



## NYIC 2016 New York City Policy & Budget Priorities Education for New Americans

### Recommendation

Improve cultural competency of New York City public schools.

- **Enact a Chancellor's Regulation that establishes clear cultural competency standards for schools.** The Department of Education (DOE) should establish via Chancellor's Regulation a set of cultural competency standards that are informed by partnerships with community based organizations, so that schools can build an institutional attitude of cultural awareness and respect. These standards can be used as a tool to identify challenges and target areas for improvement and to develop teacher/ administrator trainings, more culturally responsive curricula, anti-bullying initiatives, and identity development workshops.
- **Integrate cultural competency into the Borough Field Support Center Language Access Coordinator role.** The DOE should incorporate cultural competency monitoring of schools into the new Field Language Access Coordinator positions. As language services are a large part of cultural competency, these coordinators will already have the baseline knowledge, skills, and instincts to readily assess other areas of cultural competency. Professional development should be offered for coordinators to continuously build cultural competency skills and remain aware of any demographic changes in schools.
- **Establish budget allocations to support cultural competency initiatives in schools.** The City should provide necessary resources for schools and the DOE to successfully carry out cultural competency initiatives, including partnerships with community-based nonprofits, service providers and partners. Schools who want to improve in this area should be given the support to succeed.

### Community Need and Background

In 2011, 18% of all NYC public school students came from 197 other countries. Over 39% of students come from homes where English is not the primary language and more than 171 languages are spoken. However, the rich diversity of NYC is not adequately reflected in New York City schools' curricula, professional development, or teaching practices and instead privileges mainstream culture, norms, and knowledge. There are even greater costs to recently arrived immigrant families who often are learning English, adjusting to a new country and a new school system. The great diversity of New York City's students and families means that extra care must be taken for immigrant families who mediate their daily experiences and perspectives on education through their cultural lenses.

While improving language access is an important first step to reaching these families, utilizing the right cultural competency approach is vital as well. Building cultural competency in schools helps to bridge different ways of learning, communicating and understanding the various ways in which students demonstrate their proficiencies. Schools that lack cultural competency deter families from being fully engaged with their schools, likely contributing to low achievement and increased dropout rates.

### Opportunity and Talking Points

At a time when anti-immigrant sentiment is on the rise, we need to ensure that immigrant students and families do not feel alienated and left out by their schools, an institution that is often the centers of their communities. With an urgent need for action, this is a key opportunity for NYC schools to become the nation's model for institutionalizing cultural competency.

- Having standards will help build accountability into the system and give immigrant parents, who often find it difficult to navigate the school system, a reference to understand their rights and the courses of action that can be taken to ensure their children's safety and well-being.
- Immigrant parents are already prone to be disengaged due to numerous other factors in their lives. Having standards will help prepare schools to effectively communicate with immigrant families and improve parent engagement by providing a welcoming environment.
- Culturally competent schools can help students make connections between their home and school cultures, involve families and the community in student learning, and inform quality instruction and enriching curricula - factors that will surely foster achievement for immigrant students.

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