

# Final Evaluation Report: Options- NYCDOE Training Program

July 2016

## Executive Summary

The Goddard Riverside Options Center is one of New York City's first college access and success training program, and brings nearly 30 years of experience working to increase the number of historically underrepresented students attending and completing postsecondary options. In addition to providing direct one-on-one college access counseling services and college-related group activities, like college visits, to high school students, the Options Center has supported an intensive certificate course, the Options Institute, to train school and community-based professionals on how to guide students through the postsecondary process.

In spring 2011, in order to expand its training efforts, the Options Center partnered with the NYCDOE Office of Postsecondary Readiness to pilot a condensed six-day training series based on the Options Institute. The success of this pilot (formally called Effective Postsecondary Planning: Supporting Access and Success for All Students) led to a larger effort to bring the Options-NYCDOE Training Program ("the training") to the entire NYC high school system. From 2010-2016, the Options-NYCDOE training reached almost all high schools in New York City, serving more than 1,600 school- and CBO-based staff of various positions, expertise, and experience.

Participants consistently highlighted the interactive, hands-on nature of the sessions; the well-designed adult-learner-informed curriculum and training materials; and the experienced, credible, and empathetic trainers as critical factors contributing to the exceptional quality and value of the training. Participants appreciated the depth, practicality, and applicability of the information presented, gaining stronger professional networks, with broader access to professional resources, and an increased awareness of professional development activities that has helped them stay abreast of information related to financial aid, college applications processes, and other policies and practices that affect postsecondary options.

The training led to substantial knowledge gains for participants – enabling them to provide college advising services to all students, and equipping them to help more students reach college-going milestones and benchmarks. There are significant increases in knowledge related to the financial aid application process, to assessing postsecondary readiness, and to advising immigrant students. The first day of training sparked a "call to action" for participants to better understand how high-quality college advising can have longer-term implications for student college success.

Along with gains in knowledge, participants became more equitable and deliberate in their advising practices – thereby reaching a broader range of students and providing them with more individualized supports. Participants not only felt empowered to provide students with information, but were now equipped to help students become their own advocates and decision-makers. Although, participants returned to schools as college-going champions, changes in participants' interactions with colleagues were less noticeable or pronounced.

Overall, the Options-NYCDOE training is a foundational element in helping students – who may historically have been underrepresented in college classrooms – access the right postsecondary options and receive supports to persist and succeed in their chosen postsecondary pathway. There are many inequitable challenges that students of color, students who are first-generation college students, and students from low-income communities face, including barriers to become adequately prepared to enter and succeed in college. College advisors, counselors, educators, and administrators play a very critical role in creating a college-going culture and, therefore, it is imperative that they are better

equipped to meet and support students where they are. This training gives participants, both those who are college advisors and those who do not necessarily do college advising, the knowledge, confidence, and tangible tools to assist *all* students in planning for postsecondary success.

## Introduction

Driven by the need to provide equitable and high-quality college advising services to *all* high school students in New York City, the Goddard Riverside Options Center and the New York City Department of Education's (NYCDOE) Office of Postsecondary Readiness are leading the charge to support stronger college advising practices in schools. This report presents the cumulative findings of this work, collected over a two-year evaluation engagement.

Over the past decade, the importance of connecting *all* students to postsecondary options has gained substantial attention and traction nationally. Schools, educational partners, and stakeholders are increasingly recognizing the need to expand postsecondary options and supports to reach more students – not just the top academic performers. However, many are also recognizing the depth of support that students require to not only navigate the college application process, but to obtain and maintain adequate financial aid and ensure that supports (including social and emotional supports) are in place to help them persist and stay in college. While the need for greater breadth in supporting students has emerged, to increase equity of college completion support efforts, so has the need for greater depth in serving individual students, even among many of the highest performing students of color, first-generation college attendees, and those from low-income families.

The White House has issued a number of policy pronouncements in support of the college completion agenda, including President Obama's call to make community college free and the First Lady's Reach Higher initiative, which places a specific, and notable, focus on the need for stronger college advising, and in particular strengthening resources and support for school counselors. Reach Higher is convening and challenging partners to strengthen the reach and quality of college advising for high school students and, ultimately, inspire more students to continue and complete studies beyond high school. However, explicit financial resources to support the initiative are limited.

Additional momentum in the field is being driven by large non-profit organizations and major foundations to create local collaborations that bring together cross-sector partners to improve college and career pathways for underserved students.<sup>1</sup> These initiatives attempt to integrate programs and services across multiple entities to better serve students and increase the number of college graduates and individuals being hired for living-wage employment. Increasing attention is being placed on institutions of higher education and their ability to graduate low-income students and students of color.<sup>2</sup>

Local momentum is building as well. During spring 2016, Goddard Riverside Options Center, Young Invincibles, and Graduate NYC launched #DegreesNYC, a partnership to increase the number of young adults completing higher education and entering living wage jobs in NYC.<sup>3</sup> The group cites that, in New York City, just 21 out of every 100 ninth graders earn a college degree. Additionally, the campaign highlights readiness, enrollment, and completion gaps for black and Latino students compared to Asian and white students."<sup>4</sup> This initiative builds

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<sup>1</sup> For examples, see the Aspen Forum for Community Solutions' Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund: <http://www.jff.org/initiatives/back-track-designs/opportunity-youth-incentive-fund> assisted by Jobs for the Future; the Lumina Foundation's Community Partnership for Attainment initiative: <https://www.luminafoundation.org/community-partnerships>; the Kresge Foundation's Aligning and Strengthening Urban Higher Education Ecosystems: <http://kresge.org/programs/education/aligning-and-strengthening-urban-higher-education-ecosystems>.

<sup>2</sup> For examples, see *Toward Convergence: A Technical Guide for the Postsecondary Metrics Framework*, published May 2016 by the Institute for Higher Education Policy, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; the Lumina Foundation's "A Stronger Nation 2016."

<sup>3</sup> <https://degreesnyc.wordpress.com/>

<sup>4</sup> GraduateNYC. (June 2016). *The State of College Readiness and Degree Completion*. Brief 1.

on work by the NYCDOE, which has prioritized college access and success over the last several years, bringing in new programs like the multi-million dollar Expanded Success Initiative, which targets college readiness among Black and Latino boys.

Despite building this momentum, the level of structure and support for school counselors (“counselors”) and college advisors lags behind many other school staff personnel, including the absence of systematic evaluation systems for counselors. Tools for understanding current counselor practice and supporting practice change among counselors are far less than for teachers and school leaders, within the district and nationally. The NYC City Council passed legislation in 2014 to help instigate some new rigor in considering the state of counseling in New York City. While these early regional efforts are helping to provide a base-level of information about counselor numbers and counselor ratios, additional investments in counselors’ standards of practice and professional development have not yet followed.

As a result of these efforts in New York City and nationally, many leaders and staff members in schools recognize that the end goal of high school is no longer simply graduation, but rather supporting students to succeed in postsecondary experiences. With awareness and accountability expanding, many schools are seeking to develop and strengthen a college-going culture, one that offers high expectations and targeted advising and resources for all students.

Within this context, the Goddard Riverside Options Center and NYCDOE’s Office of Postsecondary Readiness are leading the charge to support stronger college knowledge in schools through a variety of professional development supports for school personnel, including through the Options-NYCDOE Training Program.

### **About the Options-NYCDOE Training Program**

The Goddard Riverside Options Center is one of New York City’s first college access and success training program, and brings nearly 30 years of experience working to increase the number of historically underrepresented students attending and completing postsecondary options. In addition to providing direct one-on-one college access counseling services and college-related group activities, like college visits, to high school students, the Options Center has supported an intensive certificate course, the Options Institute, to train school and community-based professionals on how to guide students through the postsecondary process.

In spring 2011, in order to expand its training efforts, the Options Center partnered with the NYCDOE Office of Postsecondary Readiness to pilot a condensed six-day training series based on the Options Institute.<sup>5</sup> The success of this pilot (formally called Effective Postsecondary Planning: Supporting Access and Success for All Students) led to a larger effort to bring the Options-NYCDOE Training Program (“the training”) to the entire NYC high school system.

Options and NYCDOE organized the training around six topics:

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<sup>5</sup> While the training was based on the Options Institute model, the partners made some modifications to the training to support its delivery at scale. For example, Options offers the Options-NYCDOE Training Program over six days rather than the nine of the Institute. Additionally, while the Options Institute requires specific supervisor engagement, this element was dropped from the Options-NYCDOE Training Program, given the real constraints of requiring additional school personnel time out of school buildings and the desire to minimize supervisor participation as a barrier to counselor/advisor participation.

- Day 1: Assessing Postsecondary Readiness
- Day 2: Matching Students to Postsecondary Opportunities
- Day 3: Strong College Applications
- Day 4: Financial Aid Application Process
- Day 5: Financial Aid Packages, Loans and Gap
- Day 6: Immigrant Students and the College Process

The Options-NYCDOE Training Program is unique in its partnership between the NYCDOE and Goddard Riverside, as well as in its ambition to provide college-advising training at scale, particularly in a district as large as New York City that serves more than 200,000 high school students.<sup>6</sup> The partnership leverages Options’ expertise in college advising and the NYCDOE’s authority with schools to deliver a common and cohesive overview of college-advising concepts across high schools. The Options-NYCDOE Training Program served staff in a variety of roles (table 1) and represents almost half of the training provided annually by the Office of Postsecondary Readiness, and is one of the largest intensive, multi-day professional development sponsored by the district.

**Table 1. Roles of Options Participants\***

Role	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
School counselor	45%	52%	48%	36%
College advisor	20%	18%	13%	24%
Teacher	5%	8%	13%	10%
Administrator	3%	2%	7%	3%
Other roles, including social workers and interns	27%	20%	26%	27%

\* Based on Options training attendance data (self-reported)

From 2010-2016, the Options-NYCDOE college advising training reached almost all high schools in New York City,<sup>7</sup> serving more than 1,600 school- and CBO-based staff of various positions, expertise, and experience.<sup>8</sup> Of the participants who engaged in the Options-NYCDOE training, over 80% attended four or more of the six sessions that were part of the series (Table 2).<sup>9</sup> While the majority of training participants have been school counselors and college advisors, the training has included teachers, school leadership, and other school staff participants.<sup>10</sup> Over half of the participants (60 percent) had no or less than two years of college advising experience and a little than half (47 percent) had been at their school three years or less.<sup>11</sup> The training included participants of a majority of schools within each of the five boroughs, from schools of all academic performance levels, and of various enrollment sizes (although small schools were somewhat less likely than larger schools to

<sup>6</sup> Based on numbers reported for 2015 by the NYCDOE: <http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/schools/data/stats/default.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Based on schools identified as high schools in the 2013 NYCDOE demographic snapshot.

<sup>8</sup> Centrally located in Manhattan over six days, usually over a six-month time period, the training was made available to a broad audience. Although schools covered time out of the building for staff, the costs of the six-day training series were supported by NYCDOE and offered free of charge to any school personnel interested in strengthening their knowledge base and skills in college advising. As a result, while school counselors made up the largest share of training participants, a wide range of school staff members participated in the training.

<sup>9</sup> Participation rates were collected from Goddard training attendance records. A participant is any individual who attended at least one of six training sessions. A completer is an individual who completed four or more training sessions. A total of 69 individuals enrolled and/or participated during more than one school year as they completed the training.

<sup>10</sup> Based on Options-NYCDOE Training Enrollment Survey (Cohorts 1-5, 2014-2015)

<sup>11</sup> Based on baseline survey response from 2014-15 cohort (n=320)

have sent a participant to the training). **This suggests that the Options-NYCDOE Training Program successfully extended its reach across the diversity of schools in the city.**

**Table 2. Options-NYCDOE Training Program Participation**

Training Year	Number of Participants	Number of Completers
Spring 2011 (pilot)	60	56
2011-2012	151	127
2012-2013	423	326
2013-2014	464	368
2014-2015	384	332
2015-2016	165	125
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,647</b>	<b>1,334</b>

### About the Evaluation and this Report

Equal Measure began its evaluation of the Options-NYCDOE Training Program in June 2014 and focused on answering the following question:

*What is the impact of Options-NYCDOE training in helping to shift educator knowledge and practice in NYC high schools to support a greater number of students in achieving college acceptance, enrollment, and persistence?*

The evaluation framework (Appendix A) outlined three levels of change that participants were expected to experience during and after the training: 1) Participant changes, 2) Changes in participant-student interactions, and 3) Participant-school staff changes (Table 3). This report draws on data from the mixed-method evaluation that included the following data sources:

- The Options-NYCDOE training attendance database
- Participant pre- and post-tests, administered during the training to assess knowledge gains
- Follow-up survey data (for 2014-15 cohorts)
- Interview data from eight school site visits
- Interview data from Goddard staff, NYCDOE staff, and CBO stakeholders
- Phone interview data with 20 participants (from 2014-15 cohorts)
- Focus group data (from 2015-16 cohorts)
- Observation data from Options trainings and from the #DegreesNYC public hearing

A further description of the methodology is provided in Appendix B.

**Table 3. Options-NYCDOE Training Evaluation Framework**

Levels of Change		Change Indicators
Changes expected during training	<b>Participant Changes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase awareness and knowledge of college advising concepts, processes, and tools</li> <li>• Access more college advising resources</li> <li>• Dedicate time for reflection and planning of new actions</li> <li>• Broaden professional network</li> </ul>
Changes Expected After Training Completion	<b>Participant-Student Interactions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer consistent college access support to students</li> <li>• Provide supports for <i>all</i> students based on need</li> <li>• Help students learn about and navigate postsecondary systems</li> <li>• Help students meet college-going benchmarks</li> <li>• Advise students on financial aid</li> <li>• Serve immigrant and undocumented students sufficiently</li> </ul>
	<b>Participant-School Staff Interactions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share new knowledge and tools with others in the building</li> <li>• Use specific activities and tools from Options training to train other school staff</li> <li>• Become the “go-to” person for information on college-going</li> <li>• Collaborate with school leadership on ways to improve college advising programming and services at the school</li> <li>• Champion college-going</li> </ul>

In this report, we lay out the findings according to the framework’s levels of change. In the first two sections (Section 2 and 3), we examine the experience of the participants and changes in the knowledge and behaviors. In the final section, we present broader implications of the evaluation findings as they relate to the training program and the broader college access and success field.

**Section 2: Training Quality and Relevance:** We summarize the overall experience of the training and examine the quality of the training program. We also explore how different types of participants (with different professional roles and responsibilities) experience the program.

**Section 3: Participants’ Changes in School Settings:** We present the components (e.g., curriculum elements, pedagogical approaches, etc.) participants are taking away from the training and identify the specific elements that are leading to changes in individual practice, and the specific changes in practice. We examine general knowledge and resource gains (Section 3.1), practice changes as they relate to interactions with students (Section 3.2), and practice changes as they relate to interactions with staff (Section 3.3).



**Section 4: Broader Implications:** Finally, we consider some of the factors and conditions outside of the training that support participant behavior change. We highlight the implications of these results for both strengthening and sharing success of the Options-NYCDOE Training Program.

## Section 2: Training Quality and Relevance

**The interactive, hands-on nature of the training; the well-designed adult-learner-informed curriculum and training materials; and the experienced, credible, and empathetic trainers were consistently highlighted as critical factors contributing to the exceptional quality and value of the training.**

Participants especially appreciated opportunities for peer interaction and learning, which attended to adult learning principles and leveraged the expertise in the room. Participants expressed a sense of appreciation for the professionalism embedded into the training –even providing participants with lunch – and greatly valued the thoughtful structure/design and expertise of the training facilitators. As well, participants praised the balance between the depth of the training and its overall relevance, and noted that the trainers demonstrated deep content knowledge and practical experience through their own work as college advisors. The trainers created a participant-centered environment that catered to the questions and experiences of the trainees. Participants indicated they would strongly consider attending (and some had attended) additional training sessions on the basis of these trainers alone.

*"It was a very in-depth training, and I was fresh from an M.A. and did take some college-going grad classes – and that was good. But this really helped me grasp the work. The facilitators – just the way they engaged us and had us discuss scenarios and broke it down in layman's terms – engaged us really well."*

-Counselor, Queens

**Participants appreciated the depth, practicality, and applicability of the information presented.** The provided materials were ready-to-use for developing college advising programming, collaborating with colleagues, and serving students (see section 3). Trainees frequently expressed a sense of renewed purpose toward their work and an interest in ongoing learning, subsequent training, refresher courses, and accessing more information. Overwhelmingly, the training provided easy-to-use resources and materials, covered the right set of topics and at sufficient depth and time, and provided adequate time to learn from other peers in training.<sup>12</sup> Training participants, regardless of position, indicated that the depth of the training and overall relevance to their work were just right. For many, the training opened up a "black box" of information and provided a series of "aha" moments.

**Participants gained stronger professional networks, with broader access to professional resources, and increased awareness of professional development activities that can help them stay abreast of information related to financial aid, college applications processes, and other policies and practices that affect postsecondary options.** New advising resources also included introductions to professional college advising and admissions organizations (e.g., the College Access Consortium of New York, the National Association for College Admissions Counseling, and the New York State Association for College Admissions Counseling) and legal resources (e.g., Legal Aid Society) that the participants could invite to attend their school's college fairs.

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<sup>12</sup> More than 90% of follow-up survey respondents (n=125) agreed or strongly agreed with these specific areas.

## How School Role Affects Training Implementation

**School role influenced how the participants used what they learned from the training.**

- Counselors and college advisors were more likely to use the training to increase their personal knowledge, compared with administrators (60% and 50% compared with 13%).
- Administrators were much more likely to share the information with colleagues than any other role (50% versus 14% of counselors, 10% of college advisors, and 21% of other roles).
- College advisors were much more likely to use the material as a reference for themselves (95%) than any other role (50% for administrators, 69% for counselors, and 77% for other roles). Not surprisingly, college advisors were also more likely to use the materials directly with students and families (85%), but administrators also reported a high use of the material in this way (75% compared with 56% of other roles and 58% of counselors).
- College advisors were more likely to apply the training to help more students reach college-going milestones (83%), such as taking the SATs, completing the FAFSA, and drafting their personal statement, etc.
- College advisors were more likely to advise on good-fit colleges (89%), and provide better information about the financial aid process (78%) than other roles.
- Administrators were significantly less likely to use the materials to help students with milestones (29%) and assess good-fit colleges (29%).

## Section 3: Participant Changes in School Settings

### 3.1 Knowledge and Resource Gains

**The training has led to substantial knowledge gains – building the overall capacity of high school staff, preparing them to provide college advising services to all students, and equipping them to help more students reach college-going milestones and benchmarks.** There are significant increases in

knowledge related to the financial aid application process, to assessing postsecondary readiness, and to advising immigrant students. Pre- and post-tests show knowledge gains among participants across all six sessions of the training series, indicating that participants left the training with new information and understanding to support college advising (Table 4). Even for those participants who felt well-versed and knowledgeable about college advising prior to the training, the training reinforced their knowledge and deepened their areas of expertise. In these six sessions, participants learned how to help students meet critical college application benchmarks (Table 5). Participants were equipped with new vocabulary (e.g., referring to “safe schools” versus “reach schools”) and had a stronger sense of the college access and success landscape, as well as of their roles and responsibilities as college-going champions.

*“I think I might have learned more during these six days than I did in grad school.”*

-School Counselor, Bronx

**Table 4. Participant Knowledge Gains Based on Pre-and Post-Test Surveys\***

Session	Year								Overall Knowledge Gains
	2011-2012		2012-2013		2013-2014		2014-2015		
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	
<b>Assessing Postsecondary Readiness</b>	49%	76%	47%	79%	34%	62%	43%	76%	31%
<b>Matching Students</b>	82%	86%	64%	76%	69%	84%	69%	87%	13%
<b>Financial Aid Application Process</b>	43%	80%	41%	71%	45%	79%	40%	79%	35%
<b>Strong College Applications</b>	49%	62%	51%	66%	53%	70%	53%	71%	16%
<b>Financial Aid Packages</b>	47%	70%	54%	70%	33%	43%	52%	66%	14%
<b>Immigrant Students</b>	50%	81%	51%	80%	53%	84%	53%	82%	30%

\* Based on the aggregate scores. The overall knowledge gains are a weighted average of the gains across the years. A copy of this table is also included in the 2015 interim evaluation report.

**The first day of training sparked a “call to action” for participants to better understand how high-quality college advising can have longer-term implications for college success for students.** Participants found starting with a review of their school’s respective “Where Are They Now Reports” and the low college completion rates of their students as significantly eye-opening and sobering to frame the importance of college advising. These reports focus on multiple measures, including whether students matriculate to college, the type of college they attend, and how many are still enrolled through four

semesters. Participants were candid about how they previously did not consider the outcomes of their students after they graduated high school, and how the first day of training allowed them to explore the college persistence outcomes of their graduates. Participants were also surprised that although their high school may boast a high graduation rate, that many of their graduates are not finishing college. Focusing part of the first training day on this broader landscape helped push forward the immediate need of the training and highlighted how gaps in high-quality college advising can have long-term implications for their students.

**Well-branded, high-quality, professional materials increased participant respect for Options and Goddard Riverside, and led to increased likelihood of participants sharing these materials upon returning to their respective buildings.** The training materials provided resources for participants to use with students. After referring to the reference materials a few times, participants found themselves feeling like experts in answering specific college application questions. Some staff used the training materials to plan workshops and sessions for the students as well.

*"I find myself, at least every few days, when I'm counseling students, pulling an Options training book out, and the materials are good, particularly when it comes to details and facts."*

–College Counselor, Bronx

**Table 5. Participant Increases in Knowledge Areas\***

Increases in Knowledge Areas	Strongly Agree or Agree
How to provide students with quality recommendation letters	83%
How to support students with different college and post-graduation needs	81%
How to provide students with quality feedback on their college essays	79%
How to help all students assess which colleges are a good fit	74%
How to help all students with the financial aid process	72%
How to counsel immigrant students on the college application process	68%

\*Based on survey responses for individuals who completed the survey at baseline and at follow-up (n=158)

## A Wealth of Advising Resources

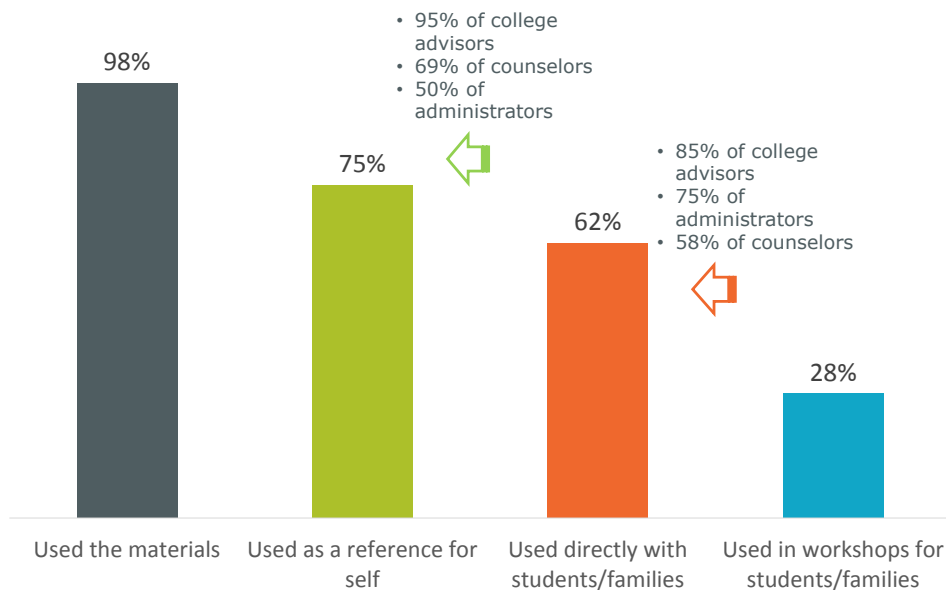
**Participants were better equipped, through the workbooks and resources provided during the training, to offer practical guidance and correct information to help students meet critical college application milestones.**

Worksheets or workbook pages that were often used included:

- ✓ Alternative postsecondary education pathways
- ✓ College application timeline
- ✓ College Board benchmarks
- ✓ Creating a list of colleges
- ✓ CUNY admission profile
- ✓ Enrollment resource sheet
- ✓ FAFSA
- ✓ FAFSA checklist
- ✓ FAFSA -parent income
- ✓ Financial aid award letter
- ✓ Financial aid comparison worksheet
- ✓ Financial aid-o-meter
- ✓ Legal Aid Society
- ✓ List of SAT optional schools
- ✓ Public versus Private schools
- ✓ Template for writing college essay
- ✓ Writing a recommendation

Nearly all of the participants reported using the training materials once they returned to their schools. College advisors were more likely to use the training materials as a reference for themselves and directly with students.

### Use of Training Materials\*



\*Based on follow-up survey data (n=179)

**Regardless of the impetus for participation – ranging from a personal passion to support individual students in college advising to a more systemic desire to build a high school’s college-going culture – the action planning portion of the training helped participants develop specific steps to address once they returned to their schools.** The action planning process encouraged participants to think about the session’s utility, and how to convert knowledge into action and practice once they returned to their schools. The majority of participants indicated that they had enacted at least one of these action plans post training, but implementation varied by role – for example, school counselors were more likely than administrators and college advisors to implement action plans. Participants noted they had developed action plans to change or adapt the advising systems in place, and indicated they used at least one of the action plans created during the training series.

Action plans were developed and used by individual participants despite whether multiple individuals from a school attended the training at the same time. Participants planned out actions for themselves. Participants with school colleagues who were also taking the training hoped to action plan as a team, but lost the momentum to do so; most participants never met again as a team once returning to their schools.

**Although the six sessions were highly regarded for their quality and relevance, participants still saw opportunities to dive even deeper in a few areas.** This reflects both the diverse range of post-secondary pathways, as well as the ever-changing policies of the college application process. Participant suggestions included:

- Providing adequate time for staff to discuss and plan for providing college supports
- Having leadership discuss college-going data with staff
- Providing students in early grades (9th and 10th) information about college
- Offering ACT/SAT support
- Engaging parents in the college application process

Options staff were very aware of the ever-changing policies and gaps in the six-session training and based on similar feedback collected directly by Options staff, the Options Institute has begun offering one day training opportunities, including:

- Opportunity Programs
- Students with Disabilities and the College Process
- Financial Aid Refresher and Updates
- How to Run a Financial Aid Workshop
- Educational and Work Related Alternatives to College

### 3.2 Practice Changes (Interactions with Students)

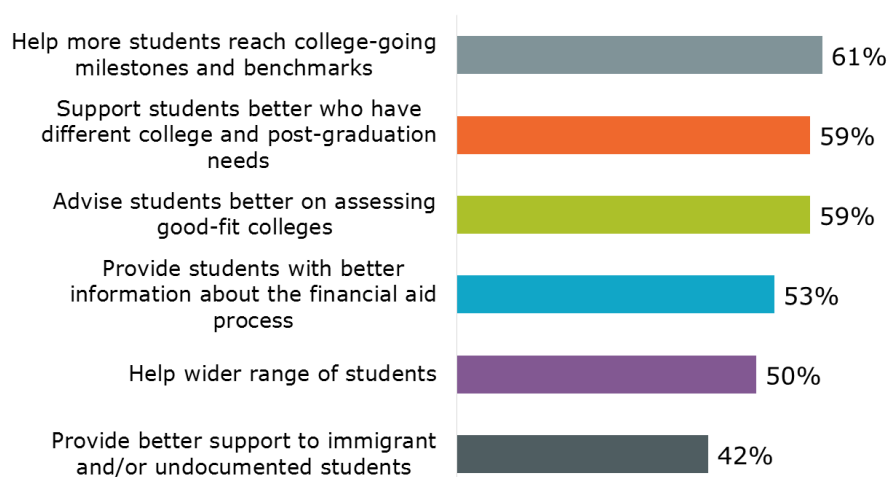
**Along with the gains in knowledge, participants are more equitable and deliberate in their advising practices – thereby reaching a broader range of students and providing them with more individualized supports.**

Participants are better equipped to help more students achieve college advising milestones, and better target services, supports, and information to meet unique student needs (e.g., assessing college fit and aligning financial need) and supporting a wider range of students – including those with differing immigrant statuses (Figure 1).<sup>13</sup> Participants saw the opportunity to, and, for some, were able to offer a greater breadth of services across all grades (9<sup>th</sup> grade through 12<sup>th</sup> grade). School counselors were more confident in serving as the first line for any general college inquiries and less likely to refer students to another office for basic college advising information. Participants could also advise students who had non-college track plans post-graduation, and said that the training enabled them to discuss more postsecondary options.

*"I was always very afraid to give misinformation. So I would always say 'check with the college office. They are the experts.' I wouldn't say that I am now an expert. I think there is still much to be learned. However, I do feel much more confident in my responses to [students]."*

- Counselor, Queens

**Figure 1. How Participants Support Students\***



\*Based on follow-up survey results (n=179)

**Participants not only felt empowered to provide students with information, but were now equipped to help students become their own advocates and decision-makers.** There was a philosophical shift in how participants interacted and mentored students, encouraging students to become their own advocates in the college application process. Students were supported to become leaders, and be the driver of their college application process. For example, students would call college admissions offices if they had any questions about their application, and, as a result of the training, participants were able

<sup>13</sup> This is especially the case for college advisors, where more than three-quarters reported helping more students reach college going milestones (83%), advise students better on assessing good-fit colleges (89%), and provide students better information on the financial aid process (78%).



to rehearse these calls with the students in order to build their confidence. Participants provided the students with objective ways to consider and weigh their different college options, rather than telling each student what they thought the student should do.

**Participants learned how to address barriers students face due to inequitable systems.** Whereas participants often had felt helpless in working with students to apply for financial aid and decipher financial aid award letters, or help students who were undocumented, they now had multiple resources to refer to on these topics.

## Increasing Equity: Demystifying the Financial Aid Process

The financial aid application process is often cited as one of the greatest barriers to college access. Low-income families are less likely to have sufficient information about financial aid, and low-income students are more likely to discuss financial aid with school counselors.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it is imperative that those who advise students on financial aid are knowledgeable and comfortable in the process.

The Options training demystifies the complicated financial aid process and equips participants with an overview of important components of applying for financial aid (e.g., steps for filing a FAFSA, a financial aid timeline, and comparing financial aid packages).

The two financial aid-related training sessions were reported to be the most impactful sessions of the entire series, but, on the other hand, the Financial Aid Packages session had one of the lowest knowledge gains based on pre- and post-tests (Table 4). This directly speaks to the complex nature of financial aid and to the amount of detailed information needed to navigate the financial aid process.

Given this, the financial aid training materials serve as tremendously helpful references that highlight different scenarios and details of the financial aid application process. Participants continually access and use these resources once they return to their school. Several participants referred to having “ripped that workbook apart” or “using those materials all the time” with their students.

Below are a several examples of how participants could advise students about financial aid:

*“I had one student apply for TAP, but she was living with her grandmother and her mother lived in North Carolina, and it became a complicated situation because some of the private schools have applications about parent finances and I learned about this beforehand at the training.”* – College Coach, Manhattan

*“Initially, the financial aid piece would be a little intimidating. There’s so many numbers, and you almost feel like an accountant, but they break it down for you so that it helps you gain your confidence and help you through it when you’re faced with it.”* – School Counselor, Bronx

*“I was better able to use different languages to explain the financial aid process, and was able to answer for students and their families why they have to give their financial info. There was a sheet that helps you break down the financial aid award letter, and I have used it with some of the students.”* – College Advisor, Bronx

*“There was a student who got his financial aid package, but didn’t get enough aid, and we called the school to ask about any initiatives or how he could earn an aid or merit scholarship. Our constant communication with the admissions officer helped him get a merit scholarship.”* – College Advisor, Bronx

*“Before I did training, I never did a financial aid form. I didn’t get it myself, so I never went through process or had to think about it as a student. So the training definitely helped and then this year is the first year I have done it with my students.”* – Counselor, Brooklyn

*“The financial aid workbooks are really helpful, because a lot of students have these weird situations. So sometimes just looking over the scenarios and revisiting how to guide that student has helped me navigate those situations. Plus, there is this great scholarships list in there for undocumented students that I reference all the time.”* – College Advisor, Queens

<sup>1</sup> Based on a literature review conducted by The Institute for College Access & Success (2008): *Paving the Way: How Financial Aid Awareness Affects College Access and Success*

## Increasing Equity: Meeting the Needs of Immigrant Students

Immigrant students, more specifically those students who are undocumented or who come from undocumented families, face significant barriers to postsecondary education attainment, including not knowing what legal and financial resources and opportunities are available to them after high school.

The Options training recognizes that in order to serve and address the needs of NYC's very diverse population, being able to work with non-US born students with various immigration statuses is critical. The training specifically addresses: helping students and parents identify their immigration status; understanding which immigration statuses are eligible for financial aid and college admissions; helping immigrant students know their rights and responsibilities; and advocating for immigrant students in the college admissions and financial aid process.

The Day 6 training session, *Immigrant Students and the College Process*, was especially powerful for many participants, as many had previously felt helpless with immigrant or undocumented students, unaware of what options were available.<sup>1</sup> Participants were now equipped to help students understand that college was indeed an option regardless of residential status, and that some forms of aid may be available:

*"The fact that they brought in an outside speaker from the Legal Aid Society to break it down and explain to us what citizens' rights are, what residents' rights are, what people on visas' rights are, that was very helpful to me as a counselor because I have all those types of students."* – Counselor, Manhattan

*"I think the immigrant student applications was most informative, just because our school has that population. [The session] provided a lot of useful information, especially around financial aid and scholarships that they can go to college with."* – After-School Staff, Brooklyn

*"Before today, I didn't have a list of walk-in offices, or know how to make an appointment with a Legal Aid attorney. I didn't really know who to call, and I also wasn't able to spot some of the issues, for example the students that are abandoned by their parents. I'd never heard of that, and that might be a possibility for a couple of my students, so I'll speak with them tomorrow, and send them the resources."* – Counselor, Bronx

*"The immigration sessions were really good, because many times the students wait until senior year to self-disclose they have no papers, even though we have been talking to them for years. I feel more prepared. I use some of the handouts. It's always good to be up to date, because you just don't know what is going to come up. That was really helpful for me, because every year I have at least one or two students who are undocumented."* – Counselor, Manhattan

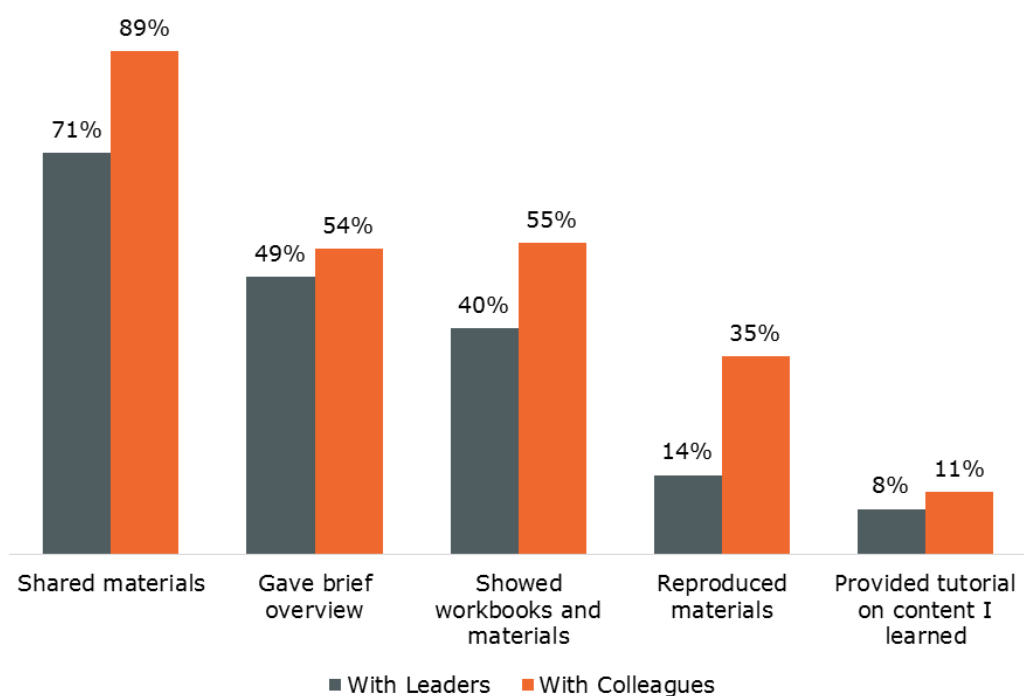
*"I was quite surprised about all the resources that undocumented immigrants have available to them. I figured that because they were undocumented, there was literally nothing as far as resources for them. You are on your own. I didn't realize there was as much as there is."* – Counselor, Queens

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted, though, that although the training equipped participants with helpful resources, a tension still exists; Participants have no control over the political and legal implications of one's residency status, and, thus, can only provide a limited amount of support to undocumented students (As seen in Figure 1).

### 3.3 Practice Changes (Interactions with School Staff)

**Participants returned to schools as college-going champions, yet changes in interactions with their colleagues were less noticeable or pronounced.** Participants continued the momentum built during the trainings by sharing what they learned with their school leaders and school colleagues – although this sharing was often brief, or a one-time event (Figure 2). Nearly all participants reported sharing information with their colleagues after the training. In most cases, this was a matter of showing the binders or giving a brief overview of the training at departmental meetings. Only a handful of individuals reported more in-depth engagement and information sharing with their colleagues. This is an area where participants generally focused on brief overviews versus providing workshops and tutorials for their school leaders and colleagues. Despite most participants not engaging in sustained exchange with their colleagues, several noted that their increased knowledge changed their standing with colleagues as they became better able to answer colleagues’ (and students’) questions. There was even less interaction with school leadership about the training. Participants were more likely to share materials with their colleagues than with school leadership.

**Figure 2. Participant Interactions with School Staff and Leadership\***



\*Based on follow-up survey results (n=179)

**There was a delicate balancing act required for being a college-going champion and, at the same time, interacting with colleagues to share this new information.**

Participants felt like they were college-going champions, yet they are not quite fully empowered to roll out college going priorities within their schools. Participants shared the training materials in three ways: 1) they copy documents and email them or put them in people's mailboxes; 2) they talk to colleagues one-on-one; or 3) (less often) they provide workshops.<sup>14</sup> In all three cases, there was a sensitivity to not step on their teaching colleagues' toes. Through the passive distribution of physical information, participants felt they had done their due diligence in informing colleagues about the training. Depending on the school culture and norms, some participants received "push back" from teachers about sharing this new college advising information. They said they had to "tread lightly" and be strategic in how they shared information, to avoid overwhelming or confusing teachers about the intention of the new information.

*"My principal said to the entire senior staff that while college advising was my primary responsibility, this was a group effort, so they also had to be involved. He had a system where he made all the senior teachers mini-advisers. Each teacher had a cohort of 10-15 seniors to check in with, and to make sure that they were up to date in what they have to do."*

- College Advisor, Queens

**For those participants who were not college advisors but had college advisors in their school, they were able to now support the efforts of their school's college advisor.** School counselors were more comfortable and more likely to have initial college application conversations with their students rather than automatically refer students to the college advisor. Counselors are also more willing to assist their students on completing a college application or scholarship application. They were more comfortable interacting with their school's college advisor and asking them questions or sending them college-related emails. After returning from the training, counselors saw the college advising role more as a shared responsibility between themselves and the college advisor rather than a responsibility only of the college advisor.

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<sup>14</sup> Participants who were part of a college advising office with fellow college advisors were able to provide workshops for teachers.

## Section 4. Additional Opportunities and Broader Implications

Based on the evaluation findings, participants found tremendous value in attending the training. The training provides unmatched opportunities for participants to gain knowledge and confidence in college advising, which leads to more effective college advising interactions with students. Yet, based on these evaluation findings, there exist additional opportunities that can further support participants in postsecondary planning, in strengthening the success of the training program, and for advancing the broader college access and success field.

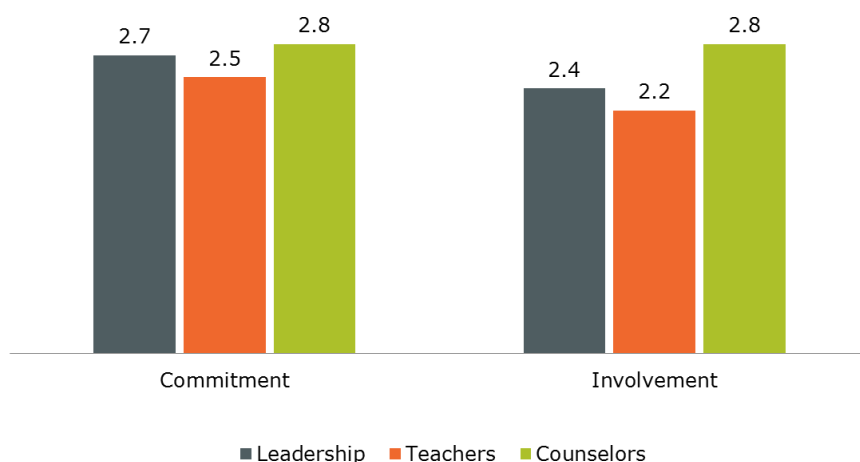
**The training is a foundational element in helping students – who may historically have been underrepresented in college classrooms – access the right postsecondary options and receive supports to persist and succeed in their chosen postsecondary pathway.** The NYCDOE Office of Postsecondary Readiness outlines “transactional benchmarks” for college and career access, including understanding the roadmap to higher education and careers, providing direct assistance in completing tasks required for entry, and financial planning. Participants left the training with a strong foundation of knowledge in these readiness benchmarks. Moreover, there is no doubt that participants are highly satisfied with the training, and describe how they have assisted students once they returned to their schools. Participants were given usable and useful resources. They are able to advise a wider range of students and are empowered to mentor students to become their own college-going advocates. *All of the changes point to the incredible and unmatched value that the training offers.*

**Participants need more support in sharing the resources back to colleagues and in having deeper conversations with colleagues about college advising roles and responsibilities.** In most schools, advising is an isolated and decoupled process, both in terms of staff responsibility for its provision as well as in terms of integration with the larger school curriculum and culture. Because of resource constraints, plans to extend access to all grades tended to focus on classroom-based service delivery, rather than more intensive individual counseling sessions. Moreover, teacher turnover in public schools is well-documented,<sup>15</sup> and an important contextual factor that may change a school culture year-to-year. Few schools had established a shared responsibility for college advising beyond the counseling or college advising office, and even fewer had integrated and sustained a college-going culture across all grade levels. Counseling staff were likely to be the most committed and involved in providing college access services and supports to all students, whereas teachers were viewed as the least committed and involved among the three groups (Figure 3). *Given the nature of college access in most of the schools included in this evaluation, it is perhaps not surprising that participants need additional resources and time to become champions of postsecondary success in their schools. Tangible ways to include staff in planning, while being sensitive to how participants could approach reluctant colleagues, would be useful for the participants as well.*

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<sup>15</sup> According to the May 2014 New York City Independent Budget Office Brief, *Demographics and Work Experience: A Statistical Portrait of New York City’s Public School Teachers*: “For teachers who started teaching in 2009-10, 19% left their current school after one year and 37% had left after two years.”

**Figure 3. Staff Commitment and Involvement in College Advising\***



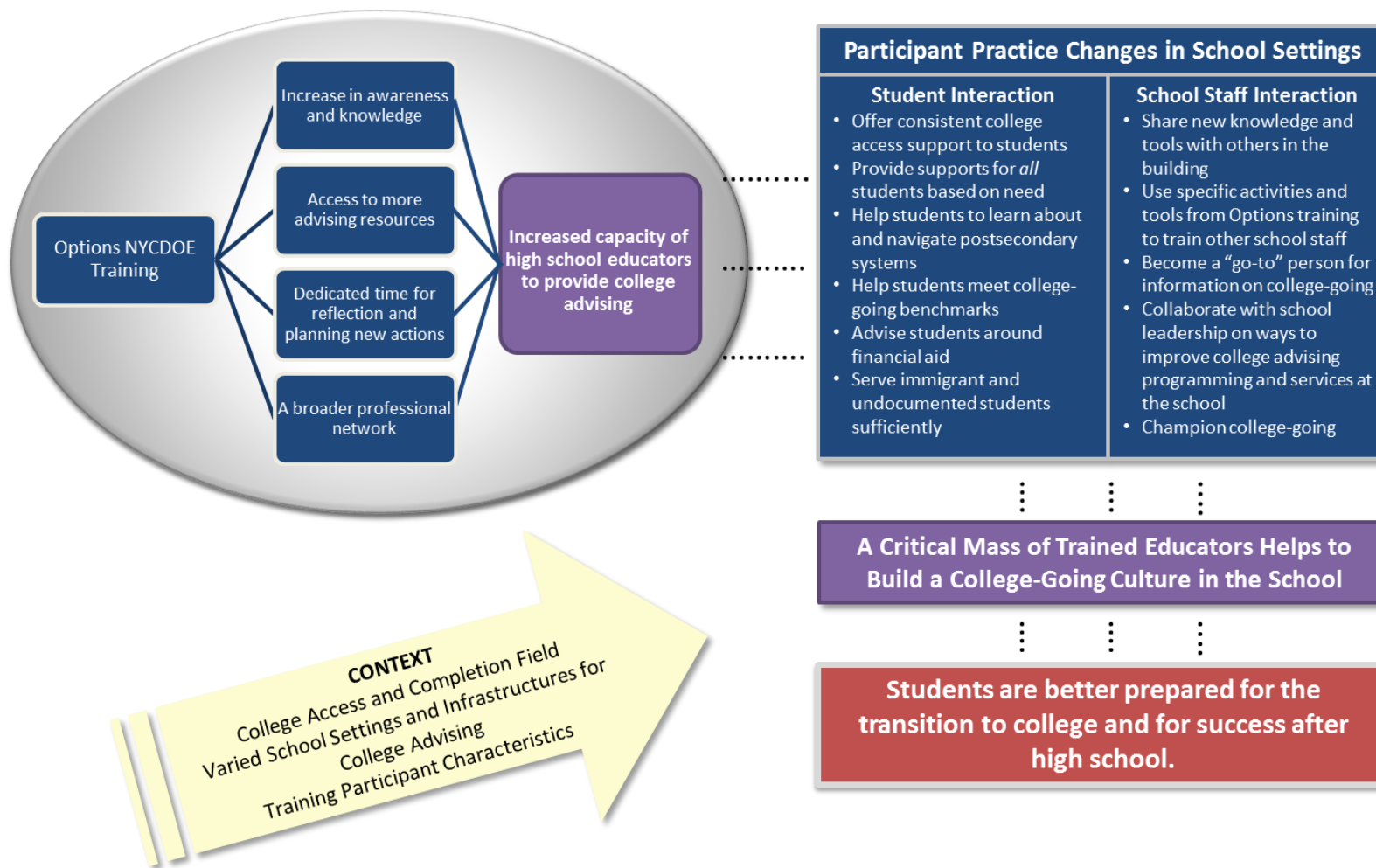
\*Based on survey responses for individuals who completed the survey at baseline and at follow-up (n=158) where 3="very committed" and 2="somewhat committed"

**Finally, there are many inequitable challenges that students of color, first-generation college students, and students from low-income communities face, including barriers to become adequately prepared to enter and succeed in college.**

According to a March 2016 report published by the U.S. Department of Education, "students with high-income parents are nearly three times more likely to attend college than their peers with low-income parents, and are more likely to succeed once enrolled."<sup>16</sup> College advisors, counselors, educators, and administrators play a very important role in creating a college-going culture. Without a dedicated college advisor, school counselors are the "go-to" college advising people; thus, not only should the training be a required professional development for all new counselors, but there should also be a tiered-approach to the training for those who hold different school roles. But, this training is not an end in itself. *A strong college advising context includes high academic rigor, dedicated and embedded college and general advising resources, and the ability and willingness of the school to tailor advising services to the diverse needs of the student body – all driven by strong leadership buy-in and commitment. A continued push to have leaders become involved in the training is also critical, especially tapping the school leaders who have taken the training and learning from them ways to engage their peers.*

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Department of Education (March 2016). *Fulfilling the Promise, Serving the Need: Advancing College Opportunity for Low-Income Students*.

## Appendix A. Options-NYCDOE Training Evaluation Framework



*\*The evaluation focuses on individual level changes, including how increases in awareness, knowledge, resources, and other products of the training influence participant-student and participant-school staff interactions.*



## Appendix B. Evaluation Methods

During the two years of the evaluation, our evaluation team employed the following methods and activities to investigate the training program and its reach: 1) the development of an evaluation framework; 2) analysis of existing Options training data, including follow-up survey data and training participation and attendance data; 3) development and implementation of a new pre-training and follow-up survey; 4) stakeholder interviews/focus groups with CBO partners and trainers; 5) site visits to high-participation schools; 6) phone interviews with participants; and 7) participant focus groups.

**1. Evaluation framework development:** Using Options' existing theory of change as a starting point, the evaluation team conducted observational training visits; reviewed training documents and literature on school counseling, college-going cultures, and college readiness; and conducted 11 interviews with NYCDOE staff, Goddard staff, and community-based organization staff. We used these data to inform development of the evaluation framework, which guided our inquiry and analysis during the first year of the evaluation. Following analysis of site visit and survey data and discussion with Goddard and the DOE in summer 2015, we updated this framework and presented it in the September 2015 interim report.

The revised framework for the Options-NYCDOE training focuses on participant-level changes in 1) awareness and knowledge of college advising concepts, processes, and tools; 2) practices affecting students; and 3) practices affecting colleagues. Having a critical mass of trained educators is expected to enhance the college-going culture in the school and enable students to become better prepared for the transition to college and for success after high school. See Appendix A for the revised framework.

**2. Analysis of existing Options-NYCDOE training data:** During the first round of data collection in 2014-2015, we reviewed the existing post-training survey data from prior years' trainings, in conjunction with participation data, to understand who was participating in the training, how representative of the district these participants were, and how participants reported using and benefiting from the training. This information suggests the training was meeting its mandate to serve the entirety of the district. Participants in the training came from schools that were representative of the district overall, in terms of the racial and ethnic makeup of the student body, the academic performance of the school, and the proportion of students receiving free or reduced price lunch. However, on the post-training follow-up survey, response rates have been fairly low (around 20%), and as a result, these data on how participants use the training is not representative of schools across the district. We found that respondents tended to come from lower-poverty, higher-performing schools.

**3. Development and implementation of new pre- and follow-up surveys:** To round out the data collected through the evaluation on participant, participant-interaction, and school-level changes, we revised the follow-up survey to better mirror the evaluation framework. We also created a pre-survey administered at the outset of the training to gauge participants' interests and expectations for the training, as well as self-ratings of their college-advising knowledge and experience prior to the training in order to estimate practice change. We administered the pre-survey to all cohorts in the 2014-15

school year, and had a 90% response rate. We administered the follow-up survey to all five cohorts of participants completing training in 2014-15.

- 4. Stakeholder interviews/focus groups:** During the first round of data collection in 2014-2015, we conducted a number of stakeholder interviews with local and state alliances (College Access Consortium of New York), the district, and CBOs (New Settlement Apartments, Urban Assembly). This supported our ability to understand how the Options-NYCDOE training fits into the landscape of offerings in New York and in particular schools. In addition, to understand more about the training context, we conducted a focus group with the four Options trainers – to gather more specific details and understanding of the training content and experience.
- 5. Site visits to eight high-participation schools:** We visited three schools in spring 2015 and five schools during the 2015-16 school year. We selected these schools on the basis of high participation in the training (had at least five participants), school size (a combination of large, medium, and small schools), and borough geography (representation of all boroughs). Those interviewed included school counselors, college advisors, and administrators, including principals, assistant principals, and directors of academic and student services. The table below provides an overview of the schools visited.
- 6. Phone interviews with 2014-15 training participants:** During the second round of data collection in 2015-16, we conducted seven phone interviews with recent participants. These interviews were helpful for learning about the immediate changes that participants made when they returned to their schools after completing the training. The interviews focused on the knowledge gains that individuals experienced, as well as changes in practice in their school settings, particularly changes in how they worked with students and colleagues as a result of the training.
- 7. Participant focus groups:** During the second round of data collection, we conducted three focus groups in March 2016 with participants who had just completed their training the day of the focus group. Focus group participants volunteered to participate and represented a variety of schools, positions, and boroughs. These conversations captured top-of-mind reflections on the participants' training experiences, including ways in which they were beginning to apply what they learned back at their schools.

## Participant Focus Groups

School Roles	Schools Represented
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Six college (and career) counselors</li> <li>• Six school counselors</li> <li>• Six other positions (e.g., college/career coach, college counseling administrator, parent coordinator)</li> <li>• Two college advisors</li>   <li>• 15 NYCDOE Staff</li> <li>• Five CBO Staff</li>   <li>• <b>20</b> focus group participants in total</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• American International High School at Monroe</li> <li>• Brooklyn Theater Arts High School</li> <li>• Department of Homeless Services</li> <li>• District 79</li> <li>• English Language Learners and International Support Preparatory Academy</li> <li>• Esperanza Preparatory Academy</li> <li>• Harlem Leadership Charter School</li> <li>• High School for Teaching and the Professions</li> <li>• High School for Health Professions and Human Services</li> <li>• Marta Valley High School</li> <li>• Maspeth High school</li> <li>• New Heights Academy Charter School</li> <li>• Young Adult Borough Center (alternative high school)</li> <li>• Urban Assembly Maker Academy</li> <li>• Urban Assembly School for Criminal Justice</li> <li>• W.E.B. Dubois Academic High School</li> <li>• Wadleigh High School</li> <li>• Wagner High School</li>   <li>• <b>18</b> high schools and organizations in total</li> </ul>

## Overview of Site Visit Schools

School name	School size <sup>17</sup>	Borough	Advising Staff	Selected Features of College Advising Programming
School 1	Very Large	Queens	One college advisor and several school counselors who assist with college going	Data system that tracks course attendance, credit completion, Regents scores, among other student data; college door contest – teachers decorate based on where they attended – and college teacher day; counselors visit classrooms; on-site college night; and CBO and community school programming
School 2	Small	Manhattan	One college advisor	CBO programming focused on college essay guidance; recognition in hallways of which colleges staff attended; and college readiness curriculum for each grade level
School 3	Very Large	Queens	One college advisor, and school counselors for each grade level	Financial aid, FAFSA workshops, PSAT & SAT workshops; college week (e.g., teachers talk about their college experiences, the CUNY system, alumni panel for juniors); and CBO programming, application assistance, and event coordination
School 4	Medium	Bronx	One Director of College Advising and five college counseling staff members from NYCDOE and CBO in the Student Success Center, including two college coaches	Summer program focused on college transition readiness; assistance with internships; on-site college fair; CBO and community school programming; and College Access: Research & Action (CARA) curriculum in advisories
School 5	Medium	Manhattan	One college advisor with school counselor for each grade	College for Every Student programming; CARA curriculum; recognition in hallways of which colleges staff attended; after-school activities; and college tours
School 6	Small/ Medium	Bronx	One college advisor	Classroom presentations; financial aid counseling; and SAT preparation integrated into English department
School 7	Medium	Queens	1.5 college advisor	Classroom presentations; college tours; data system for targeting student supports; essay support from English department; college fairs; and Financial Aid Night
School 8	Very Large	Brooklyn	Two college advisors	9th and 10th grade interest inventories; college fairs; and family nights (e.g., financial aid, SAT prep, the college process)

<sup>17</sup> School size is defined by NYCDOE as follows: Small=Under 400 students; Medium= 400-799 students; Large= 800-1,999 students; Very Large= 2,000 students and over.

## School Site Visit Interviewees

School Roles	Training Participants	Non-Participants	Total
School counselors	23	0	23
College advisors	5	1	6
Teachers	10	2	12
Administrators	8	6	14
Others	1	1	2
All	<b>47</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>57</b>