

2009 CITY BUDGET & LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES: Issue Backgrounder: EDUCATION

IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES FOR IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

A majority of children in New York City's public schools are from immigrant families. Many enter the New York City public school system with little to no English language skills, having been raised with a different native language.

Almost one in seven students are classified as English language learners (ELLs), comprising 150,000 students in New York City schools. English language learners face huge obstacles to academic success: although they have not yet had the opportunity to learn English, they are responsible for meeting academic requirements in science, math, and the other subjects.

An additional challenge is the fact that more than half of parents of public school students in New York City are not native English speakers themselves, creating a barrier impossible for many families who want to play a part in their children's education.

The school system needs to do a much better job in serving students from immigrant families. **Barely a quarter of English language learners graduate within four years—**

less than half the rate of English Proficient students. **More than half of English language learner students never earn a high school diploma in New York City.**

Immigrant students are being held to tougher promotion and graduation standards without receiving the help that they need and that was promised by the city, state, and federal governments. There are too few programs for English language learners from pre-kindergarten through high school.

Moreover, too many immigrant parents are unable to get involved in their child's education, due to language and other barriers. A Chancellor's Regulation (A-663) to help limited-English-speaking parents get more involved in schools was issued in 2006, guiding schools on how to provide language access and increasing funding for translation and interpretation. Monitoring efforts, however, reveal that the city is falling far short.

We urge Mayor Bloomberg, the City Council, and the Department of Education to stop the dropout crisis facing English language learners and students with an interrupted formal education (SIFE).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Increase funding and instruction for English language learners.

Invest in English Language Learner students who are at a high risk of dropping out, including students with an interrupted formal education (SIFE), long-term English language learners and adolescent newcomers.

Hold schools accountable for providing communication assistance to enable immigrant parents to participate in their children's education.

Recruit qualified teachers and staff to instruct English language learners, and increase the number of programs for these students.



Detailed Recommendations:

Strengthen funding and instruction for students learning English.

- *New York City should use new federal economic stimulus resources to fully fund the education budget and to reach the students who need it the most, including English language learners, and continue to fund the \$7 million English language learner Incentive Grant.*
- *The city must address the bilingual and ESL teacher shortage, encourage experienced teachers to work in low-performing schools, and provide more opportunities for teachers to get the specialized skills necessary to teach ELL students.*
- *We urge Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Klein to issue a citywide, district, and school-level strategy for improving outcomes for English language learners, and document that funds are being spent on appropriate programs to improve educational outcomes for these students.*
- *We urge Chancellor Klein to invest in better assessment tools for identifying these students, ensuring personalized instruction and smaller class sizes, and ensuring pathways to graduation for English language learners and newly arriving adolescent students.*
- *The city needs to guarantee English language learners equal access to small schools by (1) expanding the capacity of all small schools to provide quality ELL instruction and support services, and (2) increasing the number of small high schools in immigrant communities. The city also needs to increase English language learner enrollment in pre-kindergarten, charter schools, multiple-pathways, and talented-and-gifted programs.*

Invest in ELLs who are at a high risk of dropping out including Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE), Long-term ELLs and adolescent newcomers. *Nearly half of all ELL students fit into one or more of these categories, yet there are few supports in place to address their particular needs. We urge Chancellor Klein to expand the options for these students by investing in better assessment tools for identifying SIFE students, ensuring personalized instruction and smaller class sizes for both SIFE and Long-term ELLs, and ensuring pathways to graduation for newly arriving adolescent students.*

Eliminate barriers that prevent immigrant parents from participating in their children's education.

We urge the City Council and the Department of Education to ensure full implementation of Chancellor's Regulation, and to provide the initial \$12 million commitment for language services. We also urge the City Council to fund an Immigrant Parent Education Initiative for community-based organizations to do intensive outreach and educate immigrant parents about the school system.