

WHAT NEW YORKERS WANT FROM THE NEW MAYOR



A Change in Education Policies



**An Affordable Place
to Live**



**Jobs With Upward
Mobility**

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Community Service Society

Fighting Poverty
Strengthening
New York

The Community Service Society of New York (CSS) is an informed, independent, and unwavering voice for positive action on behalf of more than 3 million low-income New Yorkers. CSS draws on a 170-year history of excellence in addressing the root causes of economic disparity. We respond to urgent, contemporary challenges through applied research, advocacy, litigation, and innovative program models that strengthen and benefit all New Yorkers.

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An Agenda for the New Mayor

This report is the third in a **three-part** series detailing policy recommendations for the new mayor based on findings from *The Unheard Third*, an annual survey of low-income New Yorkers. The first installment, **For Richer or Poorer: What New Yorkers Want in the Next Mayor**, was released in October 2013 and focused on creating jobs with upward mobility. The second, **An Affordable Place to Live**, was released in January 2014 and detailed the state of affordable housing in New York City.

WHAT NEW YORKERS WANT FROM THE NEW MAYOR: A Change in Education Policies

The Inequality of Opportunity

- ▶ More than **one out of three** New York City public high school students fails to graduate within four years of entering high school; fewer than half of black and Latino males get their diploma after four years.
- ▶ Black students make up 31 percent of the city's public high school students, but were **less than 1 percent** of the entering class at the most prestigious high school, Stuyvesant High School, in fall 2013.
- ▶ The share of freshmen enrolled at CUNY's four-year colleges who are black or Latino **declined from 53 percent in 2008 to 45 percent in 2012.**
- ▶ There are over **177,000** 16- to 24-year-olds in New York City who are not in school, nor working—30 percent of these young people left school without a diploma.

These deeply troubling statistics make clear that even after 12 years of intense scrutiny and reform, New York City's public education system remains broken. It continues to fail students from low-income communities who need it most. The Bloomberg administration argued that a "market" approach—increasing competition, closing failing schools, and opening charter and other new schools—would give children from poor neighborhoods an equal opportunity to succeed, but that strategy has fallen short. Findings from a 2012 Annenberg Institute report on New York City public schools show that where a student lives—specifically, the racial composition and average income in their home zip code—is still a strong

predictor of whether or not they will graduate from high school and be ready for college.¹ School choice and charter schools have not been enough to ensure that students from low-income, predominately black and Latino neighborhoods keep pace with their more well-to-do peers. The Annenberg Institute's report concludes that neighborhood demographics still play an outsized role in student outcomes.

The failure of the city's public education system leads to a perilous situation for many young adults. Nearly 518,000 16- to 24-year-olds in the city—over half of the 16- to 24-year-old population—live in low-income households, defined as being below 200 percent of the federal poverty

level. Just over two-thirds of these young people are black or Latino. Youth in low-income households face greater challenges in completing high school and being ready for college. Those who do graduate from high school are less likely to continue their education, particularly in four-year degree programs. And at a time when even college graduates face uncertainty in the labor market, those without a high school diploma—or only a high school diploma and no college—are more likely to find themselves in low-wage jobs if they can find work at all.² These outcomes impact not only the individual, but their families, and possibly future generations.

In an effort to tackle this challenge, in 2011, the Bloomberg administration unveiled the Young Men's Initiative (YMI), aimed at improving outcomes for young black and Latino men. Former Mayor Bloomberg should be praised for acknowledging the extreme

Recent polling for the *The Unheard Third* 2013, an annual survey by the Community Service Society, shows that New York City residents are concerned about improving outcomes for low-income students and those who have left school without the

Youth in low-income households face greater challenges in completing high school and being ready for college.

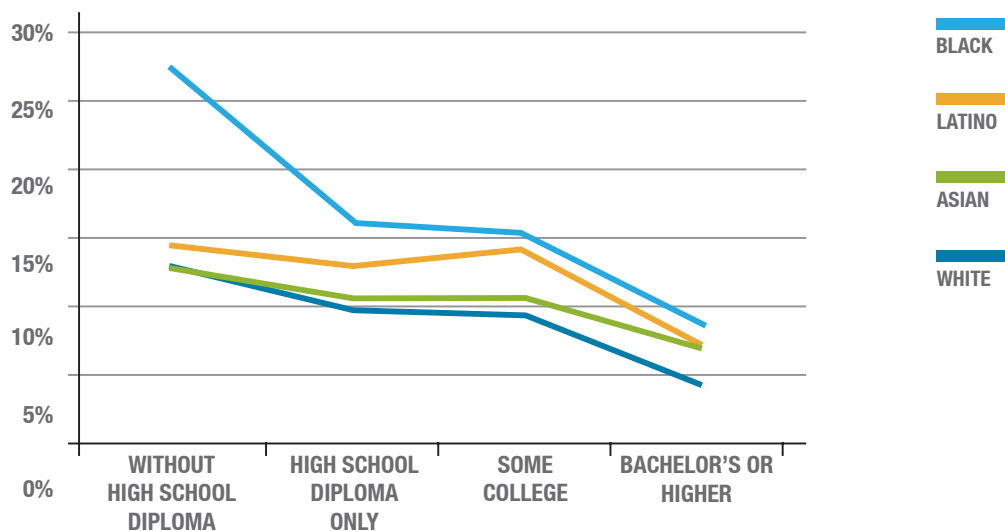
disparities in outcomes between young people of color and their peers in the areas of education, employment, criminal justice, and health. The YMI, a combination of existing programs, program expansions, and new efforts, has the potential to reduce these disparities and help many young New Yorkers from low-income communities successfully transition to young adulthood. Some of the existing programs included as part of the YMI have shown strong results. However, the success of the YMI will largely depend on whether or not successful programs can be brought up to scale so that more young people can benefit from them. This will require a commitment in funding that goes beyond the three years of largely private dollars currently funding YMI programs. The city must not only determine which parts of the YMI are working, but how and at what levels they can be funded in the future.

necessary credentials to compete in the labor market. The survey shows that 65 percent of residents want a new direction from Bloomberg's education policies. And as this report will discuss, New Yorkers want to see more investment—and are willing to pay more in taxes—to help these young people reach their potential.

In New York City, blacks have the highest unemployment rate of any racial/ethnic group at each level of education. In fact, blacks with a high school diploma – and those with some college – have higher unemployment rates than their white, Asian, and Latino peers with lower levels of educational attainment. Blacks and Latinos also have lower earnings than whites at every level of education.

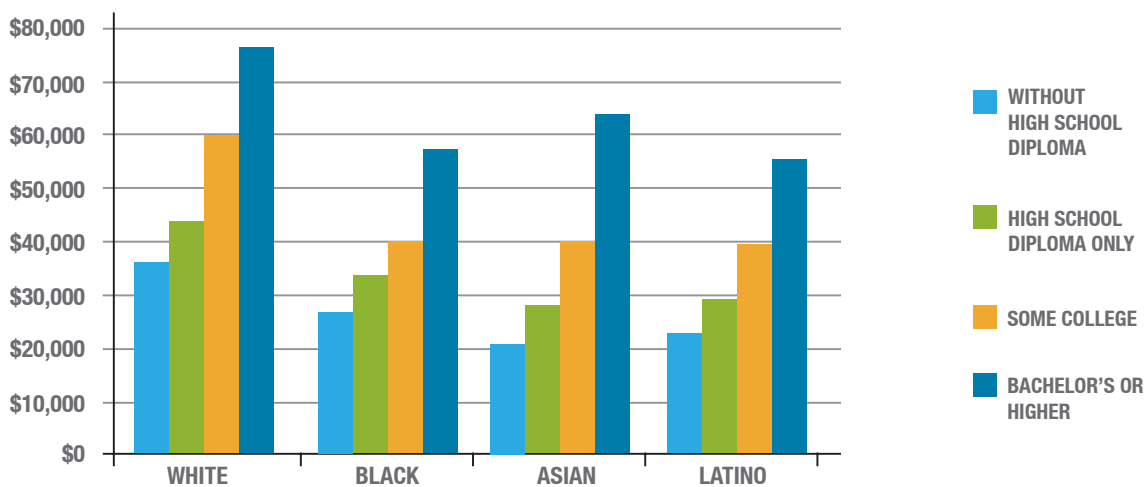
Blacks and Latinos still see significant decreases in unemployment and increases in earnings as they attain more education. The difference in unemployment between those with a Bachelor’s degree and those with only a high school diploma is larger for blacks than for any other group.

Chart 1: Unemployment rate of New York City residents by race and educational attainment level



Source: 2012 American Community Survey

Chart 2: Median income of New York City residents—full-time workers age 25 and over—by race and educational attainment level




Source: 2012 American Community Survey

WHAT THE NEW MAYOR CAN DO

Invest in an All-out Effort to Raise High School Graduation Rates

Those who feel that the Bloomberg administration's education policies were a success often point to the increase in graduation rates during his tenure. The four year graduation rate for New York City public school students increased from 47 percent for the class of 2005 to 60 percent for the class of 2012. However, those gains were not experienced equally, and for some groups, the graduation rate remains unacceptably low. The graduation rate for black students did increase from 40 percent to 55 percent, and for Latino students from 37 percent to 53 percent; however in 2012, fewer than half of Latino and black males graduated from high school within four years.

Data from the Department of Education shows that young people attending schools in the poorest districts—though they may not live there—have significantly lower graduation rates than students attending schools in middle and upper income districts. For 2012, in the school districts with the lowest median household incomes, the four year graduation rate was just 54 percent, compared to 69 percent for the three wealthiest districts.³ That 15 percentage point gap represents an increase from 2005 when the graduation rate gap between the poorest and richest districts was 13 points. While school choice may be beneficial for those students who are able to leave low-income neighborhoods to attend a better school, schools in low-income areas are falling further behind.

 **Invest more in schools in poor neighborhoods, rather than closing them in favor of new charter schools.**

A key feature of the Bloomberg administration's education policy was closing low-performing schools, while overseeing a tremendous growth in the number of charter schools. During Bloomberg's tenure, over 160 schools were closed or scheduled to be closed.⁴ During the same period, the number of charter schools grew from 17 to 183.⁵ Critics of charter schools say that the publicly-funded, privately-run schools deprive traditional public schools of much needed resources. According to *The Unheard Third* survey, 70 percent of New Yorkers favor investing more in schools in poor neighborhoods when contrasted with the previous administration's "market driven" approach touting school choice and charters. Mayor de Blasio has already committed to re-evaluating the former administration's policy on closing schools, and has vowed to start charging rent to charter schools in shared public school buildings, which could bring much needed revenue to district schools. He has also vowed to create at least 100 schools in his first term using the community school model—in which schools offer a range of health and social services to students and their families—that has proven successful in high poverty

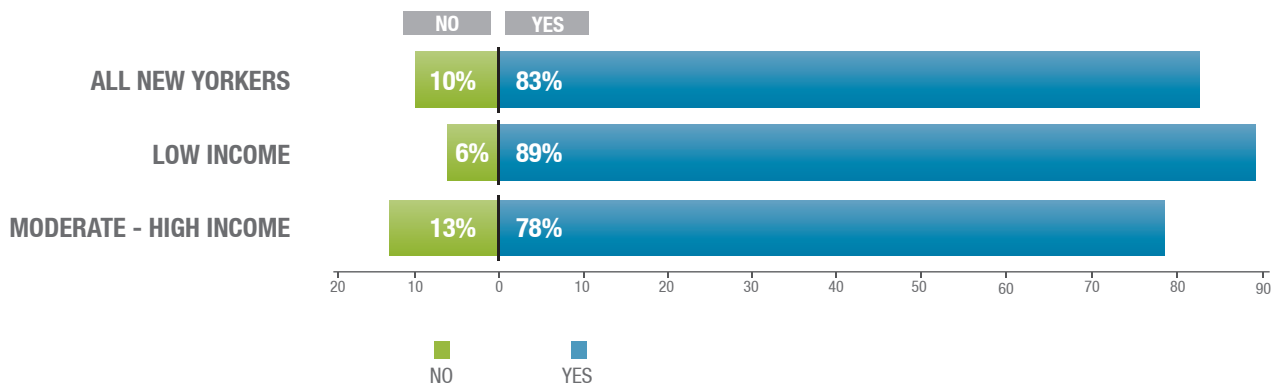
neighborhoods, such as Harlem Children's Zone and the Children's Aid Society community schools.

 **Aggressively expand the presence of CTE schools in the new school development portfolio.**

Career and technical education (CTE) programs at the high school level offer promising pathways for young adults. These schools, once considered a less rigorous alternative to traditional college-preparation programs, have been revitalized in recent years. At new CTE schools, particularly those that focus on in-demand, high-skill fields such as information technology and health sciences, graduation and post-secondary enrollment rates are well above the city average. The clear relevance of the academic programs to real world career opportunities promises to keep students engaged and give them a clearer understanding of why they should attend college, what to study once they matriculate, and how their postsecondary efforts will pay off for them in the labor market. At Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH), students can complete their high school diploma and earn an Associate's Degree in six years, and are at the front of the line for jobs at IBM. This kind of model—where students can transition seamlessly from high school to college to career—

► **A wide majority of New Yorkers say that CTE schools would be a good option for their own child, including both low and moderate-high income respondents.**

Q: Do you think high quality, career, technical or vocational programs in high schools would be a good option for your own child?



Source: 2004 CSS Unheard Third Survey

► **New Yorkers are willing to personally pay more taxes to expand and improve high school career and technical education to prepare students for in demand middle and high skill jobs.**

Q: Please tell me how willing you would be to pay a little more in taxes personally to expand and improve high school career and technical education that prepares students for good paying jobs in growing industries.



Source: 2013 CSS Unheard Third Survey

has been highly touted as an exciting new direction in career and technical education.

New research from CSS using the most recent data from the New York City Department of Education shows that students in the newer generation of CTE schools outperform students in schools with similar populations in terms of graduation and college-going. At the student level, black and Hispanic male students have the strongest gains, far outperforming their counterparts at non-CTE schools, even controlling for factors such as standardized test scores entering high school. In addition, students who score just below standards of proficiency on middle school exams—a critical group that makes up the largest part of the test-score distribution—show benefits from CTE that are greater than those who score very low or above proficient on state exams.⁶

The de Blasio administration should expand the presence of CTE schools in New York City, focusing on in-demand, middle- to high-wage industries. While Public Advocate, de Blasio issued a comprehensive report on the state of CTE schools in New York City, and has spoken often of the need to grow the portfolio of CTE schools.⁷ In addition to creating new schools, the new administration must also examine why some CTE schools are underperforming and seek ways to address the issues those schools are facing.

Implement a high-profile public awareness campaign to highlight the importance of graduating from high school.

With graduation rates still alarmingly low for certain segments of the population, the de Blasio administration should take a cue from its predecessor and launch a massive public information campaign. Only in this instance, the messages would not be about the risks of smoking cigarettes or drinking sugary sodas, but the consequences of not graduating from high school.

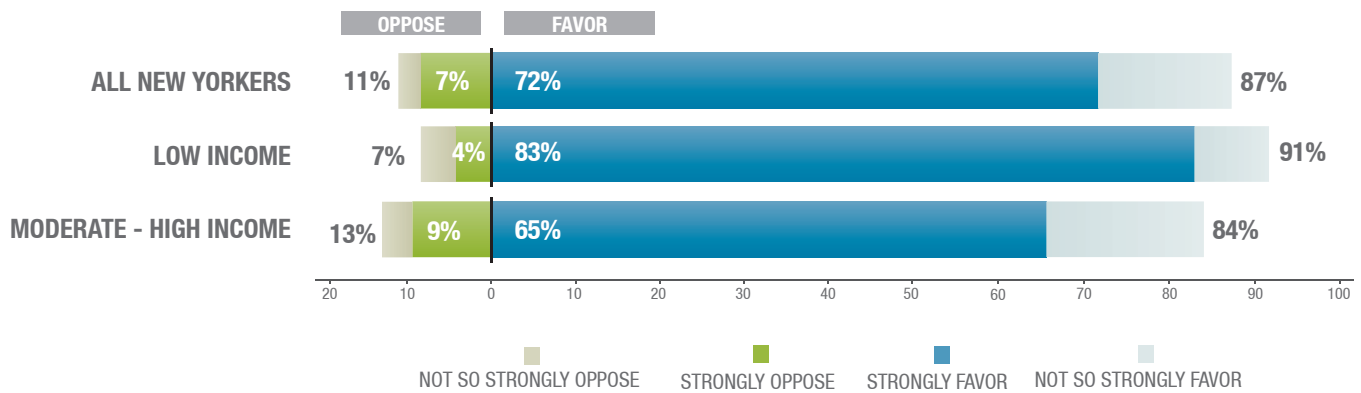
The days of being able to find a family-sustaining job without a high school diploma are long gone, and it is becoming more and more important that students graduate from high school with the necessary skills to engage in at least some post-secondary education or training.⁸ Students, parents, and the city at large should be reminded about the unacceptable graduation rates that plague many of our communities as well as the benefits of reversing these trends. As with Bloomberg's public health campaigns, the campaign to increase the graduation rate can take the form of television and subway advertisements, as well as consistent messaging and action from the Mayor's office.

Push the State to raise the age when it becomes legal to drop out of school in New York City from 17 to 18.

In New York City, it is legal for a student to drop out of school when he or she is 17 years old. Nearly 12 percent of the class of 2012, or over 9,100 students, dropped out of school before their expected graduation date. Eighty-three percent of those students were black or Latino. While it will require a range of strategies and interventions—many of which need to occur long before a student enters high school—to address the city's dropout problem, one signal that would reinforce the campaign to change attitudes on dropping out would be raising the legal dropout age from 17 to 18. This measure, which will require action at the State level, is supported by nearly two-thirds of New Yorkers polled for *The Unheard Third*. Mayor de Blasio should make his support on the issue clear and push for state legislators to make this change. Several states have struggled to pass proposed legislation to raise the drop out age—something President Obama urged lawmakers to do in his January 2012 State of the Union address—due to the extra costs associated with keeping more students enrolled. However, aiming to keep more kids in school so they may receive their high school degree is an investment well worth making.

► **New Yorkers across incomes support creating a publicly funded campaign to encourage children to complete high school. Nearly three-quarters of New Yorkers strongly favor the idea.**

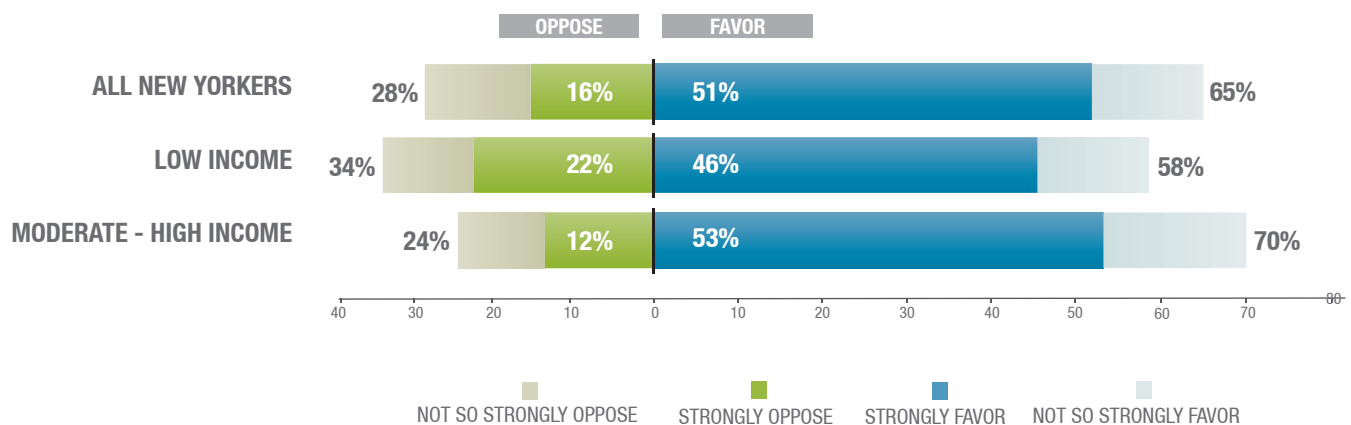
Q: Do you favor or oppose creating a publicly funded campaign, similar in size to the anti-smoking efforts, designed to encourage children to not drop out and finish high school?



Source: 2012 CSS Unheard Third Survey

► **Nearly two-thirds of New Yorkers favor raising the age when a student is legally allowed to drop out of school from 17 to 18.**

Q: Do you favor or oppose raising the age when someone is allowed to drop out of high school to 18?




Source: 2012 CSS Unheard Third Survey

WHAT THE NEW MAYOR CAN DO

Promote Fairer Access to the City's Best Public Schools

Any examination of ways to improve educational outcomes for low-income youth must also take into consideration those students who are thriving at an early age. In New York City, many young people in low-income households are overcoming significant obstacles to perform incredibly well in school. It is important that these young people have every opportunity to fulfill their potential, by being able to attend the best schools the city has to offer.

 **Revise admissions policies to the specialized high schools so that admissions are based on a fair, comprehensive assessment of merit and not a single test.**

New York City's specialized high schools are among the public institutions with the greatest ability to improve the prospects of low-income young people. These eight public high schools are among the most rigorous in the city, and provide solid preparation for admission to selective colleges. Yet the gateway into these schools—a single, 2.5 hour exam known as the Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT)—offers a limited measure of the merit of applicants, and in the process, shuts out many qualified potential

students. No other indicators of hard work or academic achievement are considered. While reliance on a single exam may at first appear to be an objective and fair measure, a deeper look reveals that the use of a single test, and the SHSAT in particular, does not provide a meaningful measure of academic achievement and promise. The test has never been validated as a predictor of academic potential and is extremely vulnerable to expensive test preparation programs. Furthermore, education experts largely agree that single tests are a weak way to measure students, and often reflect the resources that a student has enjoyed to that date, and not their ultimate potential.

As a result of this flawed admission policy, relatively few black and Latino students gain admission to the specialized high schools. Despite making up 70 percent of public school students and 43 percent of SHSAT test takers, only 11 percent of admission offers for fall 2013 went to black and Latino students. The problem is particularly acute at Stuyvesant High School and Bronx High School of Science, the most sought after specialized high schools, considered to be among the best schools in the city. Out of 11,585 black and Latino students who took the SHSAT for admission in fall 2013, just 9 black and 24 Latino students were admitted into Stuyvesant, where just 3 percent of the student body was black or Latino in the 2012–2013 school year.

At Bronx High School of Science, just 10 percent of students were black or Latino.⁹ Instead of these schools serving as a pathway to strivers from low-income communities, they have become institutions that perpetuate and heighten inequality of opportunity.

The new mayor should immediately revise admission policies at five of the eight specialized high schools where a test-only policy is not mandated by state law in favor of a more comprehensive assessment (these schools are: Staten Island Technical High School, Queens High School for the Sciences at York College, High School for Mathematics, Science and Engineering at City College, High School for American Studies at Lehman College, and Brooklyn Latin High School). At the same time, the city should work with state lawmakers to revise the policy at the three oldest schools (Stuyvesant High School, The Bronx High School of Science, and Brooklyn Technical High School).

Publicly announce support for a change in admissions policies at CUNY while appointing members to the CUNY Board of Trustees who are willing to push for new admissions procedures.

Lower-income youth who do graduate from high school are less likely to go on to college than their higher-income peers. And if they do reach post-secondary education, they are more likely to attend community colleges where graduation rates are extremely low. According to data from the National Center for Education Statistics, nationally only a quarter of students from households below the poverty level begin college in a four-year degree program, compared to half of students above 200 percent of the federal poverty level.¹⁰

The numbers and shares of black and Latino freshmen in the four-year colleges at CUNY have dropped precipitously since 2008. At Baruch College, the share of incoming freshman in fall 2011 who were black was only 6 percent, even lower than at Harvard University (7 percent).¹¹ Black and Latino students are more and more likely to enter CUNY at a community college instead of a senior college. This is especially troubling since students who enter CUNY community colleges are not likely to transfer into senior colleges—these students make up less than a third of CUNY senior college transfer students. In New York City, fewer than 3 in 10 community college students graduate with any type of degree within six years.¹²

Given their higher unemployment rates and lower earnings even at the highest levels of education (as shown in Charts 1 and 2), it is especially important that qualified black and Latino students are not left out of the CUNY senior college system. CUNY uses only rigid cutoffs for SAT scores and GPA in its admission decisions, unlike most college systems in the country that look at a range of factors when evaluating applicants. With CUNY recently selecting their first new Chancellor in fourteen years, the de Blasio administration has an opportunity to influence the university's leadership so that changes to its admissions policies are on the agenda. As mayor, de Blasio is also responsible for appointments to CUNY's Board of Trustees, which represents another platform from which he should advocate for changes to ensure that CUNY better reflects the diversity of the city's public school students. There are a range of policy options for CUNY to consider, including Texas's approach of guaranteeing admission to the top-ranked students from every high school to the kind of more comprehensive applicant reviews that other colleges, from SUNY to the California public system, have used to ensure diversity while maintaining a fair, merit-based admissions policy.

Provide the necessary supports for students to succeed once they enroll in a post-secondary institution.

Students from low-income communities face many challenges—educational and otherwise—as

they transition to post-secondary education. It is important that post-secondary institutions have programs in place that can help students stay in and graduate from college. These supports can be helpful to all students, but particularly to those who are at risk of not succeeding in college due to financial or academic challenges. Programs such as the Posse Foundation, where cohorts of students who have SAT scores below the admissions cutoffs at participating schools are granted admission and provided educational and other supports, have shown great promise in improving retention and graduation among students who otherwise would not have been granted admission.¹³

At CUNY, the Accelerated Study in Advanced Programs (ASAP) model has also shown strong results. In both internal evaluations conducted by CUNY and a random assignment study by MDRC, ASAP students were found to have greater credit accumulation, retention, and graduation rates than comparison students.¹⁴ ASAP can be found at six of CUNY's community colleges and the ASAP model also informed the development of CUNY's Guttman Community College, opened in 2012. Given the success of the program, CUNY should be using this model system wide, including at its four-year universities. This will require a significant investment, but as a recent cost-benefit analysis indicates, the return on investment from more students completing their degree far outweighs the costs.¹⁵

WHAT THE NEW MAYOR CAN DO

Scale Up Programs that Give Out of School, Jobless Youth a Second Chance to Earn Credentials and Secure Jobs

More than 177,000 New Yorkers between the ages of 16 through 24 are neither enrolled in school nor working. This group is the population most in need of direct intervention from the public sector. It is these youth that our schools have failed to prepare for college or the workforce. Many of these young people were born into families with lower incomes, with the odds against them since birth.

 **The CEO youth programs that have shown the strongest results should be expanded through direct city funding, in addition to innovative investment from sources such as Social Impact Bonds.**

In 2006, Mayor Bloomberg convened a commission to study new approaches to alleviating poverty in New York City. This effort identified out of school, out of work young people between the ages of 16 through 24 as one of its three target populations. The commission spawned the Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) and developed several strong new programs for young adults. These include the Young Adult Internship

Program (YAIP), which provides out of school, out of work (OSOW) youth with a paid 14-week internship and supportive programming from a community-based organization. YAIP offers young people the chance to not only gain skills, but build their resumes and make connections that will help them secure an unsubsidized job after the program.

For those who need less support, the CEO developed the Works Progress Program (WPP), a direct job placement initiative, offering to offset the wages of young adults who are job-ready but need a first opportunity. For those with low basic skills, the Young Adult Literacy Program (YALP) provides intensive literacy and math programming for OSOW youth, from which they can transition into high school equivalency (formerly referred to as GED) programs. And CUNY Prep, a school in the Bronx, works with those who did not finish high school to get their equivalency and enroll in college.

While the above programs have shown effectiveness, they are each too limited in scale, or face uncertain futures, given the previous administration's use of private funds, or other short-term resources—such as time-limited federal grants—to support them. These programs, which have demonstrated success, need to be expanded and baselined in the city budget.

 **Restore funding for adult literacy to 2001 levels and explore ways to use state and federal funds traditionally allocated to K–12 students in efforts to re-engage high school non-completers.**

Achievement of a High School Equivalency (HSE) diploma (traditionally reached by passing the GED exam, which has been substituted with the TASC exam) is an important step for the over 85,000 16- to 24-year-olds who have left high school without attaining a diploma, approximately 53,400 of whom are out of work. Without a diploma, they face an uncertain economic future, and little chance of obtaining jobs that pay family-sustaining wages.

The new mayor should do more to reach this population. Whereas the previous administration sought to cut adult literacy funding every single year in its Executive Budget proposals, the new mayor should restore this funding to its 2001 level. In addition, the new administration should explore innovative ways to draw down state and federal funds traditionally allocated to K–12 students in efforts

to re-engage high school non-completers. In cities such as Denver and Los Angeles, such efforts have been successful at increasing resources to get young people back in school or into alternative, community-based education settings where they can build their skills and achieve an equivalency diploma.

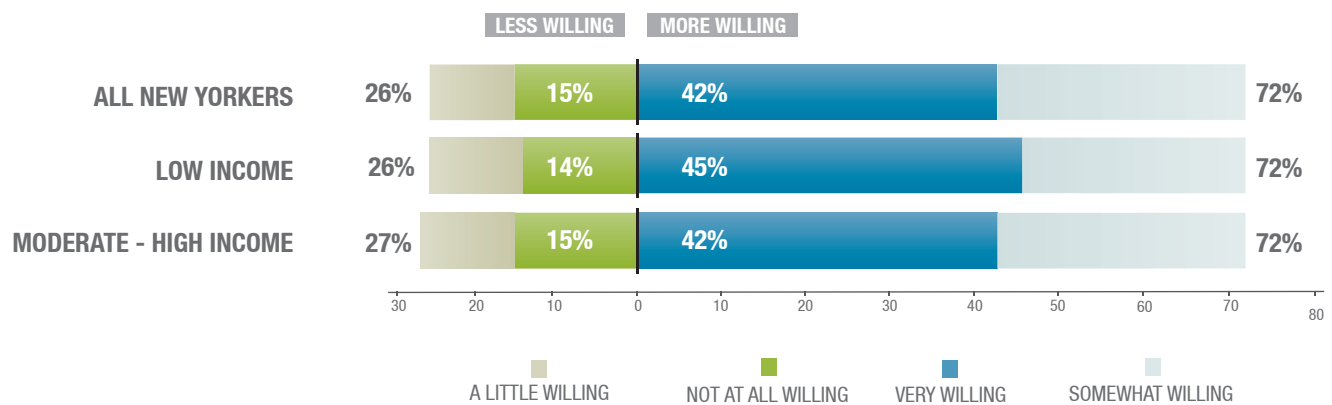
Young New Yorkers from poor and near-poor households face unique challenges from the earliest ages. Though some are able to overcome these challenges and excel, too many

young people are not reaching their potential as productive adults. The entire city will bear the burden of thousands of young people unable to find family sustaining jobs, living in poverty, and ultimately contributing to similar outcomes for future generations. The new mayor has committed his administration to reducing economic inequality. To make good on his campaign pledges, he must start by increasing investment in public schools, particularly in the low-income communities where education is the most promising path

out of poverty. Opening doors to the best possible schools and giving our young people the support they need to exit those doors, diplomas in hand, prepared for college and careers will be vital. But opening doors alone will not be enough. We cannot afford to write off the tens of thousands of young people who have already left school with no job and no prospects. Several models have demonstrated that we can get these young people back on track. That is a good investment for them and for New York City.

► **Nearly three quarters of New Yorkers, across incomes, would be willing to pay more in taxes to create a program that would provide training and jobs to out of school, out of work youth.**

Q: Please tell me how willing you would be to pay a little more in taxes personally to create a city program to train and provide jobs to young people who are out of school and not working?



Source: 2013 CSS Unheard Third Survey

Endnotes

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ABOUT THE UNHEARD THIRD

The Unheard Third, the Community Service Society's annual survey of low-income New Yorkers, is the only public opinion poll in the nation to regularly chronicle issues facing low-income individuals and families. *The Unheard Third* tracks the concerns and hardships of New York City's low-income residents and their views on what programs and policies would help them get ahead. Developed and administered in collaboration with Lake Research Partners, a leading national polling firm, *The Unheard Third* also surveys middle- and higher-income New Yorkers to see where their priorities and concerns converge—and diverge—from those of low-income New Yorkers.

The findings from *The Unheard Third* reinforce our belief that public policy aimed at this population must, in part, be guided by the life experiences and ideas of New Yorkers living in poverty. CSS uses the survey to inform and guide our research, direct service programs, and policy recommendations.

CSS aims to distribute its annual survey as widely as possible, to ensure that the voices of low-income New Yorkers are heard by politicians, community leaders, the media, researchers, and the public. CSS staff frequently brief legislators and not-for-profit organizations about the findings from *The Unheard Third*. CSS staff also seek input from labor, government, nonprofit, and civic leaders as they develop the survey each year to ensure its usefulness in addressing key issues.

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