

## II. INTRODUCTION

*“We do not want to provide the illusion of an open door to higher education which is in reality only a revolving door, admitting everyone but leading to a high proportion of student failure . . . .”*

– The Board of Higher Education of the City of New York (1969)

*“It is important to recognize that not all remediation is delivered effectively or efficiently. Like any educational process, remediation should be continuously scrutinized and revised to meet prevailing conditions and needs. Therefore, good public policy in this area must focus on two mutually reinforcing goals: (1) implementing multiple strategies that help to reduce the need for remediation in higher education, and (2) improving the effectiveness of remedial education in higher education.”*

– The Institute for Higher Education Policy (1998)

Do CUNY’s open admissions policies and remedial education programs “work”? In other words, are these policies and programs an effective and efficient use of public resources? To aid the Task Force staff in answering that question, CUNY administrators and faculty members provided volumes of data on their students, comparing their academic progress on the basis of whether they had passed or failed the CUNY FSATs as incoming freshmen. As we learned later, however, these data have little to tell us about the effectiveness or efficiency of CUNY’s open admissions policies or remediation efforts.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, fundamental flaws in CUNY’s institutional research practices and in the FSAT program itself raise serious questions about CUNY’s ability to manage its resources and serve its students.

In the course of our campus visits, interviews, review of consultants’ reports, and other research, the Task Force staff found many indications that CUNY’s open admissions policies and remedial programs are not efficient and effective. In Parts IV and V, we analyze CUNY’s incoming students, admissions practices, student assessment testing, and remedial programs. At each stage, we found evidence of waste and failure to meet students’ needs. CUNY does not communicate clear and objective admissions standards to prospective applicants; has not established any consistency or quality control in remedial instruction; and has not established or enforced exit standards for remedial students. In an accompanying report, *Beyond Graduation Rates: Assessing the Outcomes of CUNY’s Open Admissions and Remedial Education Policies*, we show that CUNY has failed to assess accurately the effectiveness of its efforts in meeting institutional and student goals. Taken together, this evidence builds a compelling case for reform within CUNY.

---

<sup>2</sup> See footnote 1 for terminology.

This report begins with a description of the history of open admissions and remediation at CUNY, to illustrate that the issues that the Task Force is studying did not arise suddenly in the late 1990s. CUNY has been struggling with the problem of balancing educational excellence with broad access since the first CUNY college was established in 1847. Our research suggests, however, that the pace and magnitude of changes to the university's admissions policies in 1969 and the early 1970s threw off that balance, and that CUNY's subsequent efforts to cope with the issues raised by the influx of vast numbers of remedial students have been insufficient.