



Harlem Academy in the Education Landscape 2020-21

Introduction

Harlem Academy (HA) drives equity of opportunity for promising students, guiding them to thrive at the highest academic levels and one day make a mark on the world. Founded in 2004, the school fills a critical opportunity gap – local public schools have limited capacity to serve high achievers, while few low-income children can access selective programs.

HA was envisioned as a school where success would be based on ability and drive, not on a zip code, a lottery, or a family’s wealth. Over the past 16 years, HA has developed a program that cultivates academic excellence and a deep commitment to community contribution. The school graduated its first class in 2012 and now serves 120 students.

HA is currently developing a permanent campus in Harlem that will extend the school’s transformational impact to 216 children in kindergarten through eighth grade, preparing our graduates to thrive at the highest academic levels and one day make a mark on the world. The campus will establish HA as an enduring institution and a permanent pathway to opportunity for promising students for generations to come.

Disparities for High-Potential, Low-Income Children

A recent study by Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, “Born to Win, Schooled to Lose,” detailed the outsized impact of income on a student’s trajectory from kindergarten through age 25 (Carnevale, Fasules, Quinn, & Campbell, 2019). The research showed that low-income kindergartners with high scores are less than half as likely to graduate from college or earn a high wage than their more affluent peers with low scores.

For high-performing,¹ low-income² kindergartners, there is a clear downward trajectory:

- By eighth grade: 49% have fallen out of the high-performing group.
- By tenth grade: 63% have fallen out of the high-performing group.
- By age 25: 75% have no college degree and 69% have below-median socioeconomic (SES) status.

For low-performing, high-income kindergartners, there is a clear upward trajectory:

- By eighth grade: 43% have risen into the high-performing group.
- By tenth grade: 49% have risen into the high-performing group
- By age 25: 60% have a college degree and 71% have above-median SES status.

This study offers an external endorsement of HA’s mission. (In fact, the researchers recognized Harlem Academy’s role in inspiring this study in its acknowledgments.) The data is staggering in clarifying how much talent is lost from underdevelopment before high school and makes a strong case for investing in promising, low-income students during the critical elementary and middle school years.

¹ “High-performing” references top-half math scores; “low performing” references bottom-half math scores.

² “Low-income” references the lowest SES quartile; “high-income” references the highest SES quartile.

Behind the Disparities: A Critical Gap in the NYC Education Landscape

Public and Charter Schools: Raising the Floor for Low Performers

Public and charter schools focus on closing the achievement gap for our nation's lowest-performing students. They generally admit students without selectivity and strive to pull low-achieving students to proficiency. Recent results on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)³ show that 79% of eighth graders in New York City public schools fail to achieve basic proficiency in math and reading (U.S. Department of Education, 2019a, 2019b).

With such high percentages of students struggling to meet basic proficiency thresholds, few resources are available to support higher-performing students. Ultimately, very few students make it to the advanced level. Among low-income students in New York City, just 2% scored at the advanced level in reading and 6% scored at the advanced level in math (U.S. Department of Education, 2019a, 2019b).

Selective Programs: Inaccessible to Low-Income Children

Selective programs, such as gifted and talented (G&T) programs, independent schools, and competitive supplementary programs, admit students who already have top scores. Low-income students lack the advantages of their higher-income peers and are generally unprepared to compete for admission to these schools and programs. In the low-income neighborhoods HA serves, just 0.3% of kindergarteners have the resources or preparation needed to test into the citywide G&T programs. The rates in wealthier NYC neighborhoods are 20 times higher (NYC Department of Education, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c).

New York City has several selective programs targeting low-income and minority children, such as A Better Chance, Breakthrough New York, Harlem Educational Activities Fund, Prep for Prep, and Oliver Scholars. These programs, however, do not begin until middle school. By then, most promising, low-income children have already lost too much ground to qualify for these opportunities.

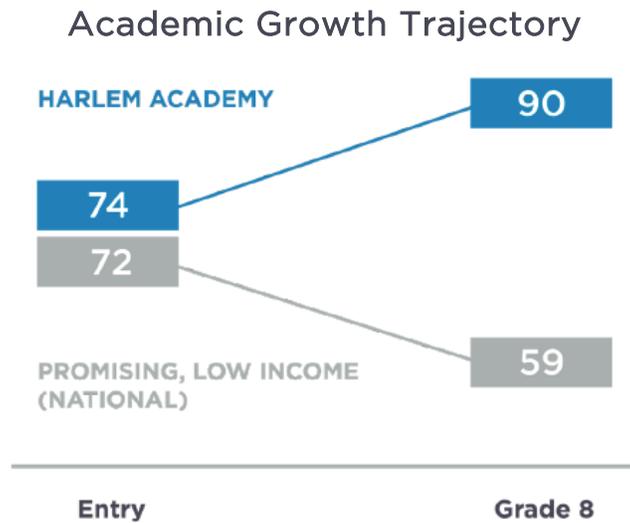
Harlem Academy Fills a Gap for Promising Students

HA fills a critical gap in the education reform landscape as the only independent school in Manhattan serving promising, low-income students in grades 1-8. By combining selective admissions, full-need scholarships, and a rigorous curriculum, the school propels traditionally overlooked students to the top echelons of academic performance. As a private school, HA has the flexibility to admit students, hire teachers, and develop curriculum based solely on the high standards the school sets for realizing its mission.

³ The NAEP is the largest nationally representative assessment in the United States focused on various subject areas.

Changing the Trajectory

By eighth grade. To understand the extent to which students grow during their time at HA, we compare baseline standardized test scores when students enter the school to their scores in the spring of eighth grade. Data from the past four graduating classes shows that the median student entered HA at the 74th percentile, gained 16 points during their time at the school, and graduated at the 90th percentile. This tremendous growth is in stark contrast to national trends for low-income students who enter first grade with similar scores to our students but lose 13 percentile points by eighth grade.



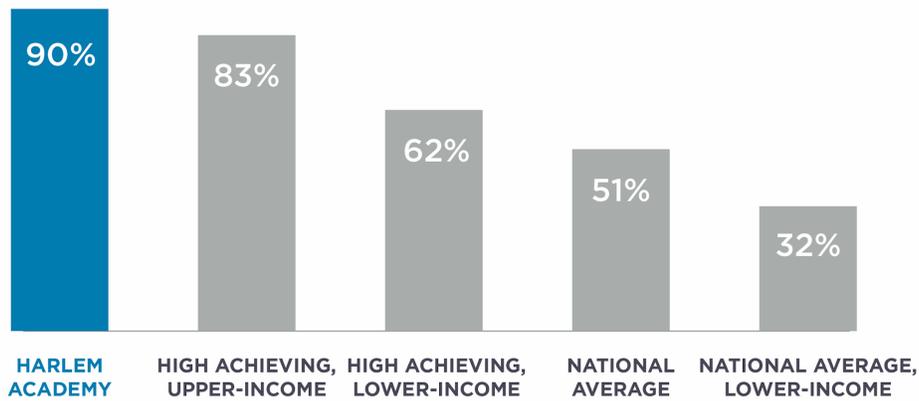
Sources: Harlem Academy nationally standardized testing (ERB CTP4 class of 2016-19); U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study: Kindergarten Class of 1998-1990, “Kindergarten-Eighth Grade Full Sample.” Analysis of ECLS-K data by Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce for Harlem Academy (2018).

By high school. For the fourth year in a row, 100% of HA graduates entered selective secondary schools, including Andover, Brearley, Horace Mann, Peddie, Riverdale, Spence, and Trinity. This year, 71% of the graduating class earned admission to independent day and boarding schools with full-need scholarships. HA graduates are thriving in secondary school, maintaining strong grades and actively participating as members of their school communities.

By college. Among HA’s first five graduating classes, 90% of students enrolled in four-year colleges, surpassing the entry-rate for high-achieving, higher-income students nationally. In addition, our graduates have a 96% college persistence rate, outpacing the 62% nationwide college completion rate (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

In 2020, 93% of graduates from the class of 2016 entered four-year colleges. Sixty percent entered top colleges and universities (rated by Barron’s as “most competitive” and “highly competitive”), including Carnegie Mellon, George Washington, Princeton, Tufts, Wesleyan, and Yale.

Comparative Four-Year College Entry Rate



Source: Harlem Academy data collection (Class of 2012-16). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS:2002), “Base Year, 2002.” Analysis of ELS data by Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce for Harlem Academy (2018).

A Model Education: Sharing Best Practices

HA is a laboratory for innovative, replicable programs designed to meet the needs of promising, low-income children and shares successful strategies to extend the school’s impact beyond its walls. Since 2016, nine articles have been accepted for publication, reaching more than 350,000 educators and school leaders.

Best Practice	Publication
“(Re)Explore NYC,” an advisory unit that empowers students to design their own daylong field trip – and then take the trip – develops social and emotional skills, such as collaboration, problem-solving, and help-seeking.	<i>AMLE Magazine</i> Spring 2021
Our approach to creating intentional space for middle schoolers to navigate tough conversations about identity and inequity.	<i>Voices from the Middle</i> March 2020
A strategy to develop meaningful, long-term partnerships with outside professionals sets the stage for deep engagement and authentic skill development.	<i>AMLE Newsletter</i> November 2018
Our multi-year approach to teacher-driven curriculum development empowers great teachers and builds a program tailored to the school’s needs.	<i>Principal Leadership</i> October 2018
A vocabulary game drives successful results in an area where there is widespread inequity across the country for students from different socioeconomic brackets.	<i>Literacy Today</i> September/October 2018
Use of a school creed and schoolwide behavior expectations develop strong habits that position students for sustained growth.	<i>Educational Leadership</i> September 2018
An innovative High School Week program prepares eighth graders for the transition to high school.	<i>AMLE Magazine</i> April 2018
A focus on primary source analysis in history challenges students to think like historians, teach advanced reading and writing skills, and cultivate empathy.	<i>AMLE Magazine</i> February 2017
A coffee series with parents fosters a two-way meaningful exchange about key issues.	<i>Principal Leadership</i> December 2016

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