

2019

Post-Secondary Outcomes of Newark High School Graduates: Community Roundtable Series

SUMMARY REPORT



Chanel L. Donaldson, Senior Manager of Communications and
Development, Newark City of Learning Collaborative



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On July 30, 2018, the Newark City of Learning Collaborative (NCLC) released [Post-Secondary Outcomes of Newark High School Graduates](#), an analysis of college enrollment, persistence, and completion trends for approximately 85 percent of all Newark high school students who graduated between 2011 and 2016. The first of its kind in Newark, the report's sample is representative of students from all school sectors, including district, charter, vocational technical, and parochial. While the findings highlight the good news that more Newark students are going to college – 54 percent of the sample immediately enrolled in college – it also highlights the need for more supports to enable Newark students to persist toward degree completion. Only about 23 percent of students earned any type of degree or credential within six years.

To ensure that the report was accessible and useable, NCLC launched an extensive community engagement effort, which included a five-part Community Roundtable Series from October 2 to November 5, 2018. The Roundtables took place in each of Newark's five wards. In total, nearly 200 parents, students, school administrators, teachers, policy makers, clergy members, and concerned citizens participated in the Roundtable Series.

Each discussion was moderated by a local school or community representative and included panelists from the community.

East Ward Roundtable: East Side High School, October 2, 2018

Moderator

Ivone Neto, Vice Principal of Innovative Programs, East Side High School

Panelists

Michael West, Principal, East Side High School

Brian Donovan, Vice Principal of Bilingual and ESL, East Side High School

Catia Nascimento, Teacher, East Side High School

Vera Amaro, Parent, East Side High School

Gabriel Morgaca, Student, East Side High School

Pierre Belizaire, Student, East Side High School

West Ward Roundtable: Jehovah-Jireh Praise and Worship Church Center, October 17, 2018

Moderator

Rev. Dr. Glenn Wilson, Pastor, Pilgrim Baptist Church; Member, Newark Clergy Affairs/Interfaith Alliance

Panelists

Akbar Cook, Principal, West Side High School

Roxanne Hall, Program Assistant, RU Ready for Work, Rutgers University-Newark

Mercy Wah, Student, University High School

South Ward Roundtable: Malcom X Shabazz High School, October 25, 2018

Moderator

Mary Bennett, Former Principal, Shabazz High School; Alliance for Newark Public Schools

Panelists

Naseed Gifted, Principal, Shabazz High School

Yakima Johnson, Vice Principal, Shabazz High School

Hind Oyibo, Student, Shabazz High School

Nasir Hayes, Student, Shabazz High School

Central Ward Roundtable: Central High School, November 1, 2018

Moderator

LaTonya White, Guidance Counselor, Central High School

Panelists

Dr. Sharnee Brown, Principal, Central High School
Yamin Reddick, Student, Central High School
Stephen Bowles, Teacher, Central High School
Pastor John Baker, Cross and Crown Christian Church
Pastor Lula Baker, Cross and Crown Christian Church

North Ward Roundtable: Barringer High School, November 5, 2018

Moderator

Lidia Dos Santos, Vice Principal, Barringer High School

Panelists

Angela Mincy, Principal, Barringer High School
Matthew Ramsay, Vice Principal, Barringer High School
Josh Myers, Teacher, Barringer High School
Samuel Bendinelli, Teacher, Barringer High School
Madison Porterfield, Student, Barringer High School
Kymberlee Valencia, Student, Barringer High School
Aryaman Ravash, Student, Barringer High School
Bishop Ronald Jones, Interfaith Community Outreach

Roundtable Series Goals

The goals of the Roundtable series were to (1) share the Post-Secondary Outcomes Report's findings, (2) uncover the real-world personal insights of the community that inform the data, and (3) collectively brainstorm comprehensive citywide strategies that better support Newark students to and through college. Thus, at each Roundtable, the agenda began with the Report's co-author, Dr. Kristi Donaldson, providing an overview of major findings. Following the presentation, the moderator began the community conversation by asking questions related to the data.¹ Panelists and audience members were encouraged to respond to the moderator's questions, raise their own questions, and share additional insights.

¹ See Appendix for moderator questions. Moderators typically began the conversation using the pre-developed questions, but were encouraged to allow the panelists and audience to shape the direction of the conversation. Thus, moderators typically did not ask all of the pre-developed questions or ask them in a particular order. The ultimate goal was for the community to raise the questions and topics most important to them.



Key Discussion Themes

Four major discussion themes emerged during the course of the Roundtable Series. Summarized under each theme are commonly held perspectives that were raised and, where applicable, the community's recommendations for improvement.

Fears, Misconceptions, and Misinformation

- Students and parents experience “sticker shock,” or dismay at the high cost of college tuition, which creates the misconception that college is unattainable for lower income students. Fear of taking on debt to pay for college is also prevalent and there is not enough information available for residents to learn about the financial aid options that offset the burden of paying for college, like scholarships and grants.
- The actual process of applying to college and applying for financial aid is frustrating. Applications are a barrier for students because they are overwhelming or confusing, especially if students do not have guidance throughout the process.

Information and Resource Sharing

- While there are many resources to help Newarkers in their transition to and through college, there is not effective information sharing about these resources. Often, the same handful of students are given multiple opportunities (pre-college programs, scholarships, internships, etc.), while students who are not already receiving resources are not given new opportunities.
- Program administrators find it challenging to identify the best ways to reach the students most in need and the community at large. New methods that reach young people where they are should be considered, like billboards outside of high schools.
- Many Newarkers are the first in their families to pursue college. Without the benefit of family members who understand what it is like to apply to, pay for, and attend college, first-generation students may face a host of challenges as they navigate their college experience. It is important to include families in the college process as early as possible to mitigate some of these challenges. For example, children and their parents should be introduced to basic college readiness planning well before high school to allow ample time to prepare for the transition.

The Importance of a Post-Secondary Degree or Credential

- For some, the value of a post-secondary credential in today's economy is undeniable, but others question whether a degree or credential is really worth pursuing. Common recurring points of discussion include:
 - The value of a college degree versus alternative post-high school options
 - Realistic job opportunities for someone with or without a post-high school credential
 - The long-term life benefits of earning a degree, i.e., building a desirable career, lifetime earnings, health and well-being, civic and community engagement, and supporting a family
 - The importance of college for an individual's personal growth and development
- Beyond the importance of earning a degree on an individual level, the City of Newark will benefit from more residents earning degrees. It will provide a pathway to improve entire communities as residents become better equipped to pursue new jobs and related opportunities. Newarkers earning college degrees moves the whole city toward a more vibrant future.

School and Community Support

- Having a mentor or role model that has been to college can help students envision themselves there, too. Mentors can also provide career guidance and exposure to career opportunities that students would not know about otherwise. Rather than it being a sporadic act of good fortune for certain students to get mentorship, there should be a way to systematize mentorship opportunities in schools and community institutions, such as churches.
- The transition period from high school to the first year of college receives the most attention, but students need help throughout all four years or more of their college experience. A lack of sustained school and community support could be a contributing factor to the significant drop in enrollment for Newark college students after their first year. The collective Newark community should develop systematic methods of staying connected to Newark college students throughout their academic career so that they maintain enrollment and ultimately complete their degrees.



Final Take-Aways

Building Newark's college-going culture is an endeavor that requires the collective effort of the entire city, including municipal government, K-12 schools, colleges and universities, businesses, houses of worship, non-profit organizations, and most importantly, students, parents, and community members themselves. Future education policies in Newark must be informed by the perspective of the community and include their input to ensure that the efforts of policymakers are responsive to actual needs.

The key discussion themes summarized here highlight a few things. First, Newarkers are thinking about many of the same issues that we are at NCLC. Captured within the eight policy recommendations of the *Post-Secondary Outcomes Report* are many of the same ideas that emerged in the community conversations. For example, Newarkers raised the issue of early family engagement, which was captured in recommendation six of the report, and the idea of systematizing school or community supports for students throughout the duration of their college career, which was captured in recommendation seven. The Roundtables were an excellent forum to confirm if our recommendations and strategic direction are in line with the community's needs.

The discussion themes also highlight a few salient issues the city should coalesce around: **debunking** fears, misconceptions, and misinformation, **expanding** information and resource sharing, **reinforcing** the importance of a post-secondary degree or credential, and **systematizing** school and community support. The affirmation that these four areas, already interwoven into the work of NCLC and its partners, are key for the community ensures that we stay on track to supporting the development of a better Newark for Newarkers.

While the Post-Secondary Outcomes Community Roundtable Series was limited to fall 2018, the impact is long lasting. The collective feedback, thoughts, and experiences of Newark residents will remain at the forefront of how NCLC builds and sustains a college-going culture that will continue well beyond 2025.

Learn More

To learn more about NCLC and download the *Post-Secondary Outcomes Report*, visit www.newarknclc.org.

Appendix

Sample Moderator Questions

1. Why is college important for Newark residents? Why is building a “college-going culture” in Newark important?
2. Many Newark high school graduates are first generation college students, or the first in their families to pursue college. Keeping this in mind, what type of “college knowledge” do Newark students need to be successful in enrolling in college? In persisting (remaining enrolled from one semester to the next)? What are the most confusing pieces of the college process for first generation students in particular?
3. The report found that most students are staying in state and close to Newark for college. What are some of the benefits – and drawbacks – of this for students? For their families?
4. Over time, the report found that a larger proportion of students are going to four-year colleges and fewer are going to two-year colleges. Why do you think this is the case?
5. How are high schools supporting students (e.g. guidance, school culture, programming, coursework) in their college preparation and planning? What is working and what isn’t working for our students?
6. The report talked about immediate enrollment, or transitioning right into college after high school without taking a break. Immediate enrollers are more likely to earn degrees. What resources are critical in getting students to enroll in college and to enroll as soon as possible?
7. The report identified persistence, or keeping students enrolled in college from one semester to the next, as an area for improvement (e.g., not as many students completed their second year as their first, particularly at two-year colleges). What do students need to persist and remain enrolled in their degree programs?
 - What strategies can assist us as a community in identifying when a student in college is not doing well?
 - How can the community support students who are already in college but facing challenges staying in college?
8. For those of you that are currently in college or have completed college, what advice do you have for those who are enrolled, planning to enroll, or considering enrolling in college?
 - Are there specific strategies you would recommend for overcoming common academic, social/emotional, or financial challenges?
 - What is an important resource you had that is helpful? What is a resource you didn’t have that would have been helpful?
9. Career development through things like jobs, paid internships, and apprenticeships can be college persistence strategies as they help the student to keep sight of the end goal (a career) and better prepare students for the workforce after graduation. What is the value in strengthening and expanding college to career pathways?
 - How do we have college/career conversations earlier (like with high school students), so that students understand the monetary value of a college education?



Newark City of Learning Collaborative

Rutgers University-Newark
Joseph C. Cornwall Center for Metropolitan
Studies 47 Bleeker Street, Newark, NJ 07102-
1811

nclc.info@newark.rutgers.edu | 973.353.1750