



**THE NEW YORK IMMIGRATION
COALITION**

275 Seventh Avenue, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10001
Tel: (212) 627-2227
Fax: (212) 627-9314



ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN

151 West 30th Street, Fifth Floor
New York, New York 10001
Phone: (212) 947-9779
Fax: (212) 947-9790
E-mail: info@advocatesforchildren.org

M e d i a R e l e a s e

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Contact: Jill Chaifetz 212-947-9779

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Margie McHugh 212-627-2227, x221

***RELEASE TODAY OF CITY PARENT SURVEY RESULTS;
LANGUAGE BARRIERS FOUND TO BLOCK SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT FOR
TENS OF THOUSANDS OF IMMIGRANT PARENTS***

Advocates for Children (AFC) and The New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC), in collaboration with eight community-based organizations from the New York metropolitan area, released a report today documenting the significant and widespread barriers facing parents who have limited English skills and who want to be involved in their child's school and education. The report, entitled *Denied At the Door: Language Barriers Block Immigrant Parents from School Involvement*, discusses the findings of a survey of nearly 1,000 parents regarding access to oral interpretation and written translation of materials in the school system. The report documents the startling lack of access to school-related information for parents who are not proficient in English, and outlines the numerous violations of federal, state and city laws and regulations in this area.

“After surveying nearly 1,000 parents whose primary language is not English, we found that almost one-half, 47%, of parents responding reported that they “never” or “rarely” receive written information from the school, school district, or Department of Education translated into their native language. The majority, 56%, of respondents also reported that they “never” or “rarely” receive oral interpretation of school-related information in their native language,” said Margie McHugh, Executive Director of the NYIC, an umbrella policy and advocacy organization for roughly 150 groups in New York that work with immigrants and refugees. “Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Klein have made substantial new investments to facilitate parent involvement,” she continued. “However, until they address the language barriers that prevent tens of thousands of City parents from having even the most basic access to school information, no other investments in parent involvement mechanisms can succeed.”

Other survey findings underscored the troubling lack of access for immigrant parents:

- Of the 342 surveys that identified the student to be in an ESL class, bilingual education program or both, one-third (34%) reported that the parent had not received information regarding either program in their native language.
- Sixty percent of the time when a parent with limited English proficiency attempted to contact their child's school the school used only English in response to parents making the effort to communicate.

- When asked if the student's school has ever asked the parent to sign documents asking for their consent that are not in the native language and the parent did not understand what s/he was signing, one quarter (26%) of survey respondents reported that the parent has indeed had to.

"There are clear federal, state and city laws and regulations mandating access to translated materials and oral interpretation at schools. What this study demonstrates is that the school system is in widespread violation of these mandates," said Jill Chaifetz, Executive Director of Advocates for Children, the City's leading education advocacy organization. "Parents, students and taxpayers lose as a result of this. The evidence is overwhelming that parental involvement is a key factor to a child's success in school. Without anybody to speak to, and no information to read in a language they can understand, such involvement becomes nearly impossible," she said.

The survey also found that lack of language access prevents participation by parents with limited English proficiency in school activities and hurts their child's school experience. "Over 75% of the parents we surveyed said they would actively participate in school activities if language services were available," said Ana Maria Archila, Executive Director of the Latin American Integration Center, a community organization with offices in Queens and Staten Island and one of the organizations that assisted in compiling the report. "Groups like mine are fed up, frankly, with seeing parents day after day who are desperate to help their children succeed in school but who can't get access to even the most basic school information," she continued. "How can we anyone expect parents to be partners in their children's education when everything from school closing notices, to report cards, to exam schedules, to holdover notices aren't written in a language they can understand? Laws and regulations have been in place for over 25 years saying the schools should be doing this. We think we've waited long enough for the City to take the obvious steps it needs to to address this problem," she said.

The report looked at the Los Angeles and Seattle school districts, two large urban school districts with significant immigrant populations and found that their systems were far more comprehensive than what is currently provided in New York. "Today's immigrants have the same hopes for their children as prior generations, but the stakes are higher for children of this generation – if they don't do well in school they are unlikely to succeed later in life," said Vladimir Epshteyn, Director of the Metropolitan Russian American Parents Association, another community partner in the report's compilation and release. "This is why Russian parents are uniting with parents of other immigrant communities to push for a comprehensive system of translation and interpretation services in New York's schools. New York, the nation's great immigrant city, should be an example for the rest of the country of how to help immigrant students and families succeed, not trailing behind so many other cities as we currently are."

The report's recommendations include immediate creation and implementation of a comprehensive language access system that meets federal *No Child Left Behind* requirements, as well as city and state regulations. Specific recommendations include creation of centralized translation and interpretation units and signage in schools informing parents of their right to language assistance. For more information and/or to arrange interviews with parents who have experienced language barriers in schools contact Jill Chaifetz of Advocates for Children at 212-822-9518 or 646-765-6125 or Margie McHugh of the New York Immigration Coalition at 212-627-2227, extension 221.

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The report can be downloaded at www.advocatesforchildren.org.