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PRESS RELEASE

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***CITYWIDE SUMMER SCHOOL REPORT UNCOVERS MAJOR PROBLEMS
AND DEMANDS THAT SYSTEM PLAY BY THE RULES***

New York City. Friday, August 25, 2000. Advocates for Children of New York and the New York Immigration Coalition today released a report entitled ***“Playing by the Rules When the School System Doesn’t: Immigrant Families and Summer School in New York City.”*** The report, which is based on surveys of over 1100 parents and students citywide, uncovers problems faced by immigrant and refugee families who sought to comply with the Board of Education’s new policies regarding promotion and mandatory summer school. Eight community groups from around the City worked directly with parents and students to gather information for the report. The report focused on immigrant families since over half of New York’s school-age population is comprised of students who are immigrants or the children of immigrants.

“While the Board of Education deserves credit for running what was, for the most part, an orderly summer school program, they must also take responsibility for correcting many of its failings, particularly those that very disproportionately affected children from immigrant and refugee families,” said Jill Chaifetz, Executive Director of Advocates for Children (AFC), one of New York’s leading education advocacy organizations. “The results of the hundreds of surveys completed for our report show a system that repeatedly broke the rules by not providing education services that children needed, or by failing to communicate with parents about summer school,” she continued. “They also showed families struggling to decipher what was expected of them, trying to comply with the new rules and regulations, usually with no help from the school system.”

Survey respondents included 650 students enrolled in 173 schools and 457 parents with children enrolled in summer school in 104 schools. Major findings from the survey responses included less than 25% of parents and students reporting that they received notification about the likelihood that they would need to attend summer school by January 31st, the date by which the Board of Education reported that 86% of parents had received such letters. Parents and students surveyed also reported that academic support services were provided to students at-risk of not being promoted in less than 50% of cases, in contrast with the Board’s contention that over 80% had received such services, and when in fact ***all*** at-risk students were supposed to have received such services.

“What was most disappointing about our survey results was finding that some of the simplest things to improve attendance that the school system had said it would do were not done – like telling parents in a language they could understand that their child needed to attend summer school,” said Margie McHugh, Executive Director of the New York Immigration Coalition. “We also were shocked to find that so few students had received the academic support services that were supposed to have been provided to help prevent them from needing summer school,” McHugh continued. “The report shows that parents and students are trying to live up to the higher standards, but no-one seems to be making the system itself meet higher standards, or even play by the basic rules they said they would use to run the summer program.”

In what the groups releasing the report cited as one of their most alarming findings, the surveys of parents and students turned up large discrepancies in instruction services provided to students who were still learning the English language. “The most important thing schools need to do with most children from immigrant families is help them learn English,” said Ninaj Raoul, Executive Director of Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees, a community education and support group in Brooklyn. “Yet, the survey results show that many students who were receiving ESL and bilingual instruction during the school year didn’t get it during the summer, and many who weren’t getting it during the school year did,” she noted. “This has left many of us wondering how students who needed those services and didn’t get them were able to learn anything in summer school, and whether those who didn’t need them were just pushed into those classes based on the sound of their last name. Whatever the case may be, it’s clear that the system wasn’t taking the needs of these children seriously,” she concluded.

Community leaders who helped conduct the surveys in local neighborhoods and who participated in the release of the report expressed hope that the survey results would open the eyes of elected officials and school administrators to the reality in local schools. “Immigrants realize that the key to their children’s success in America is a good education,” said Saramaria Archila, Executive Director of the Latin American Integration Center in Woodside, Queens, an organization that focuses on immigrant integration and voting. “We are over half of the City’s workers and taxpayers, and we are tired of paying billions of dollars in taxes to support a school system that ignores the needs of our children and refuses to communicate with us,” she continued. “If the school system wants major reforms and policy changes to succeed, it cannot continue to neglect the needs of immigrant parents and students.”

To view the report in its entirety, access the Advocates for Children website at www.advocatesforchildren.org.

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