

Education Collaborative

Coordinated by the New York Immigration Coalition

Richard Carranza
Chancellor
NYC Department of Education
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007

April 24, 2020

Dear Chancellor Carranza,

We write to you today in response to news that the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) is considering instituting a grading and promotion policy in the context of remote instruction. We recognize the importance of reevaluating these policies during this time. Before any new policy goes into effect, we wanted to provide additional feedback and recommendations from our immigrant communities. As you are aware, the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored and compounded the inequities in our society and our educational system, which have consistently marginalized immigrants, English Language Learners (ELLs), and children of Limited English Proficient parents.

Immigrant families are in crisis right now. Many immigrant families are struggling, having to deal with illness, loss of employment, food anxiety, housing insecurity, and the risk of not meeting basic needs. Understandably, many families' current focus is on survival. Moreover, immigrant families we serve have largely not been informed in their language and via accessible media about what or when important things are happening such as the steps and criteria for getting technology, food, services, and support. Many immigrant parents did not receive access to technology or instructional packets for weeks, and some have yet to receive these supports which are necessary for having a chance at engaging in remote learning. These issues are compounded by the extreme income, technological, and literacy divides in our city.

Given these realities, we urge the DOE to:

Give full course credit, or "Pass," in lieu of formal grading systems and promote all students to the next grade level.

Giving grades at this time would be unjust and inequitable, including giving formal notations such as "needs improvement" or "incomplete." While we understand the need for keeping track of how students performed so that their needs are addressed when schools are back in session, any notations of how a student performed while schools were closed should be avoided unless they are done internally, in a non-family facing data system. Any formal grading policies reflected in students' transcripts or report cards would penalize students who have not been able to access remote learning due to no fault of their own. We cannot stress enough that many of our most vulnerable immigrant populations lack technology, English proficiency, digital literacy, basic utilities and resources including food and housing and some are experiencing personal or family trauma. Further, ELLs and students with disabilities have not been fully served by the NYC DOE according to state mandates and Individualized Education Programs during this crisis.

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Identify students who need additional supports through a separate mechanism and deliver supports in person.

It is critical that the NYC DOE have a system for identifying which students are in need of support following remote learning so that they are not left behind. Instead of using school transcripts or report cards for this purpose, the NYC DOE should use existing data systems and conduct assessments of students in person when it is safe to do so to determine students' levels and needs. These assessments should not be used to further exacerbate existing inequalities. Academic support should be provided *in person*, as this will be the most effective way to ensure students who have had difficulty with the online platforms receive the support they need. Any academic support provided over the summer should be made accessible to ELLs and students with disabilities.

All seniors graduate and over-age students are allowed to return to their respective schools for the 2020-21 School Year.

All students who were slated to graduate in June 2020 should be allowed to graduate. Seniors who were slated to graduate in August 2020 should be given learning opportunities this summer and should be allowed to graduate in August as planned. 21-year-old students who have not yet met graduation requirements must be offered summer instruction and be allowed to return to their high school for the 2020-21 school year, if they choose. The NYC DOE should encourage project-based learning to recognize youth's lived experiences during this crisis and so that they can demonstrate mastery of core competencies.

Offer robust educational opportunities throughout the school shutdown that are centered on critical consciousness, social-emotional support, and wellness.

Schools should make their best effort to provide high-quality and culturally responsive and sustaining education during the school shutdown. ELLs and students with disabilities are at risk of losing valuable progress without meaningful instruction. Robust academic and socio-emotional supports should be continued throughout the school year that center around students' experiences, leverage their critical thinking skills, and maximize their agency.

We understand the difficulties in resolving promotion and grading policies and identifying ways to respond to the ongoing needs of students. This is a time to rethink the purpose of schooling, grading, and promotion, and to center educational opportunities on the most important factors: learning, wellness, and equity.

cc:

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Advocates for Children of New York (AFC)

Alliance for Quality Education (AQE)

New York Immigration Coalition

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America On Tech
BACDYS (Bangladeshi American Community Development and Youth Services)
Brooklyn Community Board 7
BUILD NYC
Chinese Progressive Association
Citywide Council for District 75
Coalition for Asian American Children and Families
Committee for Hispanic Children & Families (CHCF)
CUNY University Student Senate
El Puente
Exalt Youth
Expanded Schools
Fifth Avenue Committee/Neighbors Helping Neighbors
Flanbwayan Haitian Literacy Project
Haitian-Americans United for Progress
ImmSchools
Internationals Network for Public Schools
Literacy Inc.
Literacy Trust
LSA Family Health Service
Masa
Mixteca Organization Inc.
New Settlement Parent Action Committee
New York Immigration Coalition
New York Math Academy
Pakistani American Youth Society, Inc.
Parent Action Committee - Chaplain, Sandra Mitchell
Refugees Helping Refugees
Suffolk County Hispanic Advisory Board
The Center for Immigrant Education and Training- LAGCC