

Yonkers Public Schools



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The Landscape

For more than 100 years, Yonkers Public Schools (YPS) has been committed to empowering students to own their education and graduate “as knowledgeable, competent, responsible citizens.” As the fourth largest school district in the state of New York, Yonkers Public Schools and its staff are focused on academic achievement, student success, and individual student needs. Yonkers Public Schools’ vision emphasizes connecting learning in the classroom with real life goals. In a large urban school system, connecting learning to life takes hard work, determination, and even outside help.

Yonkers Public Schools serves nearly 26,000 students in 39 schools, the majority who come from low-income families. Across the district, 75.6% of the students qualify for the free or reduced lunch program. In YPS high schools, between 68% - 91% of students participate in the free or reduced lunch program demonstrating the extraordinary high need.

The Partnership

Like in other districts facing similar challenges, it is beneficial to have an outside partner vested in creating a system-wide college-going culture. In 2007, a non-profit, Yonkers Partners in Education (YPIE), was founded to provide YPS students with the resources needed for post-secondary success. YPIE’s mission is to “increase the number of Yonkers Public Schools students who complete a post-secondary program.”

Before YPIE arrived in 2007, YPS’s district-wide college and



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YPIE QUICK FACTS - 2012

- › Number of Seniors - 1,541
- › Seniors applying to College: 90.68%
- › Scholarship Dollars Secured: \$49,572,023
- › College Intentions: 76%
- › Student visits to YPIE Center: 17,528
- › Senior Visits to Naviance: 23,209
- › 9th to 11th Grade Student Visits to Naviance: 16,452

“ With Naviance’s many features, YPIE has a robust and reliable data information system to monitor the qualitative and quantitative impact of our work.”

- ELLEN CUTLER LEVY, YPIE Director of Programs

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career readiness effort was in place, but inconsistent among the different high schools. Ellen Cutler Levy, YPIE's Director of Programs, explained that because each school decided how to run its own college program, there was no district-wide syllabus for college and career readiness and no centralized data system to track the delivery of these programs.

One of YPIE's first steps toward creating an aligned college-going culture was building college and career centers and staffing each with a full time, experienced, master's level college and career advisor to work in partnership with the school administrators and counselors. Creating an inviting college-focused space and relieving some of the burden from the district's guidance counselors whose case loads were enormous resulted in a supportive environment for students and families to discuss and make plans for their futures and a dedicated advisor for students to approach with questions and concerns about college, careers, and financial planning.

With the centers and staff in place, YPIE's next step was to establish a variety of programs to meet the college- and career-readiness needs of its students, including: an 18-week college readiness class for juniors; a six-week summer course for SAT preparation; an intensive essay writing program; career discovery and exploration programs; and scholarship resources and workshops. Additionally, YPIE emphasizes the importance of community engagement in the college and career decision-making process, ensuring that students, parents, and families have the appropriate information and tools to navigate college and career choices. Bringing it all together was the district's use of Naviance.

Director Levy has witnessed the progress made over the past few years, "With so many demands on staff in a school district as large as Yonkers, there was understandable resistance when Naviance was initially introduced. The introduction of a new technology system, coupled with the training to implement Naviance, created skepticism among staff. However, the administrators, teachers and guidance counselors realized the

potential Naviance could provide to students. With it, students could navigate their college options and track their own college-going activities; the system began to gain traction. Today, all nine high schools use Naviance, resulting in a cohesive, district-wide system for managing the college-going process."

The Results

YPS and YPIE now have the ability to measure the impact their programs have on student success. Their consistent use of Naviance throughout the district has not only increased readiness and college access for students, but has also produced a wealth of data on how well its programs are doing. As Levy states, "Naviance is the anchor for YPIE's work. In grades seven and eight, students use their Naviance accounts to complete activities, journal about their learning, and explore careers and colleges during a 25-week, YPIE developed, college and career readiness class. In high school, students complete grade-level milestones and use Naviance to explore colleges and complete the application process. From seventh to twelfth grade, the district uses the Naviance survey tool to capture qualitative information about students' attitudes and behaviors. With Naviance's many features, YPS and YPIE have a robust and reliable data information system to monitor the qualitative and quantitative impact of our work."

Through the use of Naviance, YPS has not only improved college access throughout the district but has also seen a tremendous increase in financial aid and scholarship dollars secured by its students. In 2008, prior to the full adoption of Naviance, college-going intentions for seniors was 67%. In 2012, close to 91% of YPS seniors applied to colleges and 76% of seniors intended to enroll in four- or two-year colleges. Since using Naviance scholarship tools, YPS has more than doubled financial aid and scholarship awards from \$23 million in 2010 to over \$49 million in 2012. YPS attributes these increases to the variety of college- and career-readiness programs offered as well as improved student awareness of opportunities and resources available made possible by Naviance.

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The Next Chapter

In 2009, as YPIE continued its implementation of Naviance district-wide, the staff began to express a need for earlier engagement of students. Many of the college advisors felt that they were introducing college- and career-readiness programs too late and that some students were still missing out on the valuable resources and programs available to them. In an effort to address these concerns, YPIE created Getting Prepared for Success in 2011.

Getting Prepared for Success is an activity-based curriculum focused on helping seventh and eighth graders understand what it means to be college- and career-ready. By helping them discover college access resources available through YPS and by assigning readiness activities through Naviance, students can begin creating their college roadmap at an earlier point. As students complete the assigned activities, Naviance records their progress and builds a personalized student portfolio that stays with them throughout their time at Yonkers. The program is being implemented for 850 students in seven YPS middle schools spanning the entire academic year. Key components include career exploration, personal assessments, college research, and goal setting

The results of pre- and post-implementation surveys show positive feedback from students and suggest that students are now more aware of college and career options at an earlier point in their academic career and have deeper understanding of how classroom learning and academic performance will affect the rest of their lives. YPIE continues to gather additional information on the effect that Getting Prepared for Success is having on student engagement.

However, the real test will be what happens to Yonkers students after high school. Will they go to college and grad-

uate at a rate on par with their peers? YPIE and YPS are beginning to use Naviance Alumni Tracker to capture National Student Clearinghouse® data on college enrollment and persistence. For YPS and YPIE, success is not measured in college intentions, but rather in post-secondary completion, financial independence and personal fulfillment.

About Hobsons

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