for this work.”

— Rose Lobianco, Principal, Bronx Leadership Academy II High School

Since the opening of the first two SSCs in New York City in 2007, an additional 21 SSCs have opened with varying degrees of impact and success. Available data and years of directly supporting each SSC afforded CARA the opportunity to step back and establish a set of guiding principles for this work. It is important to note that in addition to the four SSCs that closed for funding reasons in the academic year 2020–2021, there were also six SSCs that closed in prior years. While funding is an on-going issue for all SSCs, those six centers closed for reasons related to their capacity, or lack thereof, to sustain programming.

As noted throughout the report there are four key components to the SSC model. For each there is a guiding principle:

### SSC Key Components & Guiding Principles

#### CBO-School Partnerships

CBO Matters

#### Peer Leaders

Trained, Supervised, & Paid Youth Leaders Are Essential

#### Integration of College Access Programming into School Programming

The More Developed the College Access Infrastructure, the More the SSC Can Do

#### Data Tracking

A Shared Data System Improves Programming

## CBO-School Partnerships: CBO Matters

While not all sites that have implemented SSCs have partnered with community-based organizations, a CBO partner is critical to making the SSC model work, particularly in under-resourced schools where advisement is stretched across a range of student needs. Many organizations are interested in the model, but those that are best positioned to do this work are ones with college access and youth development expertise, and those that are already connected to the community. These organizations can fulfill many roles that bolster the work of the schools served. Specifically, a well-positioned CBO partner:

- > Brings additional college access resources – including trained adults and targeted programming (e.g., test prep, college visits, etc.), increasing post-secondary programming for all students;
- > Allows for a distributed approach to college access programming that can meet more students' varied needs;
- > Provides regular and intentional supervision of Youth Leaders;
- > Offers professional development opportunities to school-based staff assisting with the college process;
- > Establishes centralized expertise in the post-secondary planning process;
- > Provides access to matriculation and college-retention support to graduated seniors;
- > Supports fundraising efforts for college access and persistence programming.

Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation is a prime example of a well-positioned CBO. Before launching its first SSC in 2007, Cypress Hills LDC had a community-based college access center, providing resources to students and families in Cypress Hills. It was also an ongoing partner to Franklin K. Lane High School Campus and an organization committed to youth development across all of its programming.

Emily Van Ingen, Deputy Director at Cypress Hills LDC, explains the organization's particular interest in the model from the beginning and why they wanted to develop a second site at the Thomas Jefferson High School Campus, under the DoE Student Success Center expansion initiative:

*"Back in the early 2000s, we identified a gap that students in the high schools we serve were not getting the services and preparation they needed to define and realize their post-secondary goals. The schools we partner with, in particular, are faced with a host of issues to address with limited resources and college was not getting the attention it needed with competing demands – attendance, grad rates, safety, mental health services, etc. The model that was brought to us by the youth organizers was an intersection of schools, CBOs, and capabilities of young people – that was what was really exciting to us...The SSC at Lane pushed us to expand our catchment area to include the Jefferson campus because we saw how much need there was and knew this was a powerful model. As an organization that was already committed to college access programming in and out of schools, the SSC model pushed us to include a peer-to-peer approach – not only at the Lane and Jefferson SSCs but also with our middle school SSCs and Bridge and retention programming as well."*

A guidance counselor at one of the schools Cypress Hills LDC works with explained how the resources brought in by the partnership, and the expanded advisement those resources afforded, fundamentally shifted her work. Her students – all of whom are low-income and Black or Latinx – are now going to college because of the opportunities provided. She explains:

*“If it wasn’t for the SSC I would hate my job. Period. And I love what I do as a school counselor. I’m the only counselor at my school serving 300 students. I love what I do because I know that I have a partnership with them. I don’t have to worry about the college piece. I can say – go to Randall (the SSC Director) or Mamadou (a Youth Leader) – and you will be in perfect hands.”*

Similar to Cypress Hills LDC, before becoming an SSC partner, **New Settlement** had its own community-based college access center. New Settlement had always been interested in sharing its expertise and programming with local high schools. In 2011, when it learned of the SSC model, it became particularly interested in partnering with the Taft Campus, a multi-school campus serving the Bronx community where New Settlement is located. Allison Palmer, who was then the Director of New Settlement’s College Access Programming and is now

New Settlement’s Deputy Director, explained why the multi-school campus model was particularly appealing to the organization:

*“We had always wanted to get onto the Taft campus to support advising because it’s our community. With the SSC we knew we would be able to maximize the resources in the school building instead of duplicating services. Once we started working there, we saw how much we could do for the whole campus, while bringing the schools together at the same time. It was also clear to us as we worked there, that the schools we were serving do not have the internal capacity to do this work on their own; the value of partnering with a CBO is that you are getting the expertise of an entire program that is solely focused on college access and success and that builds stronger advising in schools.”*

Not all CBOs that have joined the SSC community began with the same expertise as Cypress Hills LDC and New Settlement. Several of them, though, have developed the expertise they need to support their schools. Good Shepherd Services (GSS), for example, was attracted to the model because they had a well-established youth development approach and used a peer-to-peer model in their college transition programming. They already saw young people as *credible messengers* and had integrated them into their organization as paid staff. When GSS first partnered with the SSC initiative to open a site at DeWitt Clinton High School where they were a **Community School** partner,<sup>25</sup> it had less expertise in college access programming. However, with CARA’s support, it has evolved into an organization that has sustained and grown the model, becoming a lead partner in 2017 to another two campuses.



Anne Waldfogel, Assistant Executive Director for Community-Based Programs at Good Shepherd Services, recognizes that the work has had a profound impact on the organization:

*“The use of the [Student] Success Center model has strengthened our college access work and at the same time enhanced our existing college success and retention services since we are reaching students at an earlier age. Students who come from our Success Centers are better prepared to matriculate and take on the challenges of college than students who have not participated in the level of college preparation the Success Centers provide.”*

As previously noted, there have been examples of schools using this model in the absence of a community-based organization partner. Those schools that have a highly structured approach to college access programming, and ample school-based staff to support the Peer Leaders, reap strong benefits from their Youth Leaders. For example, Central Park East High School has 10 to 12 Youth Leaders per year who are supervised by a full-time college counselor and an English teacher. These Youth Leaders conduct workshops in 12th grade English classes that have carved out space for the college process, and in other classes in younger grades that have done the same; they also staff the college office, supporting caseloads of students under the supervision of an experienced college counselor. The school boasts a 100% college application completion rate, 98% FAFSA completion rate, and 97% post-secondary enrollment rate. The principal of Central Park East, Bennett Lieberman, believes the Youth Leaders are a cornerstone of the school’s success:

*“If other elements were missing, our post-secondary program could still work. Without youth leadership, we could not have the same success. Based on my experience, without peer leadership, there really is no program to speak of. That’s how important it is.”*

While Central Park East High School has raised additional funds to support its college access programming, schools without similar structures and resources are, unfortunately, not able to fully sustain the model. We have seen other sites without a CBO partner whose Youth Leaders were under-supported and unable, on their own, to create the infrastructure needed to meet the needs of all of their students. These Youth Leaders helped individual students, but the programming represented more of an enrichment-for-some than an entitlement-for-all.

A middle ground can be found at schools with fewer additional resources than Central Park East, but with consistent structures for post-secondary planning and a CBO staff partner who comes to the school once a week. For example, at Flushing International High School, there is a college counselor who spends about 75% of her time on the college process, dedicating the remaining time to non-college related responsibilities at the school. With four Youth Leaders per year, supporting a school of approximately 400 students, the counselor collaborates with a staff member from **Asian Americans for Equality (AAFE)** who is expected to come to the school once a week to support workshop development and facilitation, program planning, and case management. The AAFE staff member works across three distinct SSCs, dedicating more time to the schools that have fewer school-based college access staff members and more students.



## Peer Leaders: Trained, Supervised, & Paid Youth Leaders Are Essential

The cornerstone of the SSC model is the Youth Leader role. Since the inception of SSCs in NYC, Youth Leaders have been critical to the work – they play a role in both developing a college-going culture in their schools and supporting students one-on-one. Trained in aiding students through key milestones (e.g. creating well-balanced college lists, completing all types of college applications, filing FAFSA, etc.), paid for their work, and supported by well-positioned adult staff, Youth Leaders significantly reduce

the college guidance gap. At many schools Youth Leaders have tripled the support offered, bringing the advisor-to-student ratio closer to what low-income students need.

In addition to expanding advisement capacity, Youth Leaders bring qualities that the adult counselors do not, which help them to be particularly effective with their peers. As peers, Youth Leaders serve as credible messengers about the college process for their fellow students because they are positioned in several distinct ways from the adult counselors in a school.

### PEER LEADERS ARE...

**Accessible:** They have greater access to their peers and their peers have greater access to them. Peer Leaders report engaging students in between classes, in the cafeteria, on sports fields, and through social media. They also emphasize that, because they are approachable, students reach out to them, proactively, through text and social media outside of school hours for help with aspects of the college process or for general encouragement.



*"We know what is going on, we know the students, we know who to look out for and where to look...so we go into those little corners where they are hiding and get them out – where [adult] counselors can't find them...We break it down for them. We are that bridge to college."*

**Reliable:** They are going through the same challenges within school and often have intersecting realities outside of school related to family and community tensions. They are intimately familiar with the post-secondary fears, frustrations, and concerns of their peers.



*"Instead of telling the kid 'you have to do this and bring it back to me,' we sit down and do it with them...making sure they understand everything."*

**Understandable:** They speak the same language as their peers, literally and figuratively. They speak Spanish, Mandarin, Bengali, Creole, among others, providing translation support to students and families. And they are able to break things down about the college process in ways adults cannot. Peer Leaders deliver advice and guidance in ways that can feel less judgmental than when it comes from an adult counselor, and often help adult staff to better understand student experiences and needs. Schools that serve multilingual populations prioritize hiring Youth Leaders who speak the dominant languages in the school.



*"Students feel awkward telling their counselor certain things and don't think they have the time – they are extremely overworked. When you are in the SSC there are eight Youth Leaders you can come to and they are your age and they understand where you are coming from."*

## Figure 4.1 Right to College Sample Training Calendar

<div> <div> College Access: Research &amp; Action Creating Post-Secondary Pathways </div> </div> <div> Sample Training Calendar </div>			
Right to College			
Summer Day 1	Summer Day 2	Summer Day 3	Summer Day 4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Program Introductions with Icebreaker</li> <li>*Why Are We Here?</li> <li>*Youth Leader Panel</li> <li>*History of the SSCs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Icebreaker: First/Last Thing...</li> <li>*Assumptions about College</li> <li>*Leadership and Workstyle Assessment</li> <li>*YL Pitch/Collective Identity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Icebreaker: Dream Job Charades</li> <li>*College Vocabulary</li> <li>*Landscape of Financial Aid</li> <li>*Exploring Opportunity Programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Icebreaker: Rose, Bud, Thorn</li> <li>*Weekly Training Reflection</li> <li>*Leadership Style Follow Up</li> <li>*Site Based Planning</li> <li>*Assessment</li> </ul>
Summer Day 5	Summer Day 6	Summer Day 7	Summer Day 8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Icebreaker: Scattergories</li> <li>*First Gen to College</li> <li>*Supporting Undocumented Students</li> <li>*Supporting Students with IEPs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Icebreaker: Silent Birthday Lineup</li> <li>*CUNY Discovery</li> <li>*CUNY List Making (Balanced Lists)</li> <li>*CUNY Application Steps</li> <li>*CUNY Review</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Icebreaker: Only Two!</li> <li>*SUNY Discovery</li> <li>*SUNY List Making</li> <li>*SUNY Application Steps</li> <li>*SUNY Review Activity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Icebreaker: A-Z Scavenger Hunt</li> <li>*Weekly Training Reflection</li> <li>*Site Based Planning</li> <li>*Mock Admissions</li> <li>*Assessment</li> </ul>
Summer Day 9	Summer Training Day 10	Summer Training Day 11	Summer Training Day 12
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Icebreaker: Ten Things in Common</li> <li>*Admissions Candidate Sort</li> <li>*Private School Discovery</li> <li>*Applying to Private Colleges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Icebreaker: Two Truths and a Lie</li> <li>*Admissions Counselor Presentation</li> <li>*College Essay Advising</li> <li>*Workshop Development/Facilitation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Kahoot!</li> <li>*Counseling Skills Overview</li> <li>*Counseling Skills Practice</li> <li>*Resume Development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Icebreaker: Impressed, Improved</li> <li>*Weekly Training Reflection</li> <li>*Site Based Planning</li> <li>*Assessment</li> </ul>
Fall Training	Fall Training (2 days)	Winter Training (2 days)	Spring Training
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Review of Summer Knowledge</li> <li>*Undocumented Students: DREAM Act and Filing FAFSA</li> <li>*Empathy &amp; Inclusion in Youth Leadership Work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Review Landscape of Financial Aid</li> <li>*Review: Undocumented students</li> <li>*Submitting the FAFSA</li> <li>*Anticipating &amp; trouble shooting common challenges</li> <li>*College Essay Advising: Role of YL</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Steps After Hitting Submit</li> <li>*Supporting Seniors through Decision Making</li> <li>*Understanding Financial Aid Packages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Exploring Careers and Majors</li> <li>*Sharing best practices</li> <li>*Assessment</li> </ul>

Year-long training, provided by CARA staff, is designed to ensure Youth Leaders have the skills and knowledge to do their job well: to effectively support peers with differing interests, goals, and realities than their own. Training sessions are facilitated by CARA and school and CBO-based staff with expertise in the topics. See Figure 4.1 for a sample year-long training calendar.

The importance of this comprehensive training is clear to the Youth Leaders. One explained how the 70 hours of training prepared him:

*“Each Youth Leader is trained...not only the process of applying to colleges, but how to communicate with peers and others... build connections and trust with students...*

*help seniors with their college process and freshmen and sophomores explore more information about college so when it is time for their junior and senior years, they know exactly what to expect.”*

Training and positioning young people in these ways has an impact that goes beyond the direct help students get with the college process. On one level, when students see their peers acting as change agents, it can have a profound effect on them. And, on another, the Youth Leaders themselves begin to take increased leadership roles in their schools, communities and families – often acting as ambassadors for the college process outside of their high schools. A Youth Leader supervisor explains the collective impact of the work:

*“I have watched [the students] become empowered, activated by their peer mentors, and galvanized to work towards their own social, emotional and educational growth... The Student Success Center is the driving force in this new movement, the movement towards college access, educational attainment, and thus social equality/uplift.”*

While not the primary focus of the program model, Youth Leaders themselves are of course, impacted by their work. In addition to ensuring Youth Leaders have developed the competencies for college access and persistence, training and supervisor support also focuses on a set of professional capacities that are transferable to all professional environments. These capacities include collaboration, leadership, problem-solving, professionalism, and task management (see Figure 3.3 in Section 3 for **CARA’s Professional Capacities**).

One Youth Leader explained the impact on her personally:

*“I learned what it meant to balance academic, work, and other part-time responsibilities. I developed better time management and prioritizing skills. I got to interact with students in a way I had never done before.”*

Across its programs, CARA has found that, together, the training and job experience better position students to navigate their own college application, matriculation, and college-going process. Persistence rates for CARA-trained Peer Leaders (2014–2018) who matriculated into CUNY schools were 12% higher than propensity-score matched comparisons. Data is not currently available for Peer Leaders who matriculated into SUNY and private colleges, but anecdotal evidence suggests their persistence is stronger as well.

Armed with specific college knowledge and counseling skills, coupled with a grounded identity as change agents, many Peer Leader graduates go on to pursue careers in counseling, returning to public schools and CBOs to continue to provide culturally-relevant counseling to NYC students (see Section 5–Profile: The Rise and Fall of an SSC).

### **Integration of College Access Programming into School Programming: The More Developed the College Access Infrastructure, the More the SSC Can Do**

SSCs work to expand both advisement capacity and post-secondary planning opportunities by implementing workshops, events, and college visits, and providing one-on-one support to seniors. The more structures and supports high schools have to facilitate the work of the SSC, the more impact it can have. Three strategies can be used when SSCs are established to support a school or set of schools, which are not mutually exclusive.

#### **SSC Adult Staff and Youth Leaders can:**

**Support and bolster existing school programming** expanding its power and reach

**Push forward the creation of structures** that enable college programming to be more widely accessible

**Design college access programming and deliver** it to as many students as possible – implementing it outside of formal school structures

### Support and bolster existing school programming expanding its power and reach

SSCs are able to do this most easily when there are structures built into the school and the school day to support the work. These include:

- > **Physical space for college access programming** – ideally a large classroom space located near common and well-trafficked areas of the school building, e.g., the cafeteria;
- > **Classroom time** for dedicated post-secondary planning workshops;
- > **Dedicated school-based counselors** to partner with through the varied steps of the post-secondary planning process;
- > **Scheduled time** during the school day for college and career exploration events;
- > **Financial resources** to support programming;
- > **Access to the building** for after-school and weekend programming for students and families.

Ideally, SSC partner schools would use all of these resources. This is, however, not usually the case. Some of the SSC partner schools have little to no college guidance, and so the SSC's are charged with filling a void, while other SSCs have to negotiate access to students with school-based counselors who are reticent to share their caseload despite not being able to meet all of their students' needs. Some SSCs do their best to offer workshops after school and at lunch and recruit students to attend because they do not have access to classroom time.

On multi-school campuses, the disparities in reaching students can be seen by comparing the structures within the different schools served. On the Mott Haven Educational Campus, for example, Bronx Leadership Academy II (BLA II) had a seminar for seniors which the SSC staff used to deliver workshops, but the other school on the campus, Careers in Sports High School, had no seminar structure; in 2018–2019, there were 18 workshops delivered at BLA II in comparison to eight at Careers in Sports High School. Looking across schools served by the same CBO, Longwood Preparatory Academy provided supplemental funding to Good Shepherd Services (GSS) that they, in turn, used to organize 10 college trips in 2018–2019; however, with no additional funding at the George Washington Educational Campus, GSS was able to offer only one trip.



## Push forward the creation of structures that enable college programming to be more widely accessible

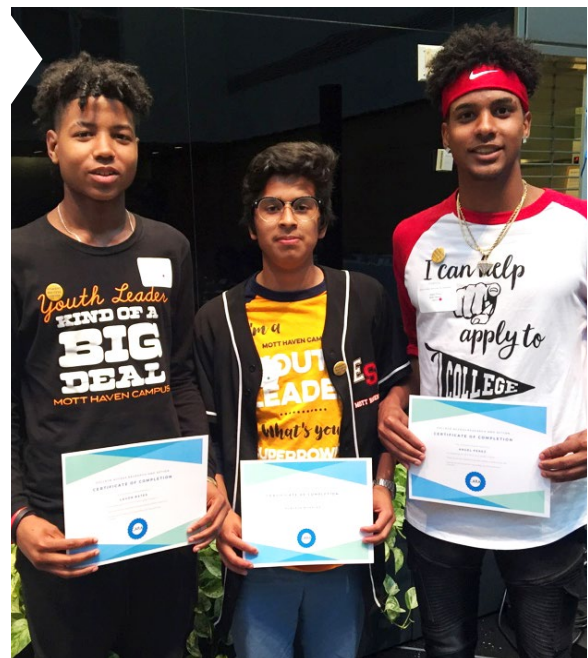
The extent to which all, or some, of the resources that help an SSC integrate into the fabric of a school are available, is often directly connected to not only the strength of the CBO, but also to the buy-in of school leadership. The evolution of SSCs during the past 13 years has illustrated how important it is, especially when the SSC is run in partnership with a community-based organization, to have regular collaboration with school administration. The school principal and/or assistant principal develop a memorandum of understanding with SSC staff, establishing year-long goals, and then, ideally, meet regularly to review and monitor data, develop staff and student understanding of the resources available, troubleshoot challenges to program implementation, and ensure adequate funding is available for sustainability.

Through this collaboration, administrators come to see the importance and value of the work and, in turn, often increase a variety of resources needed for program implementation. For example, when **East Side House Settlement** staff met with A. Philip Randolph High School's school-based counselor and principal to set goals at the beginning of the 2019–2020 school year, they voiced that while in 2018–2019 they had successfully reached more than 90% of seniors, they felt it was important to provide more scheduled programming for students in grades 9–11. They had set a goal to increase workshops for those students but were aware that doing it the same way they had done it the previous year – offering workshops during lunch and after school – would not be sufficient. The principal,

David Fanning, understood and worked with classroom teachers to provide dedicated space throughout the year during class time to ensure workshops would be facilitated for all students in those grades. The goal was achieved, and the structure of using class time for college exploration became an expectation for the following year.

Principal Fanning believed in the SSC model from the beginning; in fact, he sought out CARA to find out how he could bring the program to his school. Once there, he became a fierce advocate for the program, explaining:

*“The Youth Leaders have increased the number of counselors from our original one college counselor to 11. This massive increase in resources has transformed our college process and led more students to make well-informed decisions and avail themselves of the opportunities that lead them to the college that is right for them. The Youth Leaders also benefit as they see themselves as leaders within their community.”*





This kind of commitment from leadership and impact on school culture is not lost on students. One Youth Leader from another campus, who had a similar goal of increasing early awareness, explained:

*“When I was a freshman we never talked about college; we just talked about sophomore year. That has totally shifted on the Mott Haven campus. We have freshmen doing research on college early on. Sophomores and juniors are doing personal statements. We notice more students going away to college.”*

### **Design college access programming and deliver it to as many students as possible — implementing it outside of formal school structures**

Maximizing the impact of an SSC is difficult to do without administrative support; it hampers the ability to integrate programming into the larger school culture and threatens sustainable resources. However, there have been examples of SSCs improving the outcomes of young people despite a lack of administrative buy-in; it is often these schools where students most need the support of an SSC to navigate the college process. The outcomes will not be as strong as the sites with administrator collaboration, but these sites do important work; they just have to work double time and more creatively to reach all students. It is also important to note that, over time, reluctant administrators have come to understand the value of the work of the SSC and persist through challenges to collaboration. CARA’s rubric includes collaboration with school administration in order to emphasize the importance of meetings to co-develop the partnership.

### **Data Tracking: A Shared Data Systems Improves Programming**

As indicated throughout the above best practices — and as is the case with all college access programming — successful SSCs use data to set goals, track progress, and allocate resources and time to improve key indicators.

Using a rubric to both set goals and monitor program implementation, CARA focuses its sites on a set of leading indicators, aligned to **NCAN’s Common Measures for College Access and Success**, that increase the likelihood of college matriculation. These include increasing the percentage of seniors who:

- > Complete CUNY applications
- > Complete SUNY and private and out-of-state public applications
- > Complete FAFSA
- > Commit to a college or other post-secondary plan by the end of the year

Many of the SSC sites did not track this kind of data when the initiative first began and many schools do not have clear tracking systems when they enter into a CBO partnership. Among the first things SSCs need to set up is a data system that school, CBO staff, and Youth Leaders can access. While this can be an added cost to the model, shared data is critical to streamlining support, making sure all students are served, working toward goals, and being accountable to the students served.

### A note about sites that closed

Just as we continuously learn from the sites that are succeeding, we also learn from those that were not sustained. As already noted, 10 SSCs have not been sustained since the launch of the model. Of these, four closed in 2020–2021 because of budget reasons, showing the importance of sustained and secure funding. However, it is the six SSCs that were not sustained for structural reasons that offer important data for the SSC model. Four of the six were partnered with schools that had limited school-based structures and supports dedicated to college access programming, e.g., no full-time dedicated college counselor or dedicated classes to push programming into. Furthermore, these same sites did not have a full-time, site-based CBO presence to collaborate with school leadership to advance program development or to supervise Youth Leaders in a consistent manner. Youth Leaders were, thus, too often left to their own devices to develop and implement programming without ample structure to do so.<sup>26</sup> It is clear that college access programming cannot be built on the backs of young people – no matter how well-trained, they need active supervision and structures through which to do their work.

### SSC Youth Leaders



# PROFILE

## THE RISE AND FALL OF A STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER

5  
SECTION

“I became a Youth Leader my junior year and immediately fell in love with it. My high school journey was about me finding my voice and that was the outlet I needed...Being a Youth Leader gave me a positive way to be seen...We had a camaraderie and were invested in each other’s success. I wrote about being a Youth Leader in my personal statement for graduate school. I talked about how we had lots of resources in the community but no one in the school was hearing about them.”

– Ana Cruz, College Counselor, A. Philip Randolph High School, and former Youth Leader

A. Philip Randolph High School, run in partnership with East Side House Settlement, was the last SSC to open and one of the first to close. The story of how it started, and the impact of its closing, is one that provides powerful testimony to the SSC model, to the importance of peer leadership in a changing field of college counseling, and to the profound impact of COVID-19 on sustaining support for students at a time when they need it the most.

In the spring of 2018, A. Philip Randolph was invited to open a Student Success Center in partnership with East Side House Settlement. The announcement came after several years of interest and advocacy on the part of the principal of the school,

David Fanning, who had learned of the model from the school’s college counselor, Ana Cruz. Ms. Cruz had been a pioneer Youth Leader, helping to found the first SSC that opened on the Bushwick Educational Campus in partnership with Make the Road NY in 2007. Like several other CARA-trained peer leaders, Ms. Cruz’s experiences supporting her peers through the college process led her to a job in a NYC public high school, continuing the work she began at age 16.

The story of the SSC at A. Philip Randolph High School – and of Ana Cruz’s journey – is deeply entwined with the evolution of the SSCs across NYC. It is an important one to reflect on.



## The Early Roots of the Randolph SSC

Ms. Cruz moved from being the Parent Coordinator at Randolph to being the college counselor after Principal Fanning learned of her early experiences with and passion for college counseling. Her experience spoke for itself: Ms. Cruz had worked for two years as a Youth Leader on the Bushwick campus, continued to work there throughout her college years while attending Eugene Lang College of Liberal Arts at The New School. She then completed a degree in school counseling at CUNY. She told Principal Fanning in her interview for the position that she wanted to build a college office that served *all* students at Randolph. She also emphasized beginning the college process in 9th grade, not waiting until 12th grade when it was too late to fully explore the options.

When she was a high school student at the Bushwick campus, Ms. Cruz was keenly aware that many students were not given the knowledge and support to navigate the landscape of higher education. She spent a lot of time wondering why the highest achieving students were going to community college, and scores of others were not going to college at all. She saw there were a lot of resources in her community of Bushwick, especially through organizations like Make the Road NY, but few students knew about them or how to access them. She thought what students needed was exposure, opportunities to define their dreams, and support to achieve them. She wanted to harness the power and influence she knew she had as a young person to do this work. When she learned of the newly opened SSC on her campus, she applied to be a Youth Leader.

As a Youth Leader, Ms. Cruz worked closely with her school-based counselor who, she recognized, wanted to support all students, but was too overextended to do so. It was clear to Ms. Cruz that it would not be possible for one counselor to support all of the students effectively, especially when college counseling was not her only responsibility. Ms. Cruz saw the role of the Youth Leaders and the SSC as “filling in the gaps [the counselor] couldn’t do because of the constraints of her job.” And so she worked for two years supporting students on the Bushwick campus through college applications, FAFSA, decision-making. She hosted workshops for students in the younger grades to teach them about college, and she and her team of Youth Leaders planned events like college field days and early proms where the ticket to attend was a completed college application. Together, the Bushwick Youth Leaders helped their peers to define their college plans and get the support they needed to make them happen.



When Ms. Cruz became the college counselor at A. Philip Randolph High School, she wanted to do the same thing there. Within her first year, she had shifted the college-going culture at the school:

*“When I first came to the school there wasn’t a strong college-going culture and people just assumed community college. After my first year at the school we had six kids get into Ivy League colleges...I don’t think our kids were applying to those schools or thought they had a chance of getting in. And after that they thought, ‘This is possible. Someone I actually know got into a school and they came from my high school...not Brooklyn Tech or Stuyvesant.’ When we demystify that idea that they can’t get into those colleges coming from our school and they apply and get in – they can’t believe ‘I am having my success story.’”*

But soon after becoming college counselor, Ms. Cruz felt like the school-based counselor she had supported while in high school: she could not do this alone in a school of 1500 students. She began to advocate to bring an SSC to the campus, and when there was an

opportunity to apply for funding from the DoE’s College Access for All Initiative, she brought it to her principal. She explained the ways in which an SSC would expand the school’s advisement capacity – bringing in eight trained Youth Leaders and two other adult staff through a CBO.

Thinking back on her own influence from when she was a Youth Leader, she explained to her principal why having high school students trained to support other students was so powerful and effective:

*“I am getting older and more irrelevant as the days go by – Youth Leaders are always going to be relevant and approachable. I know that as a counselor maybe I have a wider skill set but I am never going to be the ‘friend’ of a current student and Youth Leaders can.”*

The principal was convinced, and, in partnership with East Side House Settlement, the school launched an SSC in spring of 2018, selecting a pioneering group of eight Youth Leaders and adding two East Side House Settlement staff members to the Randolph college team.

### 2018–2019 School Year

% of Students to Complete CUNY Application	71%
% of Students to Complete SUNY Application	51%
% of Students to Complete Private Application	47%
% of Students to Complete FAFSA	78%
% Seniors Receiving One-on-One Support	90%
# of College Trips	8
Workshops and Events	15

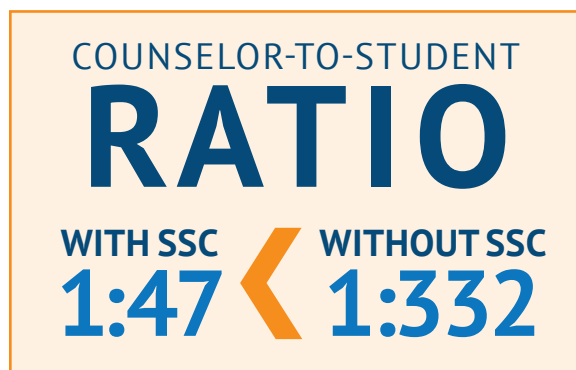


## The SSC at Work

Between fall 2018 and spring 2020, the A. Philip Randolph SSC made tremendous strides. The SSC was regularly filled with 20–30 students at a time; Youth Leaders could be found working one-on-one with seniors and running workshops in classes across the grades. The SSC implemented workshops for students across the grades and made trips to residential colleges accessible; previously, these trips were only made available to students for an average of \$300/student through outside organizations. The principal embraced large school events, including an application sleepover party held at the school for seniors. One of the Youth Leaders explained:

*“It was a senior all-nighter-CUNY completion event where we stayed at our campus all night to complete our CUNY applications. It was a great start. As soon as someone completed an application, we would celebrate them.”*

Working in partnership with Jesus Ventura, the SSC Director from East Side House Settlement, Ms. Cruz had the team she had been looking for. Together they saw a rapid increase in students served. While data tracking was not in place in the previous year to compare the numbers to, Ms. Cruz notes that in the 2018–2019 school year there were more students applying to a range of colleges.



During the 2019–2020 school year, the SSC had made even greater strides, pushing into 9th and 10th grade classes to provide college exploration workshops to students in the earlier grades and giving one-on-one support to the vast majority of seniors.

On March 13th 2020, the SSC’s work, alongside that of college offices and teachers across the country, was altered at a moment’s notice when schools shut down and moved to remote learning for the remainder of the academic year. Like SSCs across NYC, the Randolph team continued its work. Team members made sure students had support with finalizing college and financial aid applications, comparing financial aid packages, and making informed college decisions; hosted a virtual college decision day event; and even ran workshops for juniors to make sure they were getting the information they needed to start their own college process.

## The SSC Closes

As the school year drew to a close there was an open question as to whether the DoE would continue to fund the SSCs. Much to the disappointment of Ms. Cruz, Principal Fanning, the leadership and staff from East Side House Settlement, and the Youth Leaders themselves, the funding was cut.<sup>27</sup>

Ms. Cruz started the 2020–2021 school year – the most challenging one yet – with a caseload of 332 seniors and no additional support. She went from a ratio of 1:47 to 1:332. The opportunity for all students to get support has shifted drastically, especially given the remote setting. Ms. Cruz explained:

*"Since we are working with very sensitive information it's not like I can meet with groups of students all of the time. I have to meet with them on a one-on-one basis. It impacts how expedited the work can be. When we had the SSC we had anywhere from 10 to 30 kids at one time there. They all had their separate screens and they could work on stuff simultaneously and [we] could just go from student to student. Now I really have to set up individual Google Meets."*

Finding time for those Google Meets is not easy. Students no longer have regularly scheduled lunch during remote instruction. High achieving students have heavy course loads, and lower performing students are catching up on credit leaving limited time to meet. And Ms. Cruz is largely working alone.

Compounding the challenges is that seniors have to play a lot of catch up, both because of the shut down in spring 2020 and because of a delayed start to the 2021 school year. Ms. Cruz never got to meet with all of the seniors in the class of 2021; for some, it is their first time really thinking through what they want to do next year. The good news is that the pandemic increased many students' hunger to go to college as they see it as the best route to job security in an increasingly challenged economy. The challenge is that many of the students do not know or trust her yet. This is where she really misses having Youth Leaders to act as a bridge, introducing themselves in the students' classes, making announcements, being available for help through all of the steps of the process. She explains:

*"There is a shame for some of the students who don't have a relationship with me – they don't want to ask me questions because they feel so far behind. I have a Google Classroom and try to make it very open but they say, 'Oh miss, I'm sorry to bother you.' They feel they are imposing because there is a culture where they feel adults are very busy at this time and don't have time for them. If we had an SSC and we had 11 people versus one they could be like, 'Well, if I don't feel comfortable going to Ms. Cruz, I can go to someone else.'"*

Ms. Cruz feels fortunate that there are two Youth Leaders from the previous year still at the school; they are committed to helping as much as possible. They felt compelled to do something when they saw she had been largely left alone to manage the process for all of the 332 seniors. These former Youth Leaders helped ensure that seniors completed college lists, applications, personal statements, and financial aid applications. They also supported programming for students in grades 9–11. Without pay, and with their own course loads and college process to manage, the former Youth Leaders cannot put in as many hours as previously; but they make referrals, post on their social media about available help, provide some one-on-one help, and generally encourage other students through the process.

It is not enough or even close to the support she had last year. Ms. Cruz explains:

*"I'm the only one looking over their applications. A lot of it has become independent work. I tell them to fill out as much as they can and then we do a Google Meet and they share their screen. I check page by page...There are students who are*

*more needy when it comes to the application and we have to go through it page by page... and some of the students need me to read supplements too."*

Remembering the goals Ms. Cruz shared with Principal Fanning when applying for the college counselor position, she does not see these 332 students as her only caseload; she sees her caseload as all 1500 students:

*"Our first thought is – oh, the seniors. But at least they had almost three years of schooling that was not remote and didn't have all of these challenges. The juniors had two years – the freshmen and sophomores could have a lot longer with this remote learning. The amount of information that they are actually learning is going to be impacted – and the time I have with them to plant that seed of college is more limited. In the past I felt that was a seed that was fertilized and taken good care of."*

Ms. Cruz's days are packed with Google Meets, writing counselor recommendations, checking college-related assignments on Google Classroom. It has become a lonelier job, but she appreciates the support of her volunteer Youth Leaders. Having come to

this position from her own journey as a Youth Leader, she is clear that working in partnership with young people is the best way to do this work. As she reflects on the changes of the past year, this conviction remains stronger than ever, and she is not giving up: *"I haven't lost hope – hopefully we will get our SSC back."*

Ms. Cruz is not alone in fighting to get the Randolph SSC, and all of the others, back. Jesus Ventura, speaking at a "Save the Student Success Centers" on September 15th, 2020 rally, said:

*"These high school students already have the social and emotional intelligence that they are tools of change and we have an initiative that backs them up with the understanding that they are tools of change. If you don't see the power in that, I don't think you are looking closely enough...We have to make a choice today, whether we are...going to actively fight with our students...Yes, we will continue fighting...This is a five-borough problem, a five borough challenge...We are actively going to stand behind our students and we are going to continue to advocate for the lives we believe in."*



# CONCLUSION

## PEER-LED COLLEGE ACCESS PROGRAMMING: A PROFILE OF SSCs IN NEW YORK CITY

### 6 SECTION

“Being a Youth Leader has become a very important aspect of my life. I’m continuously learning and growing. My friends say, ‘How are you so dedicated to the SSC when all they make you do is work? You don’t hang with us at lunch anymore.’ What they don’t understand is that this is the best medium for me to serve my community, help create a change in their lives...my dedication was not for nothing because they are all going to college and even some of my classmates who, at the start of senior year were saying they would not go to college, are getting ready to take that really big step in their lives.”

— Youth Leader

A flood of reports raise alarm at the number of students, especially low-income students, from the graduating class of 2020 who never enrolled in college (**National Student Clearinghouse, December 2020**) and the anticipated numbers who will not from the class of 2021. In the face of these dire warnings, the Student Success Center model is more essential than ever. Remote instruction has made it increasingly difficult for students to access the college guidance support they need, budget cuts have drained schools of supplemental college access programming, and the socio-emotional and learning needs have grown substantially especially in schools serving NYC’s most vulnerable students. SSCs are a lifeline for students; now is the time to expand them, not eliminate them.

The growth of SSCs over the past 13+ years, and more broadly of peer-to-peer college access and persistence programming, is testimony to the strength of the vision young people from the Urban Youth Collaborative (UYC) had back in 2005. They believed that “every NYC high school student has the fundamental right to obtain the counseling and academic support necessary for him or her to succeed in high school and go to college.”<sup>28</sup> In 2011, the UYC *Get Us to College* campaign called for more counselors, SSCs, and College Bridge programs. The NYC Department of Education’s investment through College Access for All over the past several years helped inch toward these demands. The tenuous nature of that funding, however, and the recent cuts to it provide further



evidence to low-income students that their college aspirations are not truly valued and that the system is becoming more, not less, inequitable. We are still fighting for the same demands that were named at the beginning of the 21st century.

Since the first SSC opened in 2007–2008, students served by SSCs and the Youth Leaders themselves have uniformly said: *every school should have a Student Success Center*. Youth Leaders report serving not only students in their own high schools but others in their apartment buildings, religious institutions, families, and communities. One Youth Leader explained:

*“I know it’s a team thing to go to college – you need support whether it’s from your peers or from your teachers...you need someone there for you...My twin sister’s school doesn’t have [an SSC]. It is really hard*

*for her to go to a college counselor and ask for certain information because they are busy with all of the other students...She [comes] to our school after school and [does work] in our SSC. Or she [comes] to me for help.”*

SSCs across NYC have highlighted the need for more college access support, while simultaneously demonstrating what it takes to provide this support effectively and the impact it can have. Continued investment to sustain and spread the model will go a long way to ensuring that more NYC public high school students are given the resources and support they need to realize their college aspirations. Doing so will advance racial and economic justice in NYC, and send a clear message to low-income students, who make up 70% of NYC public school students, that their lives, college aspirations, and leadership matter to this city.





# Endnotes

## Executive Summary

1. The most active CBOs include: **Asian Americans for Equality, Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation, East Side House Settlement, Good Shepherd Services, Kingsbridge Heights Community Center, Make the Road New York, New Settlement.** Other CBOs over the years have included: **Hudson Guild, Mothers/Youth on the Move, Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition.**
2. Center for an Urban Future (2017). *Degrees of Difficulty: Boosting College Success in New York City.* [https://nycfuture.org/pdf/CUF-DegreesofDifficulty\\_Dec.pdf](https://nycfuture.org/pdf/CUF-DegreesofDifficulty_Dec.pdf)
3. In NYC, overall graduation rates have increased from 54% in 2004 to 80% in 2018; post-secondary enrollment rates have kept pace with 73% of students graduating high school in four years directly enrolling in college in 2006 and 74% in 2016. The Research Alliance for New York City Schools. "How Have NYC's High School Graduation and College Enrollment Rates Changed Over Time?" [https://research.steinhardt.nyu.edu/site/research\\_alliance/2019/06/28/how-have-nycs-high-school-graduation-and-college-enrollment-rates-changed-over-time/](https://research.steinhardt.nyu.edu/site/research_alliance/2019/06/28/how-have-nycs-high-school-graduation-and-college-enrollment-rates-changed-over-time/)
4. Schnall, Marianne. "Interview With #BlackLivesMatter Cofounder Alicia Garza: 'Fight Against Despair And Keep Doing The Work Needed To Change The World.'" Forbes. January 15, 2021. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/marianneschnall/2021/01/15/interview-with-blacklivesmatter-cofounder-alicia-garza-fight-against-despair-and-keep-doing-the-work-needed-to-change-the-world/?sh=68b353af362c>

## Introduction

5. The most active CBOs include: **Asian Americans for Equality, Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation, East Side House Settlement, Good Shepherd Services, Kingsbridge Heights Community Center, Make the Road New York, New Settlement.** Other CBOs over the years have included: **Hudson Guild, Mothers/Youth on the Move, Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition.**
6. CARA uses the same criteria as the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to define first-generation college students as those whose parents did not attend or graduate college. See: Cataldi, E.F., Bennett, C.T., and Chen, X. (2018). "First-Generation Students: College Access, Persistence, and Postbachelor's Outcomes." Stats in Brief, NCES 2018-421. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018421.pdf>.
7. While not all first-generation college students are low income and not all low-income students are first generation, there is significant overlap for the students CARA serves.
8. **ASCA** recommends a counselor-to-student ratio of 1:250, with the counselor spending 80% of their time working directly with students. Nationwide, the ratio is 1:442 with high school counselors spending 20% of their time on college-related counseling. CARA goes beyond the ASCA recommendation, arguing that schools serving a majority of low-income students should have a 1:80 ratio with staff well-trained in the college process.
9. Avery, C., Howell, J., and Page, L. (2014). "A Review of the Role of College Applications on Students' Postsecondary Outcomes." Research Brief, College Board 2014-Oct.
10. According to **NCAN**, for every 10% increase in the proportion of children living in poverty in a school district, FAFSA completion declines by 3%.
11. Philadelphia Student Union. n.d. "Past Campaigns." <http://phillystudentunion.org/campaigns/past-campaigns/>
12. Several SSCs drew on funding provided through Community Schools to sustain their programming and/or used private funding sources.

# Endnotes >>>> *continued*

## The Student Success Center Movement

13. The Urban Youth Collaborative. n.d. "Home Page." <http://www.urbanyouthcollaborative.org/>
14. Ibid.
15. For further reading on the history of the Urban Youth Collaborative and its organizing work see: Rogers, J. R., Mediratta, K., & Shah, S. (2012). "Building Power, Learning Democracy: Youth Organizing as a Site of Civic Development". *American Education Research Association Review of Research in Education*, March, 36 (1) 43–66; Mediratta, K., Cohen, A., & Shah, S. (2007). "Leveraging Reform: Youth Power in a Smart Education System." in *City Schools*, edited by Robert Rothman, 99–15. Cambridge: Harvard Education Press; Mediratta, K. (2006) "A Rising Movement". *National Civic Review*. Robert Sherman & Jee Kim, eds. 95 (1), 15–22.
16. Garvey, John (2009). "Are New York City's Public Schools Preparing Students for Success in College?" Annenberg Institute for School Reform, Brown University.
17. Chajet, Lori (2018). "'We as Students Get to Tell Our Story.'" <http://schottfoundation.org/blog/2018/08/25/personal-statement-premiere>
18. Urban Youth Collaborative. n.d. "Get Us to College." <http://www.urbanyouthcollaborative.org/college-access-and-readiness/>
19. Ibid.
20. Five of these — all single-school campuses — subsequently closed for reasons related to a failure to implement best practices explained in Section 3.
21. One of the six closed after one year because of competing demands on a campus serving six high schools.
22. Two schools had a graduation rate above 90% when they first launched their SSC; these schools were not included in this sample.

## Peer-to-Peer Programming

23. The following are a sample of organizations that do college access or persistence work that incorporates a peer-to-peer approach: **CUNY ASAP, Bottom Line, New Visions for Public Schools, PeerForward, the Student Leadership Network, Urban Assembly.**
24. It is important to note that pay for Peer Leaders encompasses both training and work time. Without compensation, being a Peer Leader cannot compete with other summer and after school jobs. While some peer leader programs use a volunteer model, CARA — and its CBO partners — have always used a payment model. The optimal approach is to pay Peer Leaders minimum wage for training time and for 8–10 hours a week during the school year. Some sites have opted for a stipend approach, splitting payment across summer training and academic-year work.

## Guiding Principles

25. This site was originally opened with funding from a private source.
26. One of the other two sites that closed had the opposite problem; located in one small school, with a full-time CBO presence, and full-time school-based counselor, and a College Advising Corps member, there were too many resources to coordinate effectively. The other simply found too many competing demands and was trying to support six schools on the campus which was challenging.

## Profile

27. For four of the SSC sites, the newest ones, which relied 100% on NYC DoE funding, this meant closure. For other sites it meant scrambling for additional funding and cutting services down. Several SSCs have relied either on **Community Schools** funding and/or private funding sources to sustain programming.

## Conclusion

28. Chajet, Lori (2018). "'We as Students Get to Tell Our Story.'" <http://schottfoundation.org/blog/2018/08/25/personal-statement-premiere>



# APPENDIX

## **CARA Resource Links**

**Peer to Peer Model Theory of Change**

**Peer Leadership for College Access & Success Core Competencies**

**Peer Leadership for College Access & Success Professional Capacities**

**Right to College Program Evaluation Rubric**

## SSC Sites, in Order of Founding

### BUSHWICK CAMPUS WITH MAKE THE ROAD NY

FALL 2007

- Academy for Environmental Leadership
- Academy of Urban Planning
- Brooklyn School for Math and Research
- Bushwick School for Social Justice

### FRANKLIN K. LANE CAMPUS WITH CYPRESS HILLS LOCAL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

SPRING 2008

- Academy of Innovative Technology
- Brooklyn Lab
- Cypress Hills Collegiate Preparatory School
- Multicultural High School

### TAFT CAMPUS WITH NEW SETTLEMENT APARTMENTS

SPRING 2012

- Academy of Innovative Technology
- Brooklyn Lab
- Cypress Hills Collegiate Preparatory School
- Multicultural High School

FALL 2013

- High School of Fashion Industries with Hudson Guild
- Flushing High School and Flushing International HS with AAFE
- Central Park East High School

FALL 2014

- ELLIS Prep with Kingsbridge Heights Community Center

FALL 2016

- Queens High School for Language Studies with AAFE

## SSC Sites, in Order of Founding

### GEORGE WASHINGTON CAMPUS WITH GOOD SHEPHERD SERVICES

SPRING 2017

- The College Academy
- High School for Law and Public Services
- High School for Media and Communications
- High School for Health Careers and Sciences

### MOTT HAVEN CAMPUS WITH EAST SIDE HOUSE SETTLEMENT

SPRING 2017

- Careers in Sports High School
- Bronx Leadership Academy
- New Explorers High School

### THOMAS JEFFERSON CAMPUS WITH CYPRESS HILLS LDC

SPRING 2017

- FDNY High School
- High School for Civil Rights
- Performing Arts and Technology High School
- World Academy for Total Community Health

### LONGWOOD CAMPUS WITH GOOD SHEPHERD SERVICES

SPRING 2017

- Longwood Preparatory Academy
- Holcombe L. Rucker High School

SPRING 2018

- A. Philip Randolph with East Side House Settlement



## SSC Schools by Cohort, with Start Years and Median Dosage

COHORT	Cohort 1 (n=16)	Cohort 2 (n=5)	Cohort 3 (n=12)
Year(s) Started	2013-14	2014-15, 2015-16, 2016-17	2017-18
Median Dosage Through 2018-19	6 years	4 years	2 years
List of Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Academy for Excellence in Leadership</li> <li>Academy of Innovative Technology</li> <li>Academy of Urban Planning</li> <li>Bronx Collegiate</li> <li>Bronx Business</li> <li>Brooklyn Lab</li> <li>Brooklyn School for Math and Research</li> <li>Brooklyn Social Justice</li> <li>Central Park East</li> <li>Claremont Int'l</li> <li>Cypress Hills Collegiate Prep</li> <li>Dreamyard Prep</li> <li>Flushing High School</li> <li>Flushing Int'l</li> <li>High School of Fashion</li> <li>Multicultural High School</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ELLIS</li> <li>Bronx Theatre</li> <li>DeWitt Clinton</li> <li>Hospitality</li> <li>Queens High School for Language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Philip Randolph (started in 2018-19)</li> <li>Bronx Leadership II</li> <li>FDNY Fire and Life</li> <li>HS for Civil Rights</li> <li>HS for Health Careers and Sciences</li> <li>HS for Law and Public Service</li> <li>HS for Media and Communications</li> <li>Longwood</li> <li>Performing Arts and Technology</li> <li>College Academy</li> <li>World Academy</li> <li>Careers in Sports</li> </ul>

## SSC Sample Budget

The costs outlined below will vary based on CBO pay scale, school size, and existing resources.

Necessary Operating Costs		
Director of Student Success Center	Supervise college counselors, supervise Youth Leaders, attend and participate in CARA trainings, liaison and manage relationships with school staff, data collection	\$83,700 (fringe included)
College Counselor(s)	Assist with supervision of Youth Leaders, manage junior and senior college process, liaise with school-based counselors, data track the work. <i># of counselors based upon # of schools. Baseline = 1 counselor per 2 schools</i>	\$67,500 (fringe included)
Youth Leader Pay	Manage a caseload of seniors, early awareness workshops, attend trainings, assist with college access efforts at site. <i># of Youth Leaders: 2 Youth Leaders per every 100 seniors or 2 Youth Leaders per small school</i>	\$7,910 per Youth Leader (Fringe Included) (\$63,580 for 8 YLs) (\$15 min wage for 8-10 hours per week for 40 weeks + 70 hours of training)
Youth Leader Training	Attendance (Youth Leaders & supervisors) at CARA training	\$1,000 per Youth Leader (\$8,000 for 8 YLs)
Data Tracking	Data tracking system and data analysis support	\$12,000 per year
Events & Trips	Trips for all grades and events for college access, refreshments, application costs, insurance	\$28,078
PD Budget	Funds for each SSC member to attend professional development opportunities to remain current in the field	\$5,000
Administrative Overhead	Includes fiscal, human resources, and IT support	12% of total operating costs- \$32,142

Total Cost on Multi-School Campus (4 schools)		
Minimal	1 SSC director, 1 college counselor, 8 Youth Leaders, suggested operational costs	\$300,000
Optimal	1 SSC director, 2 college counselor, 8 Youth Leaders, suggested operational costs	\$375,900

Note: New SSCs require an additional \$20,000 in start-up coaching and infrastructure costs.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the Urban Youth Collaborative for the vision and advocacy that made Student Success Centers possible. We would also like to thank all of the community-based organizations and schools that have partnered with CARA to develop and implement SSCs over the past 13 years. These partners have always believed deeply in the power of young people to impact the post-secondary journeys of students in their schools. In particular, the leadership of both Cypress Hills LDC and Make the Road NY who were the first to pilot the SSC model at the Franklin K. Lane and Bushwick campuses, initiating a city-wide movement of peer-to-peer college access and persistence programming.

We would also like to thank CARA staff, past and present, who shaped the Right to College program and SSC model, for all of their work developing training and a sustainable model for SSCs: Lisa Cowan, Ariela Friedman, Courtney Camacho, Rebecca Kruege, Yabelis Guerrero, Maureen Watkins, and Afridah Rahman.

Most of all, we would like to thank Youth Leaders, past and present, for the countless hours spent in training and then working with their peers to ensure that they had the support needed to define and realize their own post-secondary aspirations.

Several people read and gave feedback on drafts and we are so appreciative of their time and guidance; thank you to CARA Co-Director Janice Bloom, Emily Van Ingen, Allison Palmer, Andrea Soonachan, Ben Wides, and Lisa Cowan.

CARA's work with peer-to-peer college access and persistence programming has been supported—past and present—by generous funding from The Altman Foundation, Arbor Brothers, Booth Ferris Foundation, Capital One Foundation, Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation, The Fordham Street Foundation, The Gray Foundation, The Heckscher Foundation for Children, The Helmsley Charitable

Trust, Local Initiatives Support Corporation, The Lucius N. Littauer Foundation, Meringoff Family Foundation, The New York City Department of Education, The New York Community Trust, The Carroll and Milton Petrie Foundation, The Pinkerton Foundation, Propel Capital, The Solon E. Summerfield Foundation, and The Robert and Jane Toll Foundation. Individual Student Success Centers received support through CBO partners and/or schools from a variety of other public and private sources.

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## About CARA

CARA's mission is to ensure that first-generation college students, low-income students, and students of color have the knowledge and support necessary to enroll in and persist through college. CARA's work confronts the gap in post-secondary guidance faced by first-generation college students in New York City. While New York City public high school students need opportunities to learn about college and career pathways, most of the city's public high schools and institutions of higher education are not structured to provide this assistance. CARA's programs, research, and policy work address these inequities. We work with high schools, community-based organizations, and higher education institutions to craft a tailored mix of programs to meet their students' needs.

CARA is housed within the Center for Human Environments at the CUNY Graduate Center. 365 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10016. Our fiscal sponsor is the Research Foundation of CUNY.

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