



Advocates for Children of New York

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MORE THAN TRANSLATION

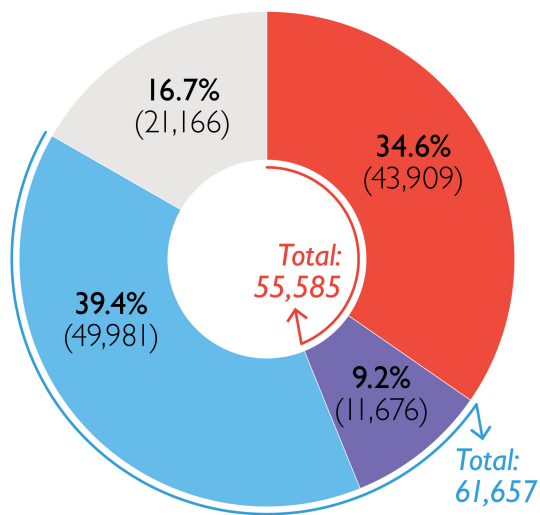
MULTI-FACETED SOLUTIONS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH NYC'S IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

In the 2020-21 school year, approximately **42% of all students enrolled in New York City Department of Education (DOE) schools spoke a language other than English at home.**¹ Data from the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) indicate that, of the more than one million children and youth attending New York City public schools, roughly **544,000 (49%) are from immigrant families and more than 329,000 (30%) do not have a parent who speaks English fluently.**² Many of these families face additional barriers when it comes to accessing information about their children's schools:

- **An estimated 55,585 students' parents have no more than an 8th grade education in addition to not being proficient in English.** This potentially limits their ability to read and understand translated materials from the DOE explaining complex processes, systems, and regulations—documents that can often be confusing even for native English speakers with college degrees.
- **An estimated 61,657 children of Limited English Proficient (LEP) parents live in households without broadband internet access,** meaning that information communicated to families online or via email is unlikely to reach them in a timely manner, if at all.
- **An estimated 29,608 students' parents have limited English proficiency and communicate in a language outside of the top nine** (Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, French, Haitian Creole, Korean, Russian, Spanish, and Urdu) into which DOE documents are routinely translated. Importantly, this is almost certainly an under-estimate of the true need, as it does *not* capture speakers of indigenous or low-incidence languages who reported a more widely used language for purposes of the survey. For example, we have worked with immigrant parents who primarily speak languages like Nahuatl or Mixtec but who rely on Spanish to communicate with their children's schools and are classified as such in the DOE's records, even though Spanish is their second language.

¹ Does not include students attending charter schools, high school equivalency programs, or 3-K and pre-K programs. NYC Department of Education, Division of Multilingual Learners, 2020-21 ELL Demographics at a Glance, <https://infohub.nyced.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/sy-2020-21-ell-demographics-at-a-glance.pdf>.

² Estimates were tabulated using the 2016-2020 ACS 5-year sample and include all children and youth between the ages of 4 and 21 who were either attending public school (inclusive of charter schools) at the time of survey completion or who were not enrolled in any educational program but did not have a high school diploma or equivalent (e.g., 4-year-olds not attending pre-K and teenagers who left school without graduating). Only parents living in the same household as the student are included; for the approximately 4.6% of children and youth who were not living with either parent at the time of survey completion (e.g., those living with grandparents or other relatives), the "head of household" was used as a proxy for a parent figure. For purposes of this brief, "immigrant families" are defined as those in which a parent was born outside of the United States (defined as the 50 states and Washington, DC) and emigrated after age 18. In line with Census Bureau definitions, parents are considered limited English proficient if they reported speaking English "not at all," "not well," or "well" on their survey questionnaire; fluency is defined as speaking English "very well" or speaking only English. *Data source:* Steven Ruggles, Sarah Flood, Ronald Goeken, Megan Schouweiler, and Matthew Sobek. IPUMS USA: Version 12.0 [2016-2020 5-year ACS]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V12.0>



An estimated 126,732 school-age children and youth in New York City have LEP parents who are unlikely to get the information they need about the public schools without a multi-faceted approach to communication.

- Neither parent has more than an 8th grade education
- Household does not have broadband internet
- Household does not have broadband and neither parent has more than an 8th grade education
- Parents speak a language other than one of the top 9, but none of the above apply

Key DOE Support for Immigrant Families on the Budget Chopping Block

The FY 2022 budget included \$4 million in one-year funding for immigrant family communication so that the DOE could provide targeted outreach and support to these students' families, taking into account their varying levels of literacy and access to digital media. The DOE has been meeting with a work group to determine the most effective uses for this funding, including using local ethnic media to share updates from the DOE, sending paper notices to families' homes, reaching families over telephone and text message, and collaborating with immigrant-facing community-based organizations (CBOs) to create and launch information campaigns. **However, Mayor Adams' FY 2023 Executive Budget does not extend the funding for this initiative. Unless the Mayor and the City Council take action to extend it in the adopted budget, set to be finalized this month, it will expire at the end of June.**

The Executive Budget does allocate \$7 million in federal American Rescue Plan funding to increase the capacity of the DOE's Translation and Interpretation Unit. While we are pleased that the City is taking steps to reduce the wait time for translations, translating documents is not, on its own, a sufficient strategy for reaching all families who speak languages other than English. Ensuring that immigrant parents get needed information and can play a meaningful role in their children's education requires *multi-faceted* approaches. The data make clear that many LEP parents have limited formal education and/or digital literacy, and our on-the-ground experience has shown us that many families never receive critical information when it is only available via translated documents posted online. The DOE must strengthen its efforts to communicate with immigrant families in a way that works for them.

One of the four pillars of Chancellor Banks' vision is "empowering families to be our true partners," and another pillar is "scaling, sustaining, and restoring what works." In line with these pillars, the City should be increasing—and certainly not eliminating—the multi-faceted immigrant family communication and outreach initiative. We call on the City to **invest and baseline \$6 million to establish a permanent, central system for immigrant family communications that allows families to get the information they need about their children's education.**