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Improve Educational Outcomes for Immigrant Students

Nearly one in seven students in New York City schools is in the process of learning English and is classified as an English language learner (ELL). Numbering around 150,000, ELLs constitute a sizable portion of the student population. These students come from a variety of backgrounds with a diversity of skills and needs. Students with an interrupted formal education, immigrant youth, long-term ELLs, and special education ELLs make up growing numbers of middle and high school ELLs.

English language learners face huge obstacles to academic success. About two-thirds of children who have not yet learned English are living in poverty, compared with only one-third of English-proficient children. Their parents are more likely to have had only limited schooling. These students face the daunting challenge of learning English and adjusting to a new country, all while catching up to meet academic requirements in science, math, and other subjects.

Dropout Crisis Facing ELL Students

The school system needs to do a much better job of serving students from immigrant families. Barely one in four English language learners graduates within four years—less than half the rate of English-proficient students. One in two English language learners never earns a high school diploma in New York City. Mayor Bloomberg, the City Council, and the Department of Education must stop the dropout crisis facing English language learners and students with an interrupted formal education.

Despite some important progress with elementary school ELLs and some recent efforts by the city to address the dropout crisis facing immigrant students, too many immigrant and ELL students continue to fall through the cracks. Barely one in four ELL students (23%) graduates high school in four years—less than half the rate of English-proficient students—and only one in ten ELLs graduates with a Regents Diploma. We urge

Recommendations

- Reverse the immigrant and ELL dropout crisis by fostering school, family and community partnerships.
- The DOE must eliminate the language barriers that prevent family engagement in schools by ensuring the full implementation of Chancellor's Regulation A-663.
- We urge the DOE remove obstacles families face entering their child's school because of inconsistencies in the type of identification cards accepted by security guards. The DOE must create a uniform standard for parental access to schools.

Mayor Bloomberg and the Department of Education to better address the needs of middle school and high school students learning English, particularly those who are at the highest risk of dropping out, like students with interrupted formal education and immigrant youth.

School, Family, Community Partnerships

We urge New York City to build a partnership between schools and families that recognizes and fosters communities' histories, languages, cultural

backgrounds, and different family structures. The Department of Education (DOE) needs to eliminate basic barriers to family engagement, such as language and information barriers, and remove the obstacles that families face when trying to enter their child's school due to confusion and inconsistent policies regarding the type of identification cards accepted by school security guards. We also urge the DOE to support leadership development for parents and youth, foster meaningful school-community partnerships, and expand professional development for school and district staff in culturally-sensitive family engagement practices regarding the type of identification cards accepted by school security guards. We also urge the DOE to support leadership development for parents and youth, foster meaningful school-community partnerships, and expand professional development for school and district staff in culturally-sensitive family engagement practices.

Detailed Recommendations:

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

- The DOE needs to eliminate basic barriers to family engagement by ensuring full implementation of Chancellor's Regulation A-663 to eliminate language barriers for families that are still in the process of learning English.
- We urge the DOE to remove obstacles families face when entering their child's school because of confusion and inconsistent policies regarding the type of identification cards accepted by security guards in schools.
- We urge the DOE to ensure timely access to information, using effective communication tools that address various literacy levels and family structures (e.g., multiple caregivers), and translating the information into languages that parents and families understand. We also urge the DOE to create district- and school-based Family Resource Centers, to serve as a one-stop, drop-in center where parent coordinators and district family advocates



can provide key information, technical assistance, community resources, and workshops for parents and youth.

Strengthen funding and instruction for students learning English.

- We urge Mayor Bloomberg to protect our schools in these difficult economic times and deliver on our state's constitutional obligation to our children. We urge the DOE to invest in ELLs who are at high risk of dropping out, including students with an interrupted formal education (SIFEs), 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 (1) expand the options for SIFE students by creating a funding mechanism for SIFE services, (2) develop a definition and a statewide diagnostic test for identifying SIFE students, and (3) provide training and support for schools and hold them accountable for serving and improving outcomes for SIFEs and other high-risk ELLs.
- 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.
- 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 ELL enrollment in pre-kindergarten, charter schools, multiple-pathways, and talented-and-gifted programs.