INTERNATIONALS NETWORK

Learning Brief 3

Opening Doors to College: Immigrant Students' High School Experiences of College Access



Students from Bronx IHS, NYC

Abstract

What do immigrant multilingual learners experience in high school as they prepare to apply to college? In this brief, we seek to answer this question from the vantage point offered by our intentionally designed secondary school programs. Internationals Network has gathered a rich set of indicators that combine demographics; academic achievement data; application, acceptance, and enrollment metrics; and focus group findings, which we present in this final Learning Brief of the 2022-23 school year. We also make recommendations for schools and districts on postsecondary support systems for immigrant students.


Students from Bronx IHS, NYC

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Introduction

How does learning about and pursuing postsecondary options change when immigrant students are in culturally and linguistically responsive high schools? What is their experience as they compose college lists, complete financial aid documents, wait for acceptances and make final decisions? What role do school structures, culture and programming play in facilitating the milestones in postsecondary access? What happens for these students after all the applications are in, and the high school graduation gowns have been put away?

In this third and final issue of the first series of Internationals Network Learning Briefs, we combine the voices and insights of students, families and school staff from the Internationals Network's New York City graduating class of 2022 with data on their applications, acceptances and enrollments. The results illuminate how a holistic approach to college readiness -- drawing on intentional school culture, structures and programming described in detail in Learning Brief 2 -- facilitates the postsecondary process for students who have often been invisible in the literature on college access. While empirical data alone offers an important window on students' experiences, the picture is far more complete with the addition of their own insights and those of their families and educators.

Internationals Network has learned to use data on college access and success to foster strategic decision-making that heightens college readiness, access, and success. As discussed in Learning Brief 1, immigrant students' pathways often disappear when they enter college institutions, and colleges do not track their progress in ways that reveal their intersecting identities. As we outlined in Learning Brief 2, the keys to fostering equity in successful transitions include intentional programming and school structures and culture that consider students' current realities, lived experiences, and strengths.

In our first Learning Brief, we explored the limitations of existing data and research on the specific postsecondary pathways of domestic immigrant high school students. Immigrant students who graduate from U.S. high schools[1] enter postsecondary pathways and disappear into the broader student body; their high schools do not have the resources to track them, and colleges do not separate them out. Yet their pathways and experiences should and must be the concern of education practitioners, researchers, policymakers and advocates. In our second Learning Brief, we described our targeted college access work and the school structures, culture, and programs that we have observed facilitate its success. In this brief, we combine empirical data with student and educator perspectives to further the goal of improving the pathways to postsecondary readiness.

Through partnerships with the NYC Public Schools, the City University of New York and the National Student Clearinghouse, Internationals Network leveraged data about students enrolled in its New York City Network schools to support these institutions in developing nuanced understandings of their postsecondary pathways. The groundbreaking work presented in these Learning Briefs addresses a significant gap in the field by creating a student-level dataset exploring the journeys of immigrant multilingual learners who are newcomers to U.S. public schools.[2]

In this final Learning Brief of the series, we explain how we documented changes over time and spurred evidence-driven improvements. We elaborate on milestones in our students' postsecondary access journeys and what they said about ways in which the programs, structures and culture of their Internationals Network schools supported the process. We explore trends in application, acceptance, and enrollment; reveal good news about enrollment and completion; and discuss some areas we would like to explore in greater depth. Finally, we present some recommendations for the high schools all over the U.S. serving growing numbers of immigrant youth.

About Internationals Learning Briefs

Learning Briefs share Internationals Network's successes, learning and recommendations from across our network of public secondary schools. The first brief published in Fall 2022 detailed our exploration of the post-secondary pathways of multiple high school graduation cohorts of immigrant high school English learners. Brief 2 detailed how schools in our network have strengthened their postsecondary readiness systems to benefit their immigrant students.

Read Learning Brief 1 *Read Learning Brief 2*

[1] We have coined the term "domestic immigrant students" to describe this population, acknowledging its obvious limitations and with the goal of identifying a specific subset of postsecondary students who have been rendered invisible by institutional data labeling and gathering practices. These students are in multiple categories, entering U.S. public high schools as newcomers or English Learners (and sometimes also as Limited English Proficient). All of these terms have certain inadequacies. We use the term multilingual learner, found in much of the research literature, to acknowledge the linguistic assets of these students.

[2] In the past, the NYC Public Schools released detailed school-level reports that detailed the pathways of each year's graduating cohort and their progress through college. These reports, called Where Are They Now?, were a valuable tool, but have been discontinued and are no longer available to NYC schools.

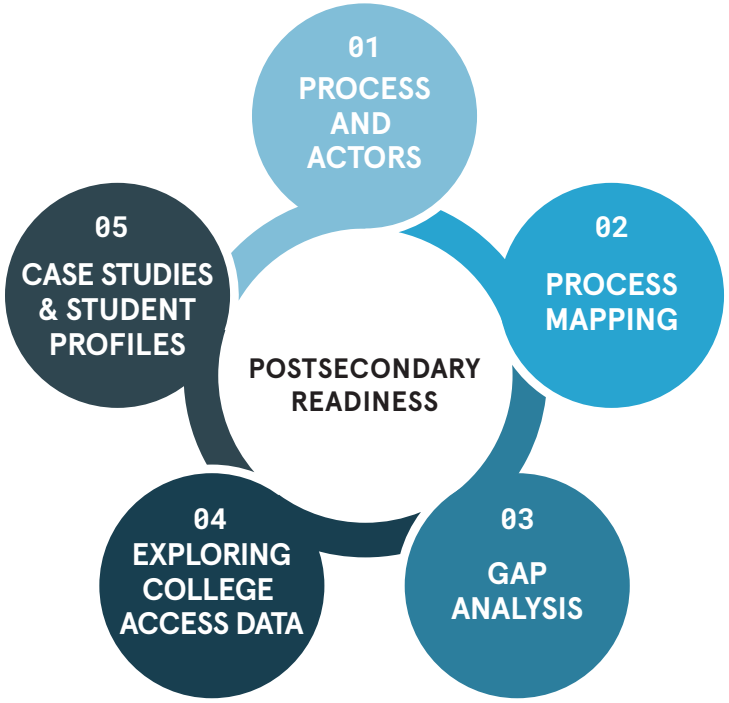
Who Applies, Who Attends: What We Know

Navigating the postsecondary access pathway involves intersecting factors and realities, including personal and family circumstances, school quality, and school support systems (Abrego and Gonzales, 2010; Covarrubias, 2010; Covarrubias and Lara, 2014; Bartlett and García, 2011; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010, 2008), not to mention education policy that can place barriers on educational advancement. Multiple scholars have examined how the intersections of generation, gender, and immigration status greatly influence access and eventual postsecondary enrollment patterns, in particular among Latine[3] youth. While we know from extensive research that immigrant youth have lower college enrollment rates than non-immigrant students, some studies also suggest that once first-generation immigrant students apply to college, they are equally or more likely to enroll and complete degrees than non-immigrant peers (Gándara and Contreras, 2009; Contreras, 2013; Rios-Aguilar and Deil-Ammen, 2015). Our postsecondary-readiness work has focused on building systems, structures, and school culture that foster equity in college access and enrollment.

As we detailed in our second Learning Brief, focusing solely on academic indicators as a window into postsecondary readiness eclipses any nuanced understanding of immigrant students' strengths, challenges, needs and experiences. In Internationals Network schools, the intentional creation of school culture, structures and programs addresses student needs identified in research. Approaches to facilitate the postsecondary access process are implemented in the context of persistent societal, economic, and public policy constraints.

It has been shown empirically that supporting students in taking the steps to apply to college and creating structures to encourage each of those steps directly influence students' plans to attend and, ultimately, overall patterns of application, acceptance, and attendance (Roderick, Coca and Nagaoka, 2011). In their research on English learners and transitions to college, Núñez, Rios-Aguilar, Kanno, and Flores (2016) discussed the significant gaps in high school completion, college enrollment, and college completion between ELs and non-ELs.

Should high schools push for all their graduates to attend elite four-year colleges, or to attend college at all? Schools in the Internationals Network for Public Schools have grappled with this question for years, given institutional and familial circumstances that make college attendance more of a challenge for some students, particularly financially. We have come to learn that educators sometimes assume community colleges and/or large public and municipal postsecondary systems like the City University of New York (CUNY)[4] are of lesser quality, more appropriate as "safety" schools rather than as first choices. However, Internationals Network expects and even hopes that our New York City graduates will attend CUNY; far from an inferior option, it is often in students' best interests.



Economist Raj Chetty[5] and his colleagues demonstrated, in their groundbreaking work on intergenerational mobility and postsecondary education as an engine of economic opportunity, that some institutions serve as a kind of "trampoline" or "opportunity engine" for low-income, first-generation college-goers. These postsecondary institutions include the City University of New York system, the State University

[3] https://www.teenvogue.com/story/latine-vs-latinx-what-young-people-think

[4] The City University of New York is the largest urban public university in the U.S. CUNY has 25 colleges (two-year, four-year, and two-four-year) across New York City's five boroughs. It enrolls more than 200,000 degree-seeking students of all ages and awards 55,000 degrees each year. CUNY's mission is to provide a quality public education to all students, regardless of means or background, and it serves a population reflective of the city's diversity: 0.3% American Indian/Alaska Native; 21.7% AA/AAPI, 25.2% Black, 30.2% Latino, 23.1% White.

[5] Chetty, R. Friedman, J.N., Saez, E., Turner, N., & Yagan, D. (2017). Mobility Report Cards: The Role of Colleges in Intergenerational Mobility, National Bureau of Economic Research. Working Paper.

The success demonstrated by public college and university systems contrasts with the performance of elite private institutions regarding low-income and immigrant students. Private colleges often document high retention and graduation rates, but they generally enroll relatively very few individuals from the lowest income groups, where immigrant students are clustered. When the income distribution of all college students is charted, the majority of domestic immigrants fall in the lower half. And low-income students as a whole are underrepresented at highly selective four-year institutions, making up on average only 13% of the student body (Núñez and Sparks, 2012).

In their research on English Learners and college-going, Kanno and Cromley (2015) found that family income was a significant predictor of whether or not ELs applied to four-year colleges, but was not for native speakers or English-proficient students.

We also know from research that applying to college and being accepted is not a guarantee of attendance and completion. The gap between acceptance and attendance is called summer melt. Castleman and Page (2014) estimate the average rate of summer melt across all socioeconomic groups at 10% to 15%. According to the U.S. Department of Education[6], about 20% to 44% of eligible students who are accepted and enroll fail to attend their freshman semester of college. Most are low-income minority students.

Summer melt reflects how much can happen in the months between high school graduation and the start of the freshman college semester. Immigrant students might travel home to visit relatives in their country of origin, reconsider their finances and the cost of college, or rethink their next steps altogether. These students already overcome many stressors to complete high school and embark upon a postsecondary path, including those presented by institutional barriers, xenophobia, separation from family, and the daily strain of adaptation. During the summer, the realities of college costs can set in, as can anxiety about leaving home. And the challenging hurdles of completing forms and selecting classes become more so if the students must complete them on their own, without the assistance of high school staff or college counselors who know them well (Castleman, Arnold, and Wartman, 2012; Castleman and Page, 2014). A Gates Foundation study[7] conducted in 2022 revealed that, while finances played a major role for many students who stopped out or did not enroll, many also considered other factors, including stress.

Internationals Network is interested in our graduates' pathways not only because it is the mission of our network schools to provide an innovative educational experience that prepares our students for college, career, and beyond. As the only U.S.-based network of public schools with a focus on immigrant multilingual learners, we have the unique capacity to channel our students' experiences and our schools' impacts to shed light on gaps in policy and practice.

Recent research has explored in depth the college-going patterns of New York City high school graduates (Black and Coca, 2017), highlighting the persistent access gap for low-income Black and Latino students. Absent from this research are understandings of the realities of multilingual learners, and in particular, any analysis of the pathways and outcomes of immigrant English learners who graduate from U.S. high schools. It is our aim to address this missing piece.

Our Evidence Base & Approach to Data

Since the launch of our research and innovation initiative in 2017, Internationals Network has integrated an approach to data that is driven by collective inquiry. Our work on postsecondary access seeks to build an evidence



Students from IHS at Prospect Heights, NYC

[6] US Department of Education (2012). Summer Melt.
[7] Where Are the Students? New Research into College Enrollment Declines https://usprogram.gatesfoundation.org/news-and-insights/articles/gates-foundation-probes-college-enrollment-decline

base in an area underexplored in research. Because we focus on designing and developing linguistically and culturally responsive school communities that build on student strengths, we need timely, actionable data to serve educators in direct contact with students. This requires bringing contextual knowledge to data analysis.

As an organization focused on improving schools and supporting immigrant youth, our overarching goal in using data is program improvement. To that end, we have data-sharing agreements in place with public school districts and partner organizations (City University of New York, National Student Clearinghouse). By combining this otherwise unavailable student-level data with college-access and enrollment data and student perspectives on their experience of the process, we have sought to create a more complete picture of student pathways from application through enrollment to help us understand how our primary work -- creating effective structures, culture, and programs at the school level -- affects students' experience and outcomes.

Our college data review draws on five main sources, much of it uniquely available to us:

- Enrollment/demographic data from ATS, New York City's public school student information system
- City University of New York Application Status Reports
- Data matching from National Student Clearinghouse
- Focus groups with nine groups of seniors graduating in 2022 from three schools Internationals Network New York City schools that participated in our College Access Inquiry Project Interviews and focus groups with families of New York City Internationals students

These data are not self-explanatory; they require contextualized knowledge for accurate analysis and interpretation. For example, any U.S. high school can identify a four-year graduating cohort, but we know from experience across our network that some students who are in their fourth year will continue for a fifth or sixth year. The graduation rates of these super seniors are reflected in the five- and six-year graduation rates for each freshman cohort, which rise each subsequent year. We also know that arriving students who are slotted into remedial college programs will not appear on student rosters of enrolled students. Learning with and from experienced educators across our network about the needs and realities of all students, including super seniors, has enabled us to develop a nuanced understanding of the data. That informs our collaboration with schools in exploring what is most actionable and identifying previously unmarked gaps.

Findings: Internationals Network's NYC 2022 Graduates and Access

As we have shown, access to pertinent information from graduating seniors through college enrollment and beyond and our direct contact with experienced educators and students have enabled us to explore and make sense of emerging trends. Below are some of our salient findings.

Profile of the Students

The graduating class of 2022 in Internationals Network's 15 New York City-based high schools comprised 1,171 students across 15 small, innovative high schools, all specialized in building on the strengths of multilingual students while simultaneously addressing their needs. Their graduation rate reached a record 85% across New York City Internationals schools – 21 percentage points higher than the New York City-wide ELL graduation rate for students in non-Internationals Network schools.

High rates of Application and Acceptance

Using the class of 2022 enrollment rosters and a City University of New York data match, we observed a high rate of college applications across Internationals Network's New York City high schools. More than half of the graduating seniors at each of the 15 schools applied; the rates ranged from 54% to 97%. Without exception, these students were accepted by at least one institution, and many were accepted into their "reach" college.

Trends we observed included an increase in applications to four-year institutions, which are more selective than community colleges. Overall, 96% of our NYC 2022 seniors who applied to college included at least one four-year institution. We acknowledge the value and importance of community colleges as a gateway to opportunities and upward mobility, particularly for low-income students who are first in their family to attend college. Nonetheless, we recognize that many such students aim low in their college aspirations, even though they may be qualified for entry into four-year colleges, a phenomenon known as undermatch (Naranjo, Ooka Pang, and Alvarado, 2015).

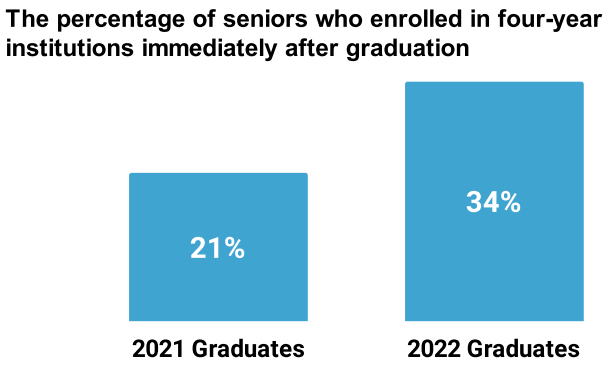
On average, the NYC Internationals graduating class of 2022 applied to between five and six CUNY colleges. Among the most popular institutions were Borough of Manhattan Community College (centrally located and with a very strong advertising presence in city subways), Lehman College in the Bronx, and City College in Manhattan. That comports with the likely significance that geography and perception of commuting distance plays, with students applying most frequently to

colleges within their borough or in an adjacent borough. Most Internationals Network graduates rely on public transportation to travel to high school and will continue to do so in college, when the vast majority continue to live at home. Colleges perceived to be farther away or more difficult to access, or that have less visibility in ad campaigns (e.g., York College in Queens and the College of Staten Island) were the least popular among applicants. (For more detail on school location and application, see HERE.)

Increase in Applications to More Competitive Programs

One of the overall goals of Internationals Network's postsecondary readiness initiative has been to increase access to more competitive colleges and programs, which have higher graduation rates. Our data reveal that among the New York City Internationals 2022 seniors who applied to CUNY, a full 96% applied to at least one four-year institution, an increase of more than 50% from our graduating class of 2021. That includes the larger numbers of students who are eligible for and apply to CUNY's Macaulay Honors College, a highly selective program that offers many academic and financial supports to help students persist through graduation and remain free of debt. At some of our schools, a single factor doubled the Macaulay application rate: Internationals Manager of Postsecondary Readiness organized a visit from a Macaulay Honors College representative to a meeting of counselors, creating a personal connection line to the students.

Test-Optional Policies Leave Barriers for



Immigrant Multilingual Learners

The upward trend in our graduates' applications to four-year colleges can be attributed in part to a shift in college admissions criteria. In 2020, CUNY colleges waived exam requirements temporarily in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. That change was made permanent, but the new policy does not translate to a seamless application process for students who are multilingual learners. This is because the Regents exam scores[8] that appear on all New York State students' transcripts can, if below a certain benchmark, trigger a request for proof of English proficiency. Prior to 2020, students scoring below a 75 on the English Language Arts (ELA) Regents were required to take the CUNY placement exam. In its place now is a "proficiency index" determined by each CUNY college, which considers diverse factors, including grade point average, weighted depending on how each college applies them. In this index, one or more English as a Second Language (ESL, ENL, ELD) courses on a transcript can be another flag to require proof of English proficiency, even if the student has tested out of EL status.

Domestic immigrant students have to prove much more than their peers to be deemed eligible to enter college. The burden of proof becomes more onerous if they have attended a newcomer program or have transcript course codes that reveal English language development courses in high school. The English Learner label[9] is hard for students to shed even after they graduate, posing further roadblocks and potentially discouraging the postsecondary aspirations of even the academically qualified. The demonstration of English proficiency required for high school graduation is not considered sufficient by City University, which does not require students from linguistic majority backgrounds to provide such proof. That is a trend we see in postsecondary settings around the world (Chen, Le, and Swigart, 2023; Pillar and Bodis, 2022)[10]. High school counselors report receiving phone calls from college admissions staff who suggest that newly admitted Internationals Network students might be better suited for community college based on assumptions that their English proficiency may be lacking.

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[8] New York State requires students to pass multiple high-stakes tests, called Regents Examinations, to graduate and receive a diploma. Internationals Network students must take an English Language Arts Regents exam and, in some cases, a Math Regents, and pass with a minimum score of 65 in order to be awarded a diploma. In addition, they are required to complete portfolio projects (PBATs) in five content areas, each involving an independent project and oral defense.

[9] The name for the category of students who are learning English is U.S. schools has shifted to reflect more emphasis on multilingualism, yet an underlying deficit perspective on student linguistic skills remains embedded in the federal and state label of Limited English Proficient (LEP) that persists in New York State.

[10] Piller, Ingrid & Bodis, A. (2022). "Marking and unmarking the (non)native speaker through English language proficiency requirements for university admission." Language in Society, 1-23. "How do universities decide whose English needs to be tested?" from Language on the Move (Jan. 6, 2023). https://www.languageonthemove.com/how-do-universities-decide-whose-english-needs-to-be-tested-for-admission/ and Chen, Le and Swigart (2023). FINAL REPORT: Multilingual Life on a Monolingual Campus. A Project of the Language, Culture and Justice Hub International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life – Brandeis University.

These are not the only challenges immigrant multilingual learners graduating from U.S. high schools face in the college application process. Those who do not test out of EL status are often channeled into yearlong intensive English programs or other developmental programs that provide academic support but are not credit-bearing. Requiring students to take and pay for classes that do not give them credit toward graduation adds to the time and economic burden college entails.

Structured, Scheduled, Regular Support Eases the Application Process: College Class

In focus group sessions with 55 immigrants from 11 countries in our 2022 graduating class, we learned a great deal about how students experience the structures, culture, and programs designed to facilitate postsecondary success. Students with a wide range of grade-point averages told us that structured support that is built into high school programming provided them with a sense of security and predictability, as well as a timeline in which to research and apply for college. The majority of students in the focus groups -- across gender, country of origin, language, and achievement level -- pointed to the importance of a scheduled college class in their regular weekly schedule and the integration of the application process into the organization of their coursework.

"I don't know how other schools do it, but the college thing doesn't feel like something extra, just like something in the school year. It's basically a normal class. First, they give us an introduction to what we are going to do, and then we do that exact thing that is part of applying."

The following are some of the things students in the focus groups told us:

"We started very early because, I don't know if it's normal for high schools but here, we have a class that's fully to learn about college and doing everything we need for college.... It started very early -- December, October, November [of senior year], something like that."

Students also highlighted the importance of support not only from the counselor, but from multiple school staff, including teachers as well as a multi-person college counseling team providing individualized support.

"We had a lot of support with [our college counselors and teacher].... They helped us a lot with revising and giving some advice...."
"One good thing, in the office, it is not just [the college counselor]. There are also other people who help with the college process.... So we get more support, it's not just one person we go to. And also, if we have writing questions, we can ask the teacher to help us."

Students named the range of people available to help them in their schools and the specific things with which they received help. This included completing applications for financial aid, scholarships, FAFSA and CUNY admittance, and locating scholarships and employment options for undocumented students.

"The students have different situations, so each [teacher] has time for the students -- who is going to see this person and who is going to help who. It is all scheduled and organized, which I really liked, because it made things easier."

Sufficient Staff in a Team Approach Facilitates the Process

One high school that saw a dramatic increase in applications to and enrollment in four-year colleges in the CUNY system attributed the change to a new college team. Previously, one full-time counselor worked alone to address both college and socioemotional needs. A team was created, with a counselor focused exclusively on postsecondary options working with a multilingual team of four alumni college coaches employed and paid by the school and partner agencies. Each coach is a recent graduate of the same high school currently enrolled at The City University of New York. The team approach leverages these alumni coaches's cultural assets and contextual knowledge.
The full-time counselor attributes the success of the college coaching to the intentional way she distributes caseloads and builds on each alumni coach's strengths and experiences. She designates coaches for cohorts of graduating seniors, including one specifically to mentor undocumented students, which provides a sense of safety for these vulnerable yet resilient students.

"We have so many people on our team making sure students are submitting applications. We tell students, 'You don't necessarily have to go to college, but we want you NOT to lose out on this opportunity. So submit an application.' I trained my college coaches to look at applications the way I would ... so that they do it correctly."

This support is structurally intentional, and also linguistically and culturally responsive. The coaches have a specific caseload of students so they can follow up on each student at each step. Some seniors may still need language support – and we can match them with a coach who speaks their primary language, lifting the comprehension of processes and materials, and broadly facilitating the use of English, including in completing applications. One coach has expertise in working on the Dream ACT, bringing support and accurate information to undocumented students.

Options for Students Who Plan Not to Attend College Are Limited

New York City Public Schools have bolstered their offerings in career and technical education and work-based learning. Nonetheless, students who seek to pursue work rather than jump immediately into a college track often find their options limited and information scarce. Only high schools certified as Career and Technical Education sites have postsecondary-readiness scores that include workforce preparation or internships; others have no accountability incentives to provide pathways into trades or apprenticeships. As a result, students often find information lacking, and counselors may not have relevant information at hand. College preparation coursework built into the schedule generally does not include in-depth information about workforce development and/or technical training. To address this gap, Internationals Network developed a Career Pathways Guide to assist college counseling teams at the high school level in referring students to immigrant-supportive programs.

In focus groups, certain students expressed clarity in choosing to work rather than immediately attend college, without ruling out the possibility of attending later. Some students expressed a desire for industry certification to help them advance in their chosen area. In general, students told us they wanted to continue working in areas in which they were already employed, often manual trade roles like construction worker, electrician or auto mechanic, or in service trades like hospitality, catering or restaurant work.

Overall, work experience among Internationals Network students is vast and diverse, and, since the start of the pandemic, more common (see Internationals' reports on pandemic experiences of students, families and schools HERE and HERE). The increase in the number of working students makes it imperative for schools and districts to provide more work-based learning opportunities, in tandem with apprenticeships and internship programs. Such programs provide early exposure to various industries that can inform college major selection; for immigrant students, they also generate more pathways into the workforce and into careers that bring economic stability and socioeconomic mobility.

Performance-Based Graduation Requirements Foster Readiness

In focus groups held separately with students and parents, all identified Internationals Network high schools' practice of performance assessments as being pivotal in preparing for the expectations of college. Students must demonstrate proficiency on five portfolio-based assessment tasks (PBATs) in addition to passing the English Language Arts Regents (and in some cases the Math Regents) in order to graduate. Consistently, alumni of Internationals Network schools report that, as a result, they enter college knowing how to work in a group of people from diverse backgrounds, conduct research, work on long-term projects, and interact with faculty; these are areas in which they observe that their college peers sometimes lack confidence. Our performance assessments are designed to enable students to bolster their English-language development and academic skills, while also demonstrating their mastery of content knowledge.

The focus-group parents indicated that the performance assessments prepared their children for college:

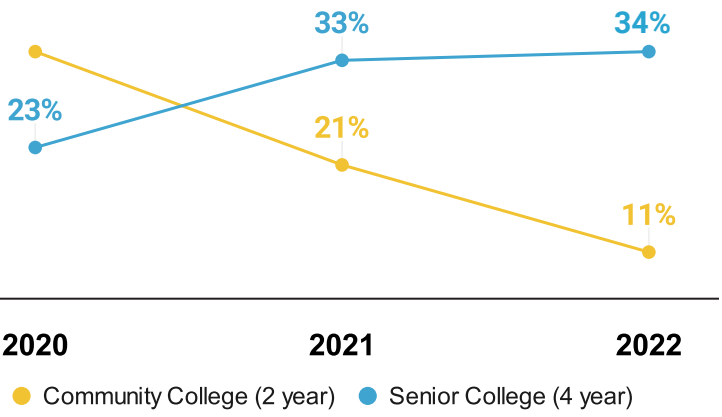
> **"Yes, they need tests to go to college, and if it's a requirement, they need to pass it. Tests are good to understand the theory, but the Graduation Portfolios (PBATs) are preparing you for a real job and life."**

Findings: Enrollment Immediately after High School Graduation

Increase in Enrollment in Four-Year Colleges

Internationals Network's New York City 2022 graduates enrolled in four-year colleges at rates more than three times higher than in two-year community colleges. That reverses the prior trend of more immediate enrollment in community colleges. See below for three-year trends beginning with New York City graduates of 2020. We suspect the change is a direct result of the increase in our seniors applying to four-year colleges and in the widened eligibility from CUNY's altered admission requirements.

Enrollment in four-year colleges has risen among Internationals graduates



Summer Melt

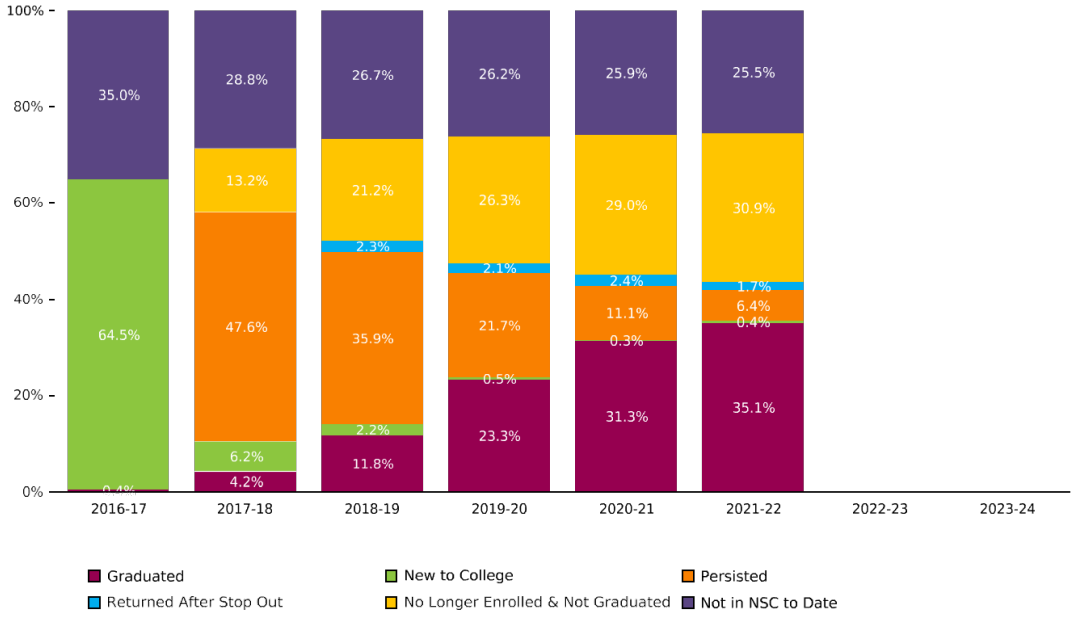
Following our 2022 NYC graduates into the Fall of 2022, we were able to identify rates of summer melt. Of the 911 who applied to college, 463 enrolled (51%), in line with the average across our network. While summer melt is especially high among Latine and low-income students, we saw significant differences across our high schools, with some hitting rates as high as 75% and others as low as 25%. As mentioned earlier, these rates may be attributed to students' need to work and earn income before attending college or their enrollment in non-credit-bearing courses.

In addition, the enrollment statistics must be considered in the context of what counts as "enrolled." Students engaged in pre-enrollment developmental education, such as the CUNY Start or the CUNY Language Immersion Program (CLIP), are attending college but are not identified as enrolled.[11] This leads us to believe that there are more students at college than the number listed as enrolled in our National Student Clearinghouse match.

Enrolling the Fall After High School Graduation: Trends Over Time

Since we began exploring the postsecondary trajectories of Internationals Network NYC graduates, we have consistently seen trends worth noting: students continuing to enroll as first-time freshmen six years after graduation, and students leaving and returning to college in years three through six after graduation.

This trend mirrors what is documented in research conducted by the New York City Research Alliance (Black & Cora, 2017): graduates of New York City high schools who enter college may stop out and re-enroll over the course of six or more years until they complete their degrees.



The data shown is reported from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) on the graduating 2017 cohort of New York City Internationals Network seniors. The top band reported as "not in NSC to date" are students who did not enroll in college as well as those at college in remedial or non-credit postsecondary programs, who are not categorized as enrolled.

[11] City University of New York (2023). CUNY Ends Traditional Remedial Courses. https://www1.cuny.edu/mu/forum/2023/01/12/cuny-ends-traditional-remedial-courses/

Enrolling the Fall After High School Graduation: Trends Over Time

At the CUNY system-wide level, some patterns emerged around students' grades and their eligibility for critical support services in college, such as SEEK[12], HEOP, and College Discovery.[13] Some opportunity programs, including those providing additional support and financial aid, have a GPA cutoff (for more detail see HERE). There is a dominant narrative that low-income, immigrant students of color have lower than average GPAs, but this is not always the case.[14] However, low-income domestic immigrant students often do need additional support and financial aid to help attend and acclimate to college, even if they excelled academically in high school. In addition, the test-blind process CUNY put in place during the COVID pandemic does not allow student transcripts to reflect recent ELA Regents information, which may disadvantage them. CUNY has historically used the ELA Regents score as a data point in deciding whether to administer a college proficiency exam, and then whether to place the student in credit-bearing or remedial courses. What remains evident on the transcript is "EL status"; "EL students" may be eliminated from consideration for admission if the "remediation support and courses" for those so classified are not available at that campus. College counselors who observe which four-year colleges are more likely to admit Internationals Network graduates impact how guidance counselors support them in creating college lists. Furthermore, while we recognize that multilingual learners bring a wealth of linguistic diversity and expertise to postsecondary pathways, colleges generally do not take such assets into account during the application and admission process.[15]

Discussion: Using Data and Student Experience to Bolster College Readiness

A lot has changed since the Internationals Network high schools in this project began to engage deeply in the work of exploring student data and experiences and improving postsecondary readiness programs. Shifts in the participating schools' structures, culture, and programming are documented in the table below.

EQUITY-DRIVEN COLLEGE ACCESS

	BEFORE	AFTER
INTENTIONAL STRUCTURES	• Postsecondary team made up of guidance counselors & alumni coaches • A new guidance counselor transitioned into college counseling; separate college team developed curricular resources for advisory (CREW) • College counselors and college seminar teacher work closely with Assistant Principal	• Postsecondary team made up of college counselor & team of alumni coaches (some hired through NYC Public School's Immigrant Ambassador Program) provide targeted supports around college applications and financial aid, working closely with College Curriculum Committee • Postsecondary team includes work-based learning coordinator • Team meets regularly
CULTURE	• Guidance counselors mostly focus on postsecondary programming for 12th grade and second semester of 11th grade • Role of parents and families in students' postsecondary journeys unclear	• Postsecondary programming starts in 9th grade, progressing to 12th grade • Improved college and career options with attention to additional supports for undocumented students • Increased parent engagement and improved ways to communicate to parents and families throughout school year
PROGRAMMING	• Postsecondary offerings mostly center on college & career opportunities • Internships and work-based learning opportunities siloed from postsecondary readiness • College and career curriculum implemented separately from core content instruction	• Work-based learning and internship opportunities integrated with the postsecondary programming • College class for seniors more integrated with the 12th grade ELA course and advisory • Additional focus on work and career options for students not electing college immediately after high school graduation

12 The Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge, or SEEK, is a program funded by New York State designed to meet the needs of students considered to be economically disadvantaged and academically underprepared.

13 The Higher Education Opportunity Program, or HEOP, is another New York State initiative designed to serve students who are considered educationally or economically disadvantaged based on different criteria.

14 Perna, L. W., Lundy-Wagner, V., Drezner, N. D., Gasman, M., Gary, S. N., & Berger, J. B. (2009). The Condition of College & Career Readiness 2009: Students from Low-Income Families. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education. This study revealed that low-income students who received need-based financial aid had higher GPAs than higher income peers who did not receive aid.

15 Chen, Le and Swigart (2023). FINAL REPORT: Multilingual Life on a Monolingual Campus A Project of the Language, Culture and Justice Hub International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life – Brandeis University https://www.brandeis.edu/ethics/international-justice/language-culture-justice/events-and-projects/mlmc_report_2023.pdf

Using data along with student experience has become an integral part of supporting Internationals Network New York City high schools in postsecondary access work that promotes equity and opportunity. We have found that the ability to track students through the senior-year process of applying to and enrolling in college enables staff to focus on specific areas for improvement, including support for students in applying to honors programs and four-year colleges.

Analyses of trends in applications and acceptances have highlighted CUNY colleges to which few students apply and that should perhaps be reconsidered. Looking at application trends and eligibility across our network for honors programs and SEEK/HEOP has allowed us to support individual schools in encouraging applications among certain subgroups of students. In some cases, data has supported advocacy work, as when we observed that many of our students met admissions criteria but were being admitted to one CUNY college at a much lower rate than others. In addition, our analyses consistently break down trends by home language to ensure that all subgroups of students receive nuanced support and attention.

Our collective work to explore data and student experience has also led to stronger connections with college partners to provide dual enrollment options for increasing numbers of Internationals Network students.

Recommendations & Implications for Educators, Researchers & Policy-Makers

Postsecondary access and success depends upon intentional and coherent systems, structures, and programs that focus on equity in the service of students. In our previous Learning Brief we surfaced initial recommendations for school and district administrators, researchers, educators, and policy-makers to create schoolwide systems that promote an equity-driven approach to college access centered on the student experience. We can now expand upon those through the lenses of school structures, culture, and programming.

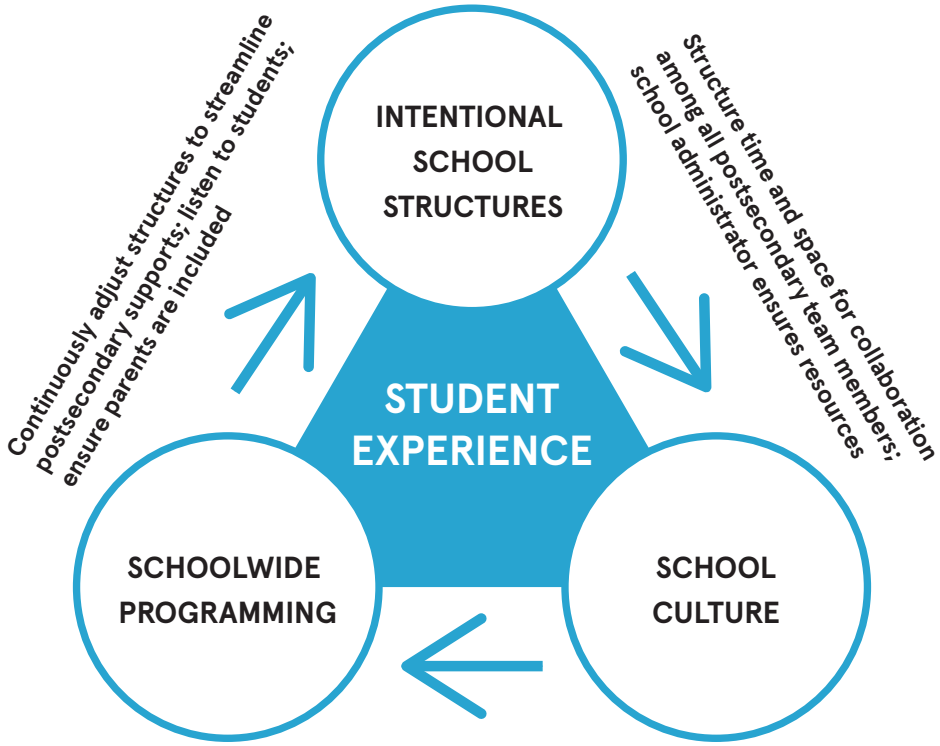
Elements of Equity-Driven College Access

(Click to jump to recommendations)

INTENTIONAL SCHOOL STRUCTURES

SCHOOL CULTURE

SCHOOLWIDE PROGRAMMING



Intentional School Structures

- **Build a postsecondary team to share responsibility.**

A school's postsecondary work cannot rest with one person alone; rather, we recommend ensuring that a team of people be involved in a schoolwide endeavor. Building a team increases staff capacity, allowing the work to be manageable and more personalized for students. The team configuration safeguards sustainability; its expertise and institutional memory is not lost if one person departs or goes on leave.

- **Create flexible schoolwide structures for postsecondary readiness.**

School Administrators must ensure that there is scheduled time, space, and dedicated resources to support the work of the postsecondary team. This may include allocating funds to allow members to gather flexibly (after school, on weekends, in the summer) in order to plan and discuss implementations, and to meet with students.

- **Utilize your alumni network to support college access.**

Consider recruiting and hiring former or recent alumni as college coaches. Launching an alumni network can support recruitment efforts, making available speakers for college info sessions, college tour leaders who are currently in attendance, representatives at college and career fairs, and the like. High school graduates who took time off after high school to work but are now in the process of reapplying to college often seek help from the high school counselors who know them well; utilizing those returnees to support current high school students in the college application process is another opportunity to leverage alumni.

School Culture

- **School Administrators must commit to articulating and implementing a strategic schoolwide vision.**

The job of the college counselor is foundational in the postsecondary pathways of immigrant students, and the success of that work begins with School Administrators. They must have a clear schoolwide vision of the programming for postsecondary access throughout students' high school experience. That clarity enables the School Principal to strategically allocate resources, and to adaptively implement and communicate the guiding vision intentionally to staff, students, and families. And creating a School Profile that details the school's programs and supports can help institutionalize the guiding vision. The profile can also serve to convey graduates' range of learning experiences to colleges and organizations that offer scholarships.

- **Know your students!**

First and foremost, the student experience must be at the center of postsecondary access work. It is evident from application artifacts that the adults who support the students know them very well. Students' personal statements reveal so much about their past, their current realities, their hopes and aspirations, and their lived experiences as first-generation immigrants. These personal statements are shared with the staff and teachers designated to write student recommendations, which highlight what students can do and how they are perceived. They often speak to students' leadership qualities: how they interact with their peers in the classroom, the roles they take on within group work settings, their responsibilities to their families and loved ones, as well as their roles during out-of-school interests and after-school activities, to name a few.

- **Build a postsecondary access data culture.**

As we discussed in our previous Learning Briefs, the standard college readiness indices often focus exclusively on academic indicators as measured by standardized tests. The use of student-level data can add insight into metrics across subgroups -- including gender, race, home language, and ethnicity. That discernment reaches into a range of areas, including access to enrichment (e.g., dual enrollment options, honors courses, internships, etc.); and access to college counseling (e.g., number of meetings with a counselor, college trips and exposure).

Institutions of higher education use robust student information systems to capture and track both demographic data and achievement metrics on enrolled students. They could consider disaggregating those data by students' home language, EL or former EL status, and socioeconomic status, to ensure that policies and programs promote equity. Data collection on linguistic diversity on campus could highlight opportunities and challenges for access initiatives.[16]

- **Consider multiple measures (beyond tests and GPA) to help students demonstrate college readiness.**

High school students are already subjected to multiple high-stakes summative exams and mandated screeners and assessments. The scrutiny becomes more pronounced for ELs, as they are also required to take English proficiency exams and ESL courses in addition

[16] One example of such data disaggregation is a recent study conducted at Brandeis University: Chen, Le & Swigart (2023). FINAL REPORT: Multilingual Life on a Monolingual Campus A Project of the Language, Culture and Justice Hub International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life – Brandeis University https://www.brandeis.edu/ethics/international-justice/language-culture-justice/events-and-projects/mlmc_report_2023.pdf events-and-projects/mlmc_report_2023.pdf

to the aforementioned high-stakes exams. Performance assessments are one of many other measures that colleges should consider when assessing students' college readiness. They provide a more holistic approach that is aligned to college and career readiness. They particularly allow EL students to demonstrate English-language development and proficiency, mastery of content knowledge through research projects and papers, the capacity to engage in academic discourse through panel presentations, and the ability to reflect about what they learned and how they learn most effectively – factors no high-stakes exam could ever capture or assess.

Schoolwide Programming

- **Start early to build in work-based learning, internships, and exposure to careers.**

At its core, postsecondary access is about providing entry points for students to pursue careers that afford financial stability and socioeconomic mobility. College allows entry to fields of study that can lead to high-earning careers and economic prosperity. Workforce development, through trade and certification programs, can also provide entry to profitable, valued careers. Whichever the pathway, there is great benefit in early exposure to the types of jobs that lead to long-term, sustainable careers within various industries. Thus, conversations about students' interests and career aspirations should start as they enter high school (some would argue earlier), not just once they reach the 11th or 12th grade. High schools that provide opportunities to connect with possible careers and explore potential interests enable students to make pathway choices that align with their long-term interests.[17] These opportunities can be in the form of an early career exploration curriculum that is offered during a scheduled advisory period in the school day; making explicit career connections during core instruction; a college and career class; work-based learning opportunities during the school year or over the summer; and paid internships and apprenticeships that build upon and leverage students' existing work and life experiences, just to name a few.

- **Focus on equity in access, pathways, participation, and completion.**

Students who enter the U.S. public school system for the first time in secondary school are building knowledge about the postsecondary landscape as they progress. Schools with an equity focus will provide opportunities for a range of experiences and exposure to new information, including dual enrollment. Focusing on the student experiences enables them to create different access points so that students are not left out of these opportunities and incentivize getting a head start on college credits. Dual enrollment and summer enrichment programs are ways for students, in particular domestic immigrant students, to demonstrate that they are challenging themselves academically. Some programs can offer students a door into a specific college (whether public or private). The organization Jobs for the Future has conducted ground-breaking research on dual enrollment, demonstrating that multilingual learners benefit not from remediation, but from the type of acceleration that dual enrollment offers.[18] Funding and partnerships with summer bridge programs and other collaborations are also imperative to stave off summer melt through intentional programming.

> "Last year, some of us took a program called College Now [dual enrollment, tuition-free to New York City high school students]. We were talking about it because we were interested in knowing how many credits a class was going to give us and how that class would help us in our classes now."



Students from Manahattan IHS, NYC

[17] Jobs for the Future has extensive research and practical recommendations on work-based learning at https://www.jff.org/what-we-do/impact-stories/center-for-apprenticeship-and-work-based-learning/

[18] Hooker, S. Finn, S. Niño, D. (2021). Designing Dual Enrollment to Reach English Learners: Boosting College Success for California Students. Jobs for the Future. https://www.jff.org/resources/designing-dual-enrollment-reach-english-learners/

Conclusions

Starting with the first brief in this series on postsecondary access and pathways of immigrant multilingual learners, we have highlighted gaps in the field, lack of data, and school-level structures, systems, and culture that make college access possible. We have also shared data on the college access experiences of students in Internationals Network New York City high schools to highlight the powerful effect appropriate support can have in the college access process. These three Learning Briefs reflect our continued work to foster equity for immigrant multilingual learners and to promote more informed discourse and continued research.

As we have highlighted throughout the series, there are limited data and no category at the postsecondary level to capture the nuanced realities of young people who immigrate to the U.S. during adolescence. Hence, they are often overlooked in policy conversations. In addition, programs that ostensibly provide them with equity-driven supports are often not data-driven, and they address students of color as a monolith.

Our recommendations are designed so that in the transition to college, students are directed toward institutions that both see and know how to support and serve them. We assert that effective institutions, both at the secondary and postsecondary level, are intentional about leveraging domestic immigrant students' strength and recognizing aspects of their identities that influence their college experience, including immigrant generation, journey and status, age at arrival, home language(s), race, gender, and family background.

These are questions we encourage all stakeholders to consider.

- What would accountability in equity of access and outcomes for domestic immigrant students look like
  a. at the high school level?
  b. at the college level?
  c. at the workforce development level?
- How can colleges identify and make domestic immigrant students visible, to serve them effectively?
- What information do researchers need to conduct research on this population?
- What partnerships – among communities, practitioners, researchers, and policy-makers – could move this work forward and build its momentum?

We are aware that considerations about immigrant youth and multilingual learners are often an afterthought in research and policy regarding postsecondary access and success. Our goal is that the realities of these students **gain a central place** in discussions about student success at both the high school and college level. We call on practitioners, policy-makers and researchers to adopt an equity mindset with an understanding of domestic immigrant students' nuanced backgrounds and an intentional focus on highlighting their strengths and needs.



Students from IHS at Prospect Heights, NYC

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