

**Notes on EdFunders Listening Session on College and Career Readiness  
October 7, 2014 at Legal Outreach, Inc.**

**Speakers:**

**Lisa Castillo Richmond**, Executive Director, [Graduate NYC!](#)

**Susan Knight**, Founding Director of College and Career Services at [Urban Assembly](#) School for Law and Justice, *panelist*

**James O’Neal**, Co-founder and Executive Director, [Legal Outreach, Inc.](#), *panelist*

**Hilary Pennington**, Vice-president of the [Ford Foundation](#)

**Jon Roure**, Director, [CBI, Young Women’s Leadership Network](#), *panelist*

**Moderator:**

Robert Hughes, President of [New Visions for Public Schools](#)

**Laying the foundation:**

Hughes opened the session by reminding the participants of key reasons why education matters.

- Education contributes to economic advancement
  - Almost half (47%) of adults without a high school diploma are frequently unemployed;
  - For college graduates, only 18% are frequently unemployed;
  - The average annual income of the adult without a high school diploma is \$22,000
  - For an adult with a college degree, it’s \$44,000
  - For an adult with a masters degree, it’s \$53,000
- And has an impact on the educational opportunities of the next generation
  - Children of parents with less than a high school diploma are less likely than children of parents with bachelors degrees to enroll in pre-kindergarten programs
  - They are more likely to repeat kindergarten.

Pennington reiterated the centrality of education to breaking the multi-generational cycles of poverty, noting that the Gates Foundation had identified increasing the number of low-income children who get “some kind of credential” beyond high school by age 26 as the key intervention. A delay beyond age 26 substantially reduces the likelihood of ever achieving such a credential. But she expressed dissatisfaction with

“the college and career readiness mantra.” She praised the focus on it for leading to important insights and knowledge we now have, including that:

- The kinds of skills needed to succeed in college and career are similar
- All kids do better with rich curricula that have high expectations – which then brought attention to the crucial questions of
  - What does that look like and
  - How do we support it?

Yet, she argued, the strong focus on standards-based education, content knowledge and testing over the past decade led to an overemphasis on one dimension of college and career readiness. Referencing research by the Consortium on Chicago School Research that is supported by The Wallace Foundation, she urged going back to basics and asking: what is the purpose of schooling? The Chicago researchers conclude that the goal is to help students achieve an integrated sense of identity. They laid out three dimensions to that goal:

1. Content knowledge
2. Non-cognitive skills, including social and emotional skills and the now pervasive “grit”
3. Sense of agency or voice: who the students are and how they can bring the future they want into being

Pennington urged schools, districts, and even cities such as New York to “backmap” programs and strategies to help young people achieve strongly in all three dimensions, identifying three foci, all of which re-emerged in various ways throughout the afternoon:

- Attention to momentum or transition points that can either reinforce progress or halt it, including summer bridge to HS between 8th and 9th grades; immediate enrollment and attendance at college post-HS graduation; transition between 1st and 2nd years of college)
- Implementing rich curricula, including curricula, such as Linked Learning, that shows the interrelationship between what students are doing in the classroom and what they will do later
- Developing systemic ways of integrating employers and work-based learning into the experience of young people in high school

## **Opening discussion (panelists and guests):**

### *1. What is college and career readiness?*

Hughes asked the panel how they, given their many years of experience, would define college and career readiness. The practitioner responses aligned with the research Pennington had laid out. They identified:

- Academic skills and strategies, including the capacity for research or knowing how to know more, which, as one speaker noted, contributes to sense of agency,
- Non-cognitive skills and strategies, including self-regulation, time-management and the ability to negotiate bureaucracies, including the college admissions process or financial aid or career planning
- Sense of personal goal, identity or agency, including developing a mindset that can envision the student in college or a workplace and can navigate the road to getting there

as key elements of college and career readiness. They also noted that students need help and guidance not just at the key transition or momentum points but also as they move along the road – and schools need to provide that guidance. One speaker raised the need to instill not just a sense of efficacy but also of the capacity to make sacrifices now for a later outcome.

### *2. What's the difference between college and career readiness?*

Hughes then asked about differences between college and career readiness. There was agreement that many of the skills needed are similar. But, because most schools focus on college counseling and because the college application process is simpler than keeping track of many different workforce training programs, there is less knowledge about how to help students make their way to careers immediately post high school. Participants from the audience highlighted the

- Importance of actual workplace experience
- Need for CTE (Career and Technical Education) schools to provide intense, focused instruction and practice – including giving the students opportunities to fail.

### *3. What are the benchmarks for college and career readiness?*

Hughes asked how we can distinguish a good college prep program from one that is struggling. The panel offered several accountability metrics, focusing on

- College enrollment
- College persistence
- College graduation

They also noted that GPA can be an important metric for post-secondary readiness. Hughes pointed out that New Visions’s data confirms that some of the “standard” benchmarks – the type of diploma and the CUNY benchmarks – are indeed successful predictors of college persistence and graduation.

### *4. How can we do better?*

The panel discussion segued to its conclusion and the breakout sessions by identifying key policy levers for change. Among the ideas raised:

- Making summer bridge programs mandatory for rising 9th-graders
- Full-time college counselors in every NYC school
- More supports on college campuses – panelists pointed to some of CUNY’s recent and very successful policy and practice changes (e.g., ASAP, the Guttman Community College) as well as longtime successful programs such as HEOP
- Ensuring that information about career options makes its way to counselors at every school – systemic partnerships with industry and employers
- Recognizing that it is never too late to assist students throughout the system in preparing for college and careers

## **END OF OPENING SESSION**

### **Closing summary:**

Lisa Castillo Richmond, Executive Director of Graduate NYC!, summarized common themes. There was a consensus, she said, that it takes a lot to get all of NYC’s 1.1 million students ready for college and careers – and to be the agents of their own lives. But, there was also agreement that we already know much about what works, from both

research and practice. While there is no need, she reiterated, to reinvent, there is a need for partnership and increased collaboration.

She noted the similarity between the aspects into which the panelists had broken college and career readiness and the three dimensions the Consortium on Chicago School Research had recently described as necessary to achieve what they posited as the goal of educating young people: achievement of an integrated sense of identity. The three are

- Academic skills, including rigor, rich curricula, and student ownership of their own education
- Non-cognitive skills, including grit; relationship building, the ability to navigate into and through college and into a sustaining career
- Agency – sense of self-identify and purpose

In both the opening session and in the breakout groups, there was discussion of using the following policy levers to effect change:

- Attention to momentum or transition points: creating bridges to HS and to (and through) college
- Development of clear pathways through educational systems, with supports available at each stage (including college counseling in every school but also embedding support on college campuses)
- Development of systemic partnerships between industries/employers and the school system to ensure that young people have opportunities to experience work meaningfully and develop particular career or technical skills and to ensure similarly clear pathways as those through college for those entering the workforce.
- Clear measures of accountability for students, schools and the system along with the recognition that not everything that is important is measured – and some attention to figuring out more meaningful measures

She noted that a key question that emerged was the role of higher education in all this. While NYC already has built a robust partnership between DoE, some CBOs and CUNY, she also noted that the break-out recommendations called for more and deeper partnerships among these. The final comment from Bob Hughes highlighted the enormous progress NYC has already made, the distance still to go and reasons for optimism. He also emphasized that it is never too late to assist young people to achieve readiness for college and/or careers.

## EXPECTATIONS BREAKOUT GROUP

What expectations do schools and other organizations have for their students and how do they help young people meet them?

Facilitated by James O'Neal (Legal Outreach) and Carol Van Atten (Charles Hayden Foundation)

*What do we mean by expectations?*

- There was a consensus that expectations encompassed what participants in the opening session described as “soft” or non-cognitive skills -- time management, being on-time, holding oneself accountable, problem-solving, grit – as well as academic skills. People talked about
  - Setting expectations early and continuously working with children and young people in individualized ways to achieve them
  - Assuring that content teachers help develop social and emotional skills as well as academic ones and that community organizations supplement this.
  - Modeling collaboration inside classrooms and between schools and community-based organizations

*Which practices should be changed – either added (to fill a gap) or expanded?*

- Increase the number of guidance counselors in each high school but also to ensure that everyone in the school takes some responsibility for setting high expectations and enabling the students to meet them (“College counseling is a full time job, but not the job of one.”)
- Be more **transparent**: Students must know what the expectations are. (E.g., They need to hear over and over in 9th grade: Get to school on time; 11 plus credits to be on track for graduation; pass at least 2 regents). Demystify what high school is like at the very beginning.
- Use data to explain the expectations and to help teachers and other staff know where the kids are and who is at risk and needs particular attention.
- Engage parents in understanding these expectations and helping to reinforce them at home – and provide support to enable them to do so – while at the same time understanding both that families have stresses that may affect young people’s

ability to meet expectations and that our expectations might not be the same as theirs; developing relationships to achieve shared expectations

- Start the college and career knowledge/expectation process earlier – certainly before sixth grade and going back to kindergarten or even before – but also know it is never too late
- Provide great awareness of workforce prospects: what is out there and what do you need (e.g., HS diploma, AA?) to do it?

*Where might additional funding be best allocated?*

- Capacity building\*
- Effective after- and out-of-school school programs.
- SAT and other targeted prep classes
- Greater support for parent engagement
- Support for advocacy
- Connecting and convening practitioners and others who might otherwise be silo-ed
- Funders might start to think a bit more out-of-the-box, look beyond their usual suspects

*What policy changes would help improve this work?*

- Making sure a NYS high school diploma signifies college readiness and eliminating areas of conflict, such as the difference between state – SUNY – and city – CUNY – standards
- Rethinking the use of time, including using summer to enhance academic and non-cognitive skills
  - Early education is a great investment but we also need to bear in mind how to help older students achieve college and career readiness
  - Thinking in terms of mastery rather than “seat time”
- Greater flexibility for schools

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\* This was identified as a priority in each breakout group.

### **Early Knowledge Breakout Group**

How can schools and community or other organizations provide students with the early knowledge they need to plan for college and work?

*What practices should be changed, either added (to fill a gap) or expanded?*

- Field trips from pre-K to 12 – to expose students to a wide range of possible careers and to college
  - They should be connected to academics. E.g.,
    - After each trip, there could be writing assignments that encourage reflection on the trip
    - Before or after the trip, the class could identify and learn about skills involved in the careers
  - Community involvement and partnership in the trips – creating awareness of careers and college opportunities is the community's responsibility as well as the schools'
- Outreach to families to communicate about opportunities and goals, developing shared language and sense of trajectory
- Explicit instruction in social and emotional learning, infused into the school curriculum instead of solely as an add-on.
- Improvement of the high school choice and guidance process so that eighth graders and their families are informed about and empowered to make good choices
- Opportunities for meaningful internships and participation in mentoring programs, including partnerships with CBOs and employers
- Career-aligned curricula – and all the supports that should go along with that
- Incorporation of best practices in college and career readiness into CBOs and after-school programs – including the professional development necessary to make that possible
- More generally, sharing of the practices across schools, CBOs, and other community partners
- Full-time college and career counselor in every school

*Where might additional funding be best allocated?*

- Capacity-building both for teachers to learn more about how to integrate college and career awareness into their curricula and for community partners who work



in schools, enabling the school's teachers and the CBOs to collaborate and complement each other's work\*

- Support for alternative pathways to careers
- Support for programs for students with disabilities
- Programs that build connections to employers and to higher education
- Programs that foster greater collaboration and alignment
  - Between elementary and middle schools and middle and high schools
  - Between schools and their community partners
  - Between counseling and teaching staff

*What policy changes would help improve this work?*

- Every school, from elementary through high school, needs to pay attention to college and career counseling. There was a clear sense among many that every school, including elementary schools, should have a full-time college and career counselor who “owns the process”
- Ensure that students participate in extra-curricular activities, including mentoring programs, that can connect them to the community and engender positive feelings about themselves
- Every high school student should have a meaningful and *credit-bearing* internship outside the school
- Some participants suggested rethinking “seat-time” requirements

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\*This was identified as a priority in each breakout group.

## Transitions Breakout Group

How can schools and other organizations support and follow up with alumni post-HS graduation?

*What practices should be changed, either added (to fill a gap) or expanded?*

- Expand and deepen coordination between CBOs and higher ed, creating a sense of a “jointly owned system”
  - Many of the 180 organizations and programs that work with students to help them get to college continue to work with them when they get to college, serving as a kind of safety net. But the partnership between and among CBOs and the institutions of higher ed needs work
  - There needs to be greater collection and/or sharing of the kinds of data most useful for CBOs who are trying to support students (E.g., to help them meet social and emotional as well as academic needs)
- College guidance in the high school years that informs students about which campuses provide essential supports for students (and which don’t)
- Summer bridge programs for high school graduates who are intending to go to college: they provide valuable information and support for students, including understanding “college culture” and negotiating registration systems
- Embedded advising on college campuses
- More implementation of the “Single Stop” approach on college campuses
- More conversations like this one, that bring together diverse organizations and constituencies and focus on key questions like “whose responsibility is the student once s/he reaches the college campus?”

*Where might additional funding be best allocated?*

- Capacity building for the organizations that are doing the work\*
- Scaling up successful programs, such as COIN, POSSE, ASAP
- Targeted support for college prep and persistence:
  - Helping pay for remedial classes
  - Greater investment in college counseling, pre-college
  - More support for advising services in college
- Fostering the partnerships between the K-12 and higher ed systems
- Better coordination between CBOs and higher ed on their “jointly owned system”
- Developing data collection mechanisms to track student social and emotional growth and their needs

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\* This was identified as a priority in each breakout group.

- Support for advocacy

*What policy changes would help improve this work?*

- Financial aid for undocumented students (Breakout participants noted that a measure to enable that failed in the state legislature by one vote – not a heavy lift)
- Greater demonstration of the political will to achieve higher college graduation rates: a Vision Zero College Dropouts
- Clarity that this is a key priority for the Department of Education, e.g., by
  - Making plain that it will hold principals accountable for their college acceptance rates
  - Greater investment in college counseling