



ISA Outcome Evaluation
Final Report
June 24, 2010

A report to:

The Institute for Student Achievement Board of Directors
by the Academy for Educational Development
New York City

ISA Outcome Study Highlights

Outcome	Results
Grade Promotion	Controlling for background factors, ¹ ISA students were more than 5 times ² as likely as comparison students to be promoted to 10 th and 11 th grades, and more than 3 times as likely to be promoted to 12 th grade.
Attendance	ISA students had higher attendance than comparison peers. Controlling for background factors, 12 th graders attended, on average, 3.5 more days per year.
Regents Exams	By 12 th grade, 93% of ISA students passed each of the required Regents exams (English, math A, global studies, history, and science). When controlling for background factors, ISA students were equally likely to pass the required Regents at the local level, but less likely to pass the tests at the more rigorous Regents advanced level.
Credit Accumulation	Controlling for background factors, ISA students earned, on average, 6.3 more credits in four years than did their comparison peers. ISA students also took more classes and failed fewer credits in core subject areas (English, science, social studies, and math).
Dropouts	The four-year dropout rate for ISA students was 7.2%, compared with 14.3% for comparison students and 13.5% citywide. Controlling for background factors, ISA students were half as likely to dropout as comparison students.
Graduation	79% of ISA students graduated in four years, compared with 63% of comparison students. Controlling for background factors, ISA students were 31% more likely to graduate than comparison students. ISA and comparison students were equally likely to earn a Regents-level diploma, but comparison students were more likely to earn an advanced diploma. ³
College Preparation	90% of ISA seniors planned to attend a two- or four-year college in the following fall. A majority of seniors reported receiving critical supports for college enrollment including visiting colleges and attending college fairs. They also reported receiving advice and guidance from teachers and counselors in completing college and financial aid applications and in selecting schools to apply to.
College Enrollment	61% of ISA students were attending four-year college, compared with 44% of African American and Latino students nationwide. 80% of ISA students attend college full-time during the first year, compared with 68% of African American and Latino students nationwide.
CUNY Remediation	34% of ISA graduates who enrolled in a CUNY program were required to take remedial coursework, slightly less than the CUNY-wide rate of 38%.
College Persistence	Of the ISA students who enrolled in college, 94% of those attending a four-year school returned for a third semester. Nationally, the persistence rate for students enrolled in four-year programs is 76% (Persistence into the third semester is a key indicator for eventual graduation).

¹ Controlled background factors included race/ethnicity, free-lunch status, ELL status, special education status, overage for grade, gender, and grade 8 reading and mathematics standardized test scores.

² All odds of ISA students achieving the particular outcomes of interest were determined using multilevel analyses.

³ The Regents diploma requires students to pass all five required regents exams with a score of 65 or higher. The advanced diploma requires students to earn six credits in a foreign language and to pass the five required Regents exams, plus an additional science and foreign language exam, with a score of 65 or higher. Graduation figures in this report include August graduates.

Introduction

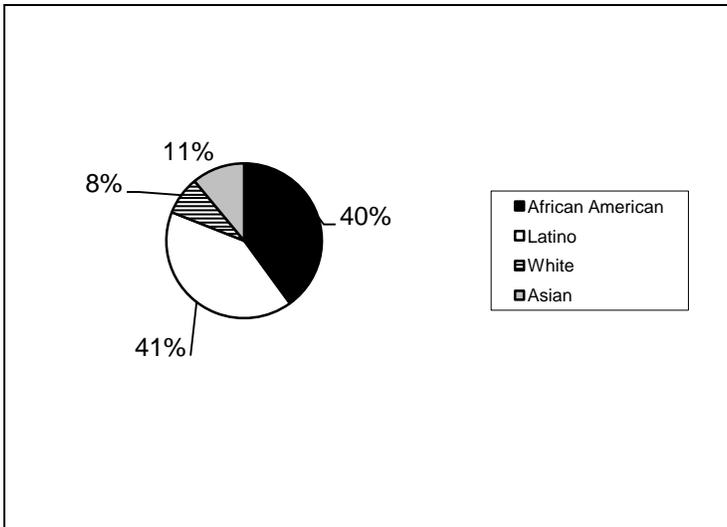
This report summarizes key findings from AED’s external evaluation of the Institute for Student Achievement (ISA). The six-year evaluation investigated the following key questions: 1) What are the outcomes for ISA students in terms of high school and college achievement?, and 2), How do outcomes for ISA students compare with those of similar students in non-ISA schools? AED also explored the contextual characteristics related to ISA implementation and outcomes. Using quantitative data obtained from student achievement records and from teacher and student surveys, qualitative data obtained from site visits, interviews of key school and ISA staff, and classroom observations, this study looked at New York City ISA schools to determine the ISA impact on student, teacher, and school outcomes using a quasi-experimental design.

Data presented below are from two cohorts of ISA students in eight NYC schools who entered as 9th graders in 2003 and 2004.

Characteristics of ISA Students

As context to the findings in this report, it is important to know that ISA study schools served a diverse student population with characteristics similar to those of all NYC high school students. A majority of students in the study were African American or Latino, as shown in Figure 1. ISA students faced several disadvantages, including low socio-economic status and poor prior achievement.

Figure 1: ISA Students, Entering 9th graders, Race/Ethnicity (N=1529)



Specifically,

- 73% were eligible for free- or reduced-priced lunch.
- 9% were English language learners.
- 11% were designated as special education students.
- Only 36% scored “proficient” in math and 31% scored “proficient” in reading on 8th grade state tests.

These rates are similar to citywide rates. Despite these disadvantages, ISA students showed promising outcomes and

outperformed comparison students on several key indicators.

Student Outcomes

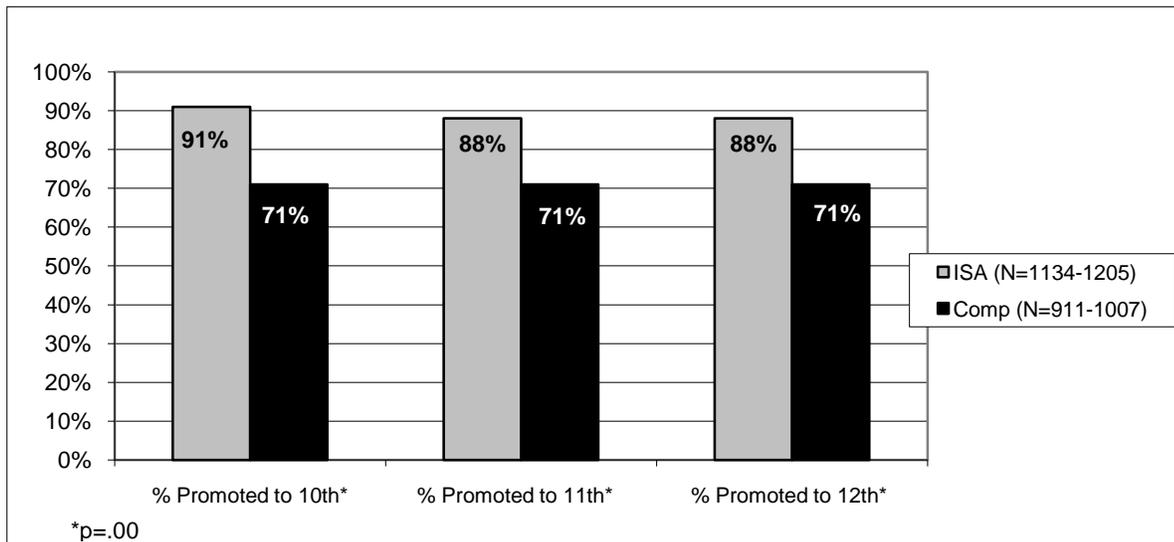
Student outcomes are presented below under the following categories:

- Grade promotion
- Attendance
- Regents exams
- Credit accumulation
- Four-year cohort graduation and dropout rates
- College readiness and college enrollment

Grade Promotion

Grade promotion is a key indicator of high school success and graduation: 9th graders who are promoted to 10th grade are 3.5 times more likely to stay in school and graduate in four years than are students who are not promoted (Roderick, 2006). In 2006–07, ISA students had high rates of promotion at each grade level, as shown in Figure 2, and far outperformed comparison students⁴ in non-ISA schools. Nearly all ISA 9th graders (91%) were promoted to 10th grade, compared to only 71% of comparison students. A total of 88% of 10th grade ISA students were promoted to 11th grade, versus 71% of comparison students. Similarly, 88% of ISA 11th graders were promoted to 12th grade, versus 71% of comparison students. Controlling for background factors, ISA 9th and 10th graders were about five times as likely as comparison students to be promoted to the next grade, and ISA 11th graders were more than three times as likely to be promoted.⁵

Figure 2: Grade Promotion Percentages



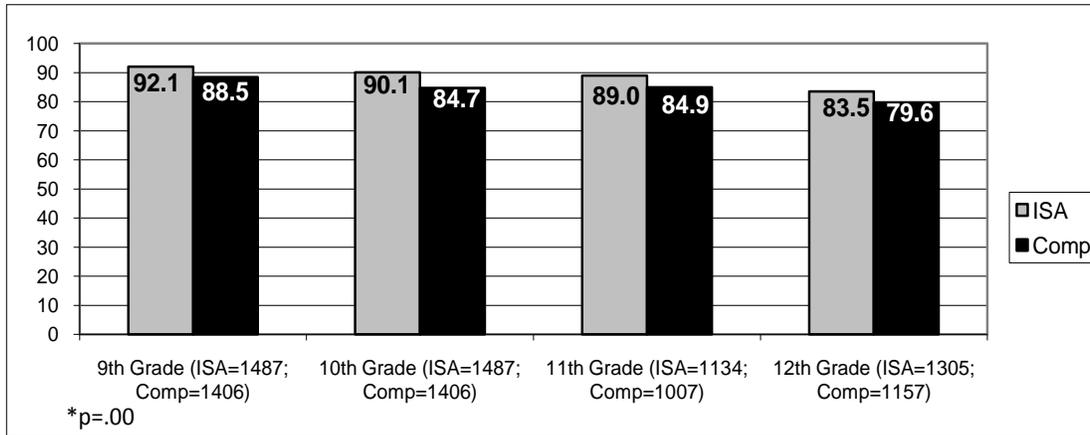
⁴ All achievement data are from the NYC Department of Education (2003–04 to 2007–08). Comparison students are students attending large, non-ISA schools, who are matched to ISA students by gender, overage for grade, race/ethnicity, prior achievement, free-lunch status, income, special education, and English language learner status, using propensity scoring.

⁵ Odds ratios were determined using multilevel analyses.

Attendance

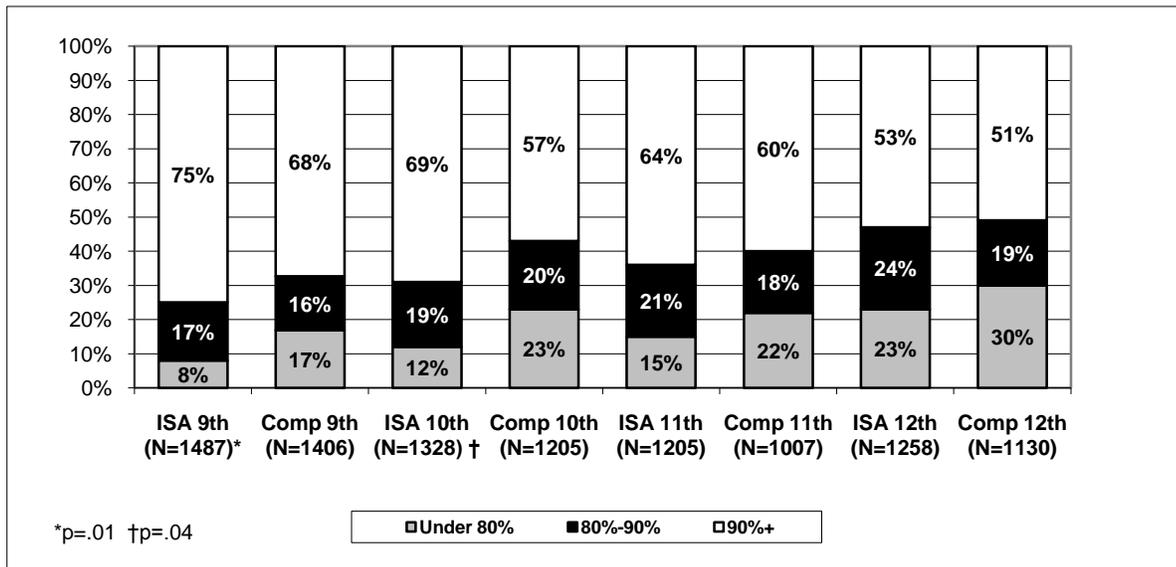
ISA students had consistently higher attendance rates than did comparison students. As shown in Figure 3, ISA students' attendance was 3–5 percentage points higher than that of their comparison peers in the 9th through 12th grades. These differences were statistically significant at each grade level.

Figure 3: Average Daily Attendance



New York City Department of Education policy states that students must attain a minimum of 90% attendance for promotion and graduation. Between 53% and 75% of ISA students met this minimum standard, as shown in Figure 4 below. Figure 4 also shows that more comparison students than ISA students were chronic low attenders (absent one or more days per week, on average). In grades 9 and 10, about half as many ISA students as comparison students were chronically absent. The trend continues in the 11th and 12th grades, though the difference between ISA and comparison students is not as large.

Figure 4: Attendance



The small, personalized environment of ISA schools is a likely explanation for the positive effect on attendance. Our interview data from the ISA schools indicated that ISA staff (teachers, counselors, social workers, and administrators) support student attendance through personal relationships in advisory classes and through structures such as attendance team meetings. Advisory classes took a variety of forms but typically consisted of dedicated periods during the school day in which teachers

and/or counselors met with a small group of students (generally 15–18) one to four times per week. Topics covered in advisory classes included social and emotional issues such as stereotyping, prejudice, interpersonal skills, and peer pressure, as well as academic issues such as career and college exploration, tutoring, and study skills. Attendance meetings were weekly meetings of support staff (e.g., social workers, guidance counselors, administrators, parent coordinators) to review attendance data and identify interventions for students who were chronically absent.

Teachers, administrators, and ISA coaches also described advisory classes as a mechanism that helped bolster students’ attendance:

As soon as a student is absent, my advisory team is on it. They call home asking, “What’s going on? Why weren’t you in school today?” It’s made a difference. (ISA principal)

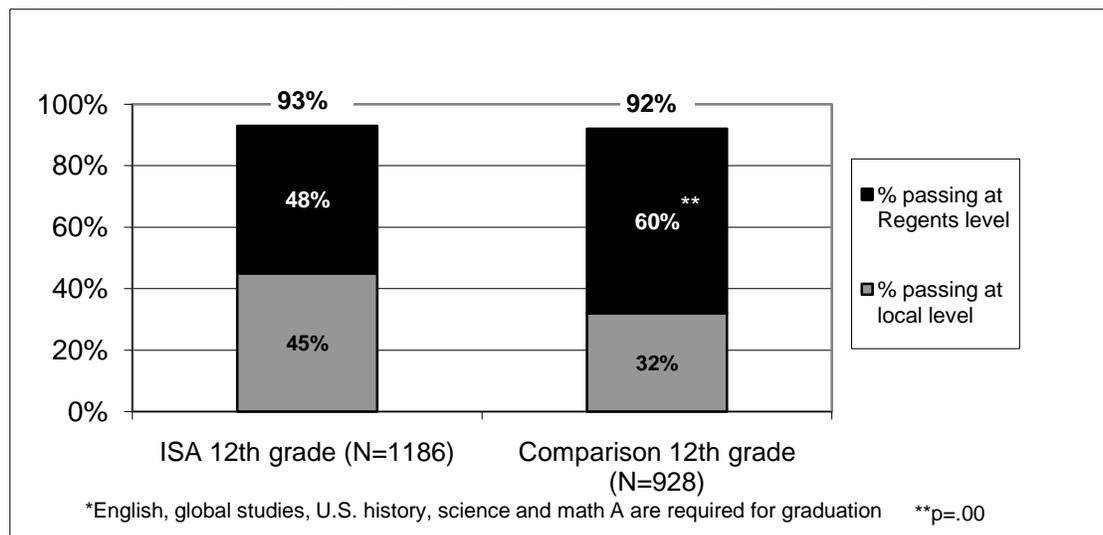
Any attendance problem—I work on it through advisory [class] and, if that doesn’t work, I hand it over to the advisory team, who are on the phone with parents every day. (ISA teacher)

The positive attendance results for ISA students are very likely related to these specific and immediate responses to absenteeism.

Regents Exams

New York City requires that students entering grade 9 in 2003 or 2004 pass five Regents exams (comprehensive English, math A, science, global history and geography, and U.S. history and government) to obtain a high school diploma.⁶ By 12th grade, nearly all ISA students (93%) had passed all five required subjects, slightly more than comparison students. When controlling for background factors, differences in overall pass rates were not statistically significant. However, comparison students were more likely to pass at the Regents level (60% versus 48%), as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Percent Passing Regents Exams in All Five Required* Subjects



Data from our interviews with ISA teachers and administrators indicate that one challenge schools face in preparing students for the Regents exams is in integrating test preparation with the ISA principle of

⁶ The Regents diploma requires students to pass all five required regents exams with a score of 65 or higher. The advanced diploma requires students to earn six credits in a foreign language and to pass the five required Regents exams, plus an additional science and foreign language exam, with a score of 65 or higher.

providing an inquiry-based, college preparatory curriculum. They do not see the Regents tests as synonymous with college readiness. Teachers expressed a conflict between preparing students to be successful on the Regents exam and offering them an inquiry-based curriculum that they believe ultimately provides students with the skills they need for success in college and life:

Regents exam, mandated curriculum, regional initiatives—all lack flexibility in programming. It gets in the way of how we want to do instruction. (ISA teacher)

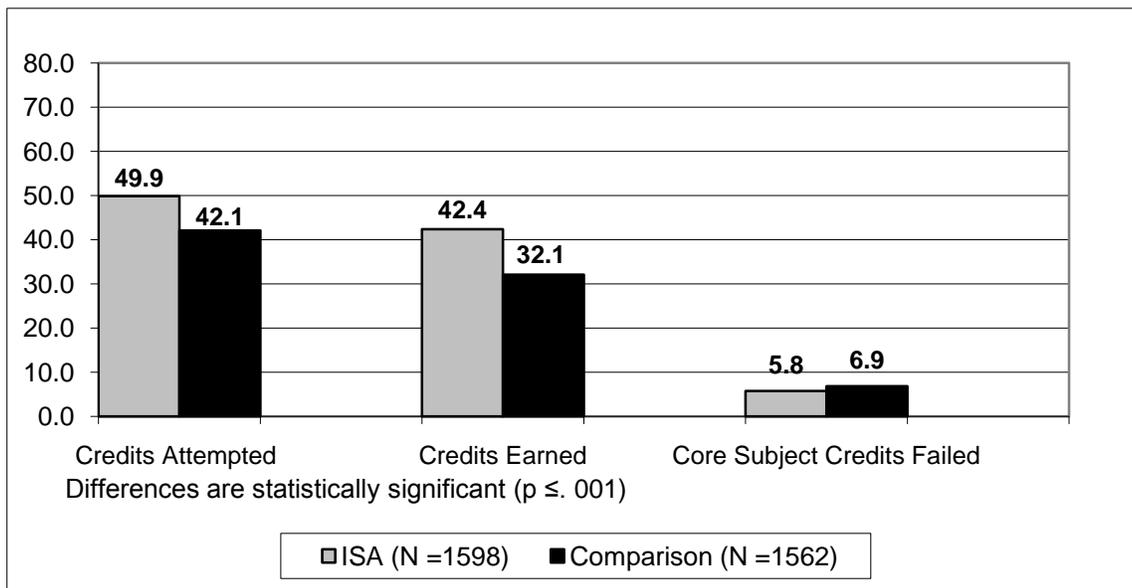
Inquiry-based instruction—it’s hard to do this with all the test prep that needs to be done. (ISA principal)

How do I balance [NYC Department of Education (DOE)] mandates with ISA goals? They don’t mesh. [For example,] DOE requires six periodic assessments per year. ISA encourages inquiry, project work, interdisciplinary assignments, etc. (ISA principal)

Credit Accumulation

Along with grade promotion, credit accumulation is a key indicator of students’ progress towards graduation. In NYC, most dropouts (93%) were found to be over age and under-credited (Parthenon Group, 2005), showing the strong correlation between lower credit accumulation and dropping out of school. NYC requires a total of 44 credits to graduate. Figure 6 shows that ISA students attempted and earned more credits than their comparison peers. When controlling for background differences, ISA students earned an average of 6.3 more credits than their comparison peers, having attempted 2.9 more credits, over the four-year period. These differences are large and statistically significant. ISA students were also less likely to fail credits in the four core subjects (English, math, science, and social studies). Controlling for background differences, ISA students were 42% less likely than comparison students to fail any core subject course.

Figure 6: Four-year Cumulative Credits Attempted, Earned and Failed

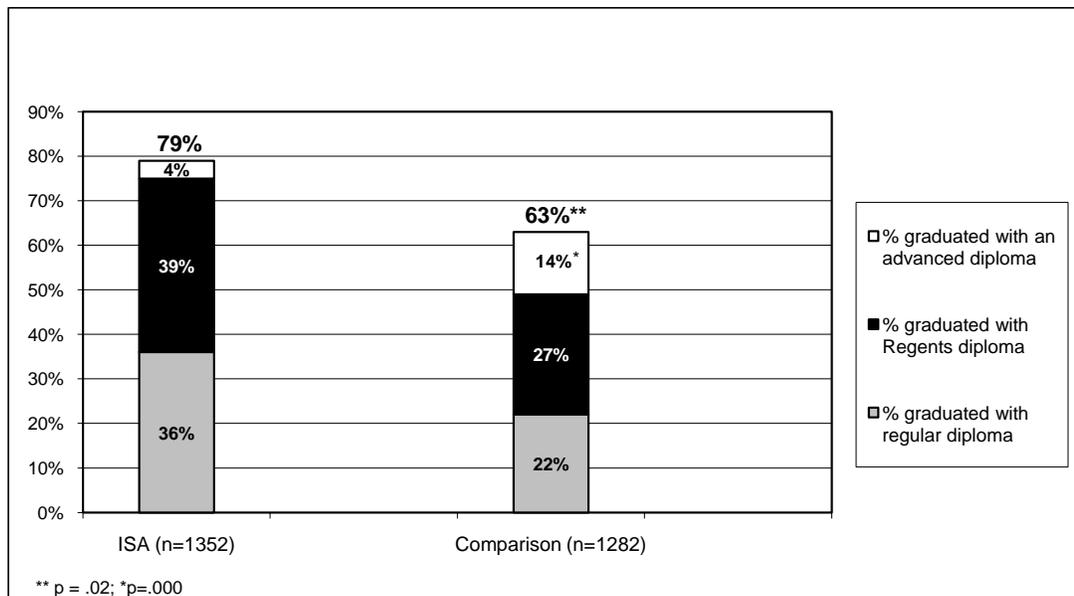


Four-year Cohort Outcomes

Four-year outcomes for students who entered the 9th grade for the first time in either 2003 or 2004 showed that ISA students were more likely to graduate in four years than comparison peers (79% versus 63%), at statistically significant levels (see Figure 7). The ISA student graduation rate also exceeded the

city-wide four-year graduation rate in 2008 of 66% (NYC DOE, 2009). When controlling for background factors, ISA students had a 31% greater likelihood of graduating in four years than did their comparable peers. In terms of types of diploma, ISA students were as likely as non-ISA students to get a Regents diploma, and less likely to get an advanced diploma, when controlling for background factors.

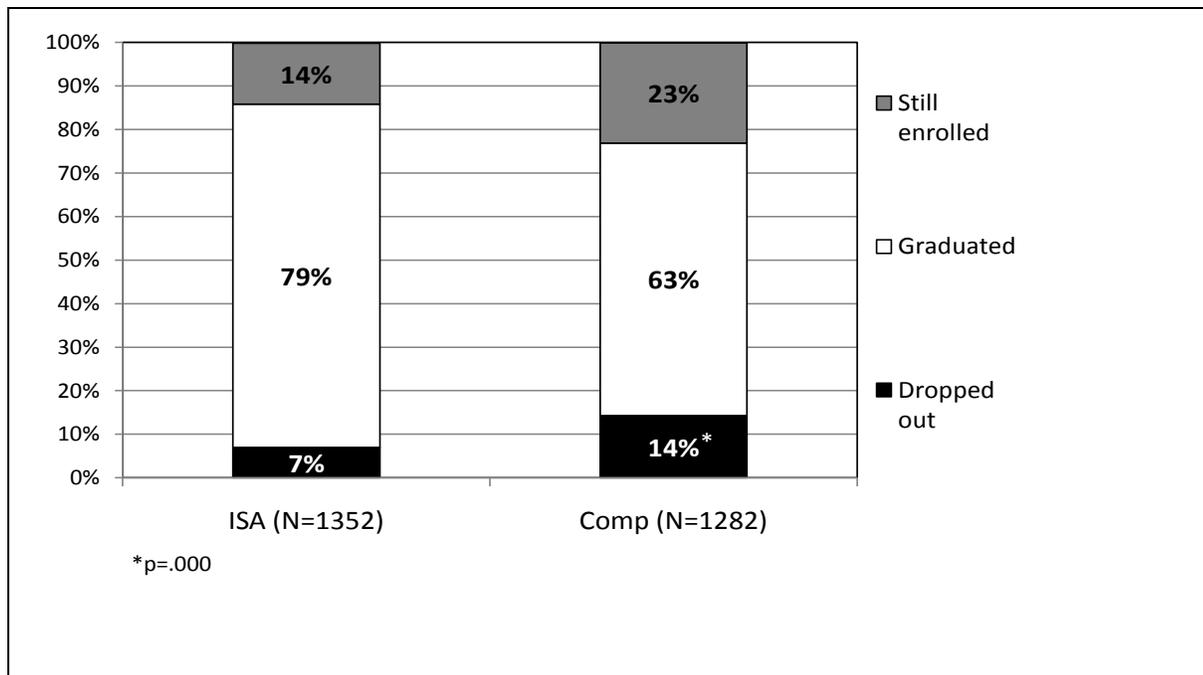
Figure 7: Four-year Graduation Outcomes



Fewer ISA than comparison students dropped out of high school after four years (7.2% versus 14.3%) (see Figure 8). Controlling for background factors, ISA students were 49% less likely to dropout than their comparison peers. The ISA dropout rate was also far lower than the citywide rate of 13.5 % for the class of 2008 (NYC DOE, 2009). A substantial portion of students were still enrolled in the New York City public school system in the fall following their fourth year,⁷ according to Department of Education records. This is consistent with NYC-wide data showing that approximately one-fourth of students stay enrolled beyond their fourth year. As many low-income students take five or more years to graduate, the proportion of students who ultimately graduate from high school increases in later years. For example, the citywide seven-year graduation rate was 72% for the class of 2004 (New York City Coalition for Educational Justice, 2009). It will be important to investigate five to seven year graduation rates for ISA and comparison students as that data become available in the future.

⁷ The fall following students' fourth year in high school was fall 2007 for cohort 1 students and fall 2008 for cohort two students.

Figure 8: Four-year Cohort Outcomes

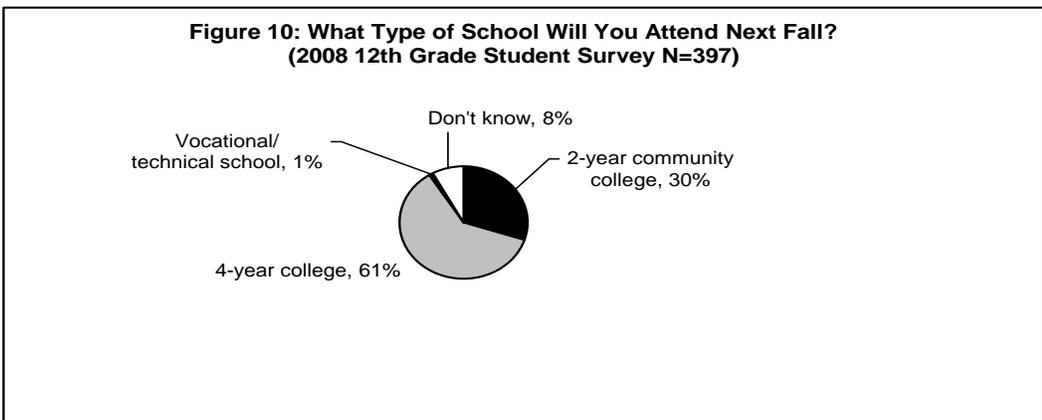
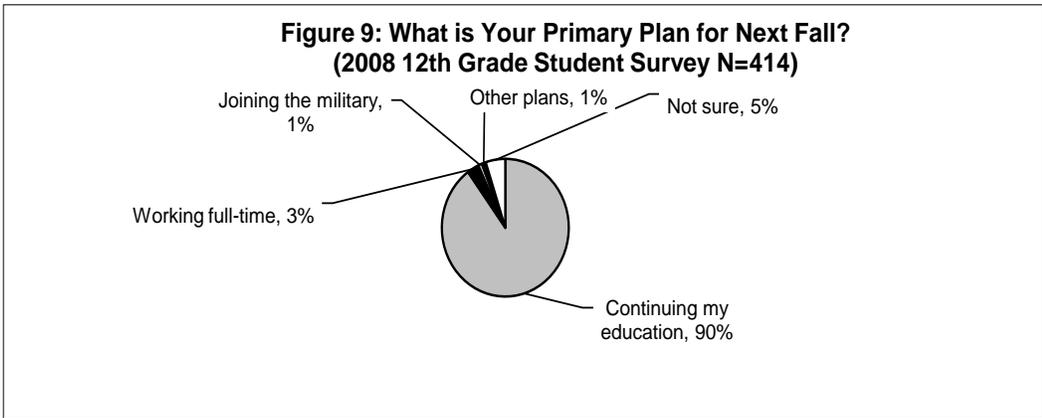


College Readiness and College Enrollment

Most ISA seniors surveyed (90%)⁸ reported that they planned to continue their education after high school (see Figure 9). A majority (61%) planned to attend a four-year college, and 30% planned to attend a two-year college (see Figure 10). These rates are higher than those reported for all NYC seniors in 2007: 47% of all seniors, and only 40% of seniors in high-poverty schools, planned to attend a four-year college, and 17% planned to attend a two-year school (New York City Coalition for Educational Justice, 2009).

ISA schools emphasize college preparation starting in the 9th grade through a variety of social and academic supports. Since a majority of ISA students are low income and many are first-generation college students, they require support to manage the application and enrollment process. Needed supports include assistance in selecting schools that are the right “fit” for students’ interests and academic and social needs, as well as help with completing college and financial applications on time (Quint, Levy Thompson, & Bald, 2008; Roderick et al., 2008; Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003). A recent study of Chicago public high school students found that a strong college climate was the single most consistent predictor of whether students took steps toward college enrollment. A strong college culture was characterized by staff who strongly encourage students to go to college, who work to ensure that students are prepared for college, and who support students in all aspects of the college application process (Roderick et al., 2008).

⁸ Senior survey results are from 437 respondents in five ISA schools. The survey was administered in May 2008.



Findings from the student survey indicate that a majority of ISA students had access to the kinds of supports found to be critical for students’ success in the college enrollment process. A majority of students reported that their teachers and counselors provided “some” or “a lot” of assistance in selecting coursework that met graduation (75%) and college admissions requirements (66%) as well as counseling and advice about selecting the right college (74%) and preparing for the realities of college life (78%).

In addition to the support provided by teachers and counselors, well over 80% of ISA seniors reported participating in key college preparation activities such as attending college fairs, speaking with college representatives, visiting colleges, and preparing for the SAT exam. Nearly half of surveyed seniors also sat in on a college-level course, which, in addition to the opportunity to earn college credit and learn college-level material, can help students understand the expectations of college (see Figure 11).

Figure 11: College Prep Activities	% Yes
1. Researched colleges (spoke to representatives, college fairs, reviewed websites and guidebooks)	96.6%
2. Visited in-state and/or out-of-state college campuses	83.3%
3. Sat in on a college-level course	46.0%
4. Took practice SAT exams	89.2%
5. Took the PSAT/NMSQT (Pre-SAT)	87.3%

Financing college can be one of the biggest hurdles high school graduates face. The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) can be confusing to complete, and students may miss opportunities for aid if they do not complete the form on time. In one study, completing the FAFSA by May of the senior year improved students' chances of enrolling in college the following fall by 50% (Roderick, et Al., 2008)⁹. Among the ISA seniors who completed a survey, over three-fourths reported that they applied for financial aid by May, and nearly 60% applied for a scholarship. Teachers and counselors also played a critical role in helping students navigate the complex process of financing college. Over three-fourths of seniors reported that their teachers and counselors helped them find scholarships and plan how to pay for college.

Figure 12: Financial Aid	% Yes
1. Applied for financial aid	77.2%
2. Applied for a scholarship	59.1%
	% A little, Some, A lot
3. Teachers/counselors helped students find scholarships to apply for	79.2%
4. Teachers/counselors helped students plan how to pay for tuition and other expenses	76.4%

The Chicago high school study (Roderick, et al., 2008) showed that chances of being accepted to a college increase when students apply to several different colleges. One ISA school requires that students apply to at least 8 colleges, including CUNY and SUNY schools. Even among those ISA schools that do not require multiple applications, teachers and counselors clearly encourage students to do so, as evidenced by the 77% of seniors who reported such encouragement. Further, most students said that they received guidance on completing applications and deciding which schools to attend. Guidance on selecting a school that is a good match for the student is critical, especially given the high rates of students who attend college but drop out within their first year. Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio (2003) found that approximately 50% of community college and 25% of four-year college students drop out after their first year.

Data from the 2007 ISA teacher survey indicate that ISA played a strong role in helping teachers and counselors provide support for college enrollment. Specifically, 75% said ISA helped them develop practices that foster a strong college culture in their school.

College Enrollment

AED obtained data from both the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) and from the City University of New York (CUNY) regarding ISA students' enrollment in college. Although there are limitations to both data sets, the information gleaned about ISA students points to positive outcomes.

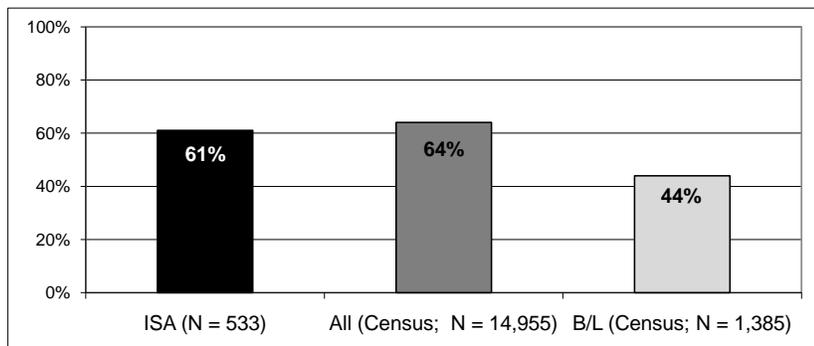
Specifically, we looked at two-year versus four-year program enrollment and at full-time versus part-time enrollment. Both factors are important indicators of future success. Students who start a full-time four-year program are much more likely to persist in college and graduate than those who attend part-time or in a two-year program (McIntosh & Rouse, 2009). Further, the potential earning power for individuals with a four-year degree is much higher for than those with a two-year degree, and the

⁹ The deadline for filing the FAFSA in New York State is May 1.

unemployment rate among people with a bachelor's degree is about a third lower than for those with an associate's degree (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009).

NSC gathers and reports information on student enrollment from 92% of colleges in the United States. Of the 954 students from five ISA schools, 56% (N=533) were matched by NSC, indicating they enrolled in college.¹⁰ Of these ISA students, 61% were attending a four-year college and 33% were attending a two-year college. In comparison, data from the U.S. Census annual population survey indicates that only 64% of students of all races attend four-year colleges, as shown in Figure 13. Among Black and Latino students—the groups into which most ISA students fall— 44% attend four-year institutions (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

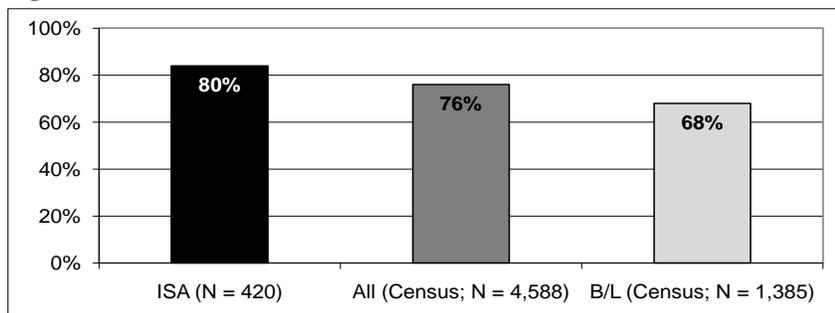
Figure 13. ISA, National, and Black and Latino Students Attending 4-Year Colleges, 2008



Sources: AED calculations on data provided by the National Student Clearinghouse and U.S Census Bureau, 2008

Finally, according to the census data, 76% of all first-year students and 68% of Black and Latino college students attend full time. According to NSC data, 80% of ISA students attended full time during their first year of college, as shown in Figure 14.

Figure 14. ISA, National, and Black and Latino Students Attending College Full Time, 2008



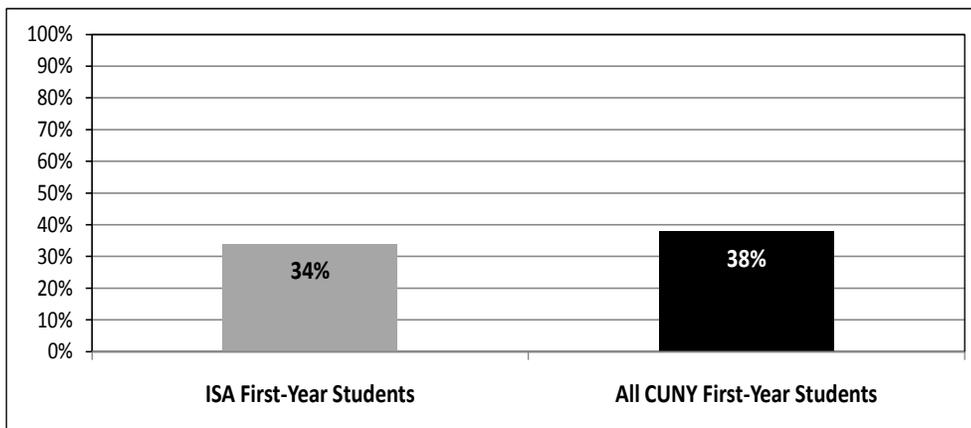
Sources: AED calculations on data provided by the National Student Clearinghouse and U.S Census Bureau, 2008

¹⁰ This rate is likely to be lower than the real rate of college attendance for these ISA students because of misspelling of students' names and other information. Because the missing students seem to be missing at random and not systematically, we believe that the students accounted for in the NSC database are representative of those who are missing.

CUNY data on ISA students' enrollment and college readiness must be interpreted with caution, as they do not reflect all ISA students in the study.¹¹ A total of 869 students from 10 ISA schools with graduating classes in New York State¹² applied for admission to at least one CUNY school in 2007, and 1,086 students from 13 ISA schools applied for admission in 2008. A total of 52% of ISA graduates who applied to CUNY schools in 2007 and 2008 ultimately enrolled. The large number of ISA applicants to CUNY colleges is not surprising: ISA schools strongly encourage all students to apply to the CUNY system as well as to other colleges. Some ISA schools even require students to apply to a CUNY school.

Figure 15 shows that 34% of ISA graduates who enrolled in CUNY programs enrolled in at least one remedial course. In comparison, a slightly greater proportion of all CUNY first-year students (38%) enrolled in at least one remedial course. Bypassing remedial courses is one measure of college readiness in first-year students.

Figure 15. ISA Graduates and All CUNY First-Year Students Enrolled in Remedial Courses in Fall 2007 (Bachelor's & Associate)



Source: AED calculations on data provided by CUNY

College Retention

Applying to and enrolling in college are only a beginning: Persisting to complete a degree is a better measure of success. Yet the dropout rate for college students nationwide, particularly in the first year and particularly for students enrolled in two-year programs, is high. As previously noted, approximately 50% of community college and 25% of four-year college students drop out after their first year (NCHEMS Information Center for State Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis, 2008; Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003).

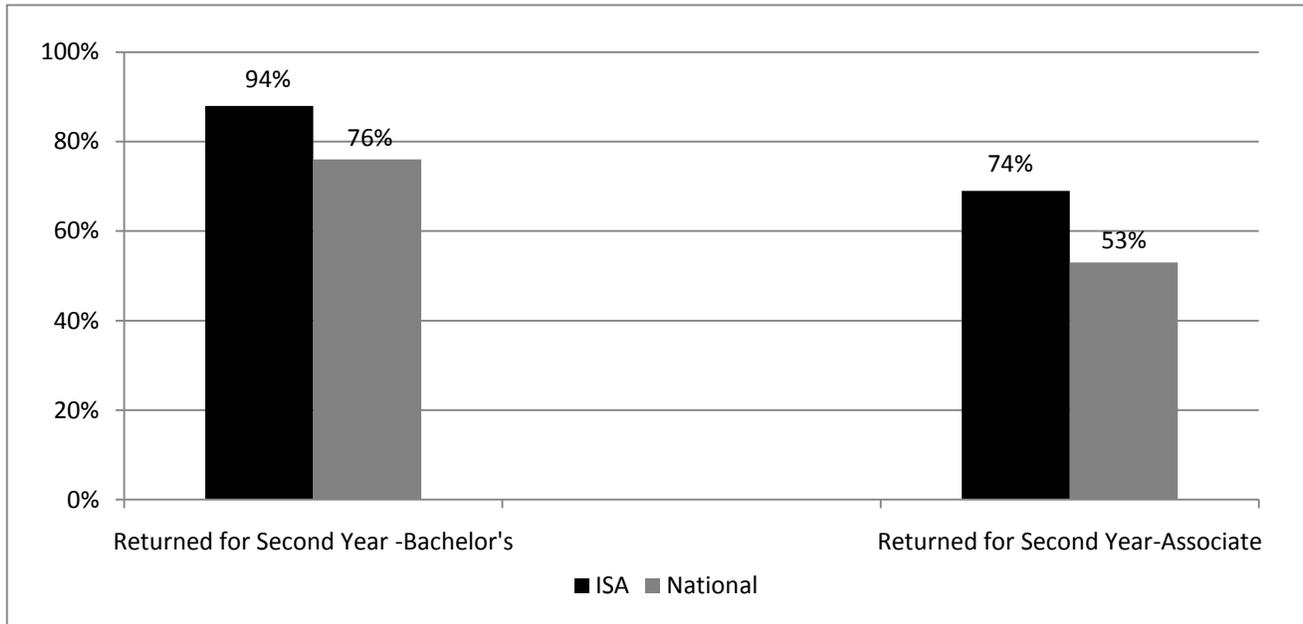
According to data from the National Student Clearinghouse, ISA students returned to college for the second year in much higher numbers than the national average. Of the ISA students who enrolled in

¹¹ CUNY data were available aggregated at the school level, rather than individual student level. Therefore, we could not determine enrollment rates and outcomes specifically for our two cohorts of 9th grade students. Nor could we determine outcomes for ISA comparison students, because our comparison sample was constructed at the individual student level and did not include all students attending comparison schools. Individual student data is necessary to conduct more refined analyses.

¹² Included in these figures are ISA schools located in cities surrounding New York City where high percentages are likely to apply to CUNY schools. While we did not have access to other evaluation data (such as student achievement records or surveys), we included these schools in order to broaden our sample.

college full time, 74% of those attending a two-year institution and 94% of those attending a four-year school attended at least three semesters, as shown in Figure 16. This is far higher than the national rates of 53% and 76%, respectively. The retention rate for ISA students is particularly impressive given the high percent of African American and Latino youth served by ISA schools. National data show that African American and Latino college completion rates are much lower than that of their white and Asian peers (USDOE, 2002)

Figure 16. Full-time First Year Students Returning Their Second Year: ISA and Nationwide, 2008



Source: AED calculations on data provided by the National Student Clearinghouse. National figures are for 2007, from NCHEMS Information Center for State Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis (2008).

Summary

The findings from AED's formative and summative evaluation show the positive results of ISA's partnerships with high schools to create and sustain intellectually rigorous, caring, and personalized learning environments. The schools in this study generally implemented ISA principles well. ISA teachers attributed many positive changes in their practice and in the school environment to ISA professional development and particularly to the ISA coaches.

Using a carefully matched comparison group of students in large, comprehensive high schools, our analyses indicate that the implementation of ISA had a large and positive effect on several student achievement outcomes including grade promotion, attendance, course passing, credit accumulation, retention, and graduation rates. Comparison students were more likely to pass Regents exams at the Regents level (scoring 65 or higher) and to earn an advanced diploma. Nevertheless, ISA students were as likely as comparison students to earn a Regents diploma. One reason for this finding may be that ISA teachers reported that they promoted academic rigor through inquiry-based instruction, privileging this type of teaching over test preparation.

Most ISA seniors were planning to attend college the following fall, and most reported in the senior survey that they received the kinds of support that low-income, first-generation college attenders often require to navigate the process of applying for college and financial aid. For example, they visited colleges; discussed career and college options with teachers and counselors; and received help in selecting schools, writing essays and applications, and completing financial aid applications.

Although data on college attendance from CUNY and from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) have limitations and need to be interpreted with caution, these data show positive post-secondary outcomes for ISA students. According to the NSC data, ISA students attend four-year colleges, rather than two-year institutions, at higher rates than do students nationwide. About one third of ISA graduates in CUNY programs were required to take remedial courses, slightly fewer than students CUNY-wide. Most ISA graduates who enrolled in college, whether CUNY or elsewhere, persisted into the second year of college, a major dropping-out point for students nationwide. Rates of college persistence for ISA graduates were much higher than the national rate.

The results of the ISA evaluation can inform the national conversation about school reform and improving student outcomes. Our findings demonstrate that schools that, like ISA schools, emphasize personalized attention for students, provide a college preparation curriculum, and foster a college-going culture from the beginning have the potential to markedly improve students' retention in and graduation from high school and to increase college persistence rates.

The positive findings from this study warrant further research on ISA. Specifically, it would be instructive to continue following ISA students through their college years and beyond to determine the long-term effects of the ISA approach. Further, it will be important to see if the schools in this study are able to sustain strong implementation of the ISA model and can continue to achieve positive outcomes for subsequent cohorts of students. Finally, it will be important to examine efforts to expand and scale-up ISA to discover the conditions under which scaling up is successful and ISA schools continue to achieve positive results.

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Principal Offices

**1825 Connecticut Avenue
Washington DC 20009-5721
Tel: 202-884-8000
Fax: 202-884-8400
www.aed.org**

**100 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10011
Tel: 212-243-1110
Fax: 212-627-0407
www.aed.org/scs**



