

## A. Introduction and Background

Access to higher education continues to be one of the nation's most pressing challenges. Evidence demonstrates persistent inequalities among students of color and those from low-income backgrounds, underscoring the need for more equitable investments and allocation of resources. The following research brief distills some of these disparities and notes key inequities in the areas of college access and school funding.

## B. Key Findings and Trends

### INEQUITIES IN SCHOOLS

#### *Persistent Inequities in High School Graduation and College Enrollment Rates*

Despite overall increases in high school graduation and college enrollment rates, students of color and those from low-income backgrounds continue to have disproportionately lower rates compared to their White and higher income peers. Some of the barriers impacting these inequities include college affordability, high college application costs, the need for timely financial aid education, and lack of access to quality school counseling. A few data points demonstrating these disparities include the following:

According to a recent spotlight by the Research Alliance for New York City Schools, "between 2006 and 2017, the percentage of NYC students who earned a high school diploma in four years and enrolled immediately in college increased from 42 to 58 percent". Additionally, according to the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2018* report "from 2000 to 2016, total college enrollment rates increased for White (from 39 to 42 percent), Black (from 31 to 36 percent), and Hispanic young adults (from 22 to 39 percent). The 2016 total college enrollment rate for American Indian/Alaska Native young adults (19 percent) was not measurably different from their 2000 rate" (NCES, 2019).

- However, a deeper look at this data reveals large disparities associated with students' race/ethnicity and neighborhood income. As shown in Figure 1, Black and Latino students have considerably lower bachelor's degree enrollment rates than their White and Asian peers. Additionally, as shown in Figure 2, bachelor's degree enrollment rates also vary by levels of neighborhood poverty; high-poverty neighborhoods have persistently lower enrollment rates than lower to moderate poverty neighborhoods. Similar patterns of inequities are associated, and compounded, when looking enrollment rates by race/ethnicity.

#### *Unequal Funding in Schools*

In 2014, New York was singled out by the University of California's Los Angeles' (UCLA) Civil Rights project as having the most segregated schools (United States Commission on Civil rights, 2020). Students of color, particularly from low-income backgrounds, have a greater likelihood of attending an underfunded and under-resourced school. High-need schools tend to lack access to resources vital to students' success, such as qualified teachers, effective early education programs, meaningful school counseling, and access to college prep classes.

Lack of access to these resources is linked to the historical inequities in school funding. State and local governments make important funding allocations that determine school quality and availability resources. These factors include how much teachers are paid, the extent and frequency of professional

development provided to school staff, the length of the school day, the number of students in a classroom, the availability of student supports and extracurricular activities, and myriad other factors that impact student learning and academic achievement (Education Trust-New York, 2018).

According to the United States Commission on Civil Rights, “underfunding high-need school districts in turn translates into underfunding school districts where the majority of students of color are enrolled. New York ranks 48<sup>th</sup> in educational equity among all states by measure of the funding gap between districts enrolling the most students in poverty and the districts enrolling the fewest and ranks 44<sup>th</sup> by the measure of the funding gap between districts enrolling the most students of color and those enrolling the fewest” (United States Commission on Civil rights, 2020).

Figure 1. (The Research Alliance for New York City Schools, 2019)

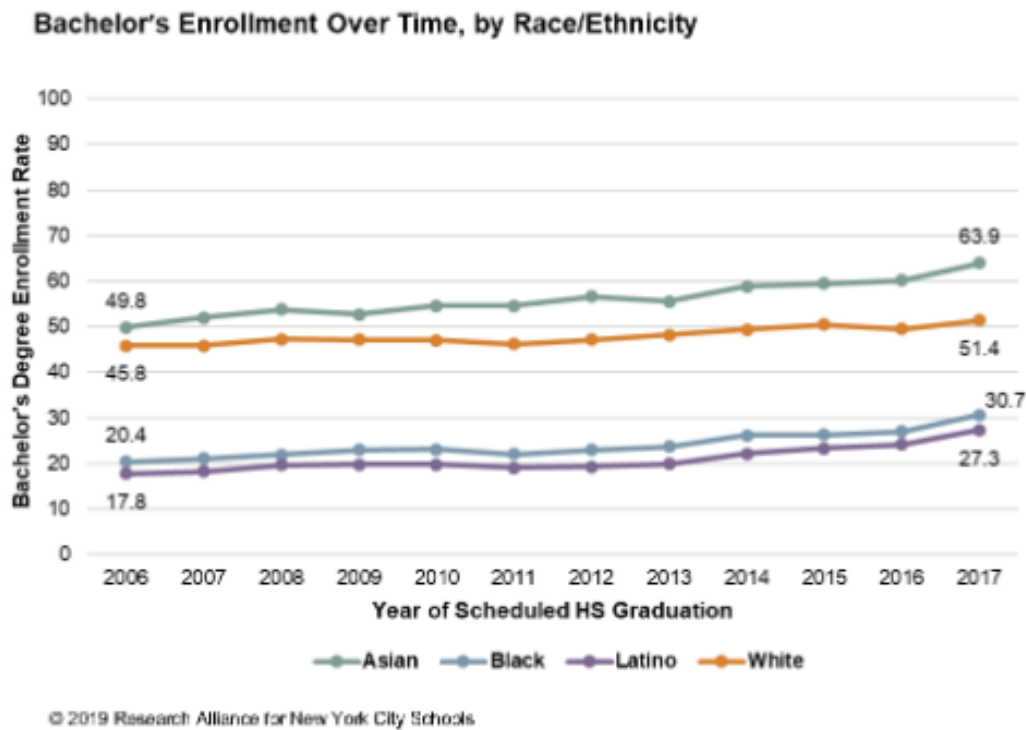
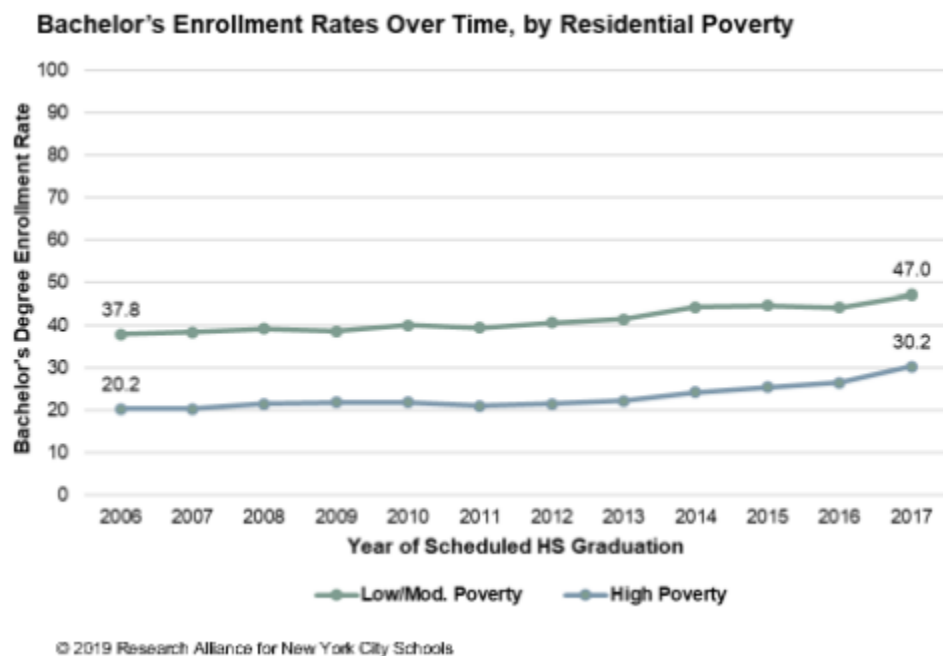


Figure 2. (The Research Alliance for New York City Schools, 2019)



## BARRIERS TO COLLEGE ACCESS

### *College Affordability*

Students and families often consider other factors beyond the cost of college tuition, when thinking about college affordability. The Institute for Women's Policy Research examines college affordability by understanding the experiences and circumstances of low-income adults, students of color, and students with dependent children. According to their 2014 report on college affordability, "low-income students are more likely to be financially independent, to be first generation students, to be students of color, and to be parents" (Gault, Reichlin, & Román, 2014). Below is the institutes' broad definition of college affordability; college is "affordable" when:

- Students and their families are able to meet living expenses with a reasonable standard of living both during and after school enrollment.
- A reasonable standard of living would provide:
- A level of income at a basic standard of self-sufficiency.
- Adequate time for schoolwork, self-care, sleep, and care for family members; and
- Opportunity to function without unhealthy levels of stress.

Students can anticipate substantial economic and social gain after graduation compared with a future without college. Affordability will be improved if the economic outcomes are comparable across lines of gender, race, and ethnicity" (Gault, Reichlin, & Román, 2014).

### *The Need for Timely Financial Aid Information*

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) helps eligible students get the financial assistance they need to attend college. Many students find this application difficult to complete as it requires the verification of a number of documents that many first-generation and low-income students have difficulty obtaining. Due to the recent COVID 19-pandemic, FAFSA completion rates are dropping at a faster rate. "In the 2019-20 school year, approximately 61.7 percent of New York State public high school seniors completed the FAFSA by June 26, representing a decline of more than 2 percentage points in FAFSA completions compared to the previous two school years. FAFSA completion data also revealed that schools that enroll the largest shares of students from low-income backgrounds have a completion rate that is 13 percent lower than schools that enroll the smallest shares of students from low-income backgrounds" (The Education Trust-New York, 2020). Thus, it is important that students and families receive information on financial aid well before the college application process.

Pell grants are typically awarded to dependent undergraduate students whose family make less than \$40k per year. Roughly 60 percent of the 7.3 million Pell Grant recipients are students of color (Nichols, A & Shack, O. 2019). The purpose of starting the Pell Grant under the Higher Education Act in 1965, was to alleviate the financial burden of college for low-income students by providing a grant which students did not have to pay back. The government now gives an annual 27-billion investment in Pell Grants. However, this investment falls short because Pell Grants barely put a dent in the tuition and fees at 4-year private institutions. According to the College Board, the Pell Grant now covers a record low of 17% of tuition fees at private institutions and 59% at public 4-year institutions (College Board, 2020).

### *College Application Costs*

College application costs can require a significant investment from students and their families. The average fee among 61 four-year institutions with the highest application fees is \$77, with Stanford University requiring a \$90 application fee (Anthony, 2020). Research shows that waiving college application fees is an important resource for students from low-income backgrounds, significantly increasing their chances of being admitted into selective universities. Since fall 2013, more than 80% of first-time, first-year students submitted three or more college applications each year. Since fall 2014, almost 36% of first-year students applied to seven or more colleges, annually. Therefore, a student's total

application fee costs can quickly add up to about \$150 after applying to at least three four-year, nonprofit institutions, and at least \$540 if they apply to seven elite institutions (Anthony, 2020).

### *Lack of Access to Quality High School Counseling*

- High school counselors play a pivotal role in ensuring access to college opportunities for students. Research shows that students who possess great potential, but attend under-resourced, underfunded and overcrowded schools have limited access and preparedness for college opportunities (Hines, Vega, Mayes, Harris, & Mack 2019).
- The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends schools maintain a ratio of 250 students per school counselor and that school counselors spend at least 80 percent of their time working directly with or indirectly for students. However, national averages show these ratios to be significantly out of proportion and nearly double the recommended ratio; recent data shows across all schools, the average student-to-school-counselor ratio is 464 to 1 (New York Education Trust, 2020).
- Additionally, nationwide, nearly 1 in 5 students — about 8 million children nationwide — do not have access to a counselor in their school and nearly 3 million of those students do not have access to any other form of school support staff, such as a school psychologist or social worker (The Education Trust-New York, 2020). The lack of school counseling and school social workers limits opportunities for students experiencing hardship who need academic interventions.

## POLICIES THAT HAVE BEEN IMPLEMENTED TO ADVANCE EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

There is a breadth of policy solutions emerging from all levels of government, designed to advance educational equity. Below are some examples of policies implemented at specific levels of government.

<i>Policy Solutions</i>	<i>Improving Access to High Education and Making College More Affordable</i>	<i>Reducing Disparities/Inequities in School Funding</i>
<b>Federal Level</b>	The <b>TRIO programs</b> began as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty and were the first national college access and retention programs to address the serious socio-economic barriers to education in America. TRIO programs target outreach and student services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds such as low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to postbaccalaureate programs.	<b>Title I, Part A funding as part of the</b> of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by Every Student Succeeds Act (ESEA) is the largest source of federal aid for elementary and secondary schools, providing school districts across the country with funding for after-school academic support, bilingual programs, health services, parent involvement efforts, and other programs for students from low-income families.
<b>State Level (as part of Gov. Cuomo's Educational Agenda)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Lowering AP Tests Fees for Low-Income Students:</b> Governor Cuomo will continue to invest funding to ensure that the test fee for AP and IB exams is free for as many low-income students as possible. New York currently invests \$5.8 million to bring the exam fee down to \$5 for low-income students, so that every student can afford to take a test.</li> <li><b>Expanding College Student Enrollment in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Benefits:</b> The Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) will establish policy to make more community college students eligible for essential SNAP benefits. Community college students engaged at least half-time in career and technical education courses of study will be exempt from the requirement to work 20 hours weekly to qualify for SNAP.</li> </ol>	<b>Require Transparency to Ensure Districts Distribute State Aid in a More Equitable Manner:</b> Governor Cuomo will continue to close the funding gap between poor and rich schools by requiring that state education funds go to the neediest schools. Although the state distributes 70 percent of its funding to the neediest districts, the districts do not always distribute funding to their schools in an equitable manner. <b>New York will continue to drive funding equity by requiring school districts to disclose, by building, where their funds go.</b>
<b>New York City (Local)</b>	Beginning in 2015, the NYC Dept. of Education (DOE) has pursued an agenda known as <a href="#">Equity and Excellence for All</a> . <sup>i</sup> Some examples of initiatives within this agenda include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>AP for All:</b> This initiative aims to ensure students at all high schools have access to at least five AP classes, thereby increasing college and career readiness for all students.</li> <li><b>The College Access for All:</b> This is a district-wide initiative that eliminated the CUNY college application fee for low-income students, made the SAT exam available to juniors free of charge, and sought to promote a "true college-ready culture" across NYC high schools.</li> </ol>	The <b>New York City Council</b> advocates for and often funds special initiatives to strengthen the city's public schools and its services. In 2019, for example, the Council provided funding to support the Positive Learning Collaborative program (\$1,500,000), the BRAVE mental health hotline (\$200,000), the creation of a new teachers center (\$3,500,000) and the expansion of Dial-a-Teacher to an online platform (\$68,800). <sup>ii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Additional information regarding this agenda can be found on the New York City Department of Education's Equity and Excellence for All website, available at: <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/about-us/vision-and-mission/equity-and-excellence>

<sup>ii</sup> As reported in the City Council Of The City Of New York Fiscal Year 2020 Adopted Expense Budget Adjustment Summary / Schedule C report, available at: <https://council.nyc.gov/budget/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2019/12/Fiscal-2020-Schedule-C-Final-Merge.pdf>