

## **CUNY Closing Out Students of Color**

Youth of color in New York City are being told to prepare for college and are making great efforts and strides in doing so, yet the opportunities for them to enroll in a four-year college at City University are diminishing.

The Community Service Society of New York (CSS) this week released a report that examines the enrollment trends of freshmen at the City University of New York (CUNY). The report, titled, ["Unintended Impacts: Fewer Black and Latino Freshmen at CUNY Senior Colleges After the Recession,"](#) finds that black and Latino students are now far less likely than they were before 2009 to be enrolled in a CUNY senior college, particularly those in the top tier where student outcomes in terms of retention and graduation are far higher than at community colleges.

### **Importance of CUNY**

The report restricts its analysis to freshmen so as to understand the opportunities available to graduating high school students seeking to enroll in CUNY. CUNY is extremely important as the major institution of higher learning for much of the city's high school students who go on to college - 73 percent of CUNY freshman in 2010 were graduates of the city's public schools.

The recession that began in late 2008 led to more applications to CUNY from students and families hit hard by the economic downturn, especially students from low-income black and Latino families. As applications increased, CUNY senior colleges raised their minimum admissions requirements, leading to much greater enrollment of students with higher SAT scores. At the same time, the numbers of black and Latino students enrolling as freshmen at the top five CUNY colleges dropped sharply, and also fell at other senior colleges.

These dynamics had a clear impact, if an unintended one, on the racial and ethnic distribution of the CUNY system after 2008. By 2010, black students comprised only 10 percent in the top five CUNY colleges - Baruch, Hunter, Brooklyn, City, and Queens Colleges - despite the fact that more black high school students than ever are taking the SAT exam. At Baruch, perhaps the top CUNY college, just 6 percent of freshmen in 2010 were black.

Blacks and Latinos make up 72 percent of the public high school system, but only 48 percent of CUNY senior college freshman in 2010 - and just 29 percent at the top five campuses. CUNY's senior colleges, particularly its best schools, are not a reflection of the demographic makeup of our public high schools. And although CUNY's community colleges represent a potential pathway to a four-year degree, their outcomes are poor. Less than one in three students graduate with any type of degree in six years.

Even the state of Texas provides better access to its public colleges. Any Texas high school student graduating in the top 10 percent is guaranteed a spot in a state college. In addition, each Texas state college uses race as a factor in order to ensure a diverse entering class.

The report is titled "Unintended Impact" for a reason. We do not believe that CUNY knew what would happen when increased standards met the economic recession. However, we believe that CUNY can increase the number and share of black and Latino students at its senior colleges.

Among our recommendations are that admissions processes should consider more than just grade point average and SAT score in a student's application in the same way the other public and private colleges do to achieve greater levels of diversity. Programs at colleges across the country provide support to students with lower scores to help them succeed once on campus. CUNY should invest in similar initiatives.

CUNY should conduct more outreach to black and Latino students, use a more comprehensive review of applications, and reinstitute the summer program of conditional admissions. It could also utilize program models to support students who might have lower SAT scores.

Two weeks ago, I wrote about the findings of a report by the Schott Foundation for Public Education that revealed that the city's school system's funds, experienced teachers, and quality programs are unequally distributed according to race and neighborhood. It showed how the school system practices of education redlining "systematically lock out most of its student population from an opportunity to learn."

### **Mayoral Priority**

This is a crucial element of public policy for the future of the city. The next mayor of New York should make it a major priority to revise the way resources are meted out in the city's schools. And there should be an even closer working relationship between the city's high schools and CUNY. After all, both are part of the city's educational system.

Our students must have adequate preparation to succeed at the college level. Our education system must be geared to prepare its students for living wage jobs in a challenging labor market. If not, we will be creating an underclass of New Yorkers with increased burdens on public resources that will eventually lower the standard of living for all of us.

In addition, an educated and well-trained workforce is one of the most important features that New York has had over the years in attracting and keeping major corporations and their jobs. Its retention is vital to the economic future of the city.

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