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Postsecondary Success for Young Men of Color in Newark



A product of the Postsecondary
Success for Men of Color Project
Spring 2019

EXECUTIVES' ALLIANCE FOR BOYS AND MEN OF COLOR

About the Executives' Alliance

The Executives' Alliance for Boys and Men of Color (EA) is a network of national, regional, and community foundations driven by a bold vision that all boys and men of color will enjoy full opportunity and inclusion in the economic, educational, leadership, and wellness opportunities that America has to offer. EA's mission is to grow the breadth, depth, and coordination of philanthropy's commitment to an investment in the safety, wellness, and success of boys and men of color. Learn more at www.funders4bmoc.org.

About the Advancing Postsecondary Success for Men of Color Project

Through generous support from the Lumina Foundation, the Executives' Alliance provided grants to six nonprofit organizations to support demonstration projects designed to build the capacity of nonprofits, networks, and advocacy efforts to improve post-secondary outcomes for boys and men of color. The grantees were pre-selected organizations in six cities where EA member foundations and allies have supported place-based efforts to improve outcomes for boys and men of color: Detroit, Newark, Buffalo, Los Angeles, Little Rock, and Oakland.

Together, these six projects represent a diverse range of strategies to promote post-secondary success. Their innovative endeavors included building the capacity of individual postsecondary education institutions; establishing or strengthening collaborations among institutions; and forging alliances between and among postsecondary institutions, nonprofits, the public sector, data experts, and local advocacy efforts.

Amidst increased national attention to disparities in college admissions, persistent gaps in college completion compelled the grantees and their partners to examine patterns and seek solutions based on a shared conviction: that systems must be aligned and policies retooled to ensure that male students of color graduate. The underlying assumption of the project is that higher education institutions must reframe the narrative about male students of color to appreciate their talents and critically examine how institutional systems and policies may adversely affect these students. A greater awareness of the positive traits that help these students overcome and address difficult institutional systems and policies will help to improve opportunity for all students.

Each grantee organization received grant funding and extensive customized technical assistance throughout the duration of the grant period from a team of national experts:

Christine Robinson – Project Director

Ronald B. Mincy – Maurice V. Russell Professor of Social Policy and Social Work Practice, Columbia University School of Social Work,

Luis Ponjuan – Associate Professor of Educational Administration and Human Resources, Texas A&M University

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April 17, 2019

Dear Newark Stakeholders,

The plight of African American and Latino males in higher education is an ongoing crisis. A review of national statistics confirms that graduation rates for minority males are still lower than those of their White counterparts. Scholars and educators across higher education are well aware of the need to continue to seek ways to improve enrollment, persistence and completion rates for men of color, especially among low-income and first-generation students.

As an open-access predominantly Black- and Hispanic-serving institution with a strong commitment to serving underrepresented populations, Essex County College is pleased to partner with the Newark City of Learning Collaborative and My Brother's Keeper Newark to determine how to remove structural barriers that impede the academic outcomes of men of color. Through this collaborative, we aim to dramatically improve the ability of our young men to acquire the skills and credentials necessary to fulfill their dreams and aspirations.

Essex County College remains firm in its mission to meet the diverse needs of our students through comprehensive programs and training, regardless of where they are. Our mantra is "Students First." Thus, this initiative will enhance the College's continuing efforts to improve postsecondary outcomes for men of color and all students who enter our doors. We invite members from elementary, secondary, and postsecondary educational institutions, as well as community and faith-based organizations to join us in this initiative.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Anthony E. Munroe".

Dr. Anthony E. Munroe
President

“Graduation rates for Newark’s district high schools have been steadily increasing, rising from 61 percent in 2012 to 78 percent in 2017, and more than half of students are going off to college. Now more than ever, we must collaborate with our higher education partners to ensure more students graduate from college. Having the Newark City of Learning Collaborative partner with My Brother’s Keeper Newark to boost college retention and completion rates for young men of color at Essex County College is the type of collective action that will keep the needle moving in the right direction. As a former educator in the Newark schools, I am putting the full weight of my office, as mayor, behind this critically important work.”

~ The Honorable Ras J. Baraka, Mayor, City of Newark

“This work is critical in addressing the pervasive disparities often found between African American and Latino males and others in higher education. Newark is a bellwether city for this vital issue, and Newark’s ability to realize its postsecondary attainment goals ultimately rests on ensuring that everyone has visible and viable pathways to degree completion. That’s why we’re so deeply committed to the partnership among NCLC, Essex County College, and My Brother’s Keeper Newark to improve persistence and completion outcomes for males of color enrolled at Essex County College.”

~ Nancy Cantor, Chancellor, Rutgers University - Newark

“As co-chairs of NCLC’s Higher Education Work Group, we are pleased to offer our support of this important initiative on behalf of our membership. This work is invaluable to all of our institutions as we look for ways to increase college access and equity for all, especially men of color. Efforts to improve outcomes at Essex County College will inform our strategies as we collectively grapple with closing persistence and completion disparities for African American and Latino males.”

~ Dr. Tresmaine Grimes, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Bloomfield College;
Sanjay Ramdath, Executive Director of Enrollment Management, Essex County College;
The Newark City of Learning Collaborative Higher Education Workgroup Co-Chairs

Introduction

In 2015, recognizing that many Newark residents lack the degrees and credentials to participate in the city's growing economy, leaders across New Jersey's largest city established a goal to raise the postsecondary attainment rate from 17 percent to 25 percent by the year 2025. This collective effort is facilitated by the Newark City of Learning Collaborative (NCLC), a citywide initiative working to increase overall college enrollment, persistence, and completion rates by drawing on the expertise of organizational partners from a range of sectors: nonprofit, corporate, philanthropic, municipal government, K-12 education, and higher education. As a result of these coordinated efforts, Newark's postsecondary attainment rate has grown to 21 percent (Backstrand & Donaldson, June 2018).

Newark established a goal to raise the postsecondary attainment rate from 17 percent to 25 percent by the year 2025.



In 2018, NCLC released its Post-Secondary Outcomes of Newark High School Graduates report. The report analyzed the postsecondary matriculation and success rate for nearly 13,500 of Newark's high school graduates. NCLC looked at enrollment, persistence, and completion rates for high school students between the years of 2011 and 2016. The report found that more Newark high school graduates are going to college, with an increase from 39 percent, for the period of 2004-2011, to 54 percent of students immediately enrolling in college (Backstrand & Donaldson, June 2018).

Building on the city's recent progress, NCLC was invited to join the Postsecondary Success for Men of Color project led by the Executives' Alliance for Boys and Young Men of Color. NCLC engaged Essex County College (ECC) and asked My Brother's Keeper Newark (MBKN) to serve as the project lead. MBKN was established by Mayor Ras Baraka as a collective impact initiative in 2015 to address persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color (BYMoC). One of MBKN's goals supports the work of NCLC and focuses on increasing the percentage of BYMoC graduating from high school and completing postsecondary degrees or certificates. Also in 2018, MBKN hosted the Obama Foundation's Pathways to Success: Opportunity Summit for Young Men of Color. The event matched 700 youth to employment, mentoring, continuing education, and other support services. Roughly 7,000 youth in Newark are either not in school or unemployed, with the vast majority of them being young men of color. MBKN has continued this focus and provided one-to-one career coaching for 500 of the Opportunity Summit attendees to help them stay on track and better understand the barriers to employment for young men of color.

ECC is a founding member of NCLC. The college's newly installed president, Dr. Anthony Munroe, has made increasing the completion rate for male students of color a priority. ECC opened in 1968 and offers more than 48 majors and 564 courses for more than 11,000 students. ECC has managed a number of innovative programs to boost persistence and completion rates for targeted populations, including a state-funded Educational Opportunity Fund program, providing pre-summer freshman programs, counseling and tutorial services, and academic scholarships. Through a US Department of Education three-year grant project, ECC launched Bridging Reentry Opportunities for Workforce Navigation to Success (BROWNS). BROWNS provided education, vocational training, and job placement services to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals. Participants received training towards certifications in welding, multimedia production and hydroponic farming. In total, ECC served more than 400 participants.

Together, these partners set out to use data to inform ways to strengthen educational pathways for males of color at ECC. Early on there was a recognition that traditional



approaches to solving this problem focused on individual student achievement or lack thereof, which at best – in the words of a Collaborative member – “tinkered around the margins” of systemic barriers and did little to change the system in which male students of color tried to function and were expected to succeed in spite of the hurdles in their paths. Instead of asking students who did not persist what they could do to stay in and finish college, the team chose to examine – and to base solutions upon – factors that caused students to get stuck in the system and how that might lead them to withdraw. This approach shifted the focus away from the perceived failings of students toward the barriers that institutions, often unknowingly, place in students’ way.

Examining Systemic Challenges and Opportunities at Essex County College

(ECC) is an open-access institution that enrolls more than one-third of Newark’s high school graduates and serves as a major gateway to more than twenty four-year colleges and universities in the New York-New Jersey region. In fall 2018, the total enrollment at ECC was 7,514 students, with 47.8 percent of students enrolled full-time and 52.2 percent part-time. The race/ethnicity composition of ECC was as follows: 43.9 percent Black/African American, 26.3 percent Hispanic/Latino, 9.2 percent White, and 3.2 percent Asian. Of the enrolled students, 42.2 percent identified as male and 57.8 percent as female. 29.7 percent of Fall 2018 students were identified as males of color. ECC has a rich history of developing supports for traditionally underrepresented student populations, particularly low-income, first-generation students: summer bridging programs, peer mentoring, and academic advising.

“The best experience I had at Essex was in the summer because they’re quick. The professors [have] real-world experience. I had an accounting professor who worked at Prudential, so he would come to the class and made the material make sense [with real-world examples].”

~ Current ECC student

“I ended up in so many different offices and not getting the right answer... Finally, one day, I woke up and said, I’m going there [ECC] again, and if I don’t leave with my schedule, I guess school isn’t for me.”

~ Former ECC student

ECC used the Federal Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) system and standards for its internal data collection. This interrelated survey is conducted annually by the National Center for Education Statistics, a part of the Institute for Education Sciences within the United States Department of Education. We examined several institutional data sets to provide critical insights on how well male students of color have fared at ECC, with a focus on retention, graduation, and transfer rates. The retention rate is the percentage of ECC’s first-time, first-year undergraduate students who return in the fall of the next year. The graduation rate is the percentage of a school’s first-time, first-year undergraduate students who complete ECC within three years. The transfer rate is the percentage of ECC’s first-time, first-year undergraduate students who transfer to another college within three years.

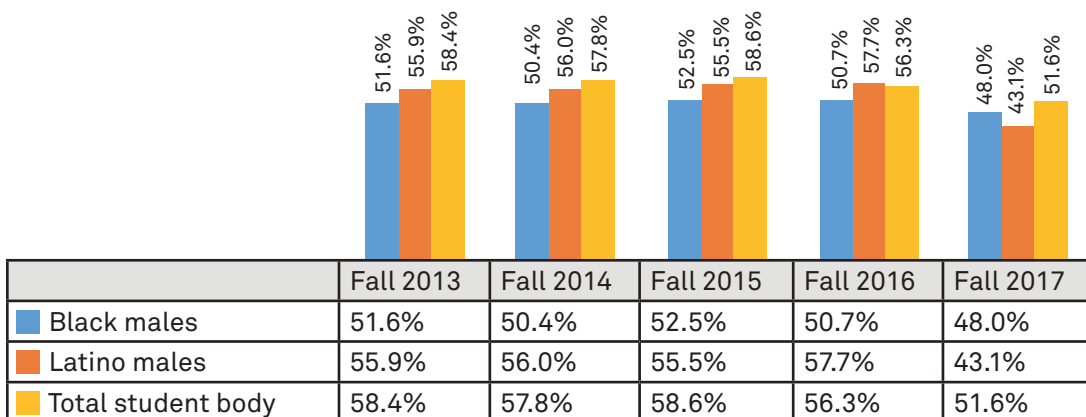
Retention Rates

The first analysis examined retention rates for male students of color from 2013 to 2017. We defined the student retention rates for students who enrolled in the fall term of their first year and successful enrollment in the second fall term of the subsequent year (e.g. Fall 2013 and Fall 2014). Retention rates results varied by racial/ethnic male student groups. These are the highlights (see Figure 1):

- Compared to all students, African American males had a lower retention rate for all five academic years.
- Compared to all students, Latino male students had a lower retention rate for all but one year (2016).

- Compared to Latino male students, African American male students had a lower retention rate for all but one year (2017).
- Over the five-year period, African American and Latino male students had lower retention rates than all other students except one year (2016).

Figure 1. Fall to fall retention rate of first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students (2013-2017)

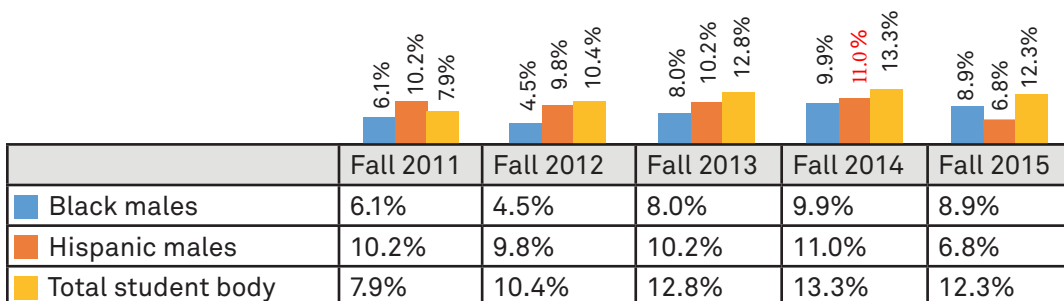


Graduation Rates

ECC examined the male students of color graduation rates in the associate degree programs. The ECC graduation data results reflected the IPEDS standard completion time of three years, or 150 percent of the expected time-to-graduation for a two-year program (see Figure 2). These graduation rates suggest that ECC needs to develop policies and programs that specifically focus on improving the graduation rates for African American and Latino male students.

- Compared to all students, Latino male students had a lower three-year graduation rate for the last four years (2012-2015).
- Compared to all students, African American male students had lower three-year graduation rates for all five academic years (2011-2015).
- Compared to all students, African American and Latino male students had a lower three-year average graduation rate except one year (2011).

Figure 2. Degree completion rates in a 3-year span for male students of color (2011 to 2015)



“I was working...I struggled with [not having enough] time every day because I wasn’t used to working full-time plus attending school full-time.”
~ Former ECC student

“I believe the Learning Center should be introduced at orientation... [Students say] I’ve never been here for the past four semesters and didn’t even know this existed... [College] is one the most difficult things I’ve ever done in my life.”
~ Former ECC student

Essex County College, State of New Jersey, and National Comparisons of Men of Color Graduation Rates

The IPED data center reveals that the national and state graduation rates for men of color for the Fall 2014 cohort for African-American and Latino males show significant gaps when compared to their counterparts. As depicted below, the Essex County College graduation rate was slightly higher than the state of New Jersey, but significantly lower than national figures. Latino males' graduation rates were lower than state and national graduation rates. Lastly, African-American and Latino graduation rates were significantly lower than White and Asian males at both the state and national levels. National standards determined by IPED allow three years for completion for first-time full-time degree-seeking (FTFTDS) students. In 2014 there were 19 community colleges in New Jersey and 974 two-year postsecondary institutions across the US.

“When I came back after dealing with some things, I had a 1.9 GPA. There was a lady [at ECC] who helped me with all my classes... She was somebody who showed that she cared. I ended up with a 3.7 GPA. I don't think I would have that GPA if it were not for her helping me.”

~ ECC graduate and Rutgers University - Newark transfer student

Figure 3: Graduation rates three years (150 percent) after entry for first-time full-time degree-seeking (FTFTDS) students

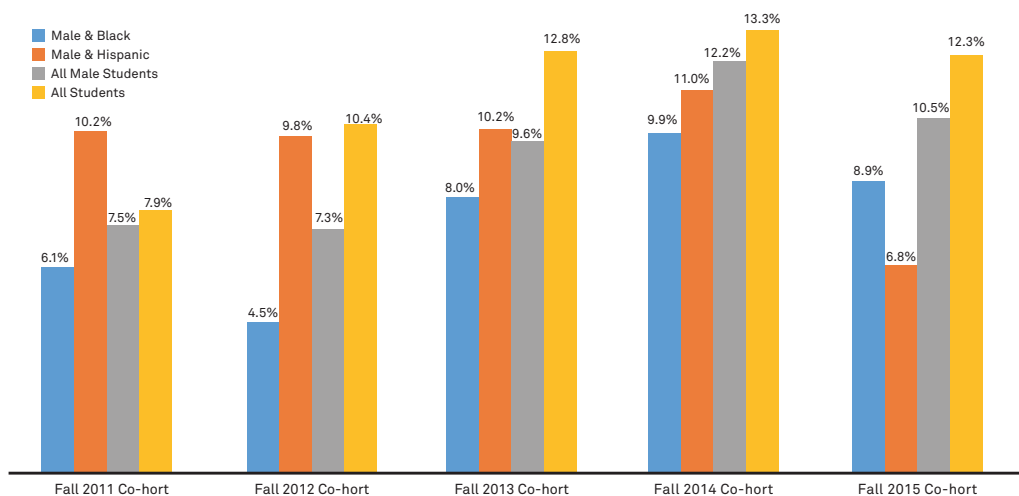


Chart 1: Comparison of graduation rates between ECC, community colleges in New Jersey, and two-year postsecondary institutions across the U.S. Fall 2014 FTFTDS cohort

	Essex	NJ(19)	USA (974)
African-American male	9.9%	9.3%	16.8%
Latino male	11.0%	15.1%	22.0%
White male	17.6%	27.5%	30.4%
Asian male	27.8%	19.9%	30.4%

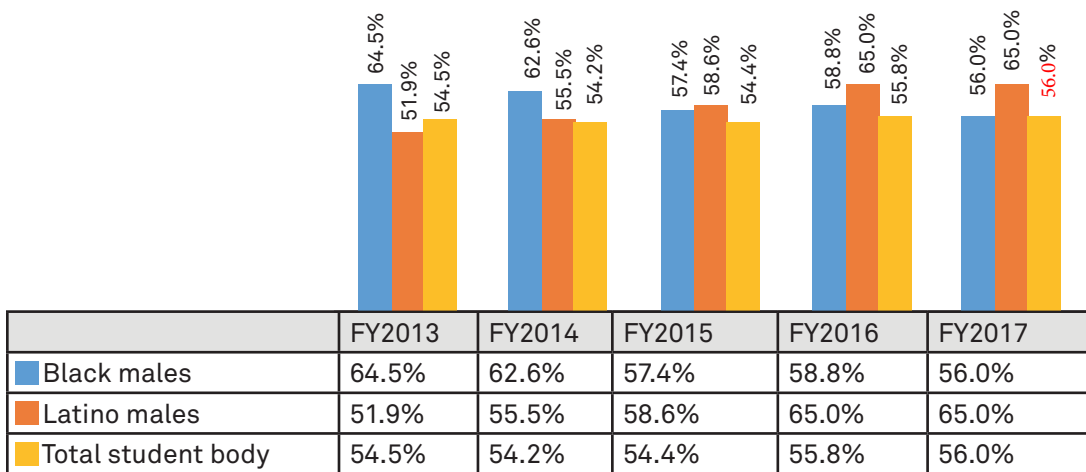
Transfer Rates

Another educational milestone for ECC community college students is the opportunity to transfer to a 4-year institution. Upon closer review of the data, several positive trends suggest that male students of color are continuing their education at 4-year institutions. The results revealed several key highlights (see Figure 3):

- Compared to all students, African American males had the highest average rates of transfer for the five academic years (2013 to 2017).
- Compared to all students, Latino male students had the highest transfer rates in the last four academic years (2014 to 2017).
- Compared to all other students, African American and Latino male students had higher transfer rates in the last five-year period (2013 to 2017).



Figure 4. Transfer rate of ECC graduates to four-year institutions within 1 year for male students of color (2013 to 2017)



Dialogues with Students and Faculty

In an effort to contextualize the analysis, the Newark team organized dialogues with both students and faculty. In particular, both groups were asked two specific questions:

1. What academic and non-academic factors became supports or barriers to persistence?
2. In what ways does the college contribute to low rates of persistence?

These dialogues were used to identify the experiences, practices, and policies that hinder persistence.

Students came from two groups: those who did not complete their studies and those who successfully completed degree programs.

Participating students had diverse profiles – many shared that their education was interrupted, at times, by personal challenges ranging from death of a loved one to providing for their families. Some shared that attending ECC was a step to improve their GPAs or cut the cost of higher education so that they could ultimately transfer to a four-year institution of their choice. In spite of these challenges, across the board, students talked about their desire to continue their education.

From the discussions with students at ECC, several themes emerged, including (1) the need for more academic and social supports, (2) the magnitude of financial constraints, and (3) students’ desire for more engagement in the classroom.

Students discussed their positive experiences with caring adults and how such support was a source of motivation that helped them persist. They expressed having more

of a connection with some professors, but not others. This relationship was fostered through teaching style. In instances where professors used classroom discussions and debates and worked directly with students on projects, students felt more engaged. In instances where, where the teaching style was more lecture-based, students did not feel the same connection. While some participants felt prepared for college, most expressed the realization that they were not only academically behind but not ready for college life. They felt unprepared to balance their academic and personal lives. The biggest academic challenges the group reported included learning how to write, thinking critically, building time-management skills, and developing good study habits. While there are resources available at the college, such as the Learning Center, the Writing Center, and the Educational Opportunity Fund, students mentioned not being aware of these programs. They suggested ways to make programs more accessible, including better marketing, nontraditional hours, and student-to-student outreach.

Faculty identified a number of barriers for students in their discussions in addition to ways the college could improve retention. They expressed a strong desire to get to the root causes of why students are discontinuing. One topic dealt with course sequencing and pointed to predictable patterns for high failure rates. These “killer courses” depended on students having the requisite academic foundations in math, reading comprehension, and writing to be successful. Faculty pointed to a practice known as “dropped courses” (formerly known as voiding courses), in which students who fail to meet the established tuition payment or fulfill their agreed-upon payment plan are unenrolled from their courses. Prior to being dropped from their courses, students are sent letters, text messages, emails, and outbound calls from a financial aid counselor at least a week in advance reminding them of payment, due dates with online payment instructions. Should students fail to make any tuition payment they are removed from their class rosters. They are subsequently still given an opportunity to make a payment and get reinstated in their courses. However, faculty seem to suggest that this practice may be a contributing factor to lowered retention and completion rates for students with financial hardship. Additional work is required by the college to examine the causes of students missing tuition payments and ways to avoid students being dropped from their courses.

It is important to note that while the participating faculty members are tenured, they only represent 25 percent of the teaching staff, with the remaining 75 percent of instructors being adjunct. Adjunct faculty often do not have the ability to create office hours and find time to fully support students. Tenured faculty highly recommended that additional resources, supports, and information be provided to adjunct instructors.

Faculty also talked about the need for a more coordinated approach for academic advising, better tools to track students from one term to the next, and identification of repeat course failures for targeted interventions for students.



Conclusion

One of the most important outcomes from this project is the collaboration that has formed between NCLC, ECC, and MBKN to improve the postsecondary outcomes for men of color in Newark. From the outset, each organization brought its expertise to bear to this challenge, providing transparent access to college success data, bringing a racial equity lens to understanding the experiences of male students of color persisting in higher education, and examining policies and practices for postsecondary success. The process began by examining these factors from an asset-based perspective that would provide the needed insight to recommend policies for improvement at ECC. The data shared by ECC, cross-referenced with insights from students and faculty, provided a road map for where to probe further for opportunities to make immediate changes that can have a positive impact. ECC has pledged to be a leader in this conversation and share what is being learned with local higher education institutions that are partnered with NCLC.

“Our students are prideful. They need us to talk to them about what they do, what their strengths are, and how they translate those strengths into success.”

~ Essex County College faculty member

“...At some point, as an institution we cannot continue to blame our students. We get the student we get. We’re an open-access institution. We have to figure out a way to give them the knowledge they need and not blame them for the knowledge they don’t have.”

~ Essex County College faculty member

“...There has to be follow-up. Getting the apparatuses together so that you can actually identify students that are in the cohort. And keep track of them and know where they are.”

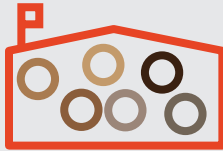
– Essex County College faculty member

Recommendations

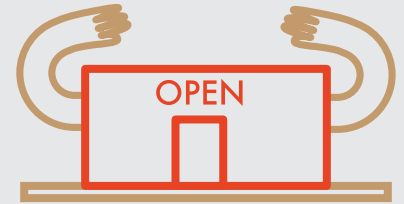
The team analyzed the information gleaned from these dialogues and identified a set of recommendations for ECC to consider adopting.



Implement more flexible course schedules that better accommodate work schedules



Develop a campus-wide minority male students of color initiative



Improve customer service and cultural fluency training for front-line staff members and faculty, particularly when it comes to male students of color



Enhance student supports in building critical skills (e.g., study habits, time management, writing and critical thinking, effective note-taking)



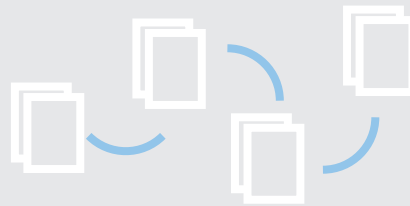
Review “voiding courses” practice



Provide mentoring, counseling, and mental health services



Improve communication regarding available services (tutoring, study skills workshops) on campus, as well as end the stigma that prevents male students of color from accessing the supports



Re-examine course sequencing to enable students to postpone courses with high levels of difficulty until the second semester



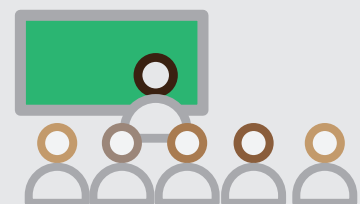
Coordinate methods to keep track of students, to know when or whether they are registered for the next semester, and to identify – and intervene – when their academic standing is in jeopardy



Improve advising regarding mapping academic programs to careers



Implement an early warning and intervention system



Improve the adjunct faculty orientation to strengthen knowledge of the ECC student population and barriers to success.

Participating Partners:

Essex County College
My Brother's Keeper Newark
Newark City of Learning Collaborative

Contact information:

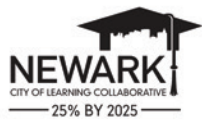
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