

2014–15  
Annual Report



**eskolta**  
We help schools learn.

# Our Team



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**Jessica Furer**, Associate Director  
**Tom McKenna**, Director of Strategic Initiatives  
**Aaron Boyle**, Senior School Developer  
**Alicia Wolcott**, Senior School Developer  
**Amanda Crowell**, PhD, Senior Researcher  
**Mike Davis**, Accounts Manager  
**Emily Kleinman**, Research and Design Facilitator  
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**Savanna Honerkamp-Smith**, Project Associate  
**P.J. Podesta**, Project Associate  
**Cara Frattasi**, Project Associate  
**Katie Gleason**, Project Associate  
**Damian Bendersky**, Data Designer  
**Fatima Bah**, Office Associate  
**Jodie Ly**, Research Fellow  
**Kate Kelly**, Program Fellow

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# Letter from the Founder

**W**ITHIN THE WALLS of each school building is a small community where adults work with youth to prepare for and experience the world they will eventually shape. While the students who succeed in school may become the leaders who make headlines in the next generation, it is the students who are failing in school who, more than we may care to admit, shape our future society. The faults that lie in our society are most evident in the lives of these students: students who struggle with challenges, students who have ceased to view themselves as learners, students who do not trust the system.

In 2014–15, our work helped almost 12,000 students to engage in deeper learning. Nearly 5,000 of these students were in first-time Eskolta projects—efforts led by teachers who helped to reshape their schools’ practices with our help. An additional 7,000 students were newly armed in classrooms and schools where practices we helped to put in place continue to make a difference.

If we want students to trust the system, to value and engage in their own growth, then we must help the educators who work with them to similarly trust the system, to be valued and engaged themselves. If we want educators to be so engaged, we must have district policies that engage schools in this way.

In 2014–15, our work empowered 155 educators to be change agents, leaders in the effort to rethink and redesign their own schools. Our research reports helped the district as a whole to better understand how its policies were affecting schools and yielded insights that the New York City Department of Education shared with every superintendent and principal in the system.

Education reform has too often failed to grasp the reality that improvement must happen simultaneously and symbiotically for students in the classroom, for adults who work with them, and for the schools where they work. Looking forward, Eskolta is making this connection core to our work improving education in the 21st century.

At each level of the system where this must occur—the classroom where students learn, the school where adults learn, and the district where institutions learn—we are proceeding through interwoven efforts to share our expertise and facilitate change in a way that supports and nurtures innovation, trust, and development. These efforts are helping to change students’ lives, to change our schools, and to change our education system.

**Michael Rothman**  
Executive Director





# Our Schools

## The Bronx

Bronx Arena High School  
Bronx Haven High School  
Bronx Leadership Academy II  
Health Opportunities High School  
I.S. 229 Roland Patterson  
Jill Chaifetz Transfer High School  
New Directions Secondary School  
Mott Haven Community High School  
ROADS Charter School 2 (Bronx)  
Soundview Academy For Culture And Scholarship

## Newark

Fast Track Success Academy  
Newark Leadership Academy

## Manhattan

City As School  
Coalition School for Social Change  
Edward A. Reynolds West Side School  
Harlem Renaissance High School  
High School for Excellence and Innovation  
Murray Hill Academy

## Queens

North Queens Community High School  
P.S./I.S. 266  
Queens Academy High School

## Brooklyn

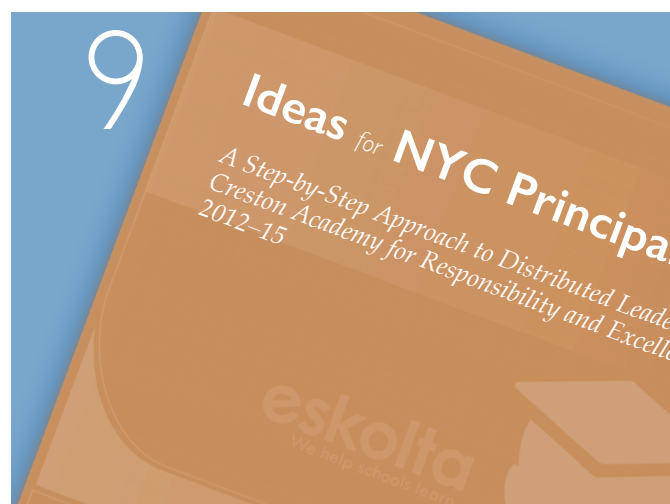
Brooklyn Bridge Academy  
Brooklyn Frontiers High School  
East Brooklyn Community High School  
High School for Research and Service  
Juan Morel Campos Secondary School  
Liberation Diploma Plus  
Metropolitan Diploma Plus High School  
Olympus Academy  
Park Slope Collegiate  
Professional Pathways High School  
ROADS Charter School (Brooklyn)  
West Brooklyn Community High School



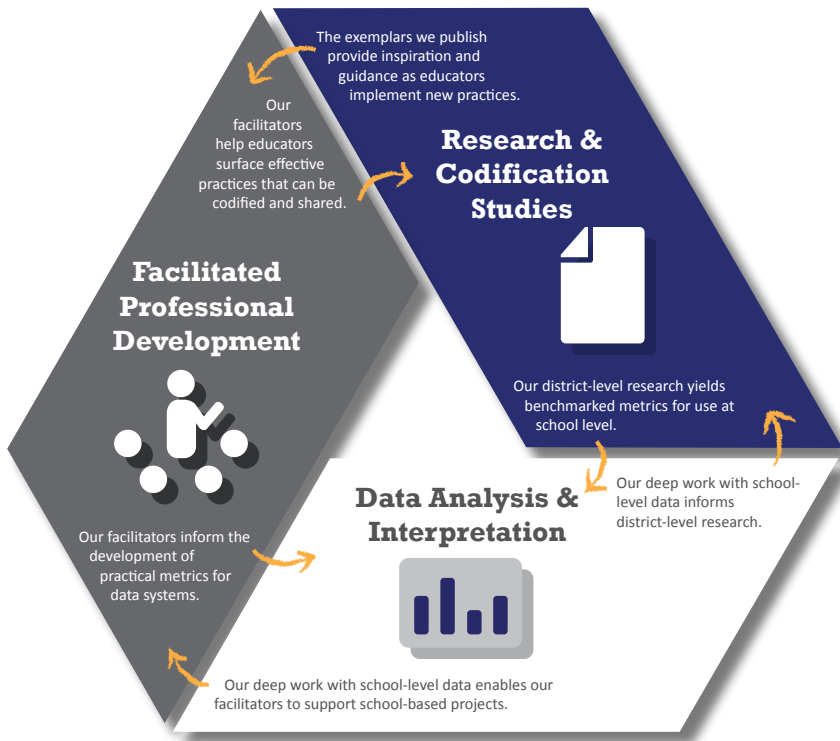
# Inside



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# Our Model



Eskolta School Research and Design works with educators, principals, and school superintendents to simultaneously advance new practices and new systems in our schools.

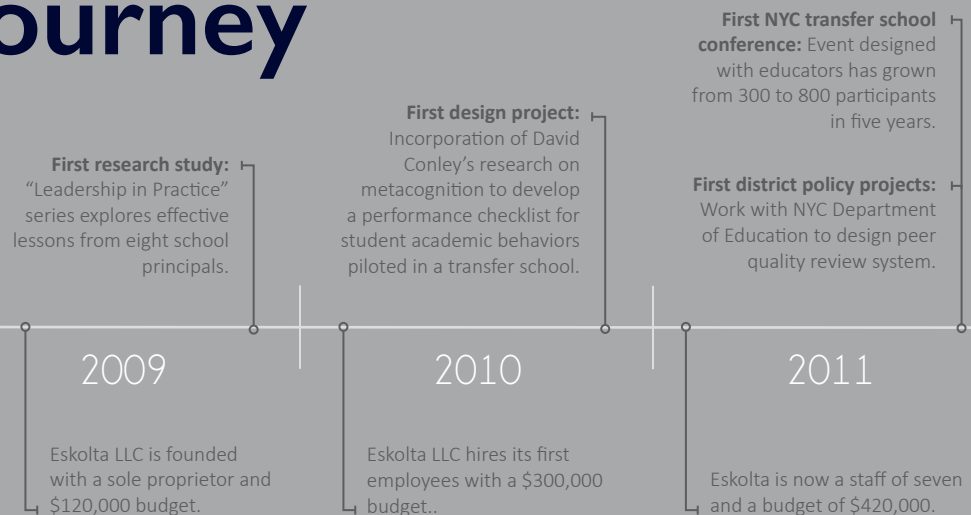
With leaders, we use data analytics to set goals to improve support for struggling students.

Our skilled facilitators empower educators to use research and data to rethink how they support struggling students.

Drawing on our school-based work, with district personnel we research and codify education practices.

This unique combination of research, analysis, and professional development has enabled Eskolta to create a repository of learning and services that help educators, schools, and districts initiate and manage change.

# Our Journey







**First inter-school visit:**  
Building upon our network of schools, we host our first learning visit.

**First project using video:**  
Student and teacher interviews tell the story of school designed goal-setting.

**First national presentation:**  
Eskolta appears at the national AERA conference panel on implementing academic behaviors in schools.

**First Eskolta Fellows:** A new effort is launched to teach our method to educators in schools.

2012

2013

2014

2015

Eskolta School Research & Design is born as a nonprofit.

Eskolta staff stands at 12 with a budget of \$1,200,000.

Eskolta staff stands at 15 with a budget of \$1,500,000.



*North Queens Community High School*

# Changing Minds: A Student Rethinks His Future

“**W**HEN I WAS IN MY OLD SCHOOL,” Scott reflects, “I messed up a lot.” It is a familiar story. A student has not fully developed the skills and techniques necessary to navigate high school. The high school is too big and rigid to meet the student where he is and engage him. The student gets into trouble. The student drops out.

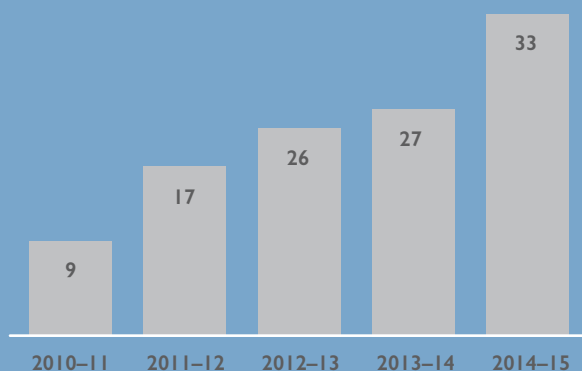
Luckily for Scott, he had heard of a different kind of school near his home in Queens. He found his way to North Queens Community High School, an Eskolta partner school of five years.

Though he re-enrolled in school, Scott was not overly optimistic. “When I came here, I didn’t expect to graduate; I just expected to go here, and if anything happened, it happened.” As Scott worked with his counselor and teachers, the year progressed and he realized real change. “In my old school I didn’t feel like I accomplished anything. But when I came here, I felt different.”

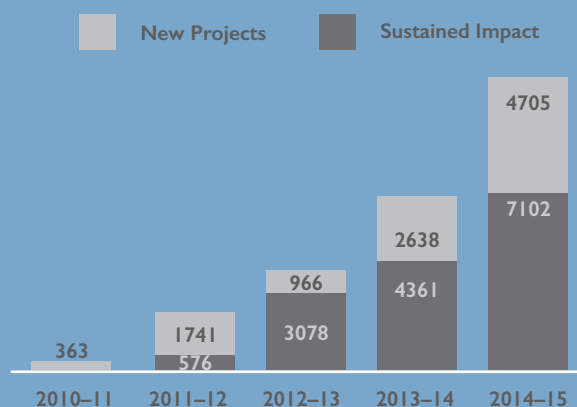
Scott didn’t know it, but North Queens had recently partnered with Eskolta through the Academic and Personal Behaviors Institute, an institute of the New York City Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Readiness (NYCDOE OPSR), and the Student Agency Improvement Community, an initiative of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Through these efforts, North Queens staff worked with Eskolta to develop new practices to promote persistence in students like Scott. “I feel the work around mindsets,” says Principal Winston McCarthy, “and all the work around productive persistence, has actually zeroed in on what we should be paying attention to.”

Working closely with an Eskolta partner, math teachers gave students surveys to ascertain their mindsets about learning, then began incorporating opportunities for them to take on more challenging questions and use math in video games—changes in lessons designed to cultivate more positive mindsets that encourage persistence. Meanwhile, Eskolta facilitated a parallel group of counselors to develop rubrics to give students a language to discuss their academic mindsets, then helped them use these with every student on their caseloads.

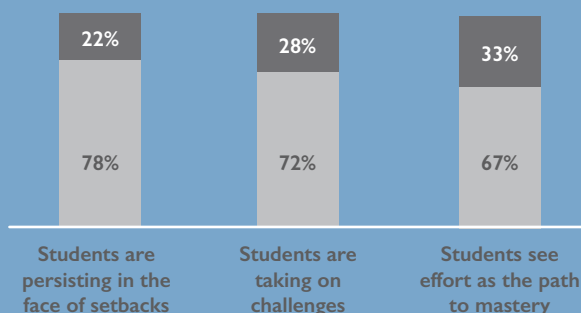
### School Design Projects



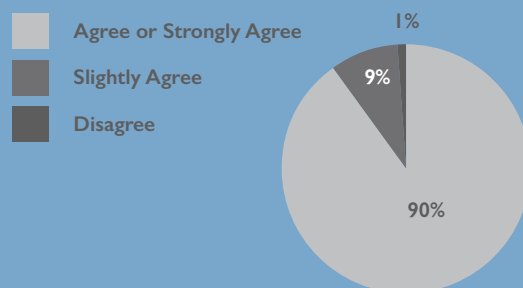
### Students Affected



Across the Academic and Personal Behaviors Institute, most teachers agree or strongly agree that their students have been positively affected by their use of growth-mindset approaches



Across the Transfer School Common Core Institute, a majority of participants report a positive impact on beliefs and practice



“It’s easy for administrators and advocate counselors and teachers to just feel like they’re always pulled into their daily work,” school director Lainey Collins reflects. “Eskolta coming in really provides an opportunity to step away and do something different, and to kind of use your brain in a different way.”

That level of engagement among teachers and counselors has now led Scott to a milestone in his young life. “It feels like a big weight has been lifted off my shoulders actually, because I’ve been through a lot in school and out of school. So for me to graduate is just a big relief.” ■

*“The knowledge, the skills, the structures that Eskolta brought to our school really helped us move.”*

**Winston McCarthy**

*Principal, North Queens Community High School*

*Liberation Diploma Plus*

# Changing Practice: A Teacher Learns through Inquiry

“I THINK IT’S EASY TO JUST THROW A POLICY at teachers and to tell them, ‘Do this,’” says Liberation Diploma Plus teacher Joseph Hayden, “but what Eskolta has been doing is facilitating that process and fostering our own learning, because just like our students, we are also learners, and we can’t just be expected to do something without some sort of facilitation.”

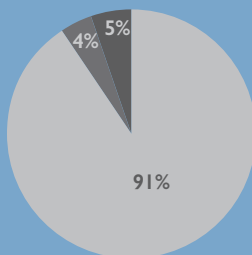
Eskolta’s facilitated work with a team of teachers and counselors created a space in Liberation to examine problems, connect research and best practices, and engage with colleagues to come up with solutions. “Having that conversation with the other teachers in the school in a structured environment that was facilitated

really drove forward how we address those student needs and how we were able to assess them as the process was going.”

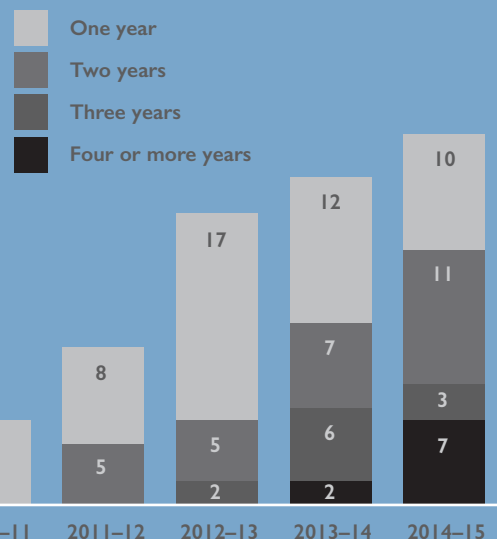
April Leong, founding principal of Liberation Diploma Plus, had signed her school up for the Transfer School Common Core Institute, an initiative of the NYCDOE OPSR, and, over three years, had the opportunity to work with Eskolta in the design of new materials. As Leong recounts, “Eskolta teamed up with Liberation and played a major role in helping us build and establish schoolwide systems. So Eskolta helped guide our thinking process. They helped guide the planning process.”

“Overall, I am satisfied with the work [my Eskolta facilitator] did on the project.”

Agree or Strongly Agree  
Slightly Agree  
Disagree



Schools Working with Eskolta







*“I think it’s easy to just throw a policy at teachers and to tell them, ‘Do this,’ but what Eskolta has been doing is facilitating that process and fostering our own learning, because just like our students, we are also learners.”*

**Joseph Hayden**

*Teacher, Liberation Diploma Plus*

The work of the group at Liberation produced a resource packet of student self-assessments, sample evidence, and tested strategies that have helped Hayden and his colleagues to re-engage some of their hardest-to-reach students. “I’m profoundly proud of what we did in our group,” Hayden says. “We’ve been developing an academic behavior rubric in which we track our students on their academic behaviors. We have several different indicators, including persistence, work habits, self-regulation, and engagement.”

“They could have easily come in and said, ‘Here’s

a perfect way to do it,’ but they didn’t,” Leong says, reflecting on the success of the project with Eskolta. “They allowed it to be a collaborative practice coming from the inquiry team and out of the teachers so that teachers owned the work; they became a lot more responsive to the work, and Eskolta’s role was really helping with the articulation of it and bringing those big ideas together, and then coming up with nice clean protocols for us to follow.”

Hayden agrees, saying that that sort of collaborative work allowed for growth not only in the students but also in him as a teacher. ■

*Bronx Haven High School*

# Partners in Success: A Principal Strategizes Change

**L**UCINDA MENDEZ, principal of Bronx Haven Community High School, knows what it is like to work with adults on their professional development. “I was a coach prior to becoming a principal, and I really believe that professional development and growth happen at the school level on a continuous basis, as opposed to one-shot events or even a series of workshops that are off-site.”

A key factor in the success of Eskolta’s work is our relationship with school leaders.

A hands-on, collaborative approach with school leaders helps make strategic change possible. “With Eskolta,” Mendez says, “it’s really about creating a system, a schedule, and a plan to execute.” Those systems and structures can make all the difference in moving a school

*“Working with Eskolta supports me in figuring out what are the best structures to ensure that the work is done and reflected on and revised, but also that there’s a sustainable system in the school that’s going to hold that. Eskolta helps me think through that.”*

**Lucinda Mendez**

*Principal, Bronx Haven High School*



forward. “A lot of times,” Lucinda continues, “we think about what we want to teach teachers and what instructional goals we have, but we don’t really think about the work that it takes to implement it and make it a system or structure that remains and sustains in the school.”

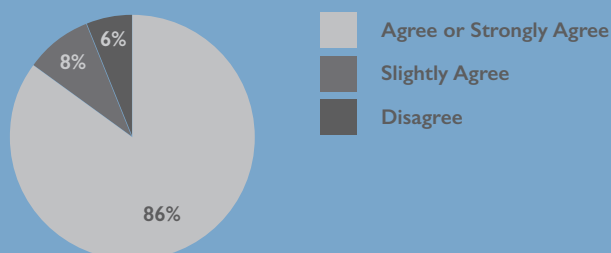
Through its involvement in the Transfer School Common Core Institute, Bronx Haven was able to partner with Eskolta and get help establishing a plan and schedule to strategically move forward a new project to engage students. Out of this plan, the work quickly moved beyond just the school leader. We established a team of teachers to come together to design and test a solution to the problem of low student skills.

Through their work with us, Bronx Haven began integrating more time for feedback, revisions, and formative assessment in classes. At first, there was some concern that scores on their statewide Regents exams would drop. Instead, Regents scores improved in every subject in each year of the three-year project.

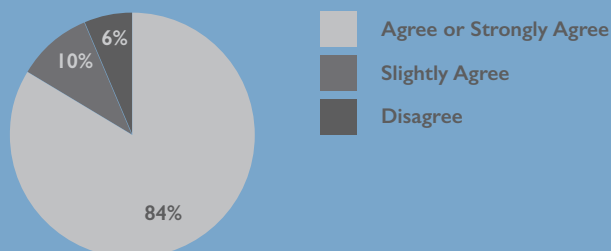
That outcome tells only a small part of the story. Since changing classroom practice to build in more time for feedback, Bronx Haven has seen a shift in teacher practice and teacher discussion that has in turn had a dramatic effect on student thinking and grades. Students who once avoided conferences now seek them out; students who were once lost as to how to improve work now submit revisions and sustain greater effort; teachers regularly use feedback interactions to guide their instruction; and counselors use insight from feedback interactions to inform their work with students.

“Kids have changed the way they speak about their work,” Mendez reports. “Daily grading and daily check-ins communicate: We’re checking in with you daily, we care about your performance. This drives belonging, value, and attendance.” ■

“Eskolta facilitators helped our team integrate outside research and our own experiences.”



“The work that we undertook with Eskolta this year is likely to continue next year.”





*The Creston Academy Report*

# Sharing What Works: A District Makes Policy Practical

**W**HEN THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR of instructional policy for the New York City Department of Education wanted to understand how policies issued from her office were translating into school-level change, she turned to us.

Julie Leopold, whose position places her in charge of formulating annual policy expectations for the largest urban public school district in the United States, felt that Eskolta was the perfect partner for this work “because they spend significant time understanding where schools are challenged, they are able to write case studies for us that feel relevant, that feel grounded, that give other schools ideas that fit with the current challenges.”

From 2012 to 2015, Eskolta conducted interviews and focus groups with staff at Creston Academy for Responsibility and Excellence, a middle school in the Bronx, watching the school’s work evolve through three rounds of policy guidance from the Central Office. Our findings helped the City refine their expectations each year and informed the development of policy supportive of schools.

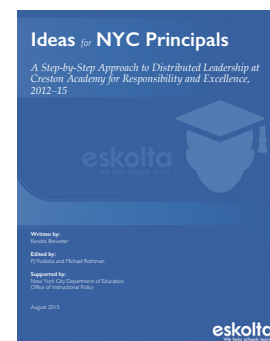
At Creston Academy, the school’s approach to employing a model of distributed leadership that empowered teachers to take on important support for their colleagues was key to its ability to meet the City’s expectations. In September 2015, the City published a guide and video that we had developed outlining Creston Academy’s approach with step-by-step guidance. The NYCDOE distributed our report to every superintendent and principal in New York City,

part of a package of guidance on how leaders can help their schools and students succeed. Our codification helped New York City make teacher leadership a practical and tangible practice that others could adapt from a success story in the system.

“Eskolta is unique in that it’s an organization that spends time in schools doing real work with schools to move practice and help students succeed, but also brings key learnings back to the Central Office that we can use to help us as we develop policies, to help us as we coach other schools,” Leopold explains, relating why her office has turned to Eskolta for four years running, “whereas I feel like other organizations usually sit in either one niche or the other; they’re either an evaluation organization that sits outside the system or they’re an organization that works inside schools and knows each school individually well. I see Eskolta stepping into a school and getting to know that school well, but also stepping back and telling a story across schools that is helpful to the Central Office.” ■

## Ideas for NYC Principals

A Step-by-Step Approach to Distributed Leadership at Creston Academy for Responsibility and Excellence, 2012–15



*“Unlike when I’ve hired evaluation organizations in the past, with Eskolta I’m hiring an organization that understands schools and tells the story in a way that’s helpful to schools.”*

**Julie Leopold**

*Executive Director of the Office of  
Instructional Policy, NYCDOE*





# Building Community

Eskolta's fifth annual New York City Transfer School Conference was the largest gathering in New York City for educators serving overage, under-credited youth. More than 800 educators from 40 transfer schools came together to engage in a day of learning, sharing, and connecting with colleagues from around the city. The conference featured nearly 70 workshops led by transfer school educators and partner

organizations, two panels—one on the role of youth development in college and career readiness and another on the experiences of transfer school alumni who went on to college after graduating—and talks by special guest speaker Dr. Vanessa Rodriguez and keynote speaker Dr. Michelle Fine. For the first time in its history, the conference also featured students as both facilitators and participants.



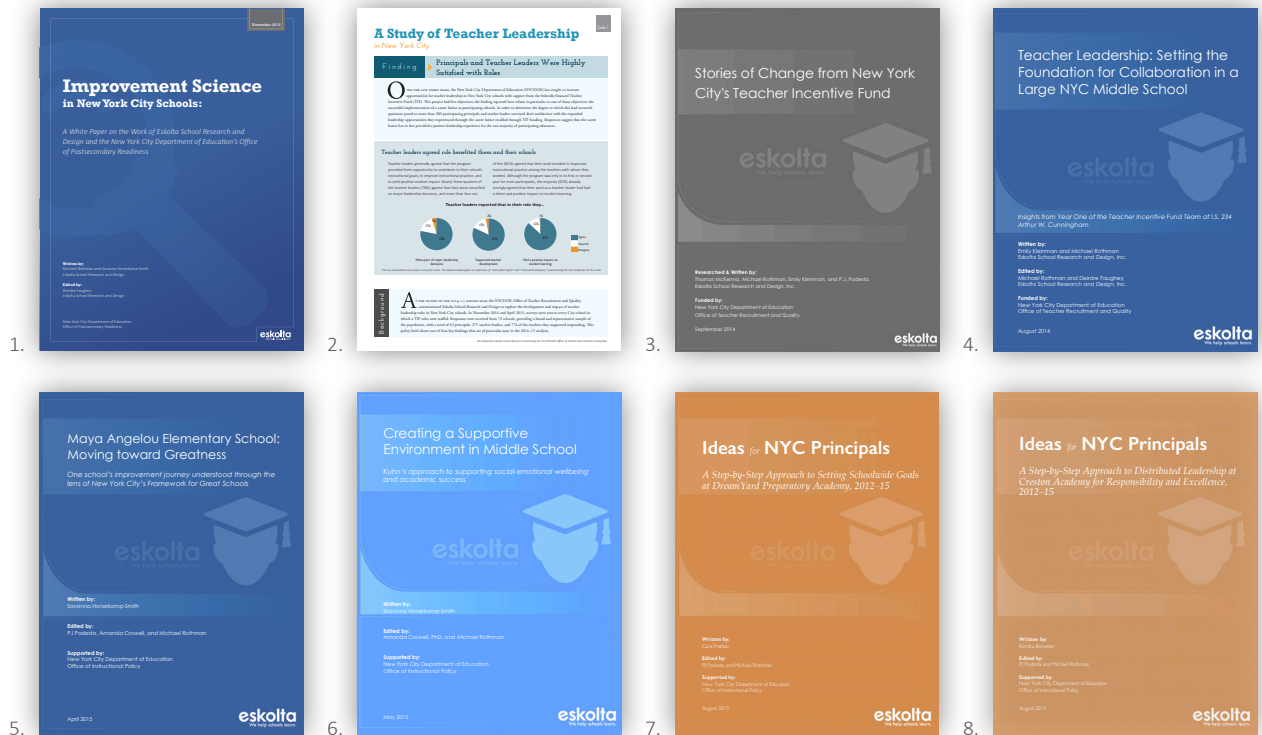






# Our Research

In 2014–15, Eskolta was commissioned by the NYCDOE to publish a range of research studies, intended to inform policy, share insights from educators' experiences at the school level, and provide exemplars across different areas of work. Below is a selection of titles:



- 1. Improvement Science in New York City Schools:** A White Paper on the Work of Eskolta School Research and Design and the New York City Department of Education's Office of Postsecondary Readiness  
**NYCDOE Office of Postsecondary Readiness**
- 2. A Study of Teacher Leadership in New York City**  
**NYCDOE Office of Teacher Recruitment and Quality**
- 3. Stories of Change from New York City's Teacher Incentive Fund**  
**NYCDOE Office of Teacher Recruitment and Quality**
- 4. Teacher Leadership:** Setting the Foundation for Collaboration as a Teacher Leader. Insights from Year one of the Teacher Incentive Fund team at I.S. 234 Arthur W. Cunningham  
**NYCDOE Office of Teacher Recruitment and Quality**
- 5. Maya Angelou Elementary School: Moving toward Greatness:** One School's Improvement Journey Understood Through the Lens of New York City's Framework for Great Schools  
**NYCDOE Office of Instructional Policy**
- 6. Creating a Supportive Environment in Middle School:** Kuhn's Approach to Supporting Social-emotional Wellbeing and Academic Success by Leveraging Deep Knowledge of Students  
**NYCDOE Office of Instructional Policy**
- 7. Ideas for NYC Principals:** A Step-by-Step Approach to Distributed Leadership at Creston Academy for Responsibility and Excellence, 2012–15  
**NYCDOE Office of Instructional Policy**
- 8. Ideas for NYC Principals:** A Step-by-Step Approach to Setting Schoolwide Goals at DreamYard Preparatory School, 2012–15  
**NYCDOE Office of Instructional Policy**



Find our publications in full at  
[eskolta.org/what-we-do/research-products](http://eskolta.org/what-we-do/research-products)

# Financials

## Revenues (in thousands) – Accrual Basis

|                                | FY14    | FY15    |
|--------------------------------|---------|---------|
| Contracts with public agencies | \$1,707 | \$1,766 |
| Surplus/Deficit                | \$481   | \$412   |

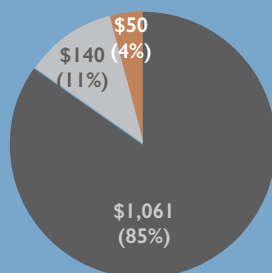
## Net Assets (in thousands) – Accrual Basis

|                                | FY14  | FY15  |
|--------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Contracts with public agencies | \$54  | \$535 |
| Surplus/Deficit                | \$481 | \$412 |
| End of Year                    | \$535 | \$947 |

## Expense by Category – Accrual Basis

Program Services
  Administrative
  Fundraising

**FY 14**  
(in thousands)



**FY 15**  
(in thousands)

