



Pandemic Response Education Platform for Immigrant Families

Public education has undergone a seismic shift overnight due to the COVID-19 outbreak. We are grateful for New York City’s educators and school staff, who have risked their safety to teach youth, support families, and feed the hungry. However, on a systemic level, this unimaginable moment has underscored profound inequities in our school system and then compounded them. Our immigrant communities are incredibly resilient in a time of unprecedented hardship. Yet, we know that more must be done in order to support their unique needs. The NYIC has outlined the following steps to drive more equitable approaches.

To support New York City’s needs, the state must make critical investments to sustain our education systems. Expanding funding for our schools is essential for school districts to equitably and effectively respond and avoid devastating cuts to their budgets. Honoring all current contracts with Adult Literacy Education providers, and increasing funding for these programs moving forward is pivotal to support parents in navigating this crisis.

On the local level, more than 30 multi-ethnic groups active in the **NYIC’s Education Collaborative** have provided critical grassroots input to shape New York City-focused recommendations below. We thank the New York City Department of Education (DOE) for their partnership and for addressing other recommendations already made by the Education Collaborative, notably by expanding access to Regional Enrichment Centers. Yet much more must be done to ensure equity and full access for our immigrant youth and families.

Immigrant families are in crisis. Family members living in close proximity are sick, they’ve lost their jobs and have tremendous anxiety regarding food, housing, and other essentials. In order for students to be able to learn during this challenging time, they must be supported in accessing basic necessities. In addition, many Limited English Proficient (LEP) and low-digital literacy families are not receiving information and still lack devices.

We call on the NYC Department of Education, City Council and Mayor to immediately:

Strengthen School-Family Engagement. Schools’ personal connections with youth and parents are essential in relaying information to “hard-to-reach” families and addressing individual challenges families are facing.

- **Make it the first priority for schools to reach out to Multilingual Learners/English Language Learners (MLLs/ELLs) and LEP families** individually to relay essential information and provide support to help them stay engaged in school, with a special focus on families with whom schools have had no contact to date. We recognize the DOE has to pay significant attention to transitioning to remote instruction and continuity of learning. However, the DOE needs to prioritize ensuring school communities have enough time and resources to help address families’ basic needs.
- **Provide schools with essential information** on meals, devices, and other supports so that they have accurate information to deliver to youth and families. This information should be updated daily and available in multiple languages to facilitate easy sharing. Schools should also be supported with information on access to healthcare, food banks, and rent and utility relief.



- **Partner with phone providers to ensure continuity of phone services for families who can no longer afford them**, as phones are essential for contacting vulnerable and low-income families.

Collect System-Wide Data on the Impact of the Pandemic on Students. In order to effectively target supports to youth who have fallen behind during the pandemic, the DOE must first build a system-level database of *who* is falling behind.

- **Collect and make publicly available school system-level data on student subgroups** that are not engaged in remote learning. Use the data to identify areas of need, deploy and target supports to vulnerable students, and identify best practices moving forward.

Address the Long-standing Adult Literacy Funding Crisis. COVID-19 and the shift to remote learning has laid bare the immense, inequitable gap in digital literacy, systems navigation skills and access to information between immigrant parents and many other New Yorkers.

- **Restore and baseline \$12 Million in adult literacy funding** to stabilize our adult literacy system and its ability to provide the English language and other key skills families desperately seek.
- **Fund an Adult Literacy pilot program** that reflects a rate that will enable programs to provide high quality, comprehensive services that all adult students deserve at the true cost of programming.

Develop a Comprehensive Plan to Address the Needs of Youth Left Behind. Due to gaps in information, lack of access to technology, family crises, and other reasons, many immigrant youth have already been left behind by online learning. The DOE needs a plan to help them catch up now and once schools re-open.

- **Implement low-tech learning strategies alongside online learning**, particularly during the immediate transition. TV-based instruction, mailed school-based packets and other strategies should be widely used to deliver instructional content and materials that are accessible in families' home languages.
- **Develop extra supports immediately to ensure retention and grade promotion** through online weekend tutoring and by substantially expanding after-school and summer education services, using data to target those services to all students left behind.

Pay Special Attention to Multilingual Learners/English Language Learners (MLLs/ELLs) and MLLs/ELLs with Disabilities. These students have greater challenges with self-directed and online learning. MLLs/ELLs already have the worst drop-out rate of any subgroup in the city, particularly tragic since they outperform their native English-speaking peers with the right supports. MLLs/ELLs with disabilities are especially vulnerable.

- **Leverage MLL/ELL and Special Education experts and lessons from other states** to implement best practices in remote ENL instruction and offer additional guidance for content area teachers.
- **Ensure that MLLs/ELLs with disabilities are receiving their IEP services** and that families have an opportunity to provide input into the development of their special education remote learning plans.



- **Ensure that newcomer immigrant students are integrated** into their new schools and have quick access to devices and wifi.
- **Fund a pilot program to expand MLLs/ELLs' access to transfer schools outside of Manhattan** so that more youth can go to schools that address their increased financial responsibilities and greater need for wrap-around supports in the aftermath of COVID-19.

Deploy Multi-Pronged Approaches to Disseminate Current Information. Many immigrant families do not have access to information online due to digital or low literacy issues.

- **Review language access resources** with schools to support utilization.
- Consistently use **local and ethnic media** (TV and radio).
- Make **proactive one-on-one calls and robocalls**, prioritizing LEP families.
- Send **translated physical letters** out to families with simplified overviews.
- Continue to **engage and update community-based partners**.
- **Enable immigrant community-based organizations to develop and launch three language services worker-owned cooperatives**—one for African Languages of Limited Diffusion (LLDs), one for Asian LLDs, and one for indigenous Latin American LLDs—by increasing the funding for the NYC Council's Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative by \$750,000 dollars.

Expand Social-Emotional Support. COVID-19 exacerbates the trauma immigrant youth and their families were already experiencing due to the anti-immigrant national climate.

- **Provide professional learning opportunities** for educators to adopt trauma-informed practices when engaging with students and families during COVID-19.
- **Make guidelines available for social workers** and strategies to provide services given privacy constraints.
- **Expand the number of bilingual social workers and guidance counselors** to address the impacts of children who have lost caregivers and families who are destabilized by the virus.
- **Ensure mental health services extend to undocumented and mixed-status families.**
- **Make a public call to other cities and states for mental health professionals** to add capacity to the system and allow NYCDOE's bilingual mental health professionals to focus on families who have not been connected to their school communities.

Continue to Expand Regional Enrichment Centers to Cover More Front-Line Families and Those Most at Risk. Without a safe place to send their children, many immigrant workers on the front lines of the City's response to COVID-19 face terrible choices.

- Include the children of **all essential workers** under the Governor's Executive Order.
- **Include vulnerable populations** such as children separated from families due to ICE action, students in temporary housing and homeless shelters, and student-parents enrolled in NYC DOE schools, and their children.

Support Child Care Providers. Certain child care providers are still open and playing critical roles serving immigrant families on the front lines.

- Ensure that providers have **communications guidelines** and **support on hygiene protocols**.
- Conduct a **needs assessment** and **provide adequate food and cleaning supplies**.



Signatures:

Advocates for Children of New York
Agudath Israel of America Community Services
Brooklyn Defender Services
Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY
Center for the Integration and Advancement of New Americans, Inc. (CIANA)
Chinese Progressive Association
CIDNY
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York
Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF)
Committee for Hispanic Children and Families
CPC (Chinese American Planning Council)
EduColor
Faith in New York
Fifth Avenue Committee/Neighbors Helping Neighbors
Flanbwayan Haitian Literacy Project
Haitian Americans United for Progress
Hamilton-Madison House
Immschools
Internationals Network for Public Schools
Language & Literacy Resource Center
Legal Services NYC
Lehman College Adult Learning Center
Literacy Assistance Center
Literacy Inc.
Masa
Mixteca Organization Inc.
New York Immigration Coalition
New York Math Academy and Coaching Services
New York State Youth Leadership Council
Next100
NYC Coalition for Educational Justice
Queens Public Library
Safe Passage Project
Sanctuary For Families
Sauti Yetu
The Alliance for Quality Education (AQE)
The Arab American Association of New York
The Center for Immigrant Education and Training - LAGCC
The Collaborative for Inclusive Education
UJA-Federation of NY
UnLocal
YMCA of Greater New York