

**NASSAU COUNTY  
OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER**



**FALLING STUDENT OUTCOMES AT  
NASSAU COMMUNITY COLLEGE, 2009-2012**

**George Maragos  
Nassau County Comptroller**

**June 13, 2014**

**NASSAU COUNTY  
OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER**



George Maragos  
*Comptroller*

Eleni Manis, Ph.D.  
*Research Associate*

Gabriel Marques  
*Senior Economic Advisor*

Jostyn Hernandez  
*Communications Director*

Sergio Blanco, Esq.  
*Counsel to the Comptroller*

# Falling Student Outcomes at Nassau Community College, 2009-2012

## Table of Contents

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	1
2. STUDENT OUTCOMES AT NASSAU COMMUNITY COLLEGE .....	5
2.1 Methodology: Measuring Community College Performance .....	5
2.2 Combined Graduation and Transfer Rate .....	6
2.3 Transfer Rate .....	8
2.4 Graduation Rate.....	9
2.5 Graduation Rate, Extended Time (4 Years).....	10
3. NASSAU COMMUNITY COLLEGE DURING THE DECLINE .....	11
4. STUDENT OUTCOMES AT NASSAU COMMUNITY COLLEGE COMPARED TO NEARBY COLLEGES .....	15
4.1 Combined Graduation and Transfer Rates at Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester Community Colleges.....	15
4.2 Transfer Rates at Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester Community Colleges.....	16
4.3 Graduation Rates at Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester Community Colleges .....	17
4.4 Graduation and Transfer Rates at Nassau and CUNY Community Colleges.....	18
4.5 Comprehensive Support Programs’ Impact at CUNY .....	19
5. CONCLUSION.....	21

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nassau Community College (NCC) is a vital Nassau County institution, serving over 23,000 students. The College is funded primarily through student tuition, state aid, and Nassau County taxpayer money (more than \$52 million in 2012).<sup>1</sup> Historically, NCC has provided high quality, affordable education—an essential alternative to costly private colleges and universities for many Nassau residents. However, after years of ranking at or above the New York State average for community colleges, NCC’s student outcomes dropped sharply from 2009 to 2012, with the graduation and transfer rate falling by more than a third, even as tuition costs continued to rise.

Community college performance is typically assessed in terms of student success at completing an associate degree or transferring to a 4-year college or other program within three years, one and a half times the minimum time normally needed to complete an associate degree. This report reviews the College’s 3-year graduation and transfer rates from 2004 to 2012, the entire period for which data is available through the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics as of June 10, 2014.<sup>2</sup> NCC’s results are compared to those of New York State community colleges as a group and to several individual downstate New York community colleges (Suffolk, Westchester, and CUNY community colleges). Based on this data, our key findings are:

---

<sup>1</sup> In 2012, “Nassau County Appropriation - Tax Levy” was \$52.2 million, according to this office’s Limited Financial Review of Nassau Community College. Field Audit Department, *Limited Financial Review of Nassau Community College*, OFFICE OF THE NASSAU COUNTY COMPTROLLER, [http://www.nassaucountyny.gov/agencies/comptroller/documents/NassauCommunityCollege\\_1\\_7\\_14.pdf](http://www.nassaucountyny.gov/agencies/comptroller/documents/NassauCommunityCollege_1_7_14.pdf) (accessed June 10, 2014), pg. 5.

<sup>2</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, *IPEDS Data Center*, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/> (last accessed June 10 2014).

## FALLING STUDENT OUTCOMES AT NASSAU COMMUNITY COLLEGE, 2009-2012

- From 2004-2009, NCC's combined graduation and transfer rate ranged between 40-45%. It fell below 40% from 2010-2012, reaching a personal low of 23% in 2011. At this low point, NCC ranked 32<sup>nd</sup> of 35 community colleges in NYS, down from 9<sup>th</sup> best in 2005.<sup>3</sup>
- NCC's transfer rate dropped 66% from 2009 to 2011, accounting for much of the decline in its combined graduation and transfer rate. After peaking at 27% in 2009 (4<sup>th</sup> best in NYS), NCC's transfer rate plunged to 9% in 2011 (32<sup>nd</sup> place). This plunge was mirrored at Suffolk and Westchester Community Colleges, which also achieved all-time highs in their transfer rates in 2009 followed by all-time lows in 2011. The pattern did not extend to the CUNY community colleges or to NYS community colleges as a group.
- NCC's graduation rate also declined from 24% in 2004 (about the NYS average) to a low of 14% in 2011 (29<sup>th</sup> place in NYS). It rebounded somewhat to 18% (24<sup>th</sup> place) the following year.

The precise causes underlying NCC's declining student outcomes are beyond the scope of this review, and we challenge the College's administration to investigate and develop a firm plan to reverse the decline. We did, however, find empirical evidence that suggested factors that may have contributed to declining student outcomes at NCC. We put them forward for NCC's more thorough investigation.

Student success rates began to decline after President Sean Fanelli's retirement ended a quarter century of stable administration at the College. This period of administrative turmoil continues to this day: NCC has yet to appoint a permanent president.

It also appears that NCC students' progress toward their degrees is being slowed by their increasing enrollment in remedial courses. NCC administrators informed us that students'

---

<sup>3</sup> There are a total of 37 public two-year institutions in New York tracked in the IPEDS database. For purposes of this review, the New Community College at CUNY (does not yet report results to IPEDS Data Center) and Western Suffolk BOCES (not a community college) were excluded.

## FALLING STUDENT OUTCOMES AT NASSAU COMMUNITY COLLEGE, 2009-2012

enrollment in remedial courses has increased in recent years.<sup>4</sup> Remedial courses do not count toward the associate degree but are needed by some students before they can successfully complete courses that count toward their degrees. Consequently, remedial coursework adds to the time that students require to make progress toward their degrees, while consuming part of students' three years of eligibility for federal and state financial aid.

We considered and discounted enrollment changes at NCC as a possible contributor to NCC's performance decline. Total enrollment at NCC increased 11.1% from Fall 2009 to Fall 2010, possibly straining the College's resources. However, we found that other community colleges in New York experienced more dramatic enrollment spikes and greater fluctuation (up and down) in enrollment without their graduation or transfer rates suffering similarly.<sup>5</sup>

We also considered and discounted the possibility that NCC's longer degrees contributed to the decline in student outcomes. NCC administrators remarked that many NCC degrees require students to accumulate 66 and in some cases up to 78 credits, whereas CUNY offers relatively compact degrees.<sup>6</sup> This factor is worth considering when comparing colleges' performance because longer degrees may well depress students' ability to graduate within three years. However, to our knowledge, NCC's introduction of 66 to 78 credit degrees does not coincide with the period of declining student outcomes, and thus cannot explain NCC's recent decline.

We lastly considered and partially discounted the possibility that broader regional factors may have been at work in producing NCC's decline—it being tempting to appeal to the Great

---

<sup>4</sup> On April 8, 2014, we met with Kenneth Saunders (Acting President), Maria Conzatti (Vice President, Academic Student Services), James Behrens, Jr. (Vice President, Finance and Chief Financial Officer), Chuck Cutolo (General Counsel for Governmental and Media Relations), Joseph Muscarella (Vice President, Administration), and Sylvester Wise (Professor Emeritus, Africana Studies) to discuss student outcomes at NCC. This group is referred to as NCC's administration in the discussion that follows.

<sup>5</sup> All relevant data was retrieved from the IPEDS database.

<sup>6</sup> Meeting with NCC administration, April 8, 2014.

## FALLING STUDENT OUTCOMES AT NASSAU COMMUNITY COLLEGE, 2009-2012

Recession to explain students' declining ability to complete their studies or to pay tuition at more expensive 4-year colleges. NCC's transfer rate declined in step with the rates of Westchester and Suffolk community colleges between 2009 and 2012. However, during this period transfer rates at the nearby CUNY community colleges' declined only moderately and were offset by rising graduation rates. Thus, while regional factors may have contributed to Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester community colleges' declining performances, the CUNY community colleges appear to have avoided or resisted such regional forces.

Whatever the explanation for NCC's recent decline in performance, it is clear that the College is underperforming, both relative to its past performance and relative to other New York State community colleges. NCC can and must resume its vital mission of providing high-quality, affordable education and career preparation for our residents. We encourage the College to appoint a permanent president as soon as possible, both to restore administrative stability and to implement programs proven at other colleges to raise graduation outcomes. The College administration's new data-driven approach to policymaking is commendable. NCC can improve student outcomes by acknowledging the problem of declining performance, by committing to data-driven initiatives to improve the College's performance, and by implementing programs proven at other community colleges.

## 2. STUDENT OUTCOMES AT NASSAU COMMUNITY COLLEGE

### 2.1 Methodology: Measuring Community College Performance

Community college performance is commonly measured by reference to student outcomes, and in particular, to the rates at which first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students complete their degrees or transfer to other programs within three years of starting college (the “Graduation and Transfer Rate”). Three-year data is reported publicly by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics.<sup>7</sup> These graduation and transfer rates are the only standardized measures of student outcomes that are available for all community colleges.<sup>8</sup> We analyzed 3-year graduation and transfer rates to assess NCC’s performance, supplementing our inquiry with 4-year data when it was available.

Nationwide, the average graduation and transfer rate for community colleges is only 37.6%.<sup>9</sup> Graduation and transfer rates do not show most community colleges in a positive light, and colleges sometimes reject analyses based on these rates by asserting that they are not representative of their students.<sup>10</sup> They are able to make this claim because 3-year rates capture outcomes for only a portion of the community college student body, excluding transfer students, part-time students, and non-degree seeking students. However, while 3-year data may not be

---

<sup>7</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, *IPEDS Data Center*, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/> (last accessed June 10, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> *Measuring Community College Completion Rates*, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY TEACHERS COLLEGE COMMUNITY COLLEGE RESEARCH CENTER, <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Measuring-Community-College-Completion-Rates.html> (last accessed on June 10, 2014). Since 1990, colleges have been required to report graduation rates to the National Center for Education Statistics as a condition of their students being eligible for federal financial aid. *See also* United States Student Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act (Public Law No: 101-542) (Reporting required by 1993; law passed 1990)).

<sup>9</sup> Most community colleges’ outcomes are similarly concerning. National average drawn from the College Measures website, <http://www.collegemeasures.org/2-year-colleges/national/scorecard/strategic-measures/> (accessed June 9, 2014). College Measures relies on data from the same database we relied upon for this study (the National Center for Education Statistics IPEDS Data Center).

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Bailey, Peter M. Crosta and Davis Jenkins, *What can student right-to-know graduation rates tell us about community college performance?: CCRC Working Paper No. 6*, COMMUNITY COLLEGE RESEARCH CENTER, August 2006.



## FALLING STUDENT OUTCOMES AT NASSAU COMMUNITY COLLEGE, 2009-2012

representative of all NCC students, it does track the outcomes of a majority of students at NCC and at other colleges. In 2012-2013, nine of ten NCC students were degree-seeking.<sup>11</sup> Of these students, 65% of new degree-seeking students (4217 of 6533 students) were first-time, full-time students.<sup>12</sup> Existing graduation and transfer data thus tracks the outcomes of a majority of NCC students and is a reasonable and appropriate basis for assessing NCC's performance.

The purpose of this report, in any case, is not to scrutinize the absolute performance levels of community colleges. Our objective is to look at the decline in NCC's performance over time and relative to its peer institutions using the common "graduation and transfer" metric as published by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics. In an attempt to understand the decline, we also explore the underlying components of the graduation and the transfer rates to determine how each of these components contributed to NCC's performance.

### **2.2 Combined Graduation and Transfer Rate**

New York State is home to 35 community colleges. In 2012, on average 37% of first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students at these colleges graduated or transferred to other schools within three years of starting college. In the same year, only 28% of Nassau Community College students completed their degrees or transferred to other schools within three years. At 28%, NCC ranks 31<sup>st</sup> among New York's 35 community colleges and graduates/transfers one quarter fewer students than the average community college in New York State.

NCC's ranking in 2012 contrasts with its performance from 2004-2009, when it typically met or exceeded the state average, graduating or transferring 40-45% of students within three

---

<sup>11</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, *IPEDS Data Center*, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/> (last accessed June 10, 2014).

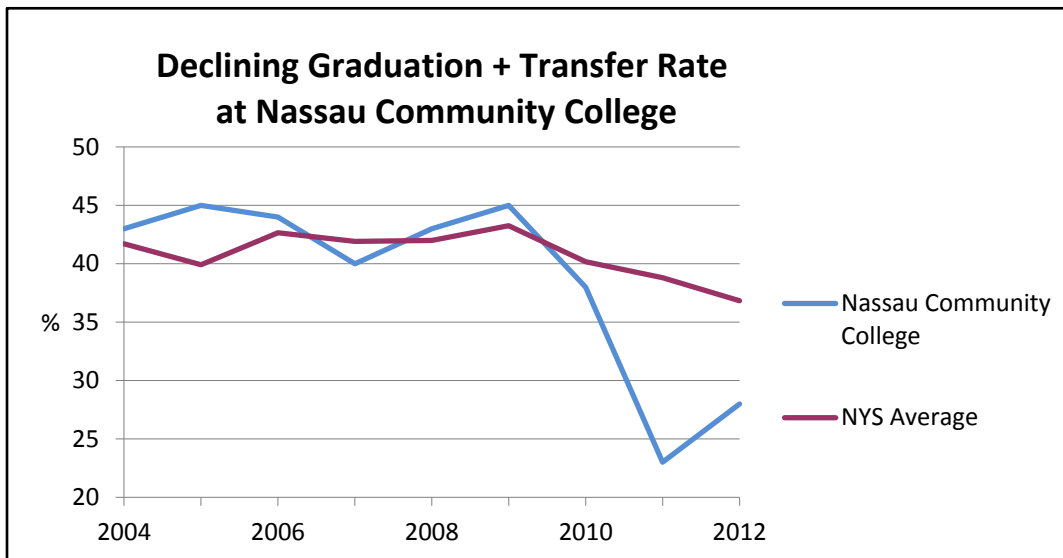
<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

## FALLING STUDENT OUTCOMES AT NASSAU COMMUNITY COLLEGE, 2009-2012

years (Figure 1). NCC ranked as high as 9<sup>th</sup> in the state for its graduation and transfer rate (in 2005, with a 45% graduation and transfer rate) and achieved its personal high of 45% again in 2009. By contrast, at its low point in 2011, only 23% of NCC students graduated or transferred within three years (32<sup>nd</sup> place in NYS).

We note the decline's reversal in 2012 when the graduation and transfer rate increased to 28%, still well below the state average of 37%. Even this decline (45% to 28% in just three years) is dramatic: put plainly, graduations and transfers dropped by more than a third.

**Fig. 1: Combined Graduation and Transfer Rate**

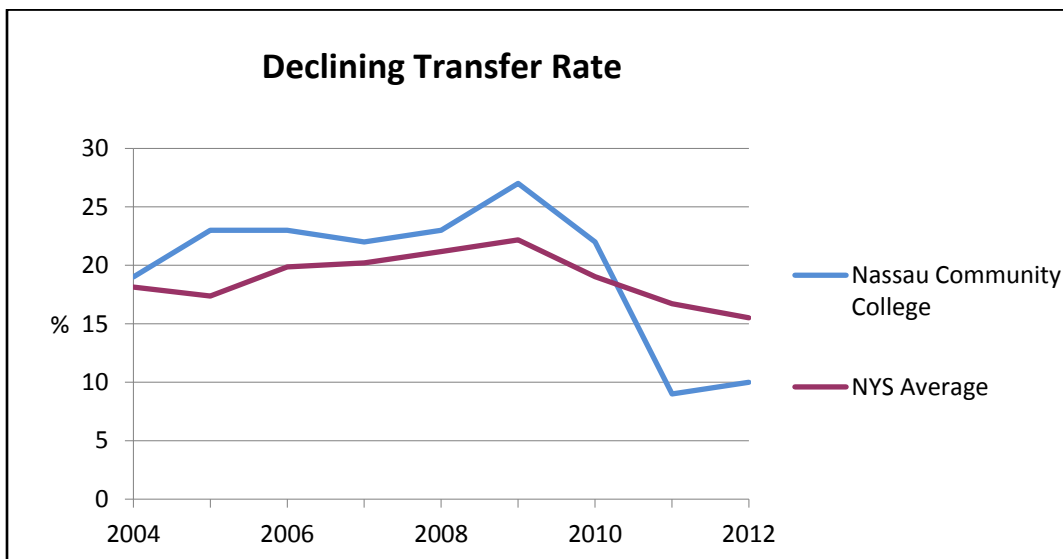


Data drawn from National Center for Education Statistics IPEDS Data Center: <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/>

### 2.3 Transfer Rate

We next separated NCC’s combined graduation and transfer rate into its components to understand how the College fared on these two basic measures of student outcomes. In 2012, 10% of NCC students transferred to other schools within three years—just two-thirds of the state average transfer rate (16%). At 32<sup>nd</sup> place, only three NYS community colleges fared worse.

**Fig. 2: Transfer Rate**



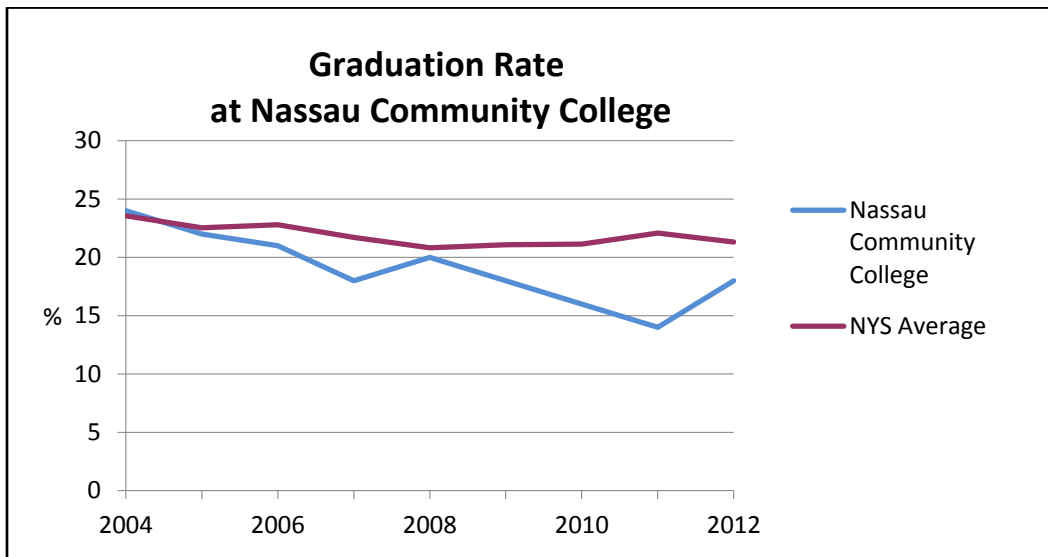
Data drawn from National Center for Education Statistics IPEDS Data Center: <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/>

A student who transfers has performed well enough at NCC to enroll in a 4-year college or at a more specialized program. Historically, the College’s transfer rate has been a consistent strength. As Figure 2 illustrates, through 2010, NCC’s transfer rate was consistently above the state average. Indeed, in 2009 the College reached an all-time transfer high: 27% of students left the College for baccalaureate or other programs within 3 years, tying the College for 4<sup>th</sup> place in New York State. Two years later, NCC reached its low point—only 9% of students transferred, a figure that improved only marginally to 10% in 2012. The decline from 27% to 9% from 2009 to 2011 represents a 66% decline in transfers.

## **2.4 Graduation Rate**

In 2012, 18% of NCC students graduated within three years and the College ranked 24<sup>th</sup> in NYS for graduations. NCC’s graduation rate has never been an area of particular strength. As Figure 3 illustrates, the College slightly exceeded the NYS graduation average in 2004 but has not risen to that level since.

**Fig. 3: Graduation Rate**



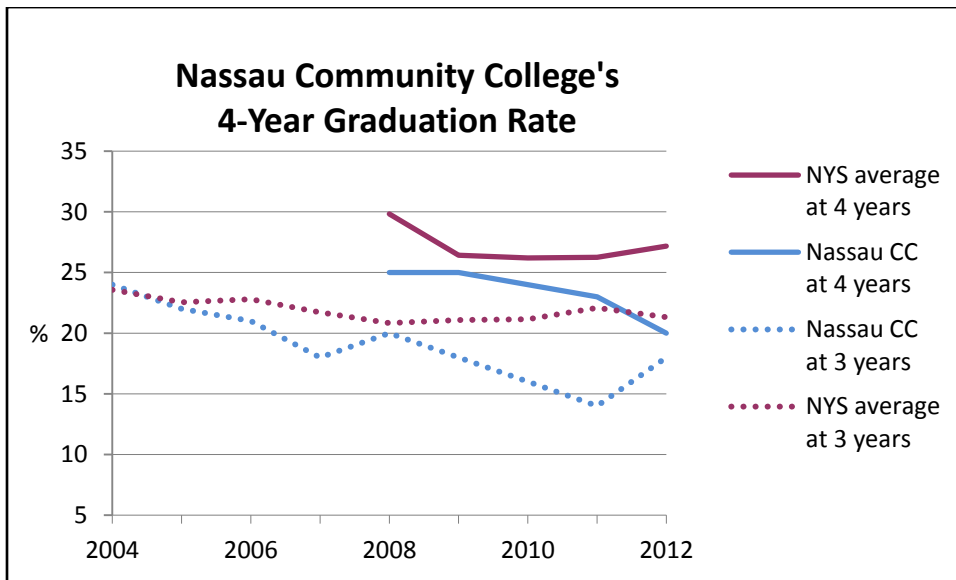
Data drawn from National Center for Education Statistics IPEDS Data Center: <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/>

At the College’s low point in 2011, only 14% of students graduated within three years (29<sup>th</sup> place among NYS community colleges). Graduations declined approximately 22% from 2009 to 2011 (18% to 14%), as compared to the 66% decline in transfers during the same period.

## 2.5 Graduation Rate, Extended Time (4 Years)

Since 2008, the National Center for Education Statistics has collected data on colleges' 4-year graduation rates in addition to the more-often-referenced 3-year rate (4-year transfer data is not available).<sup>13</sup> We compared NCC's 4-year graduation rates to the New York State average to determine whether time would improve NCC students' performance relative to their peers. As seen in Figure 4, time boosts graduation rates—the 4-year averages are reliably higher than 3-year averages. However, at four years, NCC continued to perform below the state average, with the performance gap widening over time. Indeed, while NCC's 3-year graduation rate improved from 2011 to 2012, the College's 4-year rate continued its decline. In 2012, the most recent year for which data is available, the New York State average graduation rate at 4 years was 27%, while NCC's rate was more than a third lower at 20%.

**Fig. 4: Graduation Rate, Extended Time (4 Years)**



Data drawn from National Center for Education Statistics IPEDS Data Center: <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/>

<sup>13</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, *IPEDS Data Center*, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/> (accessed June 10, 2014).

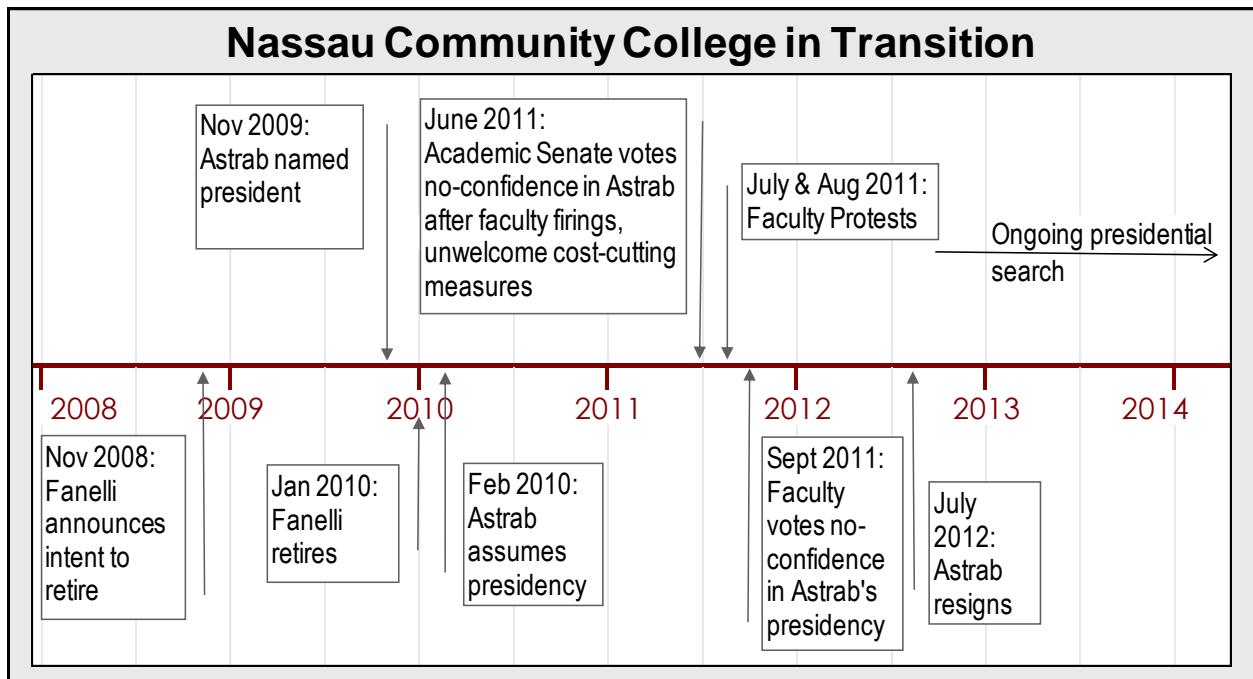
### 3. NASSAU COMMUNITY COLLEGE DURING THE DECLINE

NCC's 3-year combined graduation and transfer rate declined from 45% to 28% between 2009 and 2012, a decline of 37% over three years. The College's graduation rate declined 22% in the first two years of this period (18% to 14%), recovering much of that loss in 2012. By contrast, the College's once impressive transfer rate declined dramatically (66%) from 2009 to 2011, recovering only slightly in 2012.

In our attempt to understand students' declining rates of success, we looked for empirical factors unique to the College during the period of decline. Because students' outcomes were reported three years after they enrolled, we turned our attention to the time period 2006-2012, focusing on changes to the College's environment from its higher-performing years to this low-performance period. We found no data to *conclusively* explain the steep decline in the combined graduation and transfer rate, the steeper decline in the transfer rate compared to the graduation rate, or the transfer rate's slower recovery. We did, however, find empirical evidence that suggested factors that may have contributed to NCC students' outcomes.

The period of precipitous decline in student outcomes correlates with a period of prolonged administrative turmoil on campus, summarized in the timeline below.

**Fig. 5: NCC Administrative Turnover<sup>14</sup>**



President Sean Fanelli announced his retirement in 2008 and left the College in January 2010, ending 27 years of stable leadership at NCC.<sup>15</sup> President Donald Astrab assumed the presidency that month, but resigned in July 2012—less than two years later—apparently due to ongoing conflict with the NCC faculty related to faculty participation in decisions related to academic standards at the college.<sup>16</sup> There has been no permanent president at the College since Astrab’s departure, though Dr. Kenneth Saunders was appointed Acting Officer-in-Charge of the

<sup>14</sup> News Release, *Dr. Sean A. Fanelli, President of Nassau Community College, has announced his intention to retire*, NASSAU COMMUNITY COLLEGE, November 12, 2008; News Release, *Dr. Donald P. Astrab, 5<sup>th</sup> President of Nassau Community College*, NASSAU COMMUNITY COLLEGE, November 2009; Editorial Staff, *Nassau Community Clash Must End*, NEWSDAY, <http://www.newsday.com/opinion/nassau-community-clash-must-end-1.3158280> (accessed on June 10, 2014), September 11, 2011; Michael Steuer (Vice Chair of NCC’s Academic Senate), *Letter to the Editor: NCC faculty, ‘no confidence’ vote*, NEWSDAY, <http://www.newsday.com/opinion/letters/letters-ncc-faculty-no-confidence-vote-1.3180834> (accessed on June 10, 2014), September 18, 2011; Editorial Staff, *A Critical Task At Nassau Community College*, NEWSDAY, <http://www.newsday.com/opinion/a-critical-choice-at-nassau-community-college-editorial-1.4276138> (accessed on June 10, 2014), November 29, 2012.

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

## FALLING STUDENT OUTCOMES AT NASSAU COMMUNITY COLLEGE, 2009-2012

College in July 2012 and Acting President of the College in January 2013.<sup>17</sup> We cannot yet assess Dr. Saunders' leadership at the College on the basis of student outcomes because the graduation and transfer data currently available precedes his time at NCC.

We would not presume to present an objective description of the conflict between President Astrab and the NCC faculty—nor are we in a position to conclude that this longstanding conflict contributed to NCC's declining student outcomes. We were, however, struck by one pro-faculty publication's characterization of the *basis* for NCC faculty's complaints: "the mass firing of 39 full-time faculty members," "increased reliance on lower-paid, less secure part-timers," "increases in class size," "reductions in student services including student advisement," "the elimination of many programs and course offerings, including course sections that were fully enrolled," and "repeatedly vetoing decisions by the school's Academic Senate, which is comprised of faculty, students and administrators."<sup>18</sup> The first item refers to the firing of several temporary full-time instructors in 2011, an action that Frank Frisenda, Vice President of the NCC Federation of Teachers, characterized as the ending of a long-standing college policy on the retention of temporary faculty *without the faculty's consultation*.<sup>19</sup> These measures, if the allegations are true, may well have affected the operation of the College in addition to the faculty's morale.

In our discussion with NCC's administration, we learned that another change had taken place on campus during the period of decline: enrollment in remedial courses rose.<sup>20</sup> Remedial

---

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*

<sup>18</sup> John Tarleton, *Governance Showdown: Nassau CC Faculty Topple Autocratic President*, PSC CUNY CLARION, <http://psc-cuny.org/clarion/september-2012/governance-showdown-nassau-cc-faculty-topple-autocratic-president> (accessed on June 10, 2014), September 2012.

<sup>19</sup> Sid Cassese, *NCC faculty, board clash over budget cuts*, NEWSDAY, <http://www.newsday.com/long-island/nassau/ncc-faculty-board-clash-over-budget-cuts-1.3104147> (accessed on June 10, 2014), August 17, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Meeting with NCC administration, April 8, 2014. It is not clear to us whether the rise in remedial course enrollment coincides exactly with the period of decline, but we were informed that the College does track the relevant enrollment data.



## FALLING STUDENT OUTCOMES AT NASSAU COMMUNITY COLLEGE, 2009-2012

courses do not count toward the associate degree but are needed by some students before they can successfully complete courses that count toward their degrees. Consequently, remedial coursework adds to the time that students require to make progress toward their degrees, while consuming part of students' three years of eligibility for federal and state financial aid. NCC administrators told us that the College's standards for bypassing remedial coursework are high relative to peer institutions: NCC students must score higher on placement exams than their peers at nearby community colleges to avoid remedial courses.<sup>21</sup> Two recent studies from the Community College Research Center at Teachers College, Columbia University, suggest that ACCUPLACER, the placement exam used by NCC and many other community colleges, diverts an undue number of students into remedial courses.<sup>22</sup> It appears to be worth investigating whether NCC students' increasing need for remedial work could have affected NCC outcomes, and if so, whether this effect has been disproportionate relative to the effect of remedial enrollment on the graduation and transfer rates of NCC's peers.

In a related vein, NCC administrators also remarked that many NCC degrees require students to accumulate 66 and in some cases up to 78 credits, whereas CUNY offers relatively compact degrees.<sup>23</sup> A similar tradeoff would seem to exist between the academic benefits of demanding more credits and their costs: again, increased time to degree and depletion of students' limited financial aid. However, to our knowledge, NCC's introduction of longer degrees does not coincide with the recent and rapid decline in student outcomes.

---

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*

<sup>22</sup> Press Release, Thousands of Community College Students Misplaced into Remedial Classes, New Studies Suggest, COMMUNITY COLLEGE RESEARCH CENTER, [http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/press-releases/thousands\\_of\\_community\\_college\\_students\\_misplaced\\_into\\_remedial\\_classes\\_new\\_studies\\_suggest\\_1036.html](http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/press-releases/thousands_of_community_college_students_misplaced_into_remedial_classes_new_studies_suggest_1036.html) (accessed on June 10, 2014), February 28, 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Meeting with NCC administration, April 8, 2014.

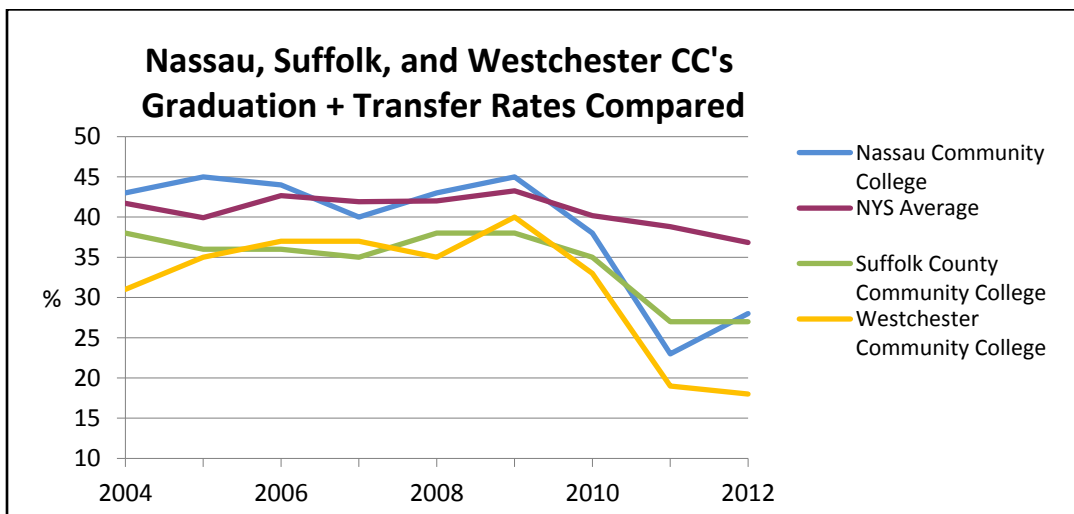
#### 4. STUDENT OUTCOMES AT NASSAU COMMUNITY COLLEGE COMPARED TO NEARBY COLLEGES

We next compared the College’s outcomes to those of Suffolk and Westchester community colleges to investigate whether regional factors played a role in depressing NCC’s performance. Suffolk, Westchester, and Nassau community colleges all serve suburban regions of downstate New York. Suffolk and NCC are similar in size and are the two largest community colleges in New York (roughly 28,000 and 23,000 students, respectively, in Fall 2012).

##### 4.1 Combined Graduation and Transfer Rates at Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester Community Colleges

NCC’s combined graduation and transfer rate declined from 2009-2011, then recovered somewhat in 2012. Suffolk and Westchester community colleges’ combined graduation and transfer rates also declined from 2009-2011, though neither college experienced a rebound comparable to NCC’s the following year (see Figure 6 below). All three colleges performed worse than the New York State average.

**Fig. 6: Combined Graduation and Transfer Rates at Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester Community Colleges**

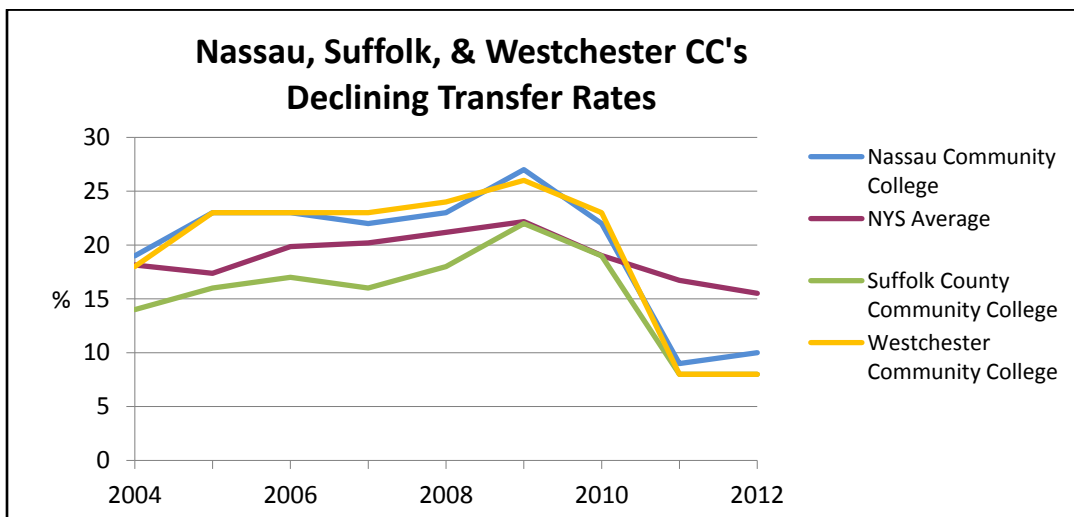


Data drawn from National Center for Education Statistics IPEDS Data Center: <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/>

#### 4.2 Transfer Rates at Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester Community Colleges

We next separated the colleges' combined graduation and transfer rates into their components. Most strikingly, NCC, Westchester, and Suffolk's transfer rates declined in tandem after 2009. As shown below, the three college's transfer rates peaked in 2009, declined slightly in 2010, declined steeply in 2011 (with all reporting declines to below 10%), and recovered slightly the following year. All three colleges performed worse than the New York State average after 2009.

**Fig. 7: Transfer Rates at Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester Community Colleges**



Data drawn from National Center for Education Statistics IPEDS Data Center: <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/>

The lockstep rise and fall of transfer rates at NCC, Suffolk, and Westchester suggests that something larger than campus turmoil drove the direction of NCC's transfer rate, if not its absolute level. It is tempting to hypothesize that the Great Recession (2007-2009)<sup>24</sup> played a role in depressing transfer rates, perhaps by depressing students' ability to pay for more expensive

<sup>24</sup> The recession occurred from December 2007 to June 2009. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *The Recession of 2007-2009*, UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR, [http://www.bls.gov/spotlight/2012/recession/pdf/recession\\_bls\\_spotlight.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/spotlight/2012/recession/pdf/recession_bls_spotlight.pdf) (accessed February 2014).

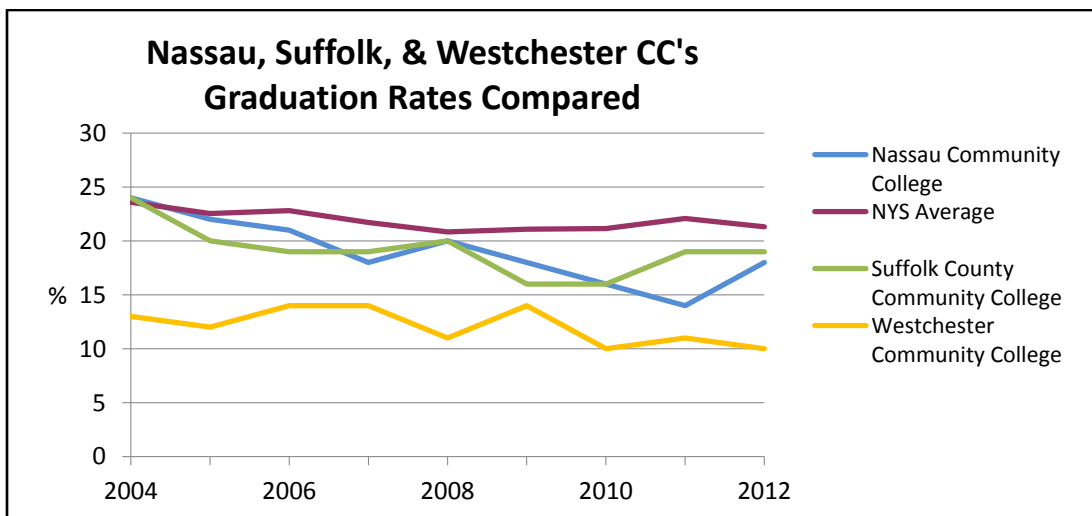
## FALLING STUDENT OUTCOMES AT NASSAU COMMUNITY COLLEGE, 2009-2012

four-year colleges in the following years or by forcing students to choose paid work over further studies. However, as we discuss later, the CUNY colleges did not experience the same decline.

### **4.3 Graduation Rates at Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester Community Colleges**

In contrast, NCC, Suffolk and Westchester community colleges' graduation rates did not conform to any particular pattern or trend during this time period. NCC's graduation rate declined for three straight years from 2008-2011 before making up a good part of that loss in 2012. Suffolk's graduation rate also fell from 2008 to 2009, but thereafter, it maintained or improved its graduation rate. Westchester's graduation rate experienced a short-lived spike from 2008 to 2009 before falling to 10-11% between 2010 and 2012. However, all three colleges performed worse than the New York State average from 2005 on.

**Fig. 8: Graduation Rates at Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester Community Colleges**

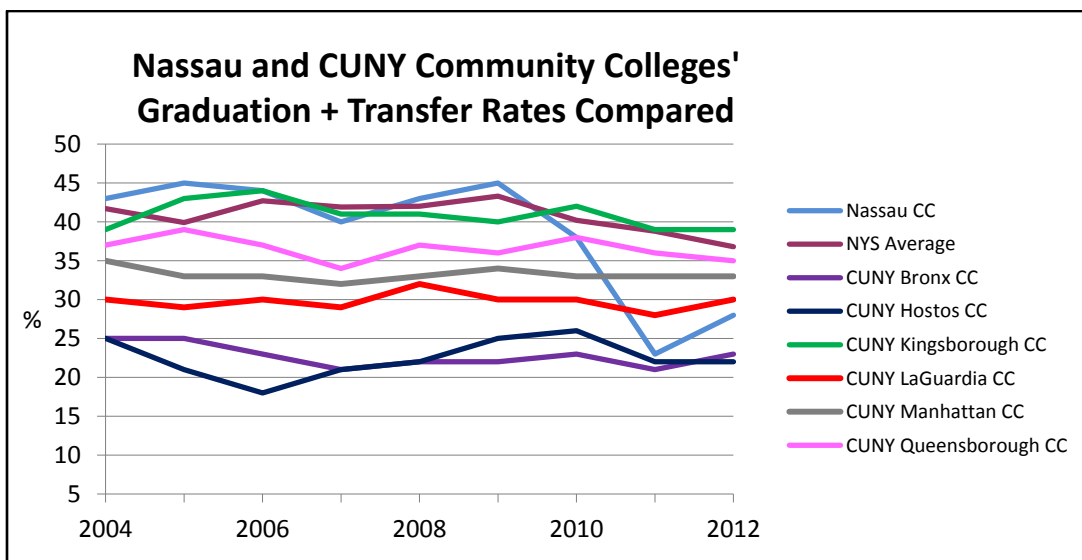


Data drawn from National Center for Education Statistics IPEDS Data Center: <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/>

#### 4.4 Graduation and Transfer Rates at Nassau and CUNY Community Colleges

To test the regional-factor hypothesis, we next examined graduation and transfer rates at the nearby CUNY community colleges. The precipitous decline in NCC’s combined graduation and transfer rate was not repeated at the CUNY schools. From 2009-2012, NCC’s combined rate dropped from 45% to 28%. By contrast, each CUNY community college’s performance was remarkably consistent: between 2009-2012, Bronx’s performance ranged between 21-23%, Hostos ranged between 22-26%, Kingsborough ranged between 39-42%, LaGuardia ranged between 28-30%, Manhattan’s ranged between 33-34%, and Queensborough ranged between 35-38%. Students at Bronx and Hostos community colleges consistently fared worse than students at NCC, but even at these low-performing colleges, no dramatic drop in graduations and transfers occurred.

**Fig. 9: Graduation and Transfer Rates at Nassau and CUNY Community Colleges**



Data drawn from National Center for Education Statistics IPEDS Data Center: <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/>

While the striking similarity between Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester community colleges’ declining transfer rates lends credence to the possibility that regional factors affected NCC’s outcomes, the CUNYs’ consistent performances appear to discredit the regional

hypothesis. At the very least, it appears that whatever drove the downstate SUNY community colleges' transfer rates to decline in tandem did not affect their nearby CUNY neighbors' performance similarly.

#### **4.5 Comprehensive Support Programs' Impact at CUNY**

The contrasting performance of the CUNY community colleges appears to work against the hypothesis that regional factors affected NCC's performance and in support of the possibility that individual college initiatives account for their differences in performance. We were able to identify one significant initiative at CUNY community colleges that may explain how the CUNYs maintained or improved their outcomes as NCC's graduation and transfer rates declined. At CUNY community colleges, students have access to Accelerated Study In Associate Programs ("ASAP") and College Discovery, programs that provide comprehensive academic and financial support to students who otherwise may not be in a position to succeed at college.<sup>25</sup> Studies of ASAP, the newest program combining financial, advising, and scheduling support for students, show that it boosts students' 3-year graduation rates tremendously.<sup>26</sup> The program offers students the following assistance:

- Financial support (tuition waivers, free Metrocards, free use of textbooks)
- Advising (mandatory academic advising, tutoring, career counseling)
- Scheduling to speed degree completion (required full-time enrollment, back-to-back course scheduling to help students balance studies with other obligations)

---

<sup>25</sup> Information regarding the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) can be found at <http://www.cuny.edu/academics/programs/notable/asap.html>; information regarding the College Discovery program is available at <http://www.cuny.edu/academics/programs/notable/seekcd.html>. Both websites last accessed June 10, 2014.

<sup>26</sup> Henry M. Levin and Emma Garcia, assistance from James Morgan, *Cost-effectiveness of Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) of the City University of New York (CUNY)*, CENTER FOR BENEFIT-COST STUDIES IN EDUCATION, TEACHERS COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, September 2012, pg. 14. See also David L. Kirp, How to Help College Students Graduate, THE NEW YORK TIMES, January 8, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/09/opinion/how-to-help-college-students-graduate.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/09/opinion/how-to-help-college-students-graduate.html?_r=0) (last accessed June 10, 2014).

FALLING STUDENT OUTCOMES AT NASSAU COMMUNITY COLLEGE, 2009-2012

A study of the first group of students to enroll in ASAP demonstrates that the program has boosted graduation rates to between 50 and 60% at each CUNY campus where it was offered—on average, 30% higher than the general CUNY community college graduation rate (see Figure 10).<sup>27</sup> It has also decreased CUNY’s average cost per completed degree from \$63,656 to \$57,297, as indicated in the two columns on the right:<sup>28</sup>

**Fig. 10: ASAP Boosts Graduation Rate at CUNY Community Colleges**

CUNY branch	3-year Graduation Rate, Control Group (No ASAP Services)	3-year Graduation Rate, ASAP Group	Cost per Completion, Control Group	Cost per Completion, ASAP Group
Manhattan	22.98%	52.61%	\$52,710	\$47,295
Bronx	15.87%	49.15%	\$90,385	\$64,586
Hostos	39.02%	50.00%	\$58,674	\$70,239
Kingsborough	29.70%	60.73%	\$45,697	\$51,485
LaGuardia	22.84%	50.96%	\$64,007	\$58,361
Queensborough	21.29%	59.21%	\$70,460	\$51,813
<b>CUNY average</b>	<b>24.12%</b>	<b>54.86%</b>	<b>\$63,656</b>	<b>\$57,297</b>

Henry M. Levin & Emma Garcia with James Morgan, “Cost-Effectiveness of Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) of The City University of New York (CUNY),” Center for Benefit-Cost Studies in Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, September 2012, pp. 14, 19.

A more recent, larger, random-assignment study of ASAP, conducted by MDRC, a nonpartisan education and social policy research firm, is establishing the program’s ability to increase graduation rates over time.<sup>29</sup> While three-year results for this study are still pending, at the two-and-a-half year mark, one third of ASAP students have completed their associate degrees—15% more than the control group.<sup>30</sup> These results differ significantly from the initial study because ASAP has expanded to target low-income students requiring remedial coursework.

We were unable to identify similar comprehensive academic and financial support programs at Nassau Community College. Administrators confirmed that NCC does not, at

<sup>27</sup> Levin, *et al.*, pg. 14.

<sup>28</sup> *Id.*, pg. 19.

<sup>29</sup> Susan Scrivener and Michael J. Weiss, *Two year results from an evaluation of Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) for developmental education students*, MDRC Policy Brief, December 2013, pg. 8-9.

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*

present, have funds for such programs. The Educational Opportunity Program, a SUNY initiative, offers financial aid and academic support to students at SUNY community colleges who may not otherwise be in a position to enroll in college.<sup>31</sup> It is offered at Westchester and Suffolk community colleges and, while we are not aware of empirical studies of its effectiveness, may also be of interest to NCC as funding becomes available.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

NCC provides an invaluable service to thousands of Nassau County residents, offering affordable higher education at a time when tuition at private institutions is soaring. However, its student outcomes have declined significantly since 2009. The College reached its low point in 2011 and recovered partially but not fully in 2012, the most recent year for which graduation and transfer data is available. In our meeting with NCC administrators, we were encouraged by NCC's recent commitment to systematic, data-driven analyses of its core policies. We offer this paper as a starting point as the College engages in data-based investigation of factors affecting students' success, and we urge NCC, in taking initiatives to reverse the decline in its students' success rate, to adopt policies already proven at other colleges to improve student outcomes.

---

<sup>31</sup> Information regarding the SUNY Educational Opportunity Program can be found at <http://www.suny.edu/attend/academics/eop/> (last accessed June 10, 2014).