

**Immigrants' Day of Action in Albany, March 2, 2010**

## **STRENGTHEN FUNDING & INSTRUCTION FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

The NYIC seeks to improve the quality of our public schools and expand educational opportunities for immigrants and English-language-learner (ELL) students. Our goals include securing adequate funding for our schools and ELL programs, strengthening oversight and coordination of ELL services, and implementing the Immigrant & ELL Success Agenda—a comprehensive blueprint for ELL educational reform. We are also working to strengthen opportunities for high-risk ELLs, including Students with Interrupted Formal Education.

ELL students face huge obstacles to academic success. ELLs are more likely to live in poverty, to have parents with limited schooling, and to be enrolled in “linguistically-segregated” schools.<sup>1</sup> ELLs who were not born in the U.S. face additional obstacles: not only must they learn a new language, but they must also adjust to a new country and a new school system—all the while trying to catch up to a moving train and meet promotion and graduation standards.

- There are more than 200,000 ELLs in New York State, representing 13% of the total student population.
- More than three-quarters are enrolled in New York City and the Big 4 Cities of Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and Yonkers.
- More than half the children in New York City come from immigrant families, and more than half of NYC school parents are not native English speakers.
- Barely a quarter of ELL students graduate within four years—less than half the rate of English-proficient students. More than half (50.5%) of ELLs in New York City never earn a high school diploma.
- Remarkably, ELLs who receive quality instruction and learn English have the highest graduation rate (67%) of all students.

Unfortunately, our public education system is not succeeding with ELL students. New York State lags behind in ELL achievement in nearly every measure of educational attainment. There are too few quality ELL programs and interventions 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.

### **Recommendations:**

We urge Governor Paterson, the State Legislature, and the Board of Regents to take immediate action to stem the English-language-learner dropout crisis and do more to help newly arrived immigrant students and those with an interrupted formal education.

1. **Restore \$1.4 billion in school cuts, and ensure Foundation Aid funding to avoid destabilizing our schools. Target possible Race to the Top funds toward ELL strategies.** The governor and the legislature should protect our schools in these difficult economic times and deliver on our state’s constitutional obligation to our children. They must ensure that New York City and other districts with large English-language-learner (ELL) populations get their fair share.

2. **Create a cabinet-level position in the NYS Education Department to oversee ELL student achievement.** The Board of Regents and the NYS Education Department should create this position so that it has authority across departments and reports directly to the commissioner. It is a critical step in strengthening oversight, coordination, and accountability of ELL services and achievement. Low ELL student achievement is a growing crisis; turning it around will require resource investment and strong leadership from the NYS Education Department.
3. **Tie ELL-generated funds to ELL students and programs under the Contracts for Excellence.** The governor and legislature must ensure that existing Foundation Aid from years one and two—aid generated by and intended for ELLs based on the 0.5 ELL funding-formula weight—actually reaches ELL students in the form of quality ESL and bilingual instruction and support services.
4. **Issue and enforce stronger Contract for Excellence regulations for ELL programs. Help school districts develop quality ELL programs.** The Board of Regents and the State Education Department should promptly issue regulations that set performance goals and outline quality ELL program options under the sixth ELL “allowable activities” category. Quality ELL program options include:
  - A. Expanding academic instruction time through extended school day, Saturday academies, and tutoring;
  - B. Expanding student supports through guidance, mentoring, and social support;
  - C. Enhancing learning resources and materials, including technology and software;
  - D. Reducing class sizes for ELLs depending on grade and ELL concentration;
  - E. Expanding pre-K and full-day Kindergarten opportunities with targeted ELL interventions;
  - F. Providing ongoing professional development for all teachers on ELL methodologies;
  - G. Strengthening planning, preparation, and support for ELL teachers;
  - H. Enhancing parent engagement, family outreach, and community partnerships.
5. **Strengthen programs and services for Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFEs).<sup>ii</sup>** We urge the Board of Regents and the NYS Education Department to (1) improve systems to identify, assess, and place SIFE students; (2) review current SIFE initiatives, and develop and implement a comprehensive plan for SIFE program creation that holds districts accountable for serving SIFEs; and (3) create professional development programs for SIFE teachers, and (4) review graduation time requirements for SIFE students.
6. **Preserve the \$12.5 billion Bilingual Categorical Grants Program.** In doing so, the legislature can expand and replicate quality ELL programs and enable school districts to hire interpreters for key parent-teacher activities and pay for translation of important school documents for parents.

---

<sup>i</sup> Linguistically segregated schools are those where more than one-third of the school’s total enrollment is also classified as ELL. Source: Margie McHugh, LEP and Immigrant Students in US Schools (*October 19, 2006*), National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy.

<sup>ii</sup> In New York City, one in ten ELL students is a SIFE, and statewide figures are likely comparable. SIFE students are generally several years behind in schooling in literacy and math compared with their peers, and by definition, entered the U.S. school system after the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. SIFE students are disproportionately represented in middle and high school grades; they make up a significant portion of ELLs who struggle to pass 8<sup>th</sup> grade ELA exams and have a high risk of dropping out of school. There are very few schools in New York City, and virtually none outside of the city, that can provide these students with an appropriate education.