

The New York Performance Standards Consortium

College Performance Study

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Statement of Problem: Do the graduates of the New York Performance Standards Consortium schools perform well in college? Do these schools prepare their students – mostly African-American, Latino, and economically disadvantaged – for college-level work?

Background: The New York Performance Standards Consortium is a coalition of 28 small high schools across New York State that exemplify educational reform based on a strong commitment to school-as-community, professional development, and innovative curricula and teaching strategies. Recognizing that their students learn best when actively engaged, Consortium schools typically utilize inquiry-based methods of learning with classrooms steeped in discussion, project-based assignments, and student choice rooted in course work. In recognition of their outstanding work, many of these schools have received national honors, including Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence and New American High Schools awards.

Typical of small schools, Consortium schools serve our nation's most vulnerable student populations: African-Americans, Latinos, and the economically disadvantaged. In a comparison of Consortium students with the general New York City high schools' population, Consortium schools have more students of color, more students who qualify for free lunch, more students receiving special education services, and more entering 9th and 10th grade students scoring below the state standard on reading and mathematics tests (1).

A key feature of the Consortium is its commitment to performance-based assessment. Asserting that learning is complex, therefore assessment should be too, Consortium schools use a variety of performance measures – literary essays and creative writing, research papers and projects, oral presentations and debates, mathematical problems and applications – to assess their students' learning. The Consortium steadfastly opposes the use of high-stakes tests, insisting instead that students must have a variety of means to demonstrate their learning.

In 1995, New York State's former Commissioner of Education, Thomas Sobol, granted the Consortium schools a waiver from the state's Regents exams, supporting them in their endeavors to develop an assessment system that would meet and exceed state standards while simultaneously addressing the local needs of their school communities. Since then, Consortium schools have developed a system of assessment that consists of six integrated components: active learning, formative and summative assessments and documentation, strategies for corrective action, multiple ways for students to express and exhibit learning,

graduation level performance-based tasks aligned with the state's Learning Standards, and a focus on professional development. In addition, the schools incorporate an external review process to ensure that student work meets the Consortium's standards.

Literature Review: Several studies demonstrate that small schools, such as those in the Consortium, do well on a variety of measures. With their focus on the active engagement of students and teachers, innovative curricula and pedagogy, and a sense of community, small schools have been successful in increasing daily attendance and college-going rates; raising student achievement; reducing dropout rates and incidences of violence; improving teacher satisfaction and retention; increasing parent involvement; better supporting special needs students; and improving overall school culture (Ayers, 2000; Fine, 1994, 2001; Fine & Somerville, 1998; Raywid, 1997; Wasley et al., 2000). In a comparison of Consortium schools with all New York City high schools, Consortium schools had a lower dropout rate (10.6% vs. 20.3%) and a higher college-bound rate (87.8% vs. 70.1%) for the Class of 2003 (2). The Consortium schools also had a higher daily attendance rate (87.6% vs. 84.7%) compared to New York City high schools for the 2002-2003 school year (1).

While the success of small schools is well-documented at the secondary level, little research has been conducted on the college performance of small school graduates. In his research on the graduates of one small school, Bensman (1995) concluded that these young people had developed the thinking skills to face challenges in college and the workplace. However, data was limited on actual performance. Since a major goal of small schools is to prepare students for the rigors of college-level work, it is incumbent upon the research community to examine whether small schools achieve this objective.

In an attempt to help address the question of how well small schools prepare their students for college, the New York Performance Standards Consortium is conducting a longitudinal study of the college performance of its schools' graduates. Specifically, this study will document how well the Consortium schools, with their unique system of performance-based assessment, prepare students for college-level work, while also speaking to the broader issue of small schools' efficacy. Results are currently available for the high school classes of 2001 and 2002. Notably, no comparable study has been attempted to determine whether the Regents system of five high-stakes tests adequately prepares students for college. To date, its predictive validity for college success remains unknown.

Methodology: All 28 schools in the Consortium have been invited to take part in the study. In June 2001, 18 Consortium schools participated, asking their graduating seniors to sign release forms granting the Consortium's research director permission to obtain their college transcripts. On average, 74% of each school's seniors returned forms. In June 2002, 15 Consortium schools – including 13 from the previous year – participated. Again, the average return rate from each school's seniors was 74%. The schools' population for the entire sample was 20.1% White, 26.0% Black, 44.0% Hispanic, 9.8%

Asian and others, and 60.3% eligible for free lunch (1). These numbers approximate the entire Consortium schools' population, i.e., 19.4% White, 27.6% Black, 43.5% Hispanic, 9.6% Asian and others, and 60.7% eligible for free lunch (1).

The first set of signed release forms was sent to colleges in December 2002. The second set was sent in February 2004. The returned transcripts – 666 in all – were then analyzed and coded for GPAs, number of credits counted towards GPAs, certain descriptors (i.e., college governance and selectivity) as determined by *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges: 25th Edition, 2003*, and current enrollment status. To increase reliability, individual GPAs were weighted against the number of credits accrued. Statistical analyses were then run to obtain the percentages of students attending 4-year colleges, 2-year colleges, and vocational programs; 4-year college selectivity enrollment rates; average GPAs; and the persistence rates of those students who had entered college within one year of high school graduation.

Results:

In the sample, 77% of Consortium school graduates attended 4-year colleges, 19% attended 2-year colleges, and 4% attended vocational or technical programs.

In the sample of students attending 4-year colleges, 7% enrolled in most competitive colleges, 14% enrolled in highly competitive colleges, 30% enrolled in very competitive colleges, 32% enrolled in competitive colleges, 14% enrolled in less competitive colleges, 2% enrolled in noncompetitive colleges, and 1% enrolled in specialized colleges, as defined by *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges: 25th Edition, 2003*. [Note: See chart for definition of each category.]

The average GPA for Consortium schools' graduates in the sample was 2.6 out of a possible 4.0. For students attending 4-year colleges, the average GPA was 2.7. For students attending 2-year institutions, the average GPA was 2.2. [Note: these GPAs are calculated for up to three completed college semesters.]

Of those in the sample who entered college within one year of high school graduation, 78% overall enrolled for a second year. Of those attending 4-year colleges, 84% enrolled for a second year. Of those attending 2-year institutions, 59% enrolled for a second year. [Note: a few students in the sample deferred college for a year, thus they had only completed one college semester at the time of data collection and are not included in this particular statistic.]

Discussion: Consortium graduates do very well in college. Most attend 4-year colleges, the vast majority of which are rated competitive or better by Barron's. Consortium schools' graduates earn, on average, a 2.6 GPA, which is close to a B-, upon completion of up to three semesters of college. [Note: The ACT defines college readiness as the ability to earn at least a C, or 2.0 GPA, in college level courses (3).] Consortium students

remain in college as well, with 84% of those attending 4-year colleges and 59% of those attending 2-year institutions returning for a second year. In comparison, on a national level only 73% of students who enter 4-year colleges and 56% of those who enter 2-year institutions return for their second year (Mortenson, 1998).

These results indicate that Consortium schools effectively prepare their students – mostly African-American and Latino, and economically disadvantaged – for college-level work. While these most vulnerable populations are typically underserved by our nation’s high schools, the schools in the New York Performance Standards Consortium have reversed this trend. These schools deserve to be protected, studied, and emulated, so that success can become the rule, not the exception, for all students.

Footnotes:

- (1) The New York City Department of Education’s 2002-2003 “Annual School Report Cards” and the New York State Department of Education’s 2002-2003 “New York State School Report Card Comprehensive Information Report.” The Consortium schools’ data were compiled from each school’s individual report card or information report. The overall New York City high schools’ data are found on every New York City school report card for comparison purposes.
- (2) The “Annual School Report Cards” base college-bound rates on student reports, which are historically unreliable. Therefore, the Consortium schools’ college-bound rate was calculated from school reports on the Class of 2004, prepared for the New York Performance Standards Consortium in August/September 2004. The other rates were calculated using the method described in footnote 1.
- (3) Lewin, T. (2003, August 20). High School Seniors Weak in Math and Science Tests. *The New York Times*.

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About the Author: Martha Foote is a PhD candidate in Teaching and Curriculum at the Margaret Warner College of Education and Human Development at the University of Rochester. She is a contributing author to *Ways of Assessing Children and Curriculum* (1993) and *Teaching in the Knowledge Society* (2003), both published by Teachers College Press. Her research interests include small schools, assessment, and high-stakes testing.

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What Kinds of Students Attend Consortium Schools?

Students at the New York Performance Standards Consortium schools come from a variety of backgrounds.

The following chart provides a comparison of our students with the general New York City high schools' population:

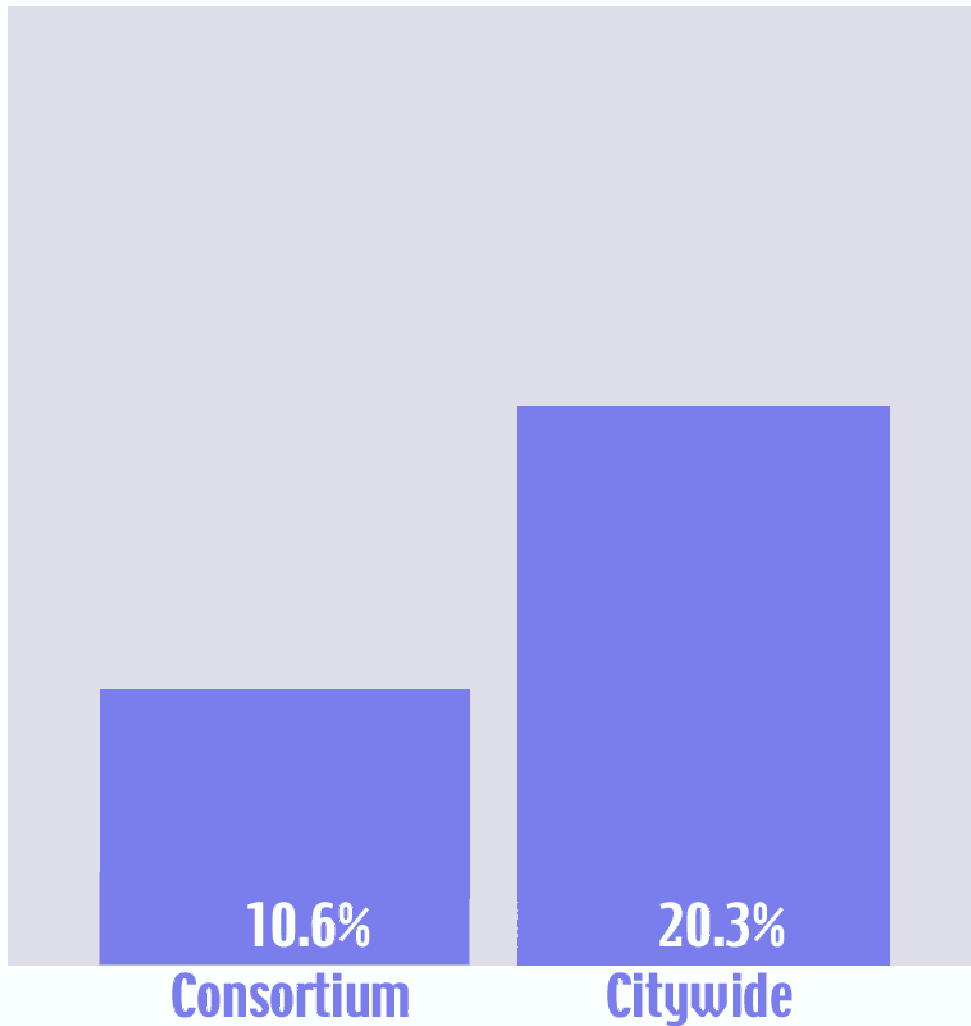
<u>Category</u>	<u>Consortium Schools</u>	<u>NYC High Schools</u>
African-American	27.6%	35.1%
Latino	43.5%	34.7%
White	19.4%	16.1%
Asian and Other	9.6%	14.1%
Eligible for Free Lunch	60.7%	54.0%
Special Education and Resource Room	12.0%	11.4%

Entering 9th and 10th Graders Meeting State Standards:

ELA	15.6%	31.0%
Mathematics	17.5%	31.0%

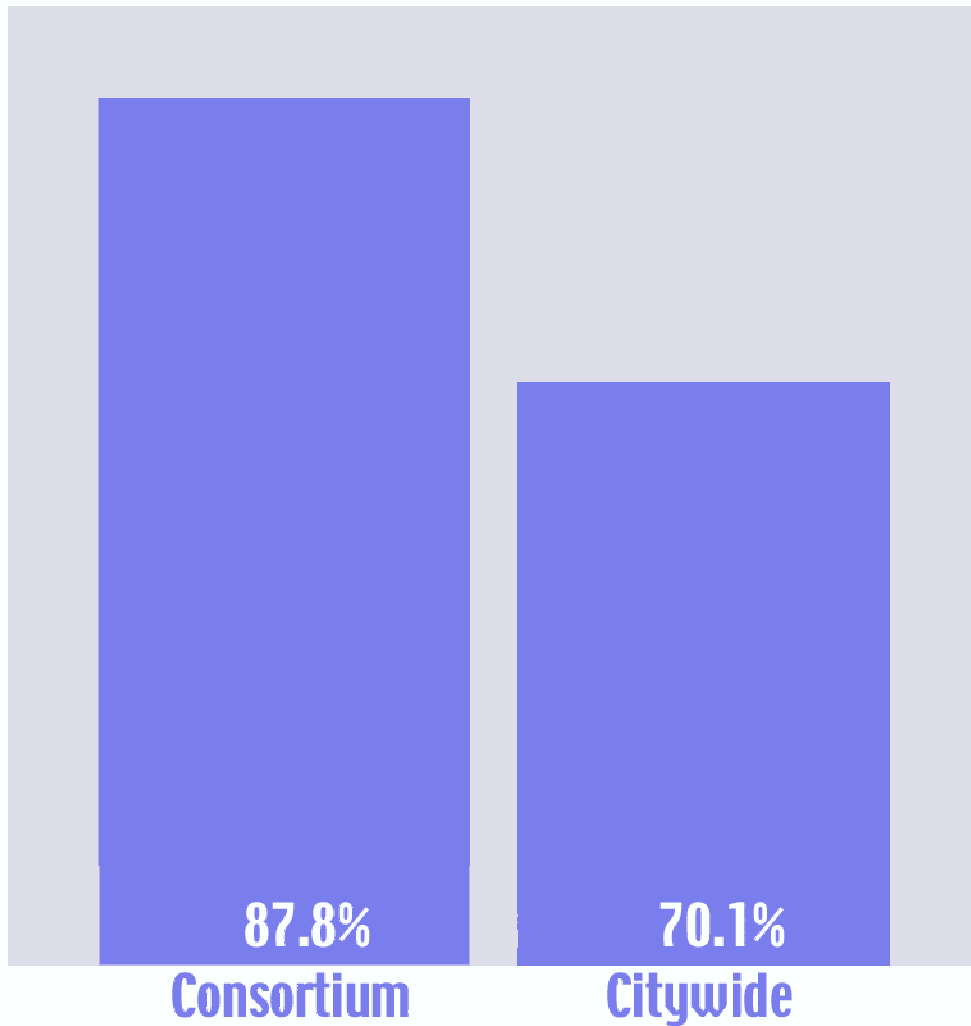
Source: The New York City Department of Education's 2002-2003 "Annual School Report Cards" and the New York State Department of Education's 2002-2003 "New York State School Report Card Comprehensive Information Reports." The Consortium schools' data were compiled from each school's individual report card or information report. The overall New York City high schools' data are found on every New York City school report card for comparison purposes.

Class of 2003 Dropout Rate



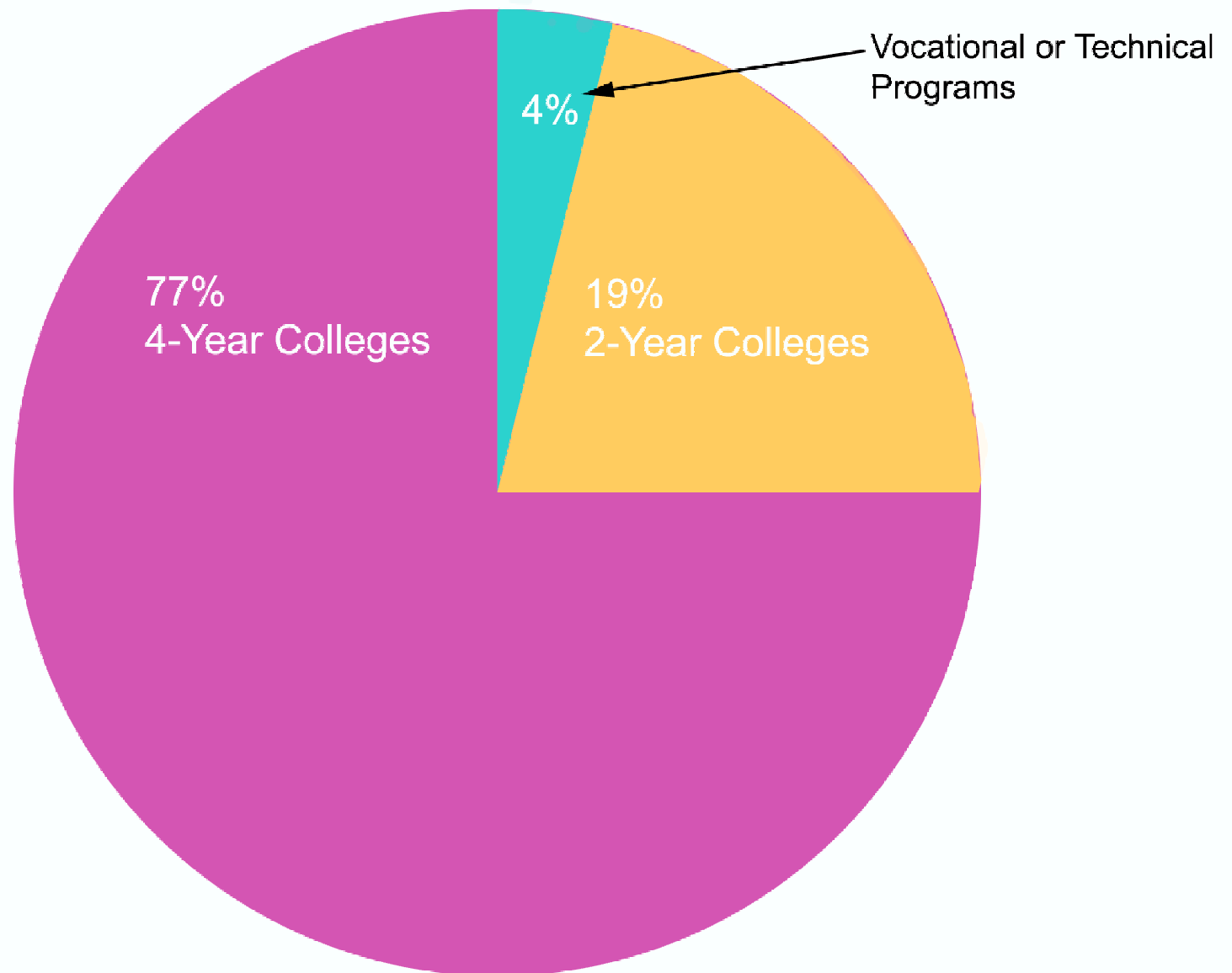
Source: The New York City Department of Education website: www.nycenet.edu

Class of 2003 College-bound Rate

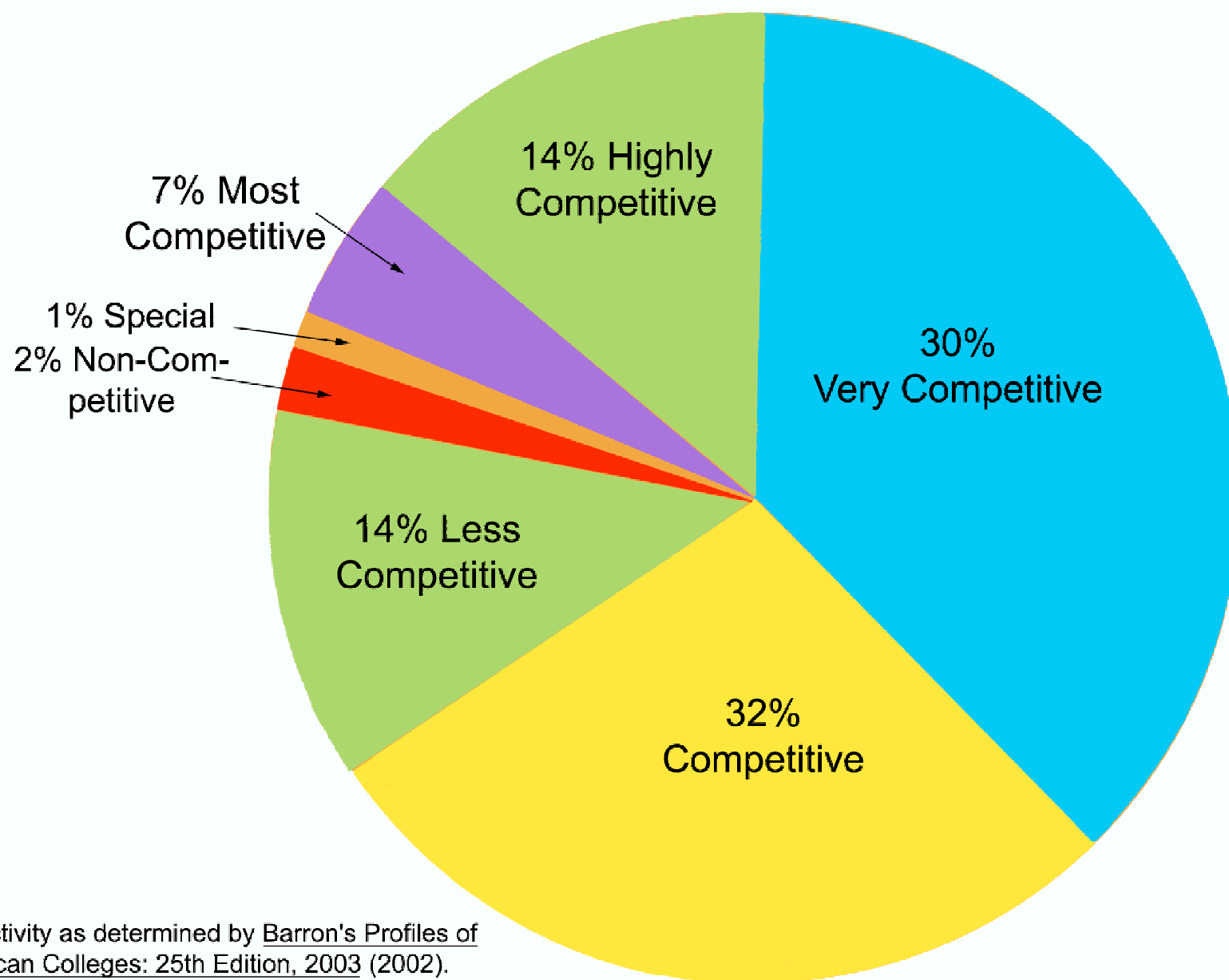


Source: The New York City Department of Education website: www.nycenet.edu

Enrollment Rates for Consortium Graduates Attending Post-Secondary Institutions



4-Year College Selectivity* Enrollment Rates for Consortium Graduates



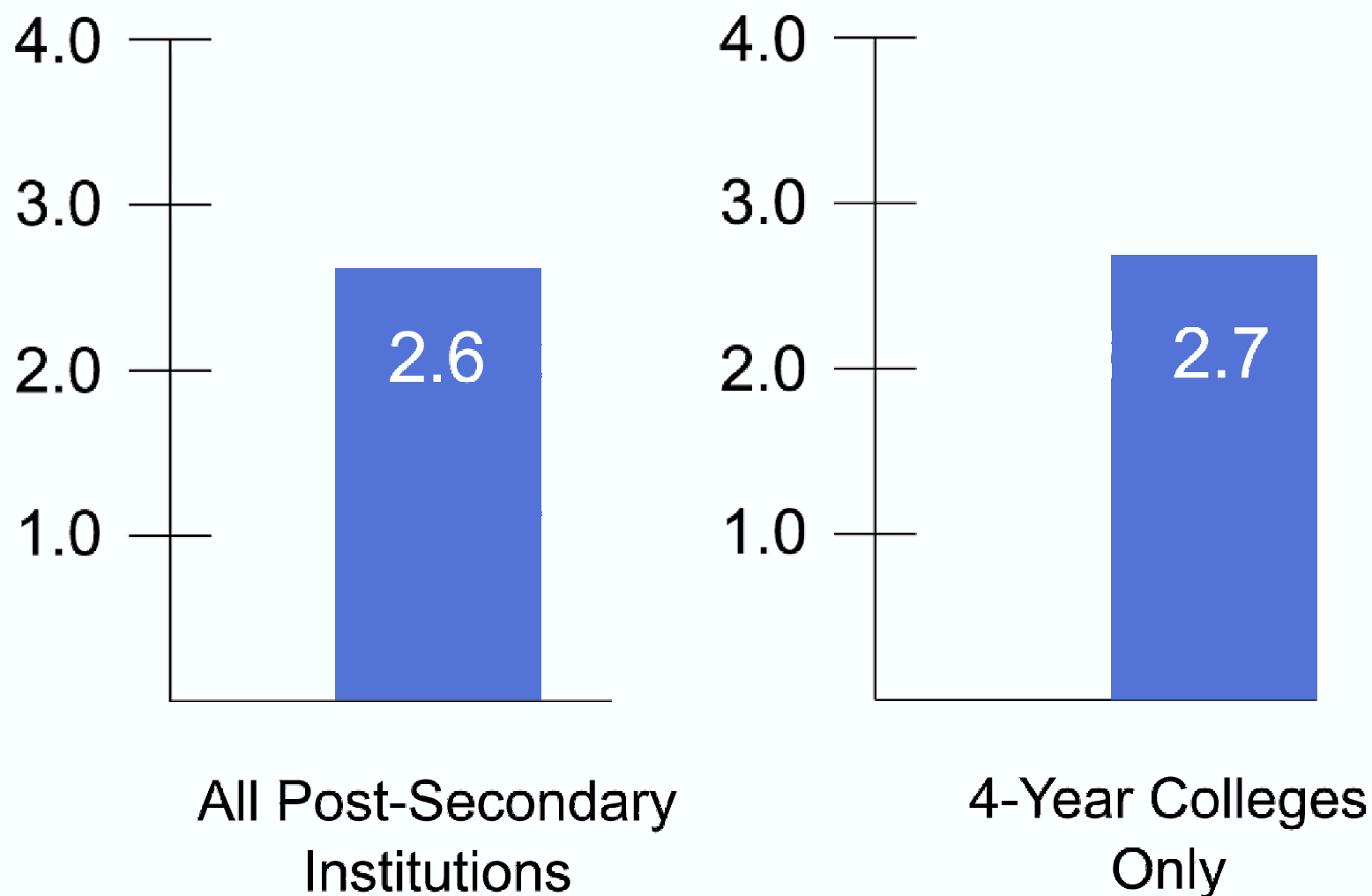
*Selectivity as determined by Barron's Profiles of American Colleges: 25th Edition, 2003 (2002).
Hauppauge, NY: Barron's Educational Series, Inc.

**College Selectivity Rating as Determined by Median
Freshman SAT I Test Scores***

<u>Selectivity Rating</u>	<u>Median Freshman SAT I Test Scores</u>
Most Competitive	655-800
Highly Competitive	620-654
Very Competitive	573-619
Competitive	500-572
Less Competitive	Below 500
Noncompetitive	N/A
Special	(Admission based on talent)

*Source: Barron's Profiles of American Colleges: 25th Edition, 2003 (2002). Hauppauge, NY:
Barron's Educational Series, Inc.

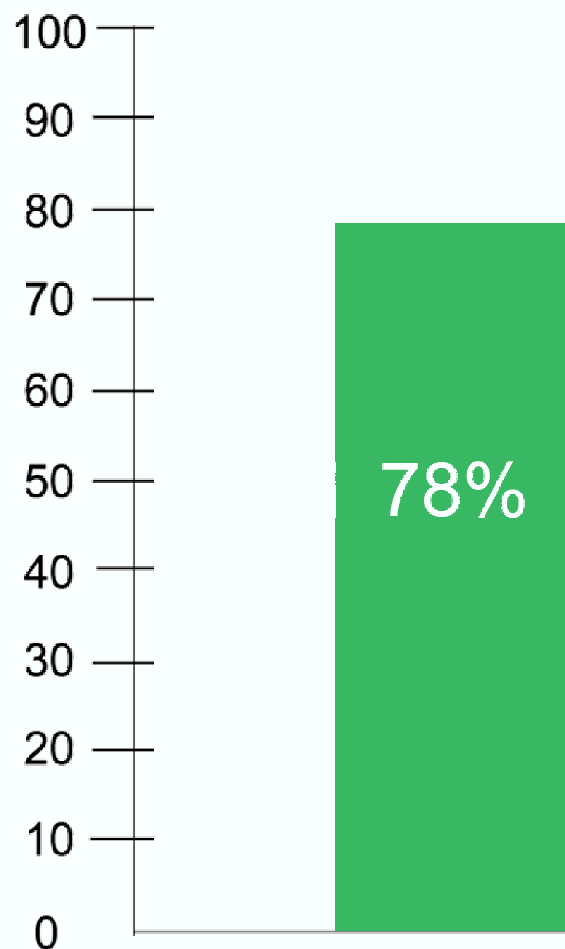
College GPAs* for Consortium Graduates



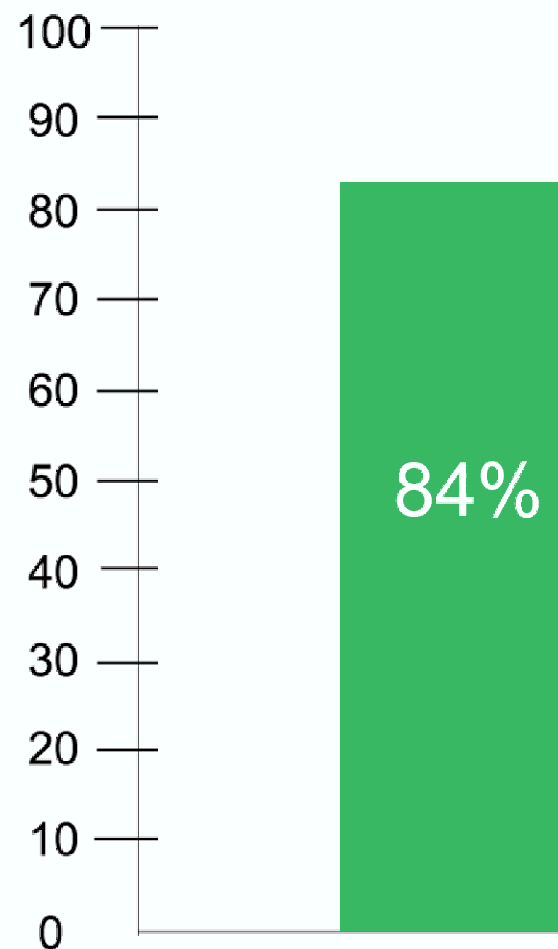
* GPAs are calculated for up to three completed college semesters.

Note: No comparable study has been conducted of New York State Regents high school graduates.

Persistence Rates for Consortium Graduates: Continued Enrollment into 2nd Year of College



Enrollment in All Post-
Secondary Institutions



Enrollment in 4-Year
Colleges