

# *The CUNY Fatherhood Academy*

## *A Qualitative Evaluation*

MARLA MCDANIEL, MARGARET SIMMS, WILLIAM MONSON, AND ERWIN DELEON  
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**NYC Center for Economic Opportunity and NYC Young Men's Initiative  
Response to Urban Institute's Evaluation of the CUNY Fatherhood Academy**

Launched in 2012 as a component of the NYC Young Men's Initiative (YMI), the CUNY Fatherhood Academy (CFA) is a 16-week high school equivalency (HSE) and college preparatory program offered at the City University of New York's (CUNY) LaGuardia Community College campus to young adult fathers ages 18 to 24 living in New York City. The program is administered by CUNY's central office and by LaGuardia Community College, with oversight from YMI and the NYC Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO). Funding is provided by the Campaign for Black Male Achievement at the Open Society Foundations through August 2014. The program promotes responsible parenting, college readiness, and employment among unemployed and underemployed fathers. Utilizing a cohort model, CFA offers HSE test preparation, academic coursework, parenting and health workshops, job readiness workshops, and personal and career counseling, all free of charge to program participants.

This evaluation report presents the findings of a qualitative evaluation of CFA conducted by the Urban Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based social and economic policy research organization. The Urban Institute was commissioned by CEO to answer four key research questions: (1) What do participants gain from the program? (2) How important is the program's location on a college campus? (3) What program modifications might improve outcomes? (4) Can and should the program be replicated or expanded? The evaluation was conducted between September 2013 and April 2014, and draws upon interviews with program staff, administrators, and other key stakeholders; focus groups with program participants; and CFA administrative and participant data.

The Urban Institute's evaluation presents encouraging findings regarding the program's education and parenting outcomes. Analysis of CFA administrative data shows that the program serves young fathers who are highly disconnected from education and employment, and who have high rates of criminal justice system involvement. Despite these barriers, the report shows that the program helps participants earn HSE diplomas at rates above the New York State average, with a 61.3% average pass rate among CFA participants, compared to averages of 56.4% among 19- to 24-year-olds, 40.7% among Blacks, and 48.8% among Latinos in the state. The evaluation also finds qualitative evidence of positive changes in post-program parenting behavior, with the strongest effects for noncustodial fathers.

In addition, the evaluation reflects overwhelmingly positive feedback for CFA from participants and stakeholders. Participants describe CFA as life changing and credit the program and its staff with increasing their motivation and their ability to pursue education and employment opportunities. The program's exclusive enrollment of fathers and explicit focus on fatherhood are cited as key drivers of recruitment and retention. CFA's location on a college campus is cited as a further source of motivation for the fathers, who emphasize that the presence of like peers in the LaGuardia student body contributes to a sense that postsecondary education is a realistic possibility. The report also highlights the staff, resources, and space provided by LaGuardia, which enhance the services that CFA delivers to its participants.



The report recommends a variety of modifications to expand program capacity and improve participant experience and outcomes. With regard to program capacity and participant experience, while participants reported satisfaction with the current quality of academic instruction, the Urban Institute finds CFA staff and participant consensus regarding the need to expand from one HSE instructor to two, noting that a second instructor could reduce class sizes, enhance the classroom experience, and increase program enrollment capacity. Additional recommendations include the implementation of an HSE curriculum tailored to fathers and enhancements to the college preparatory track, including increased academic instructions and more structured workshops with a focus on work readiness and occupational skills. Finally, the report finds unanimous support among participants for CFA replication, with a desire for new program sites in each borough of New York City, which the Urban Institute believes could be achieved through the applications of lessons learned in the implementation of CFA at LaGuardia.

Regarding participant outcomes, the Urban Institute recommends CFA enhance post-program services to provide alumni with ongoing education, employment, and parenting supports. As noted in the report, subsequent to Urban Institute data collection, CFA has added as a new staff position a part-time Alumni and Retention Specialist, who will increase CFA capacity for ongoing engagement with program alumni. YMI and CEO believe that this staffing modification will improve CFA capacity to achieve positive long-term outcomes for participants.

YMI and CEO find the recommendations presented in this report to be quite helpful for programmatic improvement. As noted above, CFA is a privately funded program, with funding scheduled to terminate in late summer 2014. At this time, YMI, CEO, and LaGuardia Community College are actively seeking new funding streams necessary to keep CFA in operation. Should continued funding be secured, YMI and CEO are committed to careful consideration of all programmatic modifications recommended in this report. Further, as suggested in the report, we recognize that this evaluation represents a preliminary assessment, and that data collection systematization and enhancement will be necessary to enable further evaluation to test CFA program impact.

Parker Krasney  
Senior Advisor, NYC Center for Economic Opportunity

Carson Hicks, PhD  
Director of Programs and Evaluation, NYC Center for Economic Opportunity

Alan S. Farrell  
Citywide Fatherhood Services Coordinator, NYC Young Men's Initiative

Jahmani Hylton  
Director, NYC Young Men's Initiative

## Executive Summary

Many young black and Latino men in New York City struggle to gain a foothold in the city's mainstream economy. Poverty rates are 50 percent higher and unemployment is 60 percent higher for the city's young black and Latino men than for young white men.<sup>1</sup> The challenges are especially steep for the estimated 109,269 men ages 18 to 24 with only a high school degree.<sup>2</sup> They are even worse for the estimated 75,561 men who have dropped out and do not have a high school equivalency (HSE) diploma. Given the economic challenges young fathers without postsecondary education face in providing for their families, New York City's Young Men's Initiative launched a fatherhood program housed in LaGuardia Community College in spring 2012. The CUNY Fatherhood Academy (CFA or the Academy) aims to connect young fathers to academic and employment opportunities while supporting them as fathers through parenting classes and workshops.

Between September 2013 and April 2014, Urban Institute researchers conducted an independent qualitative evaluation of the CFA program under a contract with the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity. The study focused on CFA's design, implementation, and participant outcomes in the first four cohorts served between March 2012 and December 2013. We interviewed administrators, staff, and advisory group members from the Academy, as well as administrators from CUNY's central administrative office, LaGuardia Community College, New York City's Young Men's Initiative, and the Open Society Foundations' Campaign for Black Male Achievement. We also held four focus groups with 33 CFA participants from cohorts 1 to 4. Including focus group participants, we interviewed 55 individuals in total. To supplement the interviews we analyzed CFA program enrollment and participation data, which included information on attendance, reading literacy, and employment. We also reviewed responses to a fatherhood survey that CFA staff administered to participants at the beginning and end of the program.

The study aimed to address the following questions:

- What do participants gain from the program?
- Have the Young Men's Initiative objectives to improve young men's education, employment opportunities, and parenting been achieved?
- How important is the program's location on a college campus?
- What program modifications might improve outcomes?
- Can and should this program be replicated or expanded?

## CFA Program Model

The Academy began in spring 2012. The model emphasizes education, employment, and parenting for students preparing to take the HSE exam or preparing for college. The HSE classes are free for students and are offered three days a week. In addition to academic coursework, the curriculum includes parenting and health workshops, employment preparation, and a men's support group. College-Ready participants come two days a week to attend workshops on preparing for college, participate in fatherhood and parenting classes, and receive personal and career counseling. They also participate in internships in different departments of the college. In total, CFA has enrolled 118 HSE participants and 29 College-Ready participants over the past two years.

## Findings

Fathers credit CFA with changing their lives. Despite commitment to their children, CFA participants are at serious risk educationally and financially, which also puts their children at risk—a risk that the fathers recognize. Many saw CFA as a second chance to get right what they had gotten wrong by not completing school (or pursuing college) or by associating with friends and peers who were not focused on school. Several fathers discussed shifting their focus and having new motivation (thanks to their children) to

think seriously about the future and make decisions that will benefit their sons or daughters. As committed fathers, they were drawn to advertisements about the program or else alerted to the opportunity by people close to them who recognized their readiness to move ahead.

CFA targets young low-income fathers, a large and underserved population in New York City. The program works to address participants' core needs by linking education, employment, parenting, and counseling services. The program helps fathers earn an HSE diploma at rates at or above the state average among all HSE test takers. Several fathers credit the program with helping them get better jobs, though work remains very unstable for these men. Roughly 9 percent of fathers have enrolled in college. It is too soon to tell if the program has had real and lasting effects on education and employment. According to participants, the program has improved their parenting, but it is too soon to tell if it increases longer-term child engagement. The fathers varied on what, if any, program changes might make it easier for more men to complete the program. Some suggested holding classes on consecutive days and not on Fridays. Some fathers expressed a desire for additional program locations in each borough, but there was no consensus on this point.

An important feature of the Academy program is its location on a college campus. Connecting men to college is central to the program's design and mission. Locating the program in a community college appears to make a difference beyond just better access to the campus. For some participants, the location increased their motivation and self-confidence. "This program is different from other GED programs," said one focus group participant. "It's on a college campus; you get that energy back being on campus." Being around college students changed the young men's self-identity as they saw new opportunities for themselves. "It feels good, like you're part of something," said one young man. "A lot of programs are in community centers, right next to some projects, and it makes you feel bad," explained another. "Here, you're with your peers and you're in this college and you realize that you can come here."

Program planners and other stakeholders have asked whether LaGuardia Community College is the best and only setting for the Academy. Our study did not examine other potential locations, such as other CUNY campuses, but by probing stakeholders, program planners, and participants on what the Academy needs for success, we conclude it could likely succeed on other CUNY college campuses. Ingredients for success appear to include dedicated staff and administrative leadership, strong instructors, sufficient classroom and administrative space, direct links to educational and employment resources, oversight and data support from the CUNY central office, and active participant outreach. For several reasons, however, LaGuardia was an ideal candidate to launch and implement the program, and lessons learned from the four cohorts could be transferred to additional campuses. LaGuardia had interested leadership, capacity to dedicate staff and space, and past experience implementing and designing pilot programs that were later expanded to other CUNY campuses.

## Recommendations

We identified two areas the program could enhance that would help program planners understand the Academy's effects and also it better suited for expanding or replicating. We recommend increased support for postprogram links and strengthening the instruction and curriculum.

*Supporting postprogram links to employment, education, parenting resources, and alumni:* The end of the program's 16 weeks is still only the beginning of the men's entrance into adulthood and growth as fathers. The program considers sustaining and supporting the men's progression an important mission, and we see this as critical to ensure that any program gains are sustained. Beginning with cohort 5, the Academy added a part-time alumni and retention specialist. This important addition could strengthen fathers' links to educational and employment opportunities, parenting resources, and each other after the program ends. In addition to helping the alumni, keeping better track of fathers will help the program understand its long-term impacts.

*Strengthening the instruction model and curriculum:* Academy students pass the HSE at rates above the state average despite staff and participant concerns about classroom size and insufficient numbers of

instructors. Now that the HSE exam has changed from the GED to the TASC,<sup>3</sup> the program should assess its instruction and consider ways to strengthen it. Staff expect that the TASC will be more difficult than the GED, so the program should focus on students' proficiencies at intake and adapt the instruction to focus on their weakest subject areas. As fathers told us, "We needed more work, more writing, more homework."

CFA is committed to helping its participants achieve college readiness, and we believe that component could be strengthened either with more academic instruction or more structured workshops and supports. Such changes would need to be carefully planned before implementing an expanded model at LaGuardia or replicating the model on other campuses.

The program is now relatively small, aiming to serve about 80 young men a year. Its size may contribute to its success. It has talented and passionate staff, a committed administration and agency partners, and relatively flexible funding that has accommodated changes as needed. In addition, the LaGuardia administration has been willing to donate in-kind resources. To replicate or expand the program and have similar success, these features would need replication as well. The program would also require more outreach to attract more than the current 40 fathers per cohort. To replicate the program on other CUNY campuses, program planners would need to make additional considerations. For one, planners would need to clearly articulate and probably document their model, including their curriculum, approach, and process, to ensure model fidelity as best as possible.

## **Building Capacity to Evaluate**

We recommend expansion that also builds the capacity to evaluate the program rigorously with a comparison group and by using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Expanding the program's small size and evaluation capacity would allow an evaluation of some of the desired long-term outcomes. Strengthening the evidence on effectiveness requires several steps. First, evaluators would need to account for possible selection bias in who enters the program. Second, the program data need to be gathered over a longer period to determine the longer-term education and employment impacts of the program on participants. Finally, the program would need much more robust data on the parenting component to evaluate its effects.

## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Per the NYC Young Men's Initiative status update, October 2013.

<sup>2</sup> 2012 estimates from US Census Bureau Fact Finder data.

<sup>3</sup> On January 1, 2014, the HSE test used in New York State was changed from the GED to the Test Assessing Secondary Completion, or TASC. This new test is designed to cost less and meet New York's P-12 Common Core Standards. It was developed by the New York State Education Department and CTB/McGraw-Hill.



# *The CUNY Fatherhood Academy*

## *A Qualitative Evaluation*

The City University of New York (CUNY) Fatherhood Academy (CFA or the Academy) is a 16-week high school equivalency and college preparatory program offered at LaGuardia Community College to fathers ages 18 to 24 living in New York City. The program promotes responsible parenting, college readiness, and work among unemployed and underemployed fathers. Under contract with the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity, researchers from the Urban Institute conducted an independent qualitative evaluation of the CFA program between September 2013 and April 2014. This report describes CFA's design, implementation, targeting, retention, and participant outcomes in the first four cohorts served between March 2012 and December 2013. It concludes with recommendations for areas of programmatic improvement.

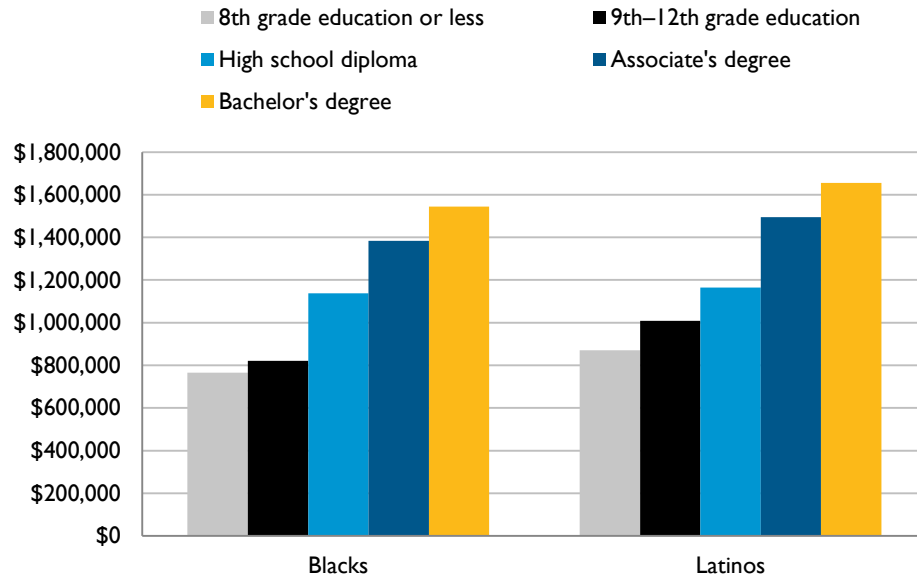
## **Section I. Supporting Young Fathers in New York City**

Many low-income men, particularly young black and Latino men in New York City, struggle to gain a foothold in the mainstream economy. Poverty rates are 50 percent higher and unemployment is 60 percent higher for the city's young black and Latino men than young white men.<sup>1</sup> The challenges are especially steep for the estimated 109,269 men ages 18 to 24 with only a high school degree.<sup>2</sup> They are even worse for the estimated 75,561 men who have dropped out and not pursued a high school equivalency (HSE) degree.

In New York City, home to 128,290 black men and 185,838 Latino men ages 16 to 24,<sup>3</sup> high school graduation rates are among the lowest in the country. In 2009–10 a little over one-quarter (28 percent) of black males in the city earned a diploma four years after starting 9th grade compared with 57 percent of white males (Holzman 2012).

Finding stable work and building the necessary skills for a career is challenging without postsecondary education. Nationally, total projected work-life earnings for black and Latino men with some high school but no diploma are \$821,293 and \$1,008,029, respectively (figure 1). For black and Latino men with a high school degree, the projected work-life earnings rise by 39 and 16 percent, respectively. With an associate's degree or a bachelor's degree, work-life earnings for black men increase by 22 and 36 percent, respectively, compared to a high school degree. The increases for Latino men with an associate's degree or bachelor's degree are 28 and 42 percent, respectively, compared to a high school degree (Julian and Kominski 2011).

**FIGURE I. Black and Latino Projected Median Work-Life Earnings by Education**



Source: Julian and Kominski (2011, table 2-B).

Young men who did not complete high school are provided with a second chance through the HSE diploma.<sup>4</sup> Initial earnings for young men with an HSE diploma are generally more comparable to earnings for high school dropouts than to graduates, although some evidence suggests that over time HSE earners may fare better than high school dropouts. The credential has been associated with higher hourly compensation, higher family earnings, greater job satisfaction, more work hours, and better fringe benefits compared to no diploma or certificate. Within three years, workers with an HSE entered more diverse occupations than their counterparts without a degree (Song 2011).

In addition to low educational attainment, other barriers or obstacles occur for young men, including race, ethnicity, and early parenting. Although research confirms young men of color face more barriers connecting to work and school (Reed, Jepsen, and Hill 2007), comparatively less is written about the additional challenges for the estimated 30,000 to 40,000 young men ages 16 to 24 in New York City who are fathers.<sup>5</sup>

Given the economic challenges young fathers without postsecondary education face and their need to provide economic support for their families, the need for programs that will assist and support them to pursue more education and lasting employment is clear. New York City's Young Men's Initiative (YMI) has recognized this need and moved to meet it by supporting a fatherhood program housed in LaGuardia Community College. The City University of New York (CUNY) Fatherhood Academy (CFA or the Academy) works to connect young fathers to academic and employment opportunities while supporting them in their role as fathers. This study evaluates the CFA program's efforts.

## The NYC Young Men's Initiative

The CUNY Fatherhood Academy is a component of New York City's Young Men's Initiative and the sole funded fatherhood program in the initiative.

Situated in the Office of the Mayor, YMI is a unique private–public partnership that focuses efforts and resources on programs and policy to support the health and well-being of black and Latino men in the city. Although YMI was officially launched in August 2011, it had its origins in January 2010, when then New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg turned attention to issues facing young men of color. The

initiative has been funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies, the Open Society Foundations Campaign for Black Male Achievement (OSF/CBMA),<sup>6</sup> and city tax levy dollars, bringing together city agencies and community-based organizations to collaborate in the areas of health, education, justice, and employment.

YMI aims to facilitate greater “father friendliness” among city agencies and help them better engage and serve fathers. The initiative partners with over 20 city agencies and offices and sponsors and supports approximately 45 programs and policies.

## **The Idea for a Fatherhood Program at CUNY**

As YMI’s one program dedicated solely to fathers, the Academy receives special attention within the initiative. Program planners and other stakeholders are especially interested in whether the pilot model works and whether it changes fathers’ lives.

The program design combines education, employment, and parenting and was modeled after a CUNY program for mothers called Perfect Opportunity for Individual Skills and Educational Development (P.O.I.S.E.D.) for Success. P.O.I.S.E.D. is a full-time, seven-month program operated on three CUNY campuses that provides academic enrichment, job placement services, parenting workshops, and case management to eligible mothers with young children who are receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families. P.O.I.S.E.D.’s creator had wanted to develop a similar model for fathers after hearing from mothers who thought men would benefit also.

When the mayor’s office, YMI, and OSF/CBMA announced plans to address disparities among young men of color, the P.O.I.S.E.D. creator collaborated with YMI’s fatherhood services coordinator and then–senior advisor to develop a proposal to OSF. The model emphasized fatherhood<sup>7</sup> as well as employment, academics, and access to college.

In addition to city agency and philanthropy partners, the Academy also has an advisory group of national fatherhood experts who meet regularly and advise on program design and implementation. During this pilot phase (through 2014), the program has been funded primarily by OSF/CBMA. Other partners include the mayor’s office, LaGuardia Community College, and several CUNY programs in addition to CUNY’s central administrative office. NYC’s Center for Economic Opportunity oversees and assists implementation and monitors and evaluates performance. The Academy is also assisted by the New York City Housing Authority, which helps with outreach and program referrals.

## **About the Study**

Our study examined the Academy’s design, implementation, targeting, and retention and also explored what participants gained or hoped to gain. We interviewed administrators and staff as well as current and former program participants. We supplemented the information with administrative program data and a review of the research literature on fathers, young men of color, and fatherhood programs.

We conducted 12 semistructured in-person interviews with 16 administrators and staff from the Academy, CUNY’s central administrative office, LaGuardia Community College, YMI, and OSF/CBMA in November 2013. In February 2014 we held four focus groups with 33 recent and former CFA participants. CFA staff identified and invited men fitting the criteria described in table 1 to participate in focus groups.<sup>8</sup> In March and April 2014 we conducted telephone interviews with six key stakeholders, including CFA advisory group members. In total, we interviewed 55 individuals. The quantitative data we received included detailed administrative data on program enrollment and participation collected by Academy staff. The database we analyzed included intake, attendance, education, and employment data, as well as a fatherhood survey administered at the beginning and end of the program. CFA staff also maintained an additional document chronicling employment retention and wages of current and former CFA participants.

**TABLE 1. Focus Groups with Current and Former CFA Participants**

Focus group	Description	Number of fathers
1	Fathers from cohorts 1 to 4 who enrolled in but did not complete the program	6
2	Fathers from cohorts 1 and 2 who had completed the HSE program	9
3	Fathers from cohorts 3 and 4 who had completed the HSE program	12
4	Fathers from cohorts 1 to 4 who had completed the College Prep program	6

From focus group 1 we wanted the perspective of men who had not completed the program to hear why they did not finish and what (if anything) about the program they would have wanted to change. From groups 2 and 3 we listened for differences between the earlier and later cohorts given program changes over time that included adding a stipend, lengthening the enrollment process, and separating the College Prep and HSE students. From group 4 we wanted to hear specifically about the College Prep program and how participants felt about it.

This report addresses the following research questions:

- What do participants gain from the program?
- Have the Young Men’s Initiative objectives to improve young men’s education, employment opportunities, and parenting been achieved?
- How important is the program’s location on a college campus?
- What program modifications might improve outcomes?
- Can and should this program be replicated or expanded?

## The CUNY Fatherhood Academy Program Model

The Academy began in spring 2012 with funding from OSF/CBMA. The model emphasizes what program staff call its three pillars: education, employment, and parenting for students preparing to take the HSE exam<sup>9</sup> or preparing for college. The HSE classes are free for students and are offered on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Fridays from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. In addition to academic coursework, the curriculum includes parenting and health workshops, employment preparation, and a men’s support group. College Prep participants come Wednesdays and Fridays from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. to attend workshops on preparing for college, participate in fatherhood and parenting classes, and receive personal and career counseling. They join HSE participants in parenting workshops on Fridays. They also have internships in different departments of the college. As of January 2014, four cohorts had completed the program (table 2). In total, CFA has enrolled 118 HSE participants and 29 College Prep participants over the past two years.

Program staff at CUNY include a director, a program coordinator, a counselor/case manager, and an academic instructor. The program also has a part-time job developer, a part-time administrative assistant, and student interns from LaGuardia Community College who work approximately 15 hours per week assisting the administrative assistant, program staff, and participants as needed. As of January 2014, a part-time alumni and retention specialist was hired to follow employment placement and related matters.

Entry into the program begins with a three-day orientation during which interested fathers take the literacy component of the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE). Applicants must score at least a 7.0 on the TABE reading component<sup>10</sup> to progress to the next stage, a meeting with a counselor and HSE instructor for further assessment. Candidates are then interviewed by the CFA program coordinator, who makes the final determination about their eligibility for the program. The program begins with a three-week trial period or “boot camp” to test if students are willing and able to participate and maintain high attendance. After the three-week boot camp, HSE students take an HSE predictor test to assess their current HSE proficiency. Participants who complete boot camp and return for the fourth week of the program are considered enrolled and eligible to complete the remaining 13 weeks. In the more recent cohorts, approximately 80 percent of students have completed boot camp and have gone on to complete the program—very few drop out after the initial three-week period. (See appendix B for a more detailed program description.)

Participants in the HSE program are taught by a single instructor from 9:30 to 12:30 on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Fridays. In the afternoons on Monday and Tuesday, the group divides and attends either a study group or a parenting workshop, switching on the next day. In cohort 1, the College Prep participants were in class with the HSE participants, but starting in cohort 2, they have been separated except for the parenting component on Friday afternoon. The College Prep participants do not receive any formal educational or academic training in the CFA program, although some fathers have tutored fellow participants in the HSE program.

HSE students are divided into two groups for the parenting component; one group meets on Monday afternoons, and the other on Tuesday afternoons. College Prep participants meet on Wednesdays, and fathers from both the HSE and College Prep programs attend a Friday afternoon parenting session. The parenting component combines formal skills training and education with informal discussions. The large Friday sessions can include guest speakers or an instructional video. The small sessions earlier in the week are jointly led by the program coordinator and the case manager and cover topics such as communication in relationships, financial stability, and ways for fathers to interact and bond with their children.

Because CFA is committed to having participants focus on the fatherhood and education program components, outside employment is not strongly encouraged in the early part of the program. During the latter part of the program, fathers may access several employment resources, including a job counselor, internship opportunities, and clothing for interviews.

Program participation is free of charge. Program benefits include a stipend (\$50/week), a paid transit card<sup>11</sup> for New York City public transportation, a LaGuardia College student ID, and access to CUNY facilities and services including Single Stop,<sup>12</sup> an office that educates and helps students access resources such as health insurance and child care subsidies.

**TABLE 2. Cohort Schedule**

Cohort	16-week session
1	March–June 2012
2	September–December 2012
3	March–June 2013
4	September–December 2013

### **Academic emphasis in a college setting**

Although a formal logic model has not been developed, several interviewees separately described a similar logic or theory of change model underlying how the intervention should produce outcomes. The model emphasizes education, and ideally college, as a tool for improving employment opportunities. Coupling parenting training, formal education, employment workshops, and internships, the program works to help fathers become better parents and better providers. An ongoing and longer-term goal is to improve child well-being.

One person explained, “The overall logic model is if you improve a young father’s economic viability and competitiveness, educational credentials, work experience, then you position him to be a much better parent. The program has really operated with these parallel objectives of engaging young men to become better parents, but much of the activity in the program is educationally based, whether it’s high school equivalency or preparation for the academic expectations of college or job readiness.”

Others were more explicit that their “hidden agenda” is college. As one individual said, “Our overall goal is to encourage a college-going mentality.” In fact, according to those involved in the program’s development, CFA’s location on a college campus was central to its design. Its location is “a signal to young men that they belong in higher education,” one person said. Another advantage is the access and connection to other services, supports, and college programming.

## Unique among fatherhood programs

The model is unlike most fatherhood programs. Although the combined focus on employment, education, and parenting may not be unique, CFA's placement on a college campus sets it apart from similar programs.

CFA is also distinguished by the young fathers it serves. As a planner remarked, "This in some ways is the hardest population to work with since they're young and inexperienced. They're still not settled in their roles as fathers. The unemployment rate is much higher; they have less patience."

In addition, CFA differs from other fatherhood programs in its deliberate decision to avoid a formal relationship with child support enforcement. Although research indicates that child support services can be a critical component of fatherhood programs (Martinson and Nightingale 2008), CFA's planners did not want a relationship with child support enforcement services to interfere with program eligibility and recruitment. As one planner explained, "We didn't want having a child support order to be [a criterion] of eligibility; we didn't want it to be a formal arrangement between them, but we did work with them a lot."

Programs that have worked successfully with child support agencies credit the relationship with helping fathers better understand their rights and responsibilities, improving fathers' opinions of and cooperation with child support payments, and in some cases leading child support agencies to modify payment arrangements. The relationship can also have a downside for programs, however, so CFA's decision not to formalize a partnership also finds support in the literature. Among challenges to recruitment and enrollment, some programs cite that fathers are wary of any involvement with child support enforcement (Martinson and Nightingale 2008), suggesting that fathers who might otherwise benefit from fatherhood programs are often deterred.

## Overview of Findings

Although the program attracts and enrolls young fathers who are expressly motivated to take part, CFA participants are not dissimilar from young men of their same age and circumstances in terms of background, labor market experiences, involvement with their children, and engagement with the criminal justice system.

The focus group participants (who our analysis shows are similar to all program participants) valued the program highly and thought it had the combination of activities and supports they needed. Key characteristics they highlighted in their comments included that the program is for fathers only, has dedicated staff, and is located on a college campus. Most thought that the program started them on the right path to the future.

When the comments of participants are combined with program data, it appears that the program does very well on some expected outcomes, most notably the parenting and education outcomes. Although asserting that they were good fathers coming into the program, participants said that the program helped them increase their parenting knowledge, and data suggest that they may be somewhat more engaged with their children after program participation. The program has a strong record in terms of HSE certification. The pass rates for program participants are as high or higher than rates for other populations taking the exam in New York State.

College enrollment and employment are additional goals mentioned by program administrators and participants. College enrollment is relatively low in the short term, but this may reflect the multitude of pressures that the young men face when getting other aspects of their lives in order. The employment gains appear to be small in the short run. Employment continues to be unstable or elusive for these young men. Among fathers in our focus groups about half were employed after program completion.<sup>13</sup> Little is known at this point about the long-term impact that the program might have on higher education and employment outcomes as the postprogram period is still quite short.

In the following sections we discuss these findings in greater detail, beginning with the characteristics of fathers and the findings from the focus groups.



## Section 2. About the Fathers

To evaluate CFA we wanted to know what effect it has had on fathers who participate: how it has changed their outlook, education, employment, and parenting. In this section we highlight what focus group participants said about their experiences in the Academy and how those experiences have affected their lives. We place their remarks in context with CFA administrative program data to understand how the focus group participants compare with other program participants.

According to the focus groups, the Academy uses a unique program model, employs caring and skilled staff, and has positively changed participants' lives. The program is distinctive for its focus on fathers, its location on a college campus, and its provision of case management and counseling services. First, the men were quick to highlight that the program is exclusively for fathers, which many participants hadn't found in similar programs. The CFA fathers form a bond that some program staff described as a "brotherhood." When we asked CFA participants whether the focus on fathers motivated them to enroll, almost everyone responded positively. "By the end of the cohort we all became a family," one father added, followed by another who said, "We pull each other up when one person starts to slack."

Second, the program is located on a college campus, which the young men found to be motivational. Several agreed with one father's comment: "It's just a good environment to be in. It's good motivation. If this person can be in college, why can't I?"

Third, CFA emphasizes counseling alongside education, employment, and parenting services. Several fathers described struggles with anger and other difficulties that had contributed to some of them dropping out of high school. The Academy was a supportive environment that accepted them and helped them work through their struggles. "Here I can talk to [program staff]," one said. Another added, "When I'm home just mad about something, I can call them and it all works out."

Related to its uniqueness, every focus group praised the Academy's staff. The fathers shared how staff cared about them, motivated them, and helped them outside the classroom. Staff were known to advocate and testify in support of participants in custody hearings or other legal matters. One father said, "[Program staff] called all the lawyers that he know[s] to try to help me with my case. That was a blessing for me." The young men also described phone calls on Christmas and text messages during New York Knicks basketball games (presumably about the young men's favorite or rival basketball team).

Several men described the program as life changing. It gave them the push they needed to accomplish a goal—getting a diploma, getting a better job, enrolling in college. "This sealed the deal on changing my life. It gave me a reason to do what I needed to do." An entire focus group nodded in agreement when one father remarked, "You leave to go to class in the morning and you come back and you see the same kids on the block, and you look at them and are like, 'damn, people used to look at me like that.'"

The nearly unanimous assessment, even among participants who hadn't completed the program, was that the Academy started them on the path to a better future. However, how typical were the focus group participants of Academy participants as a whole? How typical are Academy participants of most young fathers in New York City? To answer these questions, we examined program intake data.

Based on TABE reading scores, contact with children, and arrests at intake, the focus group participants were very much like other program participants. They had modestly higher reading scores but similar contact with their children and similar criminal justice system histories compared with all CFA participants. Comparing the 19 focus group participants who completed the HSE program to the 89 CFA participants who completed the HSE program, we see higher TABE scores and more frequent contact with children among the 19 focus group members at intake. By the end of the program, more focus group members had also passed the General Educational Development (GED) exam<sup>14</sup> (81 percent versus 65 percent). We note that CFA staff recruited the men for the focus groups and may have had an easier time recruiting fathers who felt positively about their experiences, perhaps, for example, men who passed the GED. Although we suspect this group may feel more favorably about the HSE program overall, they are still well suited to critique and represent the program given their similarities to all CFA participants.

Focus group participants may have differed in additional ways we did not observe, but we conclude that on balance the men were fairly representative of Academy participants as a whole.

## Profile of Program Participants

To understand how similar or different CFA participants are to young men in New York City and nationally, we used CFA program intake and activity data to look at fathers' involvement with children, their education, and their arrest experiences. As discussed below, we conclude that neither focus group participants nor all Academy participants are unusual for young, similarly situated fathers, and it is likely that more of the city's fathers would enroll and benefit if given the opportunity. However, the program does prioritize individuals with the motivation and commitment to completing the full 16 weeks, and in that sense is selective. We discuss the implications at the end of this section.

### Caring fathers breaking stereotypes, but not unusual

The young men who enroll<sup>15</sup> in the Academy identify strongly as fathers and describe themselves as having grown up in the streets. Most are enrolled in the Academy's HSE program (80 percent)<sup>16</sup> and see CFA as a second chance to get right what they had gotten wrong by not completing school (or pursuing college) or by associating with friends and peers who were not focused on school. Several discussed shifting their focus and having new motivation (thanks to their children) to think seriously about the future and make decisions that will benefit their sons or daughters. As committed fathers, they were drawn to advertisements about the program or else alerted to the opportunity by people close to them who recognized their readiness to move ahead.

**TABLE 3. CFA Participant Characteristics**

CFA participant characteristic	n	Average
Black	141	61.7%
Latino	141	37.6%
Average age (at intake)	147	21.9 years
Number of children (mean)	144	1.3
Expecting child (at intake)	144	4.8%
Average age of children	144	20 months
Lives with child's mother or her family	145	20.0%
Average TABE reading score	144	9.6
Ever arrested (self-reported)	146	44.5%
Ever convicted (self-reported)	146	5.5%
<b>Contact with children<sup>a</sup></b>		
Sees at least one child daily (among all fathers)	133	57.9%
Sees at least one child daily (among nonresident fathers)	66	32.0%
Lives with at least one child part time	136	49.4%
<b>Receipt of public assistance</b>		
Cash assistance	145	4.8%
SNAP (food stamps)	145	24.1%
Medicaid	145	22.1%
Living in public housing	145	12.4%

**Source:** CFA administrative intake and enrollment program data.

**Note:** Sample sizes vary because not all fathers answered all questions.

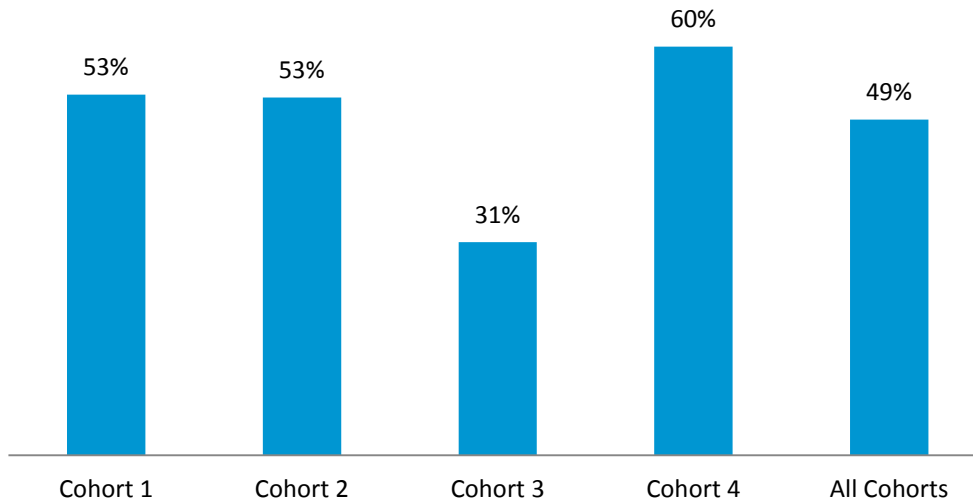
a. Excludes fathers with missing values because their child was not yet born.

The men were relatively new fathers: the average age for their children was 20 months. They reported spending time regularly with their child. Across all cohorts nearly half (49 percent) lived with at least one of their children when they enrolled in CFA (table 3). The proportion living with their children ranged



from a low of 31 percent in cohort 3 to a high of 60 percent in cohort 4 (figure 2). Most fathers felt they had a good relationship with their children, and 32 percent of nonresident dads saw at least one child daily.

**FIGURE 2. Percentage of Fathers Living with at Least One of Their Children**



Source: CFA Administrative intake and enrollment program data.

Note:  $n = 136$  (out of 147).

### **CFA fathers possibly typical of unmarried or nonresident fathers**

In contrast to media representations and stereotypes about unmarried and absent fathers, CFA enrollees appear to have relatively frequent contact with their children. But research on unmarried fathers suggests the CFA men may be more typical than once thought.

When we compare CFA participants to fathers from 20 large US cities<sup>17</sup> who participated in the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, which looks at unmarried couples with newborns, we see similar rates of reported contact with children (Edin, Tach, and Mincy 2009). Approximately 47 percent of black unmarried fathers and 58 percent of Latino unmarried fathers in the Fragile Families study lived with their children during their first year. This is similar to the 44 percent of black CFA fathers and 59 percent of Latino CFA fathers living with at least one child at the time of enrollment in CFA.<sup>18</sup> Among the nonresident fathers in the Fragile Families study, more than a third had seen their child eight days or more in the past month (Edin et al. 2009). This percentage also is comparable to fathers in CFA, 41 percent<sup>19</sup> of whom were nonresident and reported seeing at least one child one to two times per week, with most fathers seeing them every day.

Edin and colleagues (2009) examined father involvement among Fragile Families fathers during their child's first five years and concluded that fathers are less absent or unengaged than is typically believed to be the norm. However, often a father's initial involvement declined when he or the child's mother entered into a different romantic relationship, especially when the new partner also had children. The researchers found that fathers may then spread their time between their own and their new partner's children (Edin et al. 2009). Although concluding that fathers' involvement was higher than expected, the authors acknowledged that for child well-being, the decline in father engagement over time is still troubling and problematic.

The fact that fathers tend to engage less with their children over time suggests a potentially important role that CFA may play in young fathers' lives. Perhaps reaching the young men early, providing parenting education, and encouraging commitment to their children will shield against decreased involvement should the father's and mother's romantic relationships change. It is too soon to determine whether this is the case, and without a suitable comparison group of fathers, this hypothesis is unable to move beyond speculation. However, this may be a research question that CFA planners will want to explore in a future evaluation.

### **Disconnected from school and work**

Despite commitment to their children, CFA participants are at serious risk educationally and financially, which also puts their children at risk. Low-income men experience frequent unemployment spells and persistent poverty (Simms et al. 2013). And low-income unmarried fathers face challenges, very similar to low-income single mothers, in providing for their children. Obstacles include low educational attainment, little work experience, and poor health (Sorensen and Zibman 2001). In their nationwide study of low-income nonresident fathers who had not paid child support, Sorensen and Zibman (2001) concluded that men under these circumstances often are not paying child support because they cannot afford to do so. Fathers with similar barriers as low-income mothers do not have the same supports, and often struggle more to make ends meet. These fathers do not access government benefits and supports such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, food stamps,<sup>20</sup> Medicaid, and earned income tax credits as frequently as mothers.

We see potential parallels among CFA participants and the fathers in the Sorensen and Zibman (2001) study. Most fathers in that study had a high school diploma or less, and although the average age was 36, only 30 percent were working at the time they were surveyed (Sorensen and Zibman 2001). Despite describing older men from an earlier time period, the general conclusions about the men's risks and barriers to employment hold true for men in the CFA program: low educational attainment is a key risk that affects future employment. No or very limited employment affects fathers' ability to provide financially for their children.

Young fathers in the CFA focus groups felt the weight and stress of trying to find work without a high school or HSE diploma. Men in the College Prep program described similar challenges, despite having either a high school diploma or HSE credential.

### **Arrest rates about average**

Criminal convictions are another risk to employment and family stability. A substantial proportion of program participants had been involved with the criminal justice system. Focus group participants spoke about being arrested, and the program intake data revealed that nearly half of all CFA fathers reported being arrested. A much smaller share reported being convicted. Typically, a criminal record can drastically hurt men's employment chances, especially for men of color (Pager, Western, and Sugie 2009). Court-involved and formerly incarcerated individuals also face challenges in accessing public benefits. Arrests without conviction may not hurt employment opportunities and access to benefits in the same way, but once a person has come in contact with law enforcement, they could be subject to increased scrutiny in their communities and are at greater risk for subsequent arrest or conviction.

CFA participants' high rate of criminal justice system involvement is not above the national average for low-income young men of color. A nationwide study of children and adolescents found that 49 percent of black males and 44 percent of Latino males have been arrested by age 23 (Brame et al. 2014). This finding suggests that CFA is attracting participants who are similar to their national peers with regard to arrest history.

### **Varied reading ability and academic proficiency**

CFA fathers start the program ranging academically from nearly college ready to reading at a 5th grade level. Participants with a high school or HSE diploma attend the College Prep program, and young men without a diploma attend the HSE program. At intake all participants take a reading test, the literacy component of the TABE. The CFA program sets its minimum recommended TABE score for enrollment at

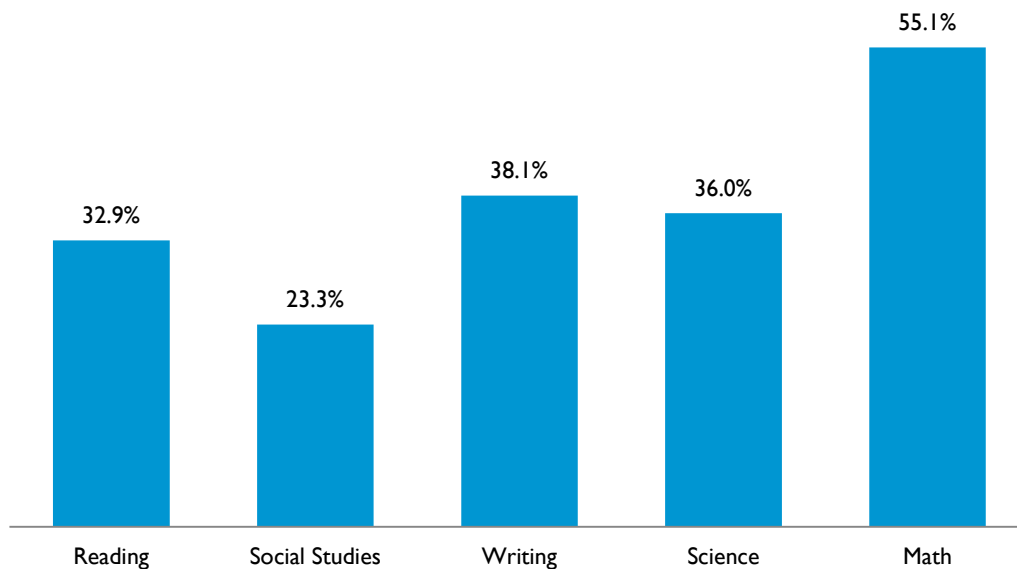
7, or a seventh grade reading level, but program providers sometimes make exceptions. “We usually look for people with at least a 7, but there are some cases where people with lower scores convince [program staff] that they are really passionate,” one person said.

The average TABE reading score among the first four HSE cohorts was 9.6, ranging from 5.6 to 12.9. The average TABE score for students in College Prep was 11.2, ranging from 6.2 to 12.9. We look at the relationship between TABE reading scores and HSE exam pass rates in the education and employment section of this report, but conclude here that the program appropriately targets young men able to benefit from the 16-week program and eventually pass the HSE exam.

The GED exam (the HSE exam used in New York prior to 2014) tested five subject areas: reading, social studies, writing, science, and math. Sometimes CFA participants come to the program having already taken all or part of an HSE exam but having not passed one or more subjects in the exam. HSE participants in cohorts 2 through 4 took an HSE practice or “predictor” test at intake in subjects they may not have taken or passed before. To pass the GED exam, test takers needed to score at least 410 on every subject and have an overall score of 2,250. Test takers did not need to retest in a subject they had passed before, but they needed to have passed the official test and not a predictor.

Relative to other subjects, more CFA participants are weak in math when they start the program (figure 3). They are strongest in social studies. The program could use predictor scores to target the HSE instruction around participants’ more challenging subjects. The range in proficiencies and reading ability underscores how responsive program staff and instructors must be to keep participants engaged and committed throughout the entire 16 weeks. As we discuss below, the program has devised effective strategies for maintaining engagement and commitment and thus retaining participants.

**FIGURE 3. Percentage of HSE Participants from Cohorts 2 to 4 That Failed GED Predictor Subject Tests**



**Source:** GED data from CUNY’s CFA student data.

**Notes:** Sample size = 89 participants. Missing: reading = 4 missing; social studies = 3 missing; writing = 5 missing; science = 3 missing; math = 11 missing. Participants took more than one subject area test.

### **Similarity of Academy participants to other young fathers**

The Academy serves a group of young men who are fairly typical of individuals in their age group and in similar circumstances. Based on fathers’ contact with children and even their arrest experiences, we

conclude the young fathers enrolled in CFA may be quite similar to their peers who have had children but have not completed high school, earned an HSE diploma, or attended college. However, the fact that CFA participants have taken steps to enroll in the program suggests they may be more focused on education and college and more motivated to improve their future than some of their peers. If this is true, CFA participant outcomes may not be attributed solely to the program, because motivation is often a factor in success. However, given what focus group participants reported regarding their friends and associates, we conclude that CFA participants are not entirely unique and that many other young fathers would likely participate in the program if given the opportunity. Focus group participants tended to agree that other fathers would benefit from the program, especially if it were located in more colleges across the city.

### **Section 3. Recruitment, Enrollment, Retention**

*“I was running the streets and had dropped out of high school. My friend had the flyer and he gave it to me. I had a daughter to worry about and had a good head on my shoulders so I decided to try it.” – CFA HSE student*

The Academy reaches most of its participants with a narrow but successful recruiting approach, advertising through flyers posted in places young low-income fathers may frequent, such as public housing communities, local community organizations, and city agencies. The Academy also tries to reach young fathers through several networks such as other Open Society Foundations programs, the NYC Dads website, and social media or other web-based resources. However, most participants reported learning of the program through posted flyers.

At present the program recruits enough fathers to nearly reach its enrollment goals. Although this recruitment level is reasonable from a programming standpoint, it is not ideal if the program hopes to expand. Expansion will require exploring other effective ways to reach prospective candidates. Program staff take six to eight weeks to recruit approximately 40 fathers for each cohort. This time requirement limits the number of times a year the program can be offered. If the program is to expand and move from being a promising program to being a proven program, this recruitment method will be insufficient. The program would need to attract more fathers if future plans include a quantitative evaluation to determine if CFA participants are truly better off than they would have been without the program. To test this question rigorously CFA would need a comparison group of fathers equally interested in CFA but not able to enroll due to program capacity constraints.

The CFA program has achieved about 93 percent of its target enrollment goals. Cohorts 1 to 4 had 148 fathers enrolled. Fathers from all five of New York City’s boroughs were represented, although Staten Island had the fewest participants at 2 percent. Two-fifths (39 percent) were from Brooklyn, a quarter (25 percent) from the Bronx, and nearly a fifth from both Manhattan (18 percent) and Queens (17 percent).

Program retention has improved between the first two and last two cohorts from a low of 61 percent in cohort 1 to 89 percent in cohort 3 and 83 percent in cohort 4. The CFA program shows that fathers can be successfully recruited and retained. Although recruitment and retention is a challenge for some fatherhood programs (Martinson and Nightingale 2008), this has not been the case for CFA. As discussed below, program administrators have made effective adjustments to improve retention.

### **Word of Mouth and Flyers**

A primary recruiting strategy is through the New York City Housing Authority, which has assisted with outreach to New York City public housing residents. Over time, word of mouth has been another successful method. Family and friends see flyers and tell fathers they know, or former participants recommend the Academy to others.

According to available program data,<sup>21</sup> four-fifths of participants heard about the program from family or friends (43 percent) or flyers (39 percent). Focus group participants confirmed this, saying they

learned about CFA mainly through flyers and from others. Flyers were passed on to the young men by their mothers, their children's mothers, their caseworkers, and friends.

"My sister's father showed me the paper with the kid on it," shared one participant. "I was running around and I got locked up and when I came back he said I needed to do something before I get locked up again. He saw the flyer on a street post." Focus group participants also reported recruiting their own friends. A focus group participant said he learned about it through a friend participating in the program. "He was starting the program and he got me involved. And since it was a bunch of fathers, I knew I'd be around more mature guys."

## Children as a Primary Motivation

Practically all focus group participants said their children motivated them most. When asked how being a father influenced his decision to enroll, one participant said, "I grew up without a father and a mother and us just being present [in the program] speaks a lot. Period. We want our young ones to have more than what we did. I say I got to get this so that I can do for you what you need." A young father who admitted to only thinking about himself most of the time summed it well: "Now it's not about me. Now I have a son. Now it's all for him."

Some participants voiced frustrations not only at the lack of similar programs for young men, but the antagonizing and punitive system that exists for men in their situation. "There are a lot of programs for mothers. They don't have anything for fathers. That's how the system looks at us." The mere fact that the Academy views them as engaged parents deserving a chance to improve themselves and not idle fathers with negligent child support payments encourages the participants.

A number of focus group participants said they also applied to the program because of the HSE component. "I saw the flyer in the building," explained one father. "It had a GED program and that was what I was interested in."

Several men described exploring and even enrolling in other HSE programs. Some of the barriers that kept them from completing other programs included cost, enrollment size (other class sizes were larger), age of other enrollees (younger), and lack of support, especially around parenting, child care issues, and financial strain. From focus group participants' perspectives the situation was different in CFA, and these differences may make the program more suitable for other fathers in similar situations.

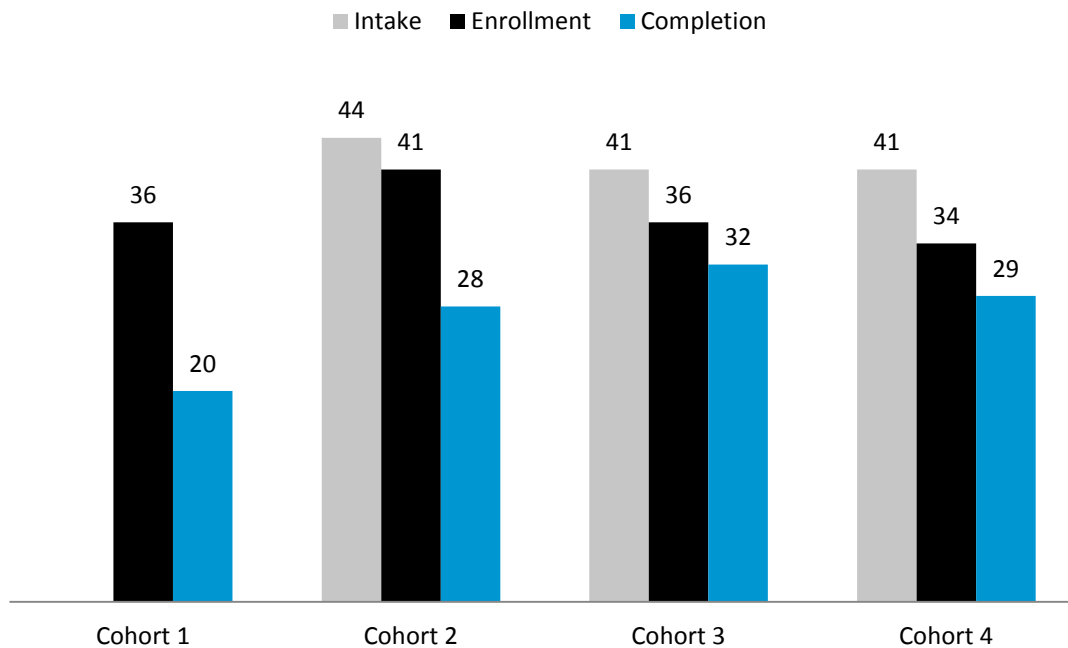
## Effective Retention

CFA planners consider retention to be a very important component of the program. Retention has eluded many fatherhood programs (Martinson and Nightingale 2008) and was a topic that received significant attention under the administration of former Mayor Michael Bloomberg. Retention is a key indicator that the program tracks, and program planners consider it one positive outcome they have achieved. As discussed below, several adjustments to the program design were made to improve retention after the first cohort.

Cohort 1 differed substantially from subsequent cohorts: the intake process was less stringent, consisting of a single interview; boot camp was shorter (only two weeks); the program did not provide a stipend; and the cohort was a single group, with both the College Prep participants and the HSE participants in classes and workshops together. Of the 147 program participants<sup>22</sup> to enroll in CFA in the first four cohorts, 109 fathers completed the program for a completion rate of 74 percent (figure 4). The percentage of CFA participants who completed the program has increased over time from a 57.1 percent completion rate in cohort 1 to 88.9 percent completion in cohort 3 before dropping to 85.3 percent in the last cohort. Among those in the HSE program, 75.4 percent of the 118 fathers at enrollment completed the program, with a high completion rate of 93.3 percent in cohort 3. Of the 37 fathers who left the program early, mostly for poor attendance, five left to pursue full-time work. Although the fathers appreciated the stipend, it wasn't the reason they enrolled. Program planners purposefully do not advertise the stipend, which focus group participants also mentioned. Some thought the stipend was smart: "You got young

fathers who are trying to get their education at the same time. And they can't work at the same time." Many said they would have come without the stipend, but the money also motivated them. "The money is not for us, it's for our children. It's helpful, but it's not about that. It helps us out and it motivates us more," one father explained.

**FIGURE 4. Program Intake, Enrollment, and Completion**



**Source:** Program intake and activity data.

**Note:** Intake numbers were not available for cohort 1. Cohort 1 also had one person missing information about completion status.

After the first cohort, the program changed the intake process to include three separate interviews, a TABE reading test, and a written essay. In addition to setting these standards, program planners designed the three-week boot camp to ensure that participants had the necessary motivation and commitment to make it through the Academy. These programmatic changes were implemented for recruiting more committed participants and raising retention rates: "We didn't always have this process. We didn't have this in the first cohort. We really just identified guys who were interested and invited them to orientation. The three-tiered process helps raise our retention." The data showed a noticeable change in retention rates; the incompleteness rate for subsequent cohorts dropped to 20 percent in the second cohort and around 18 percent for the final two cohorts.

## Why Some Fathers Leave the Program

In a focus group with six participants who hadn't completed the program, we discussed the reasons they and others left. The conversation mostly centered on complications in their own lives that had relatively little to do with the program itself. They described pressures balancing court dates, caring for children, and needing to find stable work. Although most understood that getting an HSE diploma required making it a priority, many were not able to do that while meeting their other responsibilities and eventually decided to leave. "I got started, and then my girl started making me feel guilty that I'm not helping out," said one man. "Then I missed some court dates and they were sending bills to my grandma's house and she didn't tell me. And I needed to leave the program to go work and get some money."



The men varied on what, if any, program changes might make it easier for more men to finish. Some wanted fewer days with more hours per day, others wanted more days with fewer hours each day, and still others thought the current schedule was fine. The men almost reached consensus regarding their desire to eliminate Friday sessions and instead hold classes on consecutive days. Some participants felt days off between classes caused some to become “lazy.” In addition, one father noted that he typically earned money on Fridays, so he was forgoing income by attending the program that day.

The fathers also discussed issues pertaining to program location and class size. Fathers lived throughout the city and had trouble committing uncompensated time away from work, family, and other responsibilities to travel to and from the campus. Everyone agreed offering the program in every borough would be ideal. Smaller classes would also have kept some of the men more engaged. One person left because, in his opinion, the classes kept getting sidetracked. Another person said, “I was in the first group and there were a lot of heads. And there wasn’t enough hours in the day to address everyone’s problems.” Another echoed, “[I]f they expand it there’d be less people [in the classroom] and people could learn more.”

No one described any problems with the staff or the focus on fathers. If anything they were inspired by both. Early in the discussion, one person shared, “I didn’t complete the program here. I completed the boot camp but towards the end of the program I had to go because some things that were happening in my life. But it was [program staff] who got me started, and I got my diploma somewhere else.”

He didn’t name the other program or why he was better able to complete it, but it was Academy staff that set him on the path.

## How to Reach More Fathers

Although the program has been successful in filling available slots with its current recruitment strategy, efforts to expand the pool of applicants might require supplementing the existing outreach efforts with new ones.

Focus group participants suggested that more young fathers could be reached by better targeting recruitment efforts to places where the young men can be found. Several young men suggested reaching out through the courts, jails, and shelters. The program can also be advertised online, through social media, and on television. And as one father added, “[A] nice billboard somewhere would catch people’s attention.” Program planners described using social media to advertise, but it does not appear that most fathers were aware of those efforts. Accordingly, the program may need to consider different social media sites and methods to reach potential participants directly.

Many fathers in the focus groups thought the program should expand the maximum age past 24 years. Focus group participants thought that older fathers could benefit from the program and that they themselves could learn from older fathers, who may be more mature. “The program is 18 to 24, and I think it should be older than that. I think if we let older fathers in, they have more experience and they would be able to teach more skills to the young kids [fathers].” Focus group members disagreed on the optimal age cut-off. Some proposed up to 30 years old, while others thought anyone over 26 would be in a different peer group.

## Programming Considerations

Currently, the program has limited capacity to expand and serve more fathers. A program expansion would require increased outreach efforts and an increase in staff. The Academy aims to enroll approximately 30 men in the HSE class with each cohort. Given the current program design, with only one HSE teacher, conducting more than one HSE class per cohort could be challenging, because, as several staff members mentioned, 30 people in the classroom becomes difficult to manage.

In terms of increasing the population of fathers that they can serve, the staff believes that the limiting factor is not a lack of demand on behalf of young fathers, but rather a lack of staff to support more fathers. “We would need two more GED instructors at least. . . . The biggest bottlenecks would be counselor[s] and

GED instruction,” one person explained, recognizing that they would need more instructors and more counselors if the program were to grow.

Because at present the program attracts the exact number of fathers it can serve, expanding would need to include increased, and perhaps different, outreach strategies. When asked how important program outreach has been to the model, one planner remarked, “I don’t know if there’s been a particular push. We clearly have many black and Latino young men [in the program].” The suggestion was that the current methods have produced the right number of eligible fathers given the program’s size. Increasing outreach would potentially mean they couldn’t serve all applicants who were qualified for the program.

Although the program maintains a waiting list, it is not for eligible fathers who are denied access to the program. Instead, it is a by-product of the recruitment cycle; that is, interested fathers may contact the program at any time, but enrollment only occurs twice a year. Staff keep a list of interested fathers to contact for the next cohort. As one staff member stated, “So far, we’ve gotten to the numbers that we’ve needed to do. But the recruitment is ongoing, so we have a waiting list, but we’ve never gotten to the point where we had to turn people away.”

## Section 4. Educational and Employment Outcomes

*“I failed [the GED] the first time and am going for it again. It’s hard right now. Don’t get me wrong, it’s good to put in your time and get your GED and stuff, but at the same time I need to get a job and provide for my daughter.” – CFA HSE student*

The Academy emphasizes education over short-term employment and encourages participants to think about their education as a path to a longer-term career. Still, the program recognizes young fathers have very real and immediate financial needs. The program balances this by encouraging HSE participants to focus on the HSE exam while they’re in the program and by offering employment assistance and counseling toward the end of the 16 weeks. They also provide a \$50 weekly stipend<sup>23</sup> and provide a free public transportation transit card. Fathers are not dissuaded from working during the program if they have a job already or find one during the program, but are strongly encouraged to complete the program and get their HSE diploma first. The College Prep program also emphasizes education and an eventual college degree as a launching pad for a career and not just short-term employment. But in contrast to the HSE program, it provides participants with immediate job counseling and placements in paid internships throughout LaGuardia Community College at the beginning of the program.

The education-first strategy appears to be successful, at least among HSE program participants, who have passed the GED at higher than average rates (see below). College prep students have applied to college and some have enrolled, although it is difficult to know from our study whether these are higher than average rates. On employment, participants with and without an HSE diploma appear to cycle in and out of work. Below we discuss what participants and program planners had to say about each component and we present findings from program intake data.

### Education

The educational component in many respects is the program’s cornerstone. CFA is purposefully located within LaGuardia Community College, and program planners emphasize their agenda to encourage a “college-going mentality.” At a minimum, they hope HSE participants will complete the program and pass the HSE exam, even if passing takes more than one try. But ultimately, planners would like to see all students striving for college. One CFA planner described this goal as follows: “We knew for some [fathers] college might not be for them and we could refer them to training programs or find them employment, but our goal is to get them college ready and then hand them off to CUNY ASAP (Accelerated Study in Associate Programs)<sup>24</sup> or something similar.”



The message about college has reached the fathers. As one CFA participant told us, “I wasn’t even thinking about college until I got here.”

But according to one administrator, college is not the only marker of success. “I would love to see everyone taking their GED and enrolling in a college. At the end of the day these are fathers. And I want them to be in their children’s lives and be responsible. But guys have different feelings on where they want to go. It could be just that they graduated from the programs. They committed to something. Some don’t get the GED on their first try. Usually by the second time around they pass.”

When discussing the HSE program, focus group participants provided two reasons for enrolling: (1) to get their HSE diploma and enroll in college or (2) to get the HSE diploma and use the credential to secure employment. In both cases the HSE was a stepping stone to something better for their families. When asked what they would be doing without the Academy, men gave two answers. They would still be doing what they had been doing, which as one stated involved nothing of substance: “I’d still be in the streets.” Or they would get their HSE somewhere else, but at a cost. “[I] would have gone to [another program] to get my GED and would have taken out loans.”

Noting that the Academy should be available to all young fathers like him, one father said, “Yeah, this [program] got me something that was I always missing, my GED. I think every borough, every CUNY school should have this program. There’s enough money in America to fund these programs and we need them. Everyone needs to get a part of this.”

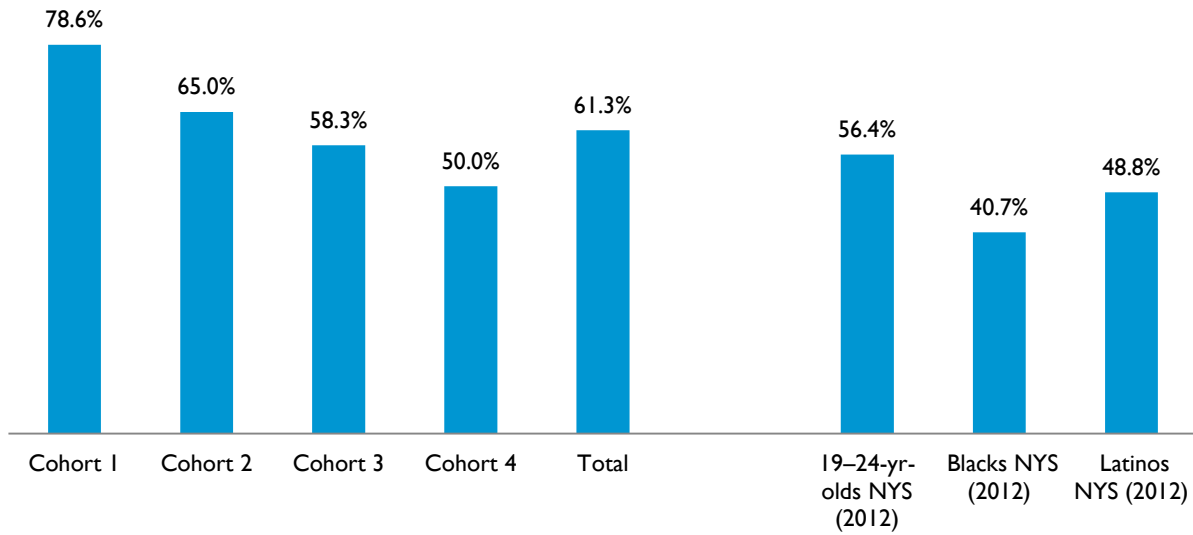
### **Fathers’ scores higher than state average**

The program appears to have succeeded in encouraging a higher share of participants enrolled in the HSE program to take the HSE exam in each subsequent cohort. In cohorts 1 and 2, 48 and 61 percent, respectively, took the exam. In cohorts 3 and 4, those percentages increased to 80 and 85 percent, respectively. Program staff had an added urgency following the fourth cohort, which ended in December 2013, because the HSE exam was changing from the GED to the Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC) in January 2014. This change meant the December 2013 exam was the final opportunity for participants to take the test for which they had prepared, the GED.

Based on GED pass rates, the outcomes for CFA fathers were at or above average compared to all test takers in New York State in 2012 (figure 5). For these comparisons we used state GED scores published by the GED Testing Service (2013). We did not have comparable information on New York City. The overall 61 percent pass rate among the 80 HSE enrollees who took the exam exceeds the proportion for all black test takers (40.7 percent), all Latino test takers (48.8 percent), and all 19- to 24-year-olds (56.4 percent) in New York in 2012. It is likely that the higher pass rates in earlier cohorts (figure 5) reflect the fact that some fathers had retaken the test. The 50 percent of cohort 4 fathers who passed took the exam immediately after their program ended. We know from the focus groups that several who didn’t pass planned to retake it.

Each cohort passed the GED in rates that exceed the state average for all Blacks and Latinos taking the test. Moreover, they appear to have done as well or better than other groups. According to the GED statistical report, the CFA participants do not fit the average GED profile. Nationally, the average age of test passers is 25.5 years. Over half are male (59 percent) and white (52.4 percent). Among test passers, 21 percent are black and 13 percent are Latino. By these indications, CFA’s HSE program appears strong.

**FIGURE 5. GED Pass Rate by Cohort among All CFA Testers between June 2012 and April 2014**



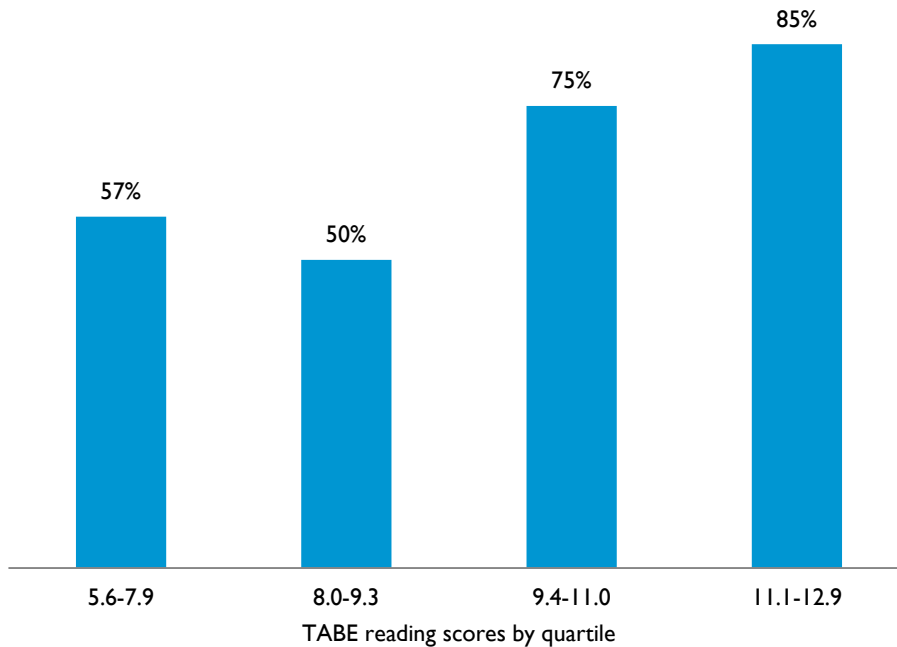
**Source:** Program intake and activity data.

**Notes:** The number of test takers in cohort 4 (n = 22) was taken from quarterly reports because that information had not yet been added to the program intake and activity data at the time of the analysis. Overall, 118 participants enrolled in the HSE program and 80 (68 percent) took the test. Among those taking the GED, 61 percent passed.

### **Initial reading literacy and passing the HSE exam**

One question program planners may want to consider is whether the program has as much success preparing fathers with lower TABE literacy scores as they do for fathers with higher TABE literacy scores. The Academy gives the TABE literacy test prior to enrollment, and we observe that most fathers in the top two quartiles of the TABE later pass the GED (75 and 85 percent); fathers in the bottom two quartiles lag behind, with 60 and 53 percent passing (figure 6). It is unclear why fathers in the second quartile may have fared less well than men in the other quartiles on the exam. It is worth pointing out, however, that even the bottom quartiles of program participants passed the GED in rates higher than the New York State average for black and Latino test takers, and fared almost as well as all 19- to 24-year-olds in the state. So it appears the program has some success with fathers with lower TABE literacy scores.

**FIGURE 6. Reading Scores and GED Pass Rates among Cohorts 1 to 3**



**Source:** Program intake and activity data.

**Notes:** The sample includes 57 of the 80 participants who took the GED, with one individual missing information. This figure includes cohorts 1 to 3 only as at the time of the analysis the program data did not include information on which members of cohort 4 had taken the GED.

### Improving the HSE component

Both staff and participants suggested ways to improve the HSE instruction. Some program staff thought it would be useful to have two instructors so the classes could be smaller. The participants also gave reasons for increasing the HSE staff. Although the young men were generally pleased with the instruction they received, they brought up the need for HSE instructors who can handle both the material and the classes better. An additional instructor could teach different subjects, presumably to better capture instructors' strengths. "The English part was good," one person said, "but we had an English teacher teaching us math. I wasn't learning the math part. I think you need to get someone who specializes in math."

About managing the classroom, one father felt instructors needed to better handle "that one person who will make distractions," disrupt the class, and ultimately, learning. "There were a lot of grown ass men and some didn't know how to be grown ass men, ruining it for the rest of us guys," said one participant. "We need someone [in the classroom] who's more aggressive," another explained. "The reason we're here is because we were hard-headed in high school. You have to hit it like that—if you're not here to listen then get out of my class."

Some young men indicated that aside from more instructors, they would have welcomed being challenged with more work. "We needed more work, more writing, more homework," one father said. "More subjects too," added another, like public speaking, business classes, and the opportunity to learn a trade.

As seen in figure 3, math is the weakest subject for most of the fathers, so the program may want to consider enhancing their math instruction. At the same time, as reflected in the range in reading ability and academic proficiency at intake, the fathers have very diverse needs and preferences. For example, one father felt he learned enough about math, but needed more reading and science. Having more instructors and smaller classes would better address these staff and participant concerns.

Prominent on Academy planners' minds during our interviews in late fall 2013 was New York State's change from the GED to the TASC after January 2014. Staff and other stakeholders were focused on ensuring the then current cohort of students, cohort 4, was prepared and ready to take the final GED exam in December 2013 before the change. The TASC covers the same topics (which include reading/language arts, social studies, science, writing, and mathematics) as the GED, but it requires additional subject area knowledge (New York State Department of Labor 2013). Accordingly, some staff were concerned the new test will be harder, which further suggests that understanding students' proficiencies at intake and customizing instruction to best address problem areas will be necessary to maintain above-average HSE pass rates.

## **Applying for and enrolling in college**

For fathers in the College Prep program college is presumably a goal. In our focus group with six fathers who had completed College Prep, we asked whether they were most interested in a job or furthering their education after the program. Most agreed they needed money to go to college and for some that meant they needed a job first. One person said he wanted both, and because he had help from his child's mother he was able to go to school. Another who had less support with child care said finances had to come first: "I need to put my life in order before I go to college. I need someone to look after my daughter before I can get that in order."

Two men unequivocally said school had been their goal. As one explained: "For me it was more school [than work]. For me I would go out and get the same type of job over and over again. I was tired of it and I wanted to start working on my career. I want to work towards my future, what I want to do. And I feel like the Academy is helping me towards that."

Although their goals toggled between school and work, they all agreed their most important priority was their children. "I think for us," one said, referring to his peers, "our first priority is to take care of our children, and you need some finance to do that. But if I was like other people and didn't have kids, I could come to school. But my daughter comes first—before work and school."

The administrative program data included information about college enrollment after the program. According to the data, approximately 9 percent of participants (13 fathers) had enrolled.<sup>25</sup> Seven college enrollees were from the college prep program (or 24 percent of College Prep participants), and six were from the HSE program (or 5 percent of HSE participants). A higher percentage of College Prep participants had enrolled in college, which is not surprising given the HSE program's greater emphasis on making sure the fathers earned their HSE. Perhaps over time enrollment rates will rise for both groups, but it is too soon to tell.

## **Employment**

For College Prep participants the employment component includes internships at LaGuardia Community College in departments the fathers are interested in. It also includes career counseling, job coaching, and assistance from a job specialist. Workshops provide fathers with help with resumes, interviewing skills, and work etiquette and attire. Participants are also given leads about available jobs. For fathers in the HSE program, the employment component starts at the end of the program. As a CFA program planner explained, "We usually don't assist the GED group with jobs [at the beginning] because we want them to focus on their program. We wanted people to come back after their GED and they're welcome back anytime to meet with [the job specialist]."

As indicated above, Academy staff place less emphasis on employment among the HSE participants. Staff felt that in earlier cohorts HSE participants tended to leave the program once they found work.

Compared to education, employment is a secondary goal of the program. Program planners acknowledge its importance but distinguish between employment necessary in the short term for survival and paying bills and keeping the family fed versus long-term employment goals, which are better realized with more education.

Describing employment as secondary is not to say it is unimportant. In fact, the CFA program is housed within LaGuardia's career development center and draws on its available resources, including job counselors to provide career counseling. The counseling focuses on "the balance between employment now to survive and employment later after you get your education."

The Academy's relative emphasis on education over employment came about during the program's design when planners realized they would be targeting young men between the ages of 18 to 24 years. Initially it may have been more workforce-oriented, like the P.O.I.S.E.D. program for women. However, given the men's ages, planners thought they could "bring [the young men] up to speed academically in the short amount of time, because what we really wanted to do was get them into college."

## Employment challenges

It was apparent from the participant focus groups and staff interviews that stable work is an ongoing struggle for the men. Fathers in each of the focus groups—from those who did not complete the Academy to those who had gone on to attend college—described cycling in and out of work. Program planners discussed different challenges, ranging from finding employers willing to hire participants with criminal backgrounds to motivating participants to follow through with job leads.

One staff person told us, "You [the fathers] have to go out there and do the work. We can train and prep you, but you need to make it to the interview. That's the challenge."

A focus group participant made virtually the same statement. "They help you with your resume. I think they're really excellent in that department. They can help you get to the door *but you got to walk through it*" (italics added).

"There's a fear of success," one administrator said. "Some guys are right there and can't finish. It's hard when someone fears becoming someone that they've never been. It's a big step for them—they have to want to make this leap of faith and believe that this will be good for them in the long run."

Focus group participants felt the employment assistance was very good. "[The employment specialist] is perfect, [the specialist] know[s] how to get you a job," one person said. Another recounted the specific jobs the specialist helped with. "Yeah, [the specialist] helped me. After the program [the specialist] got me a job at [Job 1]. After that she helped me get a job at [Job 2]. I got the [Job 3] job on my own, but [the specialist] kicked things off for me."

Despite the assistance, work remains inconsistent for most of the fathers. Program data on employment outcomes are limited because they were not systematically collected on every father at regular intervals during and after the program. Among the 33 focus group participants, roughly half reported working currently. Several others were looking for work, and some had just lost a job.

## Life after the program

Focus group participants from cohorts 1 and 2 who had completed the HSE program had been out of the program for one to two years. We wanted to know whether they had achieved their educational goals and what they were doing currently. The fathers gave mixed responses. Three of the nine men were working. "I've been working, being a family person," one said. Another was trying to enroll in CUNY but needed to wait until fall given his "financial situation." The third worker had gone to prison in the interim. He was now working two jobs. "I'm doing relatively well now," he said.

The six nonworkers were looking for work, some having lost their jobs recently. The job seekers sounded more discouraged. "I was slacking for a while working off the books, but that finished. I failed the GED test a few months ago and [am] trying not to give up." Two participants who had earned their HSE after the program were also looking for work. One said, "I was working up until Monday last week. Now I'm looking for another job." The second father remarked, "I got my GED from here but right now just riding bikes and trying to not get in trouble."

Among all 33 focus group participants we did not see a pattern of more work among the earlier cohorts. Mostly it appears the fathers cycle in and out of employment, although half may be working at

any given time. Since we do not have data on the participants' employment histories before enrolling in CFA, we cannot say whether these numbers reflect an improvement, no change, or a decline. A future evaluation should explore this question more closely.

## **Programming Considerations**

### **Are these good educational and employment outcomes?**

Program participants have better than average HSE pass rates. Postsecondary education and employment outcomes are harder to assess without good measures of the fathers' experiences before enrolling as we do not know what might have changed (or improved) as a result of the program. Still, the qualitative data show that the program has been well-received, and fathers credit the program and its staff for changing their educational credentials, outlook, and employment prospects. We conclude that these are very promising outcomes that warrant additional evaluation.

### **Are both components necessary?**

Both the education and employment components are necessary for the program. Participants sought support for each and saw both as critical to their futures. Educational goals drew fathers to the program, but employment was a constant concern. Fathers needed to see a direct tie between their educational pursuits and financial benefits for their families; having job counselors and employment resources on hand helped fathers stay the course.

### **What refinements might the program consider?**

Based on feedback from focus groups, the program may want to think about the schedule and whether and how it supports fathers' maximum participation. Several people mentioned wanting consecutive days and having Fridays off. We're unable to make a recommendation but suggest staff and participants discuss this issue. HSE and parenting classes are held on Fridays, and any conflicts participants have on that day may adversely affect attendance.

A few participants wanted more classes, more work, and more math instruction. At intake, HSE participants are weakest in math compared to other subjects, so an enhanced focus on math, or ensuring the program hires strong HSE math instructors, would potentially increase HSE pass rates.

Focus group participants in both the HSE and College Prep program were generally satisfied with the employment support and assistance they received. Finding stable employment remains a struggle for some two years after completing the program. At least one participant suggested the program should help them sooner with locating work and preparing them for internships.

Employment is much less stable for individuals with a high school degree or less compared to individuals with some college. It may be too soon to tell whether the program may have a longer-term effect on education and employment outcomes. To understand the longer-term effects, the program would need to track participants' employment more systematically and frequently. Also, to truly understand outcomes, the program would need a way to better track participants' education and employment experiences several years after they have completed the program.

An alumni and retention specialist who was hired after cohort 4 (and was not evaluated as part of this study) is likely a promising addition to the program. At the time of the study, the fathers received support from program staff when they requested it, but since fathers were also contending with the ever-present challenges of securing income and taking care of their families, most would not initiate on-going contact on their own. The fathers could benefit greatly from dedicated continued support to ease their transition from the program and further their goals.



## Section 5. Parenting Outcomes

The parenting component has two main purposes: to impart parenting and relationship skills and knowledge and to provide a space for young fathers to share problems, thoughts, and solutions about child rearing and relationships with their children and children's mothers. Although short-term changes in parenting are difficult to measure or track, parenting is the component that appears to energize the participants and staff the most. The parenting component is the central thread that holds the program together. It keeps the participants connected and engaged with each other, and brings the HSE and College Prep participants together in a classroom once a week. It is also an important part of what distinguishes the program and its students from other HSE and college-readiness programs participants had considered. Below we discuss this component and what participants felt they gained from it.

The parenting training and discussions occur twice a week. The formal session that HSE and college prep students attend together is a structured class on Friday afternoons. Often the lesson may include a video or guest speaker. The informal men's group or support groups are on Monday or Tuesday afternoons. Half the HSE participants attend on Monday and the other half on Tuesday to keep the groups small (around 15 people). The men's group is a less-structured discussion to allow the men to discuss what is on their minds. One CFA participant described it this way: "[Program staff] would throw a topic at us [and] we'd say how we'd respond to it. We'd have open discussions."

When asked what he liked best about the parenting component, one young man said, "They told you some do's and don'ts. Everyone been brought up differently and it's hard to take it out of us but just because that's what we know doesn't mean it's right." The participant appreciated the instruction.

Others valued the camaraderie. "Everyone is just connecting," one young man explained. "Because we're all from different places, and if we were on the street we would be staring at each other like what's up [in a menacing way], like that's how we were brought up. Now it's different, we see each from different boroughs and we say what up [in a friendly way]. It's in a comfortable environment and we're on the same level."

Focus group participants indicated that being among other young fathers was helpful and productive. They were grateful to be among their peers, they learned a lot from each other's experiences from changing diapers to dealing with their children's mothers. "I've always been a good parent, but I learned a lot from my peers," one participant said.

### Measuring Parenting Component Effect

Program planners and implementers felt that the parenting component's effects were difficult to assess, especially given some fathers' already high involvement with their children at enrollment. Staff were also uncertain whether changes could be observed in such a short (16-week) period. They believed parenting effects would show up later and over a longer time period. One hope was that the program would improve child well-being. When it came to understanding children's outcomes, however, program planners were aware they are not tracking children and that questions about the program's effect on children could not be answered.

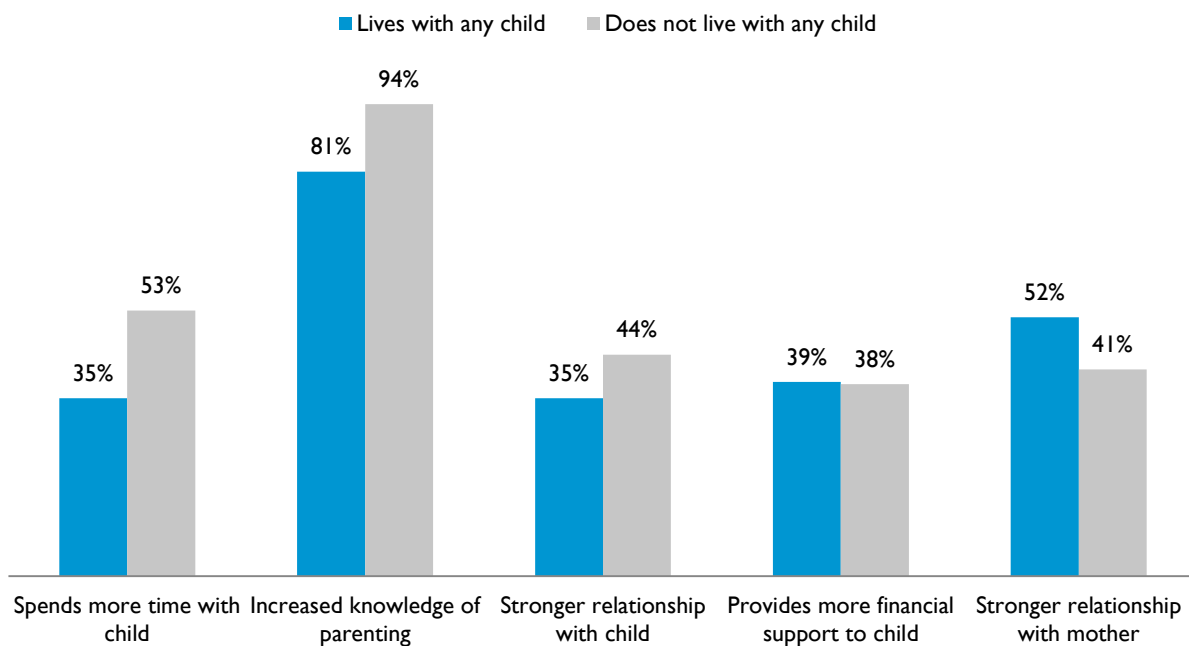
Still, staff and stakeholders were hopeful that fathers benefit from learning about child development and other critical parenting skills (e.g., when and how to seek medical care). Many saw the parenting component not just as a mechanism for imparting parenting skills, but as an opportunity for the young men to bond around a common experience. In addition to building community among the men, some think such a bonding experience also helps with retention and the critical goal of equipping them for the job market.

The difficulties measuring parenting skills were not because the program did not try. Program staff developed and administered a comprehensive survey at the beginning and end of each cohort about fathers' relationship and activities with their children and the children's mother. They knew from the high reports of parenting engagement at enrollment that it would be challenging to produce big shifts in the

parenting behaviors. “We looked at the [initial] survey data,” one person explained, “and we realized that those weren’t the right questions to ask. Other fatherhood programs asked how much time they spent with their kids, and our fathers’ pre numbers were off the charts.” The staff could see that the parents in CFA did not fit the typical fatherhood program mold.

Figure 7 compares fathers who lived with at least one child at enrollment to fathers who did not live with at least one child at enrollment. The sample is restricted to the 68 fathers who had available enrollment data and pre- and postsurvey data. Among this selective sample, figure 7 shows that a higher proportion of fathers who did not live with a child at enrollment (compared to fathers who did) credited the program with changes. More young men who were not living with their children at intake reported spending more time with them as a result of the program compared to resident fathers. More nonresident fathers gained parenting knowledge and a stronger relationship with their children compared to resident fathers. A similar proportion of resident and nonresident fathers reported providing more financial support to children as a result of the program. And by a 10 percentage point margin, more resident fathers credited the program with helping to improve their relationship with their child’s mother compared to nonresident fathers.

**FIGURE 7. Parenting Changes following Program for Fathers Living and Not Living with Their Child at Enrollment**



**Source:** CFA program intake and activity data merged with participation postsurvey.

**Notes:** The sample includes 69 participants who had completed CFA’s postprogram survey. However, four of the fathers had a missing value for child’s living situation. Two of the fathers’ children had not yet been born, so did not have a value for the living situation.

We see qualitative evidence from a postprogram survey administered by Academy staff that some of the fathers’ parenting behaviors changed. In the survey, participants had an opportunity to write comments. A few described new activities they have taken up with their children. “I’m more open to listening and spending as much time with them as possible,” shared one father. “I’m in his life more and play with him more often,” wrote another. A good number of CFA participants have begun reading to their children. “We started reading more together,” reported one father, a change echoed by others. One man



said he was teaching his daughter how to speak and say some words, while another shared that he was helping his son with homework.

They attribute these improvements to personal changes and decisions they've made because of CFA. "My relationship with my son has change[d] since the beginning of the academy because I have matured more and learned to spend more time with my son," wrote one father. Another wrote "I make myself more responsible for my actions when it comes to my daughter." "Seeing me go to school every day," explained one CFA graduate, "has inspired my son to want to go to school also."

## **Programming Considerations**

### **Are these good outcomes?**

Based on our interviews and supporting program data, we see rather consistently that program participants really value the parenting component. Fathers report gaining parenting knowledge and some increased interaction with their children. Beyond the knowledge gains, what fathers spoke about most was the connection with other fathers.

### **What is the relative value of the parenting component? Is it necessary?**

From participants' responses, we conclude that the parenting component is critical. The fact that the program is designed specifically for fathers attracted most of them to it. Although many reported they were already good fathers, nearly everyone said they learned more about parenting as a result of their participation.

By far, participants spoke most about the social and peer-learning aspects of the parenting component. They appreciated learning from each other. This appears to be a strong draw for the fathers and the program activity in which most of their bonding occurred. The informal discussions allowed the men to get to know each other personally and learn about the situations they had in common.

We do not have specific recommendations about the more formal parenting skills component because fathers did not discuss it as much (in either a positive or negative way). Several men indicated they were already good parents, which suggests they may have felt they already knew some of the information taught. However, we also see that most men reported that their parenting knowledge increased, and we cannot distinguish whether it was due to the formal parenting instruction or the informal parenting groups.

We also were unable to assess concrete changes in parenting skills, which might be something future pre- and postsurveys could better assess assuming that most participants take part.

### **What refinements might program staff consider?**

HSE and College Prep participants come together for parenting class on Fridays, which is also the day that poses scheduling troubles for some fathers. Staff may want to consider the class and workshop schedule and discuss it with the students. It is unclear whether and how the schedule may affect fathers' participation in the parenting component, or whether any aspects about the parenting class itself, such as having guest speakers and showing videos on occasion, may affect fathers' participation on Fridays. In light of some participants' suggestion that the program hold classes over three consecutive days rather than having the three-day curriculum spread over five days, alternative scheduling might be considered for this component.

## Section 6. On a College Campus

With its home at LaGuardia Community College, the Academy has classroom and administrative office space on the campus, as well as access to other CUNY resources such as continuing education programs and career counseling and planning and employment services. During their participation College Prep fathers are given paid internships in departments throughout the college. All participants may access Edith's Place, a nonprofit organization providing free clothing for job interviews, and Single Stop, a national nonprofit organization where eligible students can receive help accessing government benefits such as health insurance and child care subsidies. CFA participants learn about college transition programs such as CUNY Start, a 15- to 18-week program for students admitted to the college who need additional reading, writing, and math training before they start. Participants also learn about the CUNY Accelerated Study in Associate Programs, which is designed to help able students earn their associate's degree in no more than three years.

### The Importance of the College Setting

There was consensus among focus group participants that CFA's location on a college campus is instrumental to the program's effectiveness. Connecting men to college is central to the program's design and mission. Locating the program in a community college appears to make a difference. Participants contrasted it with HSE programs in other settings. For some, the location increased their motivation and self-confidence.

"This program is different from other GED programs," said one focus group participant. "It's on a college campus; you get that energy back being on campus."

"Yeah, I was in GED school before this and it wasn't like this," added another. "It was like being in jail. I wasn't there for long."

Being around college students changed the young men's self-identity as they saw new opportunities for themselves. "It feels good, like you're part of something," said one young man.

"A lot of programs are in community centers, right next to some projects, and it makes you feel bad," explained another. "Here, you're with your peers and you're in this college and you realize that you can come here."

Fathers' emphasis on seeing peers and others who looked like them attending college, working, and raising families is critical. From the standpoint of a person's development into an adult, especially between the ages of 18 and 24, these are considered typical on-time activities. Men who have dropped out of high school or who have a high school diploma or HSE but are not working may feel disconnected and alienated from their contemporaries. The community college setting is geared to this age group and older and is designed to reconnect the disconnected. Plus, the setting includes other young men and women of color, so the college students look like many of the CFA participants. It is not surprising that the fathers feel they belong.

The program planners and stakeholders described similar added benefits. The college campus is a "signal" to the men that they belong there. Before becoming affiliated with the program, one stakeholder was impressed by the setting. "What was really great is that [the program] was on a college campus. And I think that's huge. Just to have young people on a college campus, interacting with other young people who are students." The campus bolsters the program's "hidden agenda"—college.

The college setting also plays a role in the competing tensions fathers confront when weighing work versus school. As one person observed, "For young men and young fathers, the need to bring money in to support their families can get in the way of them getting the skills they need to start careers. By offering peer support, intensive academic remediation, access to college campus, and stipend, you give the men the opportunity to do both at the same time."

## **The Effect of the College Setting on Costs**

Although everyone acknowledged the benefits, one potential critique concerns cost. A program like CFA has larger infrastructure costs when offered at a college than at a community-based agency. However, several people interviewed said that substantial costs were absorbed by the college through in-kind contributions and other supports, which make the true, full costs difficult to calculate. LaGuardia's in-kind contributions included space and staff and other resources available to students. Some wondered if the model would be less costly elsewhere. "Peer support, case management could be done much more inexpensively off of a college campus. What you lose, of course, is the connection to college and the ability to push people into programs."

How much is the "connection to college and ability to push people into programs" worth? This question at CFA's current early implementation phase is largely philosophical, but it could be explored rigorously and empirically over time. According to most people we spoke to, this connection was quintessential to the model.

## **The Choice of LaGuardia Community College**

Program planners and other stakeholders wonder whether LaGuardia Community College is the best and only setting for the Academy. Our study did not examine other potential locations and CUNY campuses, but by probing stakeholders, program planners, and participants on what the Academy needs for success, we conclude it could succeed on other CUNY campuses as well. Ingredients for success appear to include dedicated staff and administrative leadership, strong instructors, sufficient classroom and administrative space, direct links to educational and employment resources, oversight and data support from the CUNY central office, and active participant outreach. For several reasons, however, LaGuardia was the best candidate to launch and implement the program, and lessons learned from the four cohorts could be transferred to additional campuses.

LaGuardia has the largest adult and continuing education enrollment among CUNY colleges, as well as experience launching pilot programs that later expand to other campuses. Three features made LaGuardia a good choice for starting the program. First, LaGuardia's leadership was excited to host the program. Second, LaGuardia had resources and infrastructure that other CUNY campuses did not. Third, LaGuardia had experience with similar programs and actively designed a program that fit its strengths and culture. In several instances this required changing the originally proposed model.

### **Using LaGuardia's unique strengths**

LaGuardia's interest in the program and willingness to contribute resources and help design the program made them vital for a successful launch. The search for a home for CFA was first introduced at a continuing education meeting of all CUNY campuses. LaGuardia's leadership was first to volunteer, citing that the program matched their mission and concerned a population they wanted to serve. As one leader remarked, "It fit into who we think we are, and the kinds of populations that we want to serve."

Beyond interested leadership, LaGuardia had the immediate capacity to dedicate both space and staff time as in-kind contributions to the program. The Academy has been shaped by those resources, and other campuses would need to fully understand the true direct and in-kind costs associated with the program if it is expanded.

"They've [LaGuardia's leadership] put a lot of resources in terms of staff into the program," one stakeholder explained. "They made offices and rooms available. They've facilitated college applications for the students. One thing that would really be important if we expanded is for the college to provide those same types of resources."

LaGuardia has also customized the program to fit LaGuardia's resources and strengths. For example, program planners initially were considering offering the HSE component on different campuses and offering the parenting component at a single central location. However, LaGuardia insisted that one location should provide all components, and they had an especially strong package of resources to support

students. One feature they emphasized and added to the program model was a strong linkage between the HSE and employment components. Through LaGuardia's precollege academic programming and the rigorously evaluated GED Bridge to College and Careers Program (Martin and Broadus 2013), they would be able to better assist HSE participants with their transitions to work or college.

### **Applying lessons to other campuses**

With attention to core features, but with some flexibility to customize the program to different settings and cultures, the Academy could be replicated on other CUNY campuses. Those most familiar with other campuses held the general belief that core program features could be retained even if the delivery and model were modified in some ways. LaGuardia has had two years' and four cohorts' experience serving the young fathers and refining program features to improve program retention and get men to the HSE exam or to apply to college. These lessons, with support from current LaGuardia staff, could be applied to other settings. "LaGuardia was well-suited, but now we know what it requires," one program planner explained. "Each campus is slightly different and you would have to tailor the program to each site, but I think we can do that." And as program administrators and participants insisted, it would work elsewhere as long as the right type of people were hired. Some participants said they would need LaGuardia's current staff. LaGuardia's staff were confident other staff like them could be found. "Sure, it could work," one said. "If you have the right group of people working together, you can do incredible work. You'd have to have a solid hiring process and training."

### **Minimizing potential barriers due to location**

Program planners and participants alike acknowledged that an immediate benefit to expanding the number of locations would be attracting participants from other boroughs who may be deterred by the current location. This point was raised by several focus group participants, especially by men who had not completed the program. As one program planner summarized, "One thing about the current location is that it's not readily accessible to all clients. If it was in multiple places, we would see higher numbers."

Although the idea to expand the program was popularly supported, some participants were very happy they were not attending a program in their borough. For some, not knowing anyone and not being known was an advantage. Three men shared this exchange:

"I was coming from the Bronx, and it was good to not know anyone here because it would have been a distraction."

Another participant added, "Yeah, same. It's good that it wasn't in Brooklyn."

And a third father also agreed. "Yeah, it's comfortable for me, and it's good that it's not in the 'hood."

Given the fact that some people prefer to have some distance between them and their home neighborhood, if the program expands to other campuses, the Academy should permit participants to attend whichever campus they prefer.

## Section 7. Observations and Conclusions

The past decade has seen an increase in programs that target various populations of fathers, from teens to those involved in the criminal justice system. But there is limited information on the effectiveness of these programs (Bronte-Tinkew et al. 2007). In identifying some of the challenges and successes of programs of this type, we can view CFA as a program that has many effective elements. It has staff who are experienced and empathetic, and whom participants closely identify with, respect, and trust. The staff develops and nurtures one-on-one relationships with program participants well beyond program completion. CFA also combines education and employment services while providing incentives such as stipends. At its current size, it has a relatively effective recruitment strategy. It attracts a sufficient pool of candidates to fill each class. This is often a challenge for fatherhood programs and may reflect some combination of recruitment efforts and staff encouragement.

Our study shows the Academy has clear merit and promise. It is a comprehensive model that combines education, employment, and parenting (along with counseling), and we see no evidence that any component is less important than another. Each is complementary and sufficiently emphasized to address participants' core needs. The program effectively helps fathers earn an HSE diploma at rates at or above the state average among all HSE test takers. In targeting young, low-income fathers, CFA reaches an important and underserved population. We also see some effects on college entrance and employment, but it is too soon to tell any significant impact on college enrollment and completion or on long-term employment outcomes. Making such a determination would require different study methods. According to participants, the program has had a positive effect on their parenting, but again, it too early to know if it increases longer-term child engagement.

The Academy's focus on fathers and fatherhood is essential to its success. Its added value is that it draws in and helps a special segment of underserved men: low-income young fathers. The fathers' shared experience as parents unites them. The program staff understand the men's barriers and challenges and can make accommodations that other HSE and College Prep program might not make. One example is CFA's policy of allowing fathers to bring their children to class when necessary. Are these fathers unique among low-income young fathers? Probably not. Their level of engagement with their young children is similar to that of other young fathers—and greater than stereotypes suggest—and they have similarly poor employment outcomes and prospects. The program also reaches the young men at a critical point in their parenting, that is, at the beginning. Research shows that nonresident low-income fathers engage less with their children over time. It is unclear whether the program may affect future engagement, but the prospect is promising with this early intervention. The men also have similar arrest rates as their peers nationally. From these similarities we conclude the program does not handpick young men most likely to take and pass an HSE exam on the first try or immediately enroll into college, but it does select young men ready to commit now to completing the program. One concern about selecting participants most likely to succeed would be the risk that participants would have succeeded at these tasks without the program. From our interviews and analysis, this does not appear to be the case. Some of the fathers would likely have succeeded, but it would have been harder, more expensive, and with less added support around parenting and family well-being.

The Academy's location is important both for the men it serves and for the model's success. For the men, it is a rare (if not only) program providing the package of education, employment, parenting, and counseling services, all on a college campus, which the men treasure. Fathers were impressed and encouraged by seeing others who looked like them earning college degrees. If the program were offered at additional colleges, those colleges should also have a strong presence of black and Latino students to enhance fathers' sense of belonging. The college campus also improves the men's access to other resources that complement the emphasis on education, such as employment services that help fathers see opportunities available to them once they have achieved their educational goals.

The location is also essential to the program model. It indirectly bolsters the "hidden agenda" to encourage college enrollment by physically bringing participants onto the campus. It comes with built-in education and employment resources. It is a setting already committed to and experienced with the 18- to

24-year-old age group, making it developmentally appropriate. The program model in this location reaches the young men as they are entering adulthood and beginning their employment trajectories, in a setting with peers doing the same.

## **Recommended Enhancements**

We see two areas the program could enhance that would help program planners understand the Academy's effects and also make it better suited for expanding or replicating. We recommend increased support for postprogram links and strengthening the instruction and curriculum.

### **Supporting postprogram links to employment, education, parenting resources, and alumni**

The end of the program's 16 weeks is still only the beginning of the men's entrance into adulthood and growth as fathers. The program considers sustaining and supporting the men's growth as an important mission. We see this as critical to ensure that any program gains are sustained. At the time of our administrator and staff interviews in November 2013 the program had not formalized a system for working with former participants, but by January 2014 a part-time alumni and retention specialist had been hired. Before this hire, the Academy relied on the program coordinator and case manager to reach out to alumni; however, dual roles had become more difficult to maintain as the alumni population grew with each new cohort. Given the focus group participants' desire to stay connected with one another, the establishment of an alumni network will be of great value. Beginning with Cohort 5, the alumni specialist's responsibilities will include assisting in the classroom and developing rapport with current participants; staying in touch with alumni and advising them on educational and employment options; organizing activities and programs; and monitoring current and former participants' progress. The specialist will also refer participants to support services and other resources. In addition to helping the men themselves, keeping better track of fathers will aid the program in understanding its long-term impacts.

### **Strengthening the instruction model and curriculum**

CFA participants in the cohorts studied passed the HSE at rates that were above the state average despite staff and participant concerns about classroom size and insufficient numbers of instructors. Now that the HSE exam has changed from the GED to the TASC, it is important for the program to assess its instruction and consider ways to strengthen it. Given that staff expect the TASC to be more difficult than the GED, the program should focus on students' proficiencies at intake and adapt the instruction to focus on their weakest subject areas. As fathers told us, "We needed more work, more writing, more homework."

Our evaluation did not focus on the curriculum, but study participants reported that additional refinements could improve the program. First, CFA continues to tweak its college prep activities. The program is committed to helping its participants achieve college readiness. However, participants report that those program components could be strengthened with either increased academic instruction or more structured workshops and support. Such improvements would need to be considered and planned before an expanded program were implemented at LaGuardia or replicated on other campuses. Second, some participants mentioned wanting to find or develop an HSE academic curriculum that is especially suited to fathers, with examples and scenarios related to fatherhood.

## **Expanding the Evidence on Program Effectiveness**

This study has used qualitative and quantitative evidence to evaluate how well the program is working and some of the short-term outcomes for the participants. However, for this program to move from the category of promising to proven, more evidence would need to be gathered. The Academy wants to encourage better relationships between fathers, their children, and their children's mothers and improve parenting skills, father-child interactions, and child well-being. The program also aims to increase educational attainment and employment. We have information in our study on short-term outcomes in



education, and some data on employment, but much less on parenting and nothing on children's well-being. Moving from promising to proven would require additional data for measuring longer-term outcomes, such as more detailed and systematically collected employment and earnings histories; HSE pass rates; college enrollment, retention, and completion; and parenting measures and child outcomes.

Currently the program is relatively small, aiming to serve about 80 young men a year. Its size may contribute to its success. It has talented and passionate staff, a committed administration and agency partners, and relatively flexible funding that accommodated changes as needed, such as money for stipends and public transit cards. To replicate or expand the program and to have similar success, these features would need replication as well. There was strong support among most participants and program staff for replicating the program on other campuses. The good representation from most boroughs among CFA participants suggests that each borough would likely produce interested applicants. To expand at LaGuardia the program would need more instructors and potentially more administrative staff or assistance, including additional data collection support. The program would also require more outreach to attract more than the current 40 fathers per cohort. To replicate the program on other CUNY campuses, program planners would need to make additional considerations. For one, program planners and administrators would need to clearly articulate and properly document their model, including their curriculum, approach, and process, to ensure model fidelity as best as possible. Hiring staff with the right skill sets, talents, and dedication would be critical. The correct campus resources and other supports would be very important, including space and potentially in-kind administrative staff if these costs could not be covered fully by program resources.

We recommend expansion that also builds the capacity to evaluate the program rigorously with a comparison group and both quantitative and qualitative methods. Expanding the program's small size and evaluation capacity would allow an evaluation of some of the desired outcomes that are relatively long-term. In order to strengthen the evidence on effectiveness, several steps are necessary. First, we would need to account for possible selection bias in who enters the program. Our analysis shows that the young men are probably more motivated than other young fathers and may be somewhat better off in terms of test-taking ability. However, if the pool of similarly qualified men were sufficiently large, we could have a comparison or control group consisting of men who were not admitted to the program and who could be followed in order to compare outcomes and see if the program makes a difference. Second, we would need to have data gathered over a longer period of time in order to identify the longer-term education and employment impacts of the program on participants. Finally, we would need much more robust data on the parenting component to evaluate parenting as a separate program outcome. To understand whether the parenting component improves child outcomes and relationships with the children's mothers, in-depth measures of parenting and mother and child outcomes will need to be developed and collected consistently and over a period consistent with the timeframe for change to have occurred.

In summary, the next steps to determine the program's effectiveness would include the development of clearer and more specific outcomes that connect to the various components of the program. This development would lead to a set of data necessary to measure outcomes. Data sufficient for evaluation could only be achieved with more consistent and systematic data collection over time, including tracking and follow-up with participants and alumni.

# Appendices

A. Study Methods

B. CFA Program Description

C. Interview Discussion Guides



# Appendix A. Study Methods

## Evaluation Goals

The evaluation qualitatively examined and documented several core aspects of the CFA program, including the program design and model, its targeting and screening methods, and its perceived effects on program participants. More specifically, this study explored how the program is designed, implemented, and run; who the program targets and serves; who persists to completion; and what participants gain or would like to gain from the program. The primary method of analysis was through qualitative interviews with administrators and staff as well as focus groups with past program participants. This information was supplemented by quantitative analysis of administrative data and a brief literature review of similar fatherhood programs.

## Research Issues

- Understanding the men who participate in CFA, including their family structure, relationships with their children's mother(s), and interactions with children, and how their ambitions and family engagement may differ from stereotypes and conventional assumptions about young fathers.
- Portraying men's stories and what the program means to them (e.g., we were told that one participant stated, it's "not just a program, but a brotherhood") and exploring whether participants feel the program helps build strong bonds between participants, and if so, how.
- Exploring outcomes associated with program participation and whether participants attribute changes in parenting, academic, and/or employment outcomes to the program; and examining how participants (current and former) feel about different components of the program (employment, education, and the parenting component) and which components are most valued and perceived to have led to specific outcomes of interest.

## Evaluation Approach

### Staff and administrator interviews

The first two-day site visit, conducted in November 2013 by the two coprincipal investigators and a research assistant, consisted of meetings and interviews with program administrators and staff. We interviewed individuals from the Center for Economic Opportunity, individuals from City Hall, administrators and staff at CUNY, and all CFA staff. Interviews lasted for 60 to 90 minutes and included discussion about the program and each individual's role. The visit also included a discussion of available program data, as well as an observation of a GED class. The interview protocol (appendix C) explored the background of each individual, the history of the program, its organizational structure and roles, and the perceived success of the program.

### Program administrative data

CUNY provided four sets of data from the CFA program for this analysis. As the program only has around 147 observations of data, the quantitative component to this evaluation is only meant to supplement the qualitative interviews and provide context for the participants. We limit the analysis to cross-tabulations and descriptive summary statistics.

*Intake form:* filled out by fathers the first time they come into the program. The intake form includes demographic background information, living arrangements and marital status, work history, educational background, and questions about their children.

*Attendance database:* data are collected on attendance and activities such as internships and counseling.

*Pre- and postsurveys on fatherhood:* A survey about parenting and relationships with children is given to fathers at the beginning and end of the program. The presurvey asks about the number and ages

of children and specific information about one target child selected by the father, including the target child's living arrangements, the father's relationship and contact with the child's mother, how often he sees the child, whether he pays child support, and activities and other caregiving he engages in. The presurvey also asks how fathers learned about CFA. The postsurvey asks fathers about parenting accomplishments since participating in CFA, how often they see the target child, the target child's current living arrangements, any changes in his relationship with the child's mother, child support arrangements, and activities and other caregiving he engages in.

*Education and employment data:* CFA obtains postparticipation outcome data including GED scores, credential obtained, employment, and college enrollment. Students who matriculate at CUNY colleges will have information on which colleges they attended, enrollment dates, full-time/part-time status, degree pursued, major field of study, and degrees or certificates earned.

*Reports submitted to NYC Center for Economic Opportunity:* CUNY central administrative staff maintain data on the CFA program that they submit quarterly to the Center for Economic Opportunity. The data include information collected in the four datasets, but they are also supplemented with direct and up-to-date information from program staff that may not be fully recorded in the datasets.

### **Participant focus group data**

The second site visit consisted of two research team members for two days on the LaGuardia Community College campus. The primary focus of this visit was to conduct focus groups on the participants' experiences and opinions of CFA and outcomes they attribute to the program. (The interview protocol is available in appendix C.) Prior to the visit we worked closely with CFA staff members, who helped recruit recent and former CFA participants to take part in the focus groups. Staff have maintained strong relationships with prior participants and were therefore able to recruit focus group members. Because certain groupings of participants would be harder to recruit than others, we structured the groups in the following manner:

- Group 1: All noncompleters of the program, from any cohort, for both the GED and College Prep components (six participants)
- Group 2: All GED completers of the program from the first and second cohorts (nine participants)
- Group 3: All GED completers of the program from the third and fourth cohorts (12 participants)
- Group 4: All College Prep completers of the program from any cohort (six participants)

## Appendix B. CFA Program Description

### Location

From the outset, administrators at LaGuardia were drawn to hosting the Academy for a variety of reasons. They already had an established continuing education program and were accustomed to serving similar populations of students. In addition, they were in a position to contribute in-kind resources such as room space and a director to run the program, which freed up funds to hire the other staff members: the program coordinator, counselor/case manager, academic instructor, and part-time job coordinator, as well as administrative positions and interns.

For the fathers, the LaGuardia campus location offered a number of benefits. First, as fathers were traveling from the far reaches of the five boroughs, Long Island City was a convenient midpoint that is relatively accessible by public transportation. Second, as official students they enjoyed the full rights and privileges of a college student, such as use of the library, gym, and dining facilities. More importantly, the program architects hoped that this exposure would accustom young fathers to a collegiate environment and thereby reorient their self-perceptions and what they believe they are academically capable of achieving. As one interviewee stated, it's significant "for a city institution like CUNY to open its doors to young black and Latino dads and to say that they think they have promise and are willing to invest in their potential."

### Recruitment

Because there is a sizable population of disadvantaged young fathers in New York City and CFA is a small program, a strong emphasis on recruitment has not been necessary. Although they employ several methods of recruitment, including social media and a variety of more traditional media techniques, CFA's most successful recruitment strategy is primarily the posters they are allowed to post in New York City Housing Authority buildings, which normally do not allow posters. The next most significant recruitment tool is simply word of mouth from past participants or from friends and family who see the posters and recommend the program to the young fathers.

### Intake and Boot Camp

Once the father hears about the program and is interested, he contacts the counselor, who arranges for 5 to 10 men to meet and hear about the structure and expectations of the program. Men who are interested in participating fill out an application for the program and arrange to take a TABE reading test. Generally an individual needs a minimum score of about 7.0 on the TABE reading test to enroll in the program, though staff make an exception and review the test results if the individual seems particularly determined during the subsequent interview with the case manager and academic instructor. Individuals who do not make the cut are recommended to other CUNY programs to get caught up academically. This meeting is considered the second interview. Finally, the father comes back for a third interview with the program coordinator. In this meeting the father fills out a sheet detailing his prior issues in education and subjects and books they enjoy. In addition, they complete an individual development plan that chronicles why the father wants to be in this program and what supports he has available outside the program.

This three-step intake process is expanded from the process in the first cohort, which consisted of a single meeting with the potential participant. The more intensive process is purposely designed to identify individuals who are the most dedicated to the program and therefore minimize the number of students who drop out.

The program begins on a Friday with an orientation in which the fully assembled cohort learns the rules and regulations of the program. On the following Monday they begin the three weeks of boot camp. The boot camp is a mirror image of the actual program; that is, they attend GED and parenting classes from the start. The purpose of boot camp is to get the young men back into the habit of a schedule and to

set the expectations of the program. There is very little dropout between boot camp and enrollment due to the intensive intake procedure.

## Components of the CFA

Following completion of boot camp, the men are officially enrolled in the Academy. The program is built on three essential pillars: academics, parenting, and workforce development. The weekly schedule for the young fathers depends on whether they are in the HSE group or the college preparation group.

Men in the HSE program attend class from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Fridays. These classes are taught by a single instructor whose background is English but who teaches all components of the HSE. Because the fathers frequently don't have anyone to watch their young children, they are allowed to bring the children to class. Once in class, the men are encouraged to work in groups and collaborate on problem sets. In the afternoons, the class is split into two groups. One group attends a fatherhood workshop while the other has an extension of the HSE program in which work continues on academic skills in a smaller group setting. On Tuesdays these two groups swap. Groups are determined by the fathers' TABE scores; those with higher scores are separated from those with lower scores.

In the first cohort the College Prep individuals were placed in the same class as the men studying for the HSE. Since then, the program has altered their approach to the College Prep component for nearly every cohort. At the time of the interviews, these participants attended CFA Wednesday through Friday, although program staff acknowledged that the fathers in this group do not need the same amount of time that HSE students need in the program. The College Prep fathers participated in the fatherhood components of the program on Wednesdays and also met with program counselors and additional career counselors. When they are not in the fatherhood component of the program, a participant in the College Prep group is frequently engaged in various internships at LaGuardia, such as in the audio tech department or other CUNY programs. Some of the men worked with the HSE classes as mentors. There was no formal academic portion of the program tailored to the College Prep group.

The parenting component consists of a smaller group of HSE students on either Monday or Tuesday afternoons, and then the full group, including College Prep students, on Friday afternoons. The parenting sessions are a combination of active and passive components. The large Friday sessions typically consist of a more active component in which either a representative from a parent resource network speaks or the fathers watch an instructional video. The small sessions earlier in the week combine active and passive techniques. They are jointly led by the program coordinator and the case manager and cover a range of topics such as communication in relationships, financial stability, and ways for fathers to interact and bond with their children. The primary passive components of these sessions are the reception and encouragement of the young fathers of one another as peers. As described by the focus group participants, sometimes this component comes in the form of knowledge transferred from one father to another, who may have experience with a certain situation that another individual is experiencing. Another component is simply having an audience of similarly situated peers to whom the young father can express his frustrations as well as his achievements. This observation reflects the sentiment that came up many times in the interviews, that this is not just a fatherhood program, it is a "brotherhood."

The employment section, although an important component of the program, is still secondary to the educational component. Program staff explained that they delay emphasis on employment until later in the program so that students are not encouraged to leave the program for full-time work.

The program provides a part-time job coordinator who assists students with their job searches and provides them with job leads and counseling for accessing mostly entry-level positions in retail and security. Like the rest of the program staff, the job coordinator also reaches out to program alumni with available job opportunities and interviews.

In addition to the job coordinator, several other employment-related benefits to the program are made available to participants. As mentioned above, many of the College Prep participants are given internships within the college. Edith's Place, which provides clothes for interviews and is located on the LaGuardia campus, is also available to CFA students.

Finally, the program provides direct benefits and incentives to the participants in the form of metro passes and stipend checks. The program first issued stipends with the second cohort under the assumption that the participants would be less inclined to drop out of the program in favor of employment if they could justify the time spent by earning money. The program pays \$50 a week to participants who show consistent attendance.

## Appendix C. Interview Discussion Guides

**Note:** These protocols were used as guides in our conversations and were not read verbatim in our interviews.

### Administrator and Staff Protocol Combined

1. Respondent background: What is your current position? Where have you worked before? What is your connection to CFA?
2. [CUNY administrator or CFA program coordinator only] How did the CFA program come about? When did planning begin, and who were the main planning partners?
3. [CUNY administrator or CFA program coordinator only] How did the CFA advisory group form? Who are its members, and what do they do?
4. Does everyone have a shared vision for CFA? Does anyone see the program as accomplishing different goals?
5. Has the program changed over time at all? If so, in what way?
6. [CUNY administrator, CFA program coordinator, non-CUNY staff, non-CFA staff] As far as you know, does CFA have a 'logic model' or well-conceived theory of the program and how program activities are linked to intended outcomes? If not, please describe key resources and outputs of program.
7. [CUNY administrator or CFA program coordinator only] Can you describe the program's relationship with both CUNY and LaGuardia Community College? Are there any other organizations that the program works with?
8. [All] Do you think the program has adequate resources? These include things like staff, space for offices and program services, equipment (or access to equipment), and support/partnerships from schools or city agencies.
9. [CFA staff] Can you briefly give an overview of the CFA program?
10. [CFA staff] We'd like to hear more about the academic portion. Please tell us about the classes, curriculum, schedule, goals, structure, and so forth.
11. [CFA staff] We'd like to hear more about the job development component and how it is structured and organized.
12. [CFA staff] We'd like to hear more about the fatherhood/parenting component and how it is structured and organized (how often it meets, who runs it, whether there's a structured curriculum).
13. [CFA staff] Please tell us about other components of the program (e.g., anything mentioned in the overview, guest speakers, field trips, financial literacy, any other potential components).
14. [Program coordinator, non-CUNY staff, non-CFA staff] How is CFA similar or different from other responsible fatherhood programs you are familiar with?
15. Have you noticed any differences among the cohorts of young fathers? In demographics/background, success in the program, or outcomes after program completion?
16. Besides the intake form and parental engagement pre- and postsurveys, do you collect any other data on participants?
17. Do you have access to additional data on participants, such as employment, educational data? Are you able to track these data after the participant leaves the program?
18. How do you currently use the data that you track to better inform program initiatives or actions?
19. [CFA staff] Please describe the recruitment process for fathers. When do you start, and what kind of outreach do you do? What type of fathers is the CFA trying to recruit? Are there any eligibility requirements?
20. Describe the enrollment process.
21. The program's stated goals are to promote responsible parenting, educational achievement, and economic stability. Do you feel that these goals are accurate? Are there any additional goals that you would add?
22. What factors do you think are most important in helping fathers succeed in the program? To your knowledge, does this success persist after fathers leave the program?

23. What are some things that CFA can do better to address fathers who are not achieving these goals and/or dropping out of the program?
24. What do you see as the biggest challenges for the program?
25. If you were to offer CFA one suggestion for how to improve its program, what would that be?

## **Focus Group Protocols**

26. Now please start by telling us your first name, your age, and the age or ages of your children, and the cohort you were in [clockwise around the focus group].
27. How did you hear about the Academy, and why did you apply for the program? How can outreach be improved? Were there other programs that you were considering at the same time? Which programs?
28. How did you find the boot camp during the first three weeks of the program (before getting accepted to the Academy)?
29. What was the most interesting or rewarding part of the program? What was the most challenging or burdensome part of the program?
30. [For GED class] What did you like most about the GED class? What did you like least? What changes, if any, would you suggest for the GED class?
31. [For College Prep class] What did you like most about the College Prep class? What did you like least? What changes, if any, would you suggest for the College Prep class?
32. Who has taken employment prep workshops or some other job-readiness component? What did you like most about the employment preparation workshops? What did you like least?
33. What changes, if any, would you suggest for the employment preparation workshops or other job-readiness components (building resumes, etiquette, and attire training)?
34. Was it more important for you to come out of the CFA program with a job, or was it more important to further your education? In what ways did participating in CFA make you more ready for employment?
35. What did you like most about the parenting workshops? What did you like least? What changes, if any, would you suggest for the parenting workshops? How has your relationship with your child/child's mother changed as a result of the parenting workshops?
36. What do you think of the support group? What do you like most about the support group? What do you like least? What changes, if any, would you suggest for support group?
37. Who here received a stipend for being in the program? For those that received it, how important was the stipend for your participation in the program? For those in the first cohort who didn't receive a stipend, would it have affected your decision to leave the program? What amount do you think would be needed to keep you in the program?
38. Do you think your peers with young children would benefit equally from this program, or do you think the program is not for everyone?
39. What kind of goals did you envision going into the CFA program? At this point have you achieved those goals?
40. Please describe your relationship with the CFA staff and how important they were over the course of the program. Do your other peers who aren't here feel the same way?
41. Final question: All in all, how has the academy affected your life? In your own words, how would you say you've changed as a result of the CFA program?

## **Additional Questions for Specific Focus Groups**

### **Noncompleters, any cohort**

1. A quick show of hands, how many of you made it through boot camp? How many left before boot camp ended? For those who completed boot camp, about how long did you stay in the program?
2. You've told us a little about what you liked/didn't like about CFA. What are some of the reasons that you and potentially some of your classmates/friends left the program early?
3. Would there have been anything CFA could have done to make it easier (or to make you want to stay through completion)?



4. For cohorts 1 and 2: You left the program in the past 1 to 2 years; what have you been doing since the program? Do you keep in touch with any classmates? If so, what are some things that they are doing now? About how many classmates do you keep in touch with?
5. For cohorts 3 and 4: You left the program more recently; what have you been doing since you left the program? Do you keep in touch with any classmates? If so, what are some things that they are doing now? About how many classmates do you keep in touch with?
6. Since leaving the program, have you been in contact with CFA staff for any reason and if so, why and how often?

### **GED completers, cohorts 1 and 2**

7. You left the program in the past 1 to 2 years; what have you been doing since the program?
8. Do you keep in touch with any classmates? If so, what are some things that they are doing now? About how many classmates do you keep in touch with?
9. Since completing the program, have you been in contact with CFA staff for any reason and if so, why and how often?

### **GED completers, cohorts 3 and 4**

10. You completed/left the program relatively recently; what have you been doing since you left the program?
11. Do you keep in touch with any classmates? If so, what are some things that they are doing now? About how many classmates do you keep in touch with?
12. Since completing the program, have you been in contact with CFA staff for any reason and if so, why and how often?

### **College Prep program, all completers**

13. For cohorts 1 and 2: You completed the program 1 to 2 years ago; what have you been doing since the program? Do you keep in touch with any classmates? If so, what are some things that they are doing now? About how many classmates do you keep in touch with?
14. For cohorts 3 and 4: You completed the program more recently; what have you been doing since you left the program? Do you keep in touch with any classmates? If so, what are some things that they are doing now? About how many classmates do you keep in touch with?

### **Working group members**

1. As background, can you describe your work outside the CFA working group and how it relates to fatherhood issues or the program of the Academy? How long have you been on the CFA working group?
2. What's the role of the working group in the CFA program? Has it changed in some ways over time? how so? (Probe: Was the group involved in its formation and program design?)
3. From your knowledge of fatherhood programs, how does the CUNY Fatherhood Academy model compare to other fatherhood programs? (Probe: What (if anything) do you think makes it unique or different?) Are there any programs similar to CFA? Do you have recommendations for information on or studies of similar fatherhood programs that would be helpful for us to reference?
4. Have you examined any reported outcomes from CFA? How do these results compare to other fatherhood programs? Do you think the CFA participants are comparable to those in other studies/programs? In what ways are they [similar/different]? Would these outcomes lead you to recommend any promising practices for other fatherhood programs?
5. What do you see as the future of the CFA program? Do you see this as a program that there would be an interest in replicating or expanding? Why or why not?
6. Is there one thing that CFA could do better? If so, what would it be?

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Per the NYC Young Men's Initiative status update, October 2013.

<sup>2</sup> 2012 estimates from US Census Bureau Fact Finder data.

<sup>3</sup> New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Epiquery: NYC Interactive Health Data System: "New York City Population Estimates, 2000–2012." Accessed October 2013. <http://nyc.gov/health/epiquery>.

<sup>4</sup> On January 1, 2014, the HSE test used in New York State was changed from the GED to the TASC. Song (2011) uses data from the 1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth to examine outcomes in 2008 among individuals completing the GED.

<sup>5</sup> This estimate, prepared by YMI in collaboration with the NYC Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence, was derived from a number of sources due to the lack of systematic data collected about fathers. A total of 60,458 unique women between the ages of 16 to 24 years gave birth between 2001 and 2011 (according to 2011 data, the most recent year available). Of those, 11,879 (19.6 percent) records are missing father's race/ethnicity; 12,122 (20.1 percent) are missing father's date of birth; and 17,439 (28.8 percent) are missing father's name. In contrast, there were only 23,864 unique fathers between the ages of 16 to 24 years who had a baby between 2001 and 2011. Even taking into account the records in which the father's date of birth is missing, this likely means that a large portion of young mothers had older partners. Data were received from the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Office of Vital Statistics, in June 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Around the time the city launched YMI, the OSF/CBMA announced that fatherhood would be the foundation's prime focus within YMI.

<sup>7</sup> CFA's emphasis on fatherhood was in keeping with YMI's focus on fathers through former Mayor Michael Bloomberg's Fatherhood Initiative, NYC Dads.

<sup>8</sup> Given the trusted connection that CFA staff maintained with fathers during and after the program, we expected the recruitment for our focus groups would be most successful (i.e., result in more men willing to participate) if fathers were invited by Academy staff. The staff did not participate in the focus groups themselves and followed a recruitment protocol provided by the Urban Institute research team that explained the men's participation would be voluntary and would not affect their standing or participation in CFA in any way. The tradeoff to this approach is that while we may have had a better turnout, we also ran the risk that fathers who were reachable and agreed to participate may have held more favorable views about the program than fathers who were unreachable or declined to participate. We discuss potential implications for bias in section 2, "About the Fathers."

<sup>9</sup> On January 1, 2014, the HSE test used in New York State was changed from the GED to the TASC. The New York State Education Department worked with CTB/McGraw-Hill to develop the TASC. This new test is designed to cost less and meet New York's P-12 Common Core Standards.

<sup>10</sup> The TABE reading component tests the equivalent grade level of reading comprehension of each participant.

<sup>11</sup> Funding for stipends and transit cards was not included in the original OSF grant, but was requested by the program and supported later by supplemental funding from YMI.

<sup>12</sup> Single Stop is a national nonprofit organization that partners with a number of community-based organizations to provide screening, information, and counseling about government benefits such as health insurance, housing, child care, nutrition programs, and other resources students may not have known about or known how to access. Counselors answer questions and assist students with applications.

<sup>13</sup> CFA has set an employment target goal of 35 percent of students employed per cohort, which according to program reports it has exceeded on average.

<sup>14</sup> This estimate includes cohorts 1 to 3, as we could not access information on who in cohort 4 had taken the test, only who had passed.

<sup>15</sup> We count as “enrolled” the 147 men who attended and completed CFA boot camp with available data and were considered enrolled by CFA staff. Official Academy enrollment numbers include 148, but we have incomplete information and can report on only 147 of the fathers.

<sup>16</sup> From administrative program and intake data collected by CFA staff.

<sup>17</sup> Includes New York City.

<sup>18</sup> The data have 6 missing race/ethnicity values and 11 missing child living situation values.

<sup>19</sup> There are 14 missing values for the frequency of child visit variable.

<sup>20</sup> Now the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), but called food stamps at the time of the Sorensen and Zibman (2001) study.

<sup>21</sup> About 29 percent of responses are blank.

<sup>22</sup> Program data are missing one individual that official program records count. Therefore our intake and activity data reflect a sample size of 147 instead of 148.

<sup>23</sup> The stipend is not intended to provide substantial income, but to provide some spending money. One father described it as being for their children.

<sup>24</sup> CUNY Accelerated Study in Associate Programs is a structured program launched and funded by the NYC Center for Economic Opportunity. According to Center for Economic Opportunity evaluations the program has been extremely successful in helping community college students graduate with an associate’s degree within three years. The program provides students with academic, social, and financial support with the ultimate goal of graduating 50 percent of each cohort.

<sup>25</sup> Our data included three fewer men than the CFA program’s official count of 16, which may be because program staff had more up-to-date information than was reflected in the administrative data.

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