



Advocates for Children of New York

# Our Children, Our Schools



## *A Blueprint for Creating Partnerships Between Immigrant Families and New York City Public Schools*

Written by Advocates for Children of New York

In collaboration with:

Chinese Progressive Association  
Coalition for Asian American Children and Families  
Filipino American Human Services Inc.  
Haitian Americans United for Progress  
La Union (Fifth Avenue Committee)  
Lutheran Family Health Centers  
Metropolitan Russian American Parents Association

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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*All I want is the best for our children and for us to be heard.*

*—Parent in a focus group in Manhattan.*

*When immigrant parents come to school, they arrive nervous, outside of their comfort zone, and a cold reception will send them running out of the office.*

*—Organizer in the Chinese community*

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Eighty percent of immigrant parents surveyed indicated that they would like to be more involved in their children’s schools. However, immigrant parents are often under-utilized as critical resources in their school communities. In New York City, where more than 60% of students are either immigrants or the children of immigrants,<sup>1</sup> schools cannot afford to allow immigrant families to remain alienated. Schools need to determine what keeps immigrant parents away and address these hurdles proactively.

In this paper, we offer a comprehensive picture of what hinders immigrant parent participation in the New York City public schools and what can be done to make schools more inclusive of immigrant parents so that they can be active partners in their children’s education. We asked 82 immigrant parents and representatives from ten community-based organizations (CBOs) that work with immigrant parents across the City’s diverse communities to tell us about their experiences in the schools and what could be done to improve those experiences. Their stories and recommendations are the heart of this paper. We also identified a number of promising practices in New York City and other cities around the country and provide a number of concrete steps the New York City Department of Education (DOE) and individual schools can take to build true partnerships with immigrant families.

The immigrant parents we interviewed identified several significant barriers to participating in school activities, including being stopped at the door when they do not have identification, intimidated by school staff who were insensitive or unresponsive to their needs and treated badly because of their background or limited English. Despite some gains in language access for Spanish-speaking parents, parents who spoke other languages said they could not get answers to basic questions about their children’s schools. In addition, schools often rely on written communication to connect with families — which is a problem for parents with limited literacy. Immigrant parents also told us that language, lack of information, and cultural differences prevented them from participating in Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) and other school leadership opportunities. Many parents said that schools reached out or responded to them only when there were problems with their children in school.

To reach immigrant parents successfully, the DOE must lead an effort to change the culture in schools so that immigrant families are seen as vital partners in their children’s education. Schools must go beyond typical outreach efforts (e.g., providing parents with information they need via flyers and notices) and make schools more responsive to, reflective of and integrated into the communities

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<sup>1</sup> *Looming Crisis or Historic Opportunity? Meeting the Challenge of the Regents Graduation Standards* (NYC Coalition for Educational Justice) Feb. 2009, at 12 [hereinafter NYC CEJ, *Looming Crisis*].

they serve. As we urge the DOE to work toward this long-term goal, we offer concrete ways that the administration and the schools can work with parents and CBOs to create partnerships that will, in turn, strengthen the schools and improve student outcomes.

In difficult economic times, investments in strong school-family-community partnerships are wise expenditures. Many of the strategies outlined in this paper can be implemented at little cost to schools because they draw upon materials that have already been developed, suggest ways to use staff more effectively and explore ways to develop relationships with existing community organizations that will combine resources to accomplish common goals. Furthermore, strong school-family-community partnerships will bring more resources into our public schools through increased volunteerism, strong parent leadership, and more effective communication. In the end, these partnerships will create schools that are responsive to the needs of their communities, recognize parents as educators and improve learning and future options for all students.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

### I. LAYING A FOUNDATION THAT MAKES PARTNERSHIPS WITH IMMIGRANT PARENTS A DOE PRIORITY

1. Change the parent involvement framework from one of parent engagement to mutual responsibility and partnership.
2. Create a citywide advisory committee, such as a Family Partnership Advisory Committee, to examine current parent involvement efforts and develop recommendations for effective parent partnerships with diverse communities.
3. Launch a “listening campaign” focused on the experiences of immigrant families.
4. Develop a model immigrant parent partnership plan and pilot it in several schools around the city.
5. Create yearly benchmarks and evaluation methods to measure the success of parent involvement efforts and ensure accountability.
6. Compile a list of promising practices in other districts and schools and disseminate this list to schools.
7. Work with the teachers’ and principals’ unions to disseminate information and ideas about working with immigrant families and reinforce school and citywide efforts.

## II. BRIDGING THE DIVIDE BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND IMMIGRANT PARENTS IN NEW YORK CITY

### A. Create Welcoming Schools

1. Issue a statement from the Chancellor emphasizing that the New York City school system is a safe zone for immigrant families.
2. Issue a statement reaffirming that existing prohibitions on discrimination protects parents, including immigrant parents, as well as a directive barring retaliation against parents and children who express concerns in the schools.
3. Hold annual planning summits with CBOs that work with immigrant families to generate and implement outreach strategies for the upcoming year.
4. Create a family-friendly checklist and guide for schools to use to create welcoming environments for parents of all backgrounds.
5. Develop a “parent friendliness” training module and provide this training in professional development courses.
6. Create an Immigrant Family Resource Center in each borough.
7. Create parent identification cards so that parents can more easily access schools.
8. Create and support a Parent Welcoming Committee in each school.
9. Use a space near the front desk, or other easily accessible and visible area, to create a Parent Resource Center or Family Center in each school.
10. Work with all school staff and school safety officers to ensure that their actions support school efforts to welcome immigrant parents.
11. Hire school staff that have ties to and speak the language(s) of the communities the school serves.
12. Distribute a welcome letter or packet to parents at the beginning of the school year in the languages spoken by families in the school.
13. Inform parents of their rights and ways to report incidents of discriminatory or retaliatory practices.
14. Create and distribute an “asset map,” which is a list of neighborhood resources that support

families and are learning environments for students outside of the school.

15. Provide workshops and other learning opportunities for immigrant parents.
16. Hold meetings at CBOs or in other community spaces if working with large immigrant populations who are not likely to attend events at the school.
17. Explore using home visits and phone calls to parents to develop relationships and build trust with immigrant families.
18. Explore partnering with CBOs to provide services such as outreach, translation, child care, or food for school meetings.
19. Re-make schools as centers of their communities, bringing in social services and other community partners that involve families more comprehensively.

**B. Break Down Language and Communication Barriers**

1. Use an auto-dialer system to provide important citywide information about schools and events to parents in their native languages.
2. Develop a standing committee of CBOs and parents to work with the Translation and Interpretation Unit at the DOE.
3. Develop a training program for all DOE staff who serve as interpreters.
4. Explore training volunteer interpreters from the community.
5. Provide training and support for school staff on how to access translated documents posted on the DOE's website.
6. Explore using different modes of communication with parents.
7. Explore ways to make written communication more effective.
8. Record school voicemail in all languages spoken by parents in the school.
9. Make an effort at the school level to hire bi/multi-lingual parent coordinators or outreach staff who are members of the community or are familiar with the needs of the community they serve.
10. Provide interpretation at school events and all workshops for parents, and publicize the

availability of these services.

11. Explore providing translation and interpretation services in conjunction with local CBOs.

### **C. Make Schools More Responsive to Parents**

1. Strengthen existing complaint procedures to enable parents to resolve problems and hold schools accountable.
2. Give parents a role in hiring and training parent coordinators, and consider hiring parent coordinators affiliated with CBOs.
3. Solicit parent input on important school policies and when appropriate, modify policies based on their feedback.
4. Hold events or regular open office hours when principals, assistant principals and other relevant school staff are accessible to parents.

### **D. Facilitate Immigrant Parent Leadership in Schools**

1. Create a training module for immigrant parents that orients them to the school system and builds their skills to take on parent leadership positions.
2. Create school governance structures that give more decision-making power to parents and provide for meaningful parent leadership in schools.
3. Create more opportunities for immigrant parent volunteers, and ensure that potential and current volunteers receive support.
4. Hold at least one PTA meeting in the beginning of the year in the native language of parents who do not speak English, and make PTA and School Leadership Team (SLT) meetings multilingual.
5. Create a multicultural advisory committee of the PTA to participate in general parent involvement efforts and help recruit immigrant parent leaders.
6. Explore making PTA schedules and meetings more flexible and accommodating to immigrant parents and parents with different work schedules.
7. Partner with CBOs to inform parents about SLTs and recruit members.



## INTRODUCTION

### *The Need to Involve Immigrant Families*

Family involvement<sup>2</sup> in education is a “powerful predictor” of academic achievement and social development as children progress from kindergarten through high school and higher education.<sup>3</sup> It is directly correlated with student success and applies to families of all economic, racial/ethnic and educational backgrounds.<sup>4</sup> Family involvement is associated with numerous positive outcomes including higher self-esteem, higher reading scores and grades, better language growth and development, greater motivation to achieve, and higher rates of high school completion and college enrollment.<sup>5</sup> A report reviewing 51 studies on parent and community involvement in schools found that schools that fully adopt well-designed practices to involve families will see many benefits to student achievement, including higher grades, increased passage of classes, more credits earned and better attendance.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to student success, family involvement in schools helps strengthen communities. Public schools represent a unique public site, where immigrant parents in particular can develop civic leadership skills that can be used to strengthen not only schools, but communities as a whole. Through participation in school activities, parents develop skills such as exercising voice, setting agendas, making decisions, meeting with government representatives, developing solutions to school problems, contributing to school planning and programming and developing culturally inclusive policies.<sup>7</sup> Thus, immigrant parent involvement in schools is a vehicle for broader political participation that incorporates the interests and concerns of immigrants into policy decisions.<sup>8</sup>

In New York City, immigrants make up 36% of the city’s population and 43% of its labor force.<sup>9</sup> More than 60% of students in the New York City public schools are immigrants or the children of immigrants.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, fostering strong family involvement in education in New York City must

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this Blueprint we use the words partner, participation and involvement instead of engagement. As one participating CBO staff member noted, the word engagement has a negative connotation and assumes that parents are somehow disengaged or do not want to be involved.

<sup>3</sup> National Association of Secondary School Principals, *Promoting Family Involvement*, 1-2, Vol. 2 Issue 6, Principal’s Research Review (Nov. 2007); *Family Involvement in Elementary School Children’s Education* (Harvard Family Research Project, Boston, MA.), Winter 2006/2007 [hereinafter HFRP, *Family Involvement in Elementary School*]; *Family Involvement in Middle and High School Students’ Education* (Harvard Family Research Project, Boston, MA.), Spring 2007 [hereinafter HFRP, *Family Involvement in Middle and High School*].

<sup>4</sup> Anne T. Henderson & Karen L. Mapp, *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, Annual Synthesis, at 24 (2002) [hereinafter, Henderson, *A New Wave of Evidence*].

<sup>5</sup> HFRP, *Family Involvement in Elementary School*, *supra* note 3; HFRP, *Family Involvement in Middle and High School*, *supra* note 3; Anne T. Henderson et al., Beyond the Bake Sale: the Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships 2-3 (The New Press 2007) [hereinafter Henderson, Beyond the Bake Sale].

<sup>6</sup> Henderson, *A New Wave of Evidence*, *supra* note 4, at 24.

<sup>7</sup> See John Rogers et al., *Civic Lessons: Public Schools and the Civic Development of Undocumented Students and Parents*, *Northwestern Journal of Law and Social Policy* 13 (Spring 2008) [hereinafter, Rogers, *Civic Lessons*]; Veronica Terriquez & John Rogers, *Becoming Civic: Latino Immigrant Parental School Participation*, 13, in Critical Voices in Bicultural Parent Engagement: Operationalizing Advocacy and Empowerment (E.M. Olivos, Ochoa, A.M. & Jimenez-Castellanos, O. Albano eds., Sunny Press forthcoming 2009) [hereinafter, Terriquez, *Becoming Civic*].

<sup>8</sup> Rogers, *Civic Lessons*, *supra* note 7, at 18; Terriquez, *Becoming Civic*, *supra* note 7, at 3, 12.

<sup>9</sup> Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs, <http://www.nyc.gov/html/imm/html/about/about.shtml> (last visited Feb. 2009).

<sup>10</sup> NYC CEJ, *Looming Crisis*, *supra* note 1, at 12.

include a comprehensive plan for developing successful partnerships with immigrant families. Furthermore, increasing immigrant parent involvement would bolster efforts to increase academic success for immigrant students and English Language Learners (ELLs). ELLs currently have some of the lowest graduation rates of any student population in the city.<sup>11</sup> Any comprehensive plan to increase graduation rates should include strengthening opportunities for immigrant parent partnership with the schools.

Federal law actually requires that districts and schools that receive Title I funds have effective parent involvement policies that include immigrant parents, and it also sets aside specific funding for parent involvement activities. In 2009, all of the districts and 1,201 (80%) of the public schools in New York City received Title I funding and must comply with this requirement.

### **Efforts to Increase Immigrant Families' Participation in the New York City Schools**

The DOE has acknowledged the importance of parent<sup>12</sup> involvement and has initiated efforts targeted at immigrant parents in particular. In recent years, these efforts have focused on improving language access for parents with limited English skills and providing basic information about school systems and policies to immigrant parents. Although these efforts are welcome, our research indicates that they are not, in themselves, sufficient to bridge the divide between immigrant families and the schools that educate their children.

For much of the last decade, immigrants' rights advocates concerned with parents' access to schools have worked to ensure that parents receive information and can communicate with school staff in their native language.<sup>13</sup> As a result of years of advocacy, there has been significant progress toward this goal in New York City, including the issuance of Chancellor's Regulation A-663 and citywide Executive Order 120. Chancellor's Regulation A-663, in effect since June 2006, requires the DOE to provide translation and interpretation services to, at a minimum, parents who speak the eight most

<sup>11</sup> NYC Department of Education, *Graduation Rates Class of 2007*, Aug. 11, 2008, at 12, [http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/062C7D9B-EC9C-4ABC-B634.../42240/PUBLIC\\_REPORT\\_GraduationRates\\_Release\\_81108.pdf](http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/062C7D9B-EC9C-4ABC-B634.../42240/PUBLIC_REPORT_GraduationRates_Release_81108.pdf) (last visited Feb. 2009)

<sup>12</sup> In this report, parent means person in parental relation as defined in New York State Education Law, and includes a birth or adoptive parent, a legally appointed guardian, or a custodian. See N.Y. Educ. Law § 3212 (McKinney 2005). A person in parental relation may also be an individual designated pursuant to Title 15-A of the General Obligations Law, Gen. Oblig. Law § 5-1551 (McKinney 2009), or a surrogate parent. 8 N.Y.C.R.R. § 200.1(ii) (1) (2008).

<sup>13</sup> B. Arias and M. Morillo-Campbell, *Promoting ELL Parental Involvement: Challenges in Contested Times*, (Arizona State Univ. Education Policy Research Unit/Ed. Public Interest Center) Jan. 2008; *School Year Filled with Missed Communications: Despite Chancellor's Regulation, Immigrant Parents Still Face Language Barriers* (Advocates for Children of NY and The New York Immigration Coalition) June 27, 2007 [hereinafter AFC & NYIC, *Missed Communications*]; *Lost Without Translation: Language Barriers Faced by Limited English Proficient Parents with Children in the San Francisco Unified School District* (Chinese For Affirmative Action) November 2006; *A Bad Start to the School Year: Despite New Regulation Immigrant Parents Still Face Major Language Barriers* (Advocates for Children of NY and The New York Immigration Coalition) September 28, 2006 [hereinafter AFC & NYIC, *Bad Start*]; *From Translation to Participation: A Survey of Parent Coordinators in New York City and Their Ability to Assist Non-English Speaking Parents* (Advocates for Children of NY and The New York Immigration Coalition) May 24, 2004 [hereinafter AFC & NYIC, *From Translation to Participation*]; *Denied At the Door: Language Barriers Block Immigrant Parents from School Involvement* (Advocates for Children of NY and The New York Immigration Coalition) February 19, 2004 [hereinafter AFC & NYIC, *Denied at the Door*].

common languages other than English. Executive Order 120, signed by Mayor Michael Bloomberg in July 2008, requires all city government agencies to provide interpretation services for, and translate essential public documents and forms into, the top six languages spoken in New York City. Despite this recent progress, implementation remains a challenge, and there is no dispute that significantly more work needs to be done before the New York City public school system achieves full language access for all immigrant families.<sup>14</sup>

The DOE also has attempted to address parent involvement beyond issues of language access. When the Mayor gained control of the DOE in 2002, he and Chancellor Joel Klein created a central office for parent initiatives, and in 2003, placed a parent coordinator in each school. Parents were not consulted, however, on the creation of the parent coordinator position, and parents and advocates raised concerns about whether parent coordinators would effectively address parents' concerns.<sup>15</sup> In 2007, the DOE created the position of Chief Family Engagement Officer and appointed Martine Guerrier to the position. They also changed the central office on parent initiatives to the Office of Family Engagement and Advocacy (OFEA)<sup>16</sup> and stationed District Family Advocates (DFAs) in each school district to answer questions parents may have.

In October 2007, OFEA began a citywide outreach and community education effort targeting immigrant parents. During the 2007-2008 school year, OFEA held 78 Native Language Forums to inform immigrant parents on various school-related matters in the eight most common languages other than English, with another 117 forums scheduled for the 2008-2009 school year. While the DOE publicized these events through flyers in multiple languages and offered translated materials, parent turnout was very low for the 2007-2008 forums. In response, OFEA created an advisory committee with CBOs that has significantly improved parent turnout this school year.

As explained more fully below, OFEA's efforts thus far are not enough to foster successful partnerships with immigrant parents on a widespread basis. At the citywide level, the low turnout at Native Language Forums indicates that the DOE needs to develop a more effective citywide approach to communicating with immigrant parents and community groups and should involve parents and communities in devising their initiatives. At the school level, even with the addition of parent coordinators and some improvements in language access, many immigrant parents find it extremely difficult to approach and communicate with school staff, and most schools do not do a good job of welcoming immigrant parents or providing opportunities for their participation. To be successful, efforts to increase immigrant parent involvement must be part of a more comprehensive plan geared towards creating true partnerships between immigrant parents and schools.

<sup>14</sup> AFC & NYIC, *Missed Communication*, *supra* note 13; AFC & NYIC, *Bad Start*, *supra* note 13; AFC & NYIC, *From Translation to Participation*, *supra* note 13; AFC & NYIC, *Denied at the Door*, *supra* note 13.

<sup>15</sup> Jennifer Medina, *Cost of Parent Coordinators Too Much for Some Parents*, *The New York Times*, May 2, 2003 [hereinafter Medina, *Cost of Parent Coordinators*].

<sup>16</sup> In 2002, the DOE changed the Office of Parent Partnerships to the Office of Parent and Community Engagement, and then, in 2005, it became the Office of Parent Engagement. In 2007, it became the Office of Family Engagement and Advocacy.

### ***Our Examination of Immigrant Parent Participation in New York City Schools***

We worked with immigrant parents and a number of community-based organizations (CBOs) to examine the barriers to immigrant parent participation in the New York City schools and identify ways to overcome those barriers at the citywide and school levels. In the Spring and Summer of 2008, we convened eight focus groups with a total of 77 immigrant parents, disseminated 82 surveys to immigrant parents, conducted interviews with representatives from ten New York City CBOs, and consulted with representatives of six CBOs or school districts from other cities with large immigrant populations. Their experiences and recommendations are at the heart of this paper.

Focus groups were organized in collaboration with the Center for Immigrant Education and Training at LaGuardia Community College, the Center for Immigrant Families, La Union (Fifth Avenue Committee), Lutheran Family Health Centers, and the Metropolitan Russian American Parents Association. Focus groups, comprised of 5-15 parents each, were conducted in the native language of the parents attending. Surveys were collected from parents during focus groups and were also distributed to parents by CBOs that were unable to conduct a focus group.

The individuals interviewed represented 10 New York City CBOs. Interviews were conducted with staff from Arab Women Active in the Arts and Media, Council of Peoples Organization, Chinese Progressive Association, Filipino American Human Services Inc., Haitian Americans United for Progress, Haitian Bilingual and ESL Technical Assistance Center, La Union (Fifth Avenue Committee), Make the Road New York, Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation, and YWCA Queens. We also spoke with a number of school staff about their experiences involving immigrant parents in their schools. These individuals work with a variety of immigrant parents representing the Asian Pacific Islander, Caribbean, Eastern European, Latin American, Middle Eastern, North African and South Asian communities.

Interviews were also conducted with CBOs and individuals who work with immigrant parents in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Austin, Washington D.C., and Montgomery County, Maryland. Those consulted include representatives from the Texas Center for Education Policy, Chinese for Affirmative Action, Asian Pacific American Legal Center, Asian American LEAD, the University of California at Los Angeles, and the Montgomery County Public Schools. Interviews were also conducted with representatives from the Family Involvement Network of Educators, which is a national clearinghouse committed to promoting strong partnerships between schools, families and communities, and Pedro Noguera, the Executive Director of the Metropolitan Center for Urban Education at New York University.

## PART I: BARRIERS TO IMMIGRANT PARENT PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOLS

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*“There is an invisible wall at the school that we can’t penetrate to express our concerns.”  
–Parent in a focus group conducted in Northern Manhattan*

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### A. Many Schools are not Welcoming to Immigrant Parents

Through talking with parents and CBOs, we found that parents often face physical barriers that prevent them from entering schools and intimidating atmospheres that discourage them from visiting or speaking with school staff. Many immigrant parents, especially those who are undocumented, are nervous and afraid of the people who work in the schools. These feelings often predate any contact with the schools, and when coupled with an unfriendly reception, discrimination by school staff and a fear of retaliation against their children, schools become an unwelcoming place for immigrant parents. In focus groups and interviews, participants explained that fear or apprehension is a major factor that limits immigrant parents’ participation in the schools.

Participants reported that when immigrant parents attempt to visit their children’s schools, they face barriers that begin at the front door. As a result, parents often feel they are unable to visit or are discouraged from visiting their children’s schools. The presence of security guards at the front door requesting identification (ID) creates a physical barrier to parent access, particularly for immigrant parents who may not have official ID. Staff members at an organization working with Latino parents in Brooklyn told us that they create identification cards for their members in part to help them access the schools. One of their parent members, for example, was trying to attend an English as a Second Language (ESL) class offered in her child’s school, and the security guard did not allow her in the building because she did not have a government-issued ID or passport. It was only after the CBO created an ID for her that she was able to visit the school with ease. The mere fact that parents have to show ID to enter the school can invoke fears of immigration enforcement for parents. For example, a parent from Mexico was afraid to visit his child’s school because he did not have a US government-issued ID and was undocumented. After his daughter had been absent from class, school staff told her that her parents had to meet with the attendance teacher before she could return. Because of his fear of having to produce ID, her father was too afraid to visit the school without an advocate.

*A parent from Mexico was afraid to visit his child’s school because he did not have a US government-issued ID and was undocumented. After his daughter had been absent from class, school staff told her that her parents had to meet with the attendance teacher before she could return. Because of his fear of having to produce ID, her father was too afraid to visit the school without an advocate.*

In addition to barriers to entry, the actions of school staff can create an unwelcoming atmosphere. Immigrant parents often come across indifferent or even hostile staff at the front door and front office. Several participants noted that school safety staff can be particularly unwelcoming. One participant said, for example, “Often security staff are unable to communicate with parents. They are rude and abrasive and create a really unwelcoming first impression.” Parents in a focus group in

Brooklyn said that the security staff treat students and parents very badly and restrict parents’ access to teachers and administrators. On a tour of a parent-friendly school in Manhattan, a safety officer noted that school safety officers earn low wages and often work in unsafe environments; under such conditions, it is not surprising that they are frustrated and sometimes treat parents poorly as a result. Once inside the school, a few providers said that parents are often made to wait a long time without being acknowledged or recognized. A service provider working with Arab and Latino parents said that the policies in the schools are good, but do not always trickle down to the people parents see when they go to a school. Another provider summed up the situation by saying, “When immigrant parents come to school, they arrive nervous, outside of their comfort zone, and a cold reception will send them running out of the office.”

*When immigrant parents come to school, they arrive nervous, outside of their comfort zone, and a cold reception will send them running out of the office.*  
 –Organizer in the Chinese community

Throughout our interviews, participants repeatedly voiced a distrust of school staff based on

*A Spanish-speaking parent in Brooklyn said that a guidance counselor at school asked her daughter if her parents had papers and told her she would not be able to go to college or get a decent job because they were undocumented.*

parents’ fear of, and actual experiences with, schools inquiring about immigration status. Because schools are government institutions, many immigrant parents believe that they have connections with Immigration and Customs Enforcement. As one organizer in the Haitian community noted, “Some parents in our community are undocumented and speak no English. Those parents do not want to go to any official meetings because they are scared, they are scared of institutions and do not separate the DOE from immigration authorities.” Although schools should

not inquire about immigration status,<sup>17</sup> they often do. A Spanish-speaking parent in Brooklyn, for example, said that a guidance counselor at school asked her daughter if her parents had papers and told her she would not be able to go to college or get a decent job because they were undocumented.

Immigrant parents also reported facing discrimination in the schools on the basis of language, race and national origin. A parent in a focus group in Manhattan said, for example, that there are

*In response to the question, “The school treats me differently than it treats English speaking parents,” one in four survey participants responded that the school “treats me worse.”*

“certain parents with preference—racism against Hispanic parents and preference for the Americans.” Some Spanish-speaking parents in a focus group in Brooklyn spoke of witnessing discrimination against Chinese parents and said Chinese parents were treated differently from others. Many focus group participants said that parents who speak English are treated better in the schools. One parent from Queens said, for example, that when she visits her child’s school, the principal will not even look at or acknowledge her because she does not speak English. Another parent in Queens said, “When you don’t speak English good, they are not very nice to you in the schools.” In response to the question, “The school treats me differently than it treats English speaking parents,” one in four survey participants re-

<sup>17</sup> New York City Executive Order No. 41 (New York City Legislative Annual) September 17, 2003 (Section 3(a) states: “A city officer or employee, other than law enforcement officers, shall not inquire about a person’s immigration status unless (1) Such person’s immigration status is necessary for the determination of program, service or benefit eligibility or the provision of City services, or (2) Such officer or employee is required by law to inquire about such person’s immigration status.”).

sponded that the school “treats me worse.” A service provider in the Haitian community said he absolutely thought that immigrant parents in his community are treated differently from other parents. He said, “When you don’t speak English and go and ask someone for something, people get really annoyed and treat you badly because they feel that it is an extra

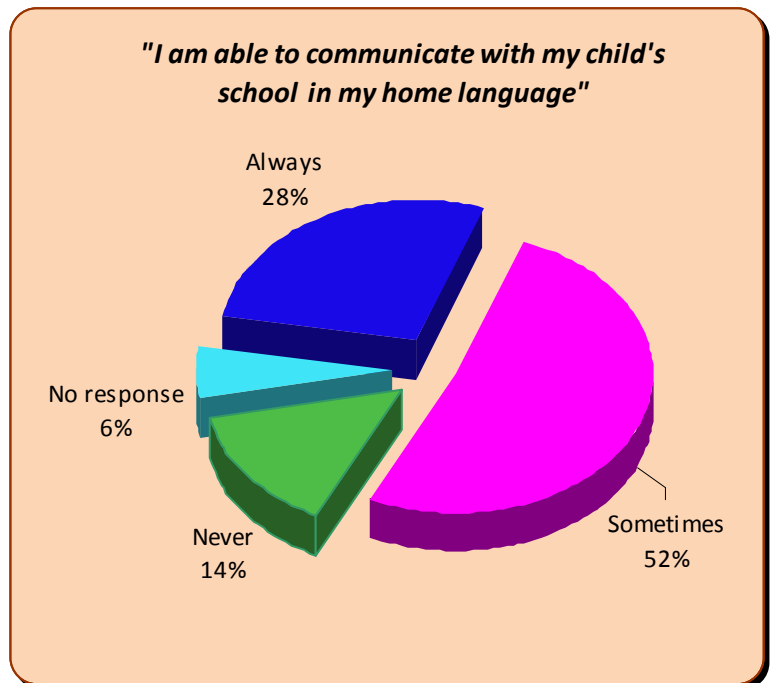
*Schools do not have the time or patience for parents with whom they cannot communicate. That leaves parents offended and schools frustrated.*  
 —Service provider in the South Asian community

hassle.” Similarly a service provider in the South Asian community said that “schools do not have the time or patience for parents with whom they cannot communicate. That leaves parents offended and schools frustrated.”

While many immigrant parents in the focus groups reported feeling unwelcome in their schools, there were parents who reported that their schools made them feel welcome. These parents described individual schools’ efforts to include immigrant parents, such as sending special welcome letters and providing adult English classes.<sup>18</sup> A parent coordinator at a school in Chinatown explained, “Parents feel welcome here because everyone speaks their language, and when they come in, I explain to them how the school system works, that it is not like it was before in China, that we like to see them at the school and we want them to visit.”

**B. Language is Still a Barrier**

Parents and service providers told us that language continues to be a major barrier to immigrant parent participation in many schools. In response to the survey statement “I am able to communicate with my child’s school in my home language,” an overwhelming majority of respondents stated “sometimes” or “never” while little more than one fourth of parents reported that they were “always” able to do so. For example, in one focus group, a Spanish-speaking parent described attempts to visit her child’s school in Queens twice, but she was turned away both times because no one in the school spoke Spanish or offered an interpreter. As a result, she has not attended any parent meetings and is unable to resolve problems that arise in the school.



From school events to school voice-mails, parents whose primary language is not English have limited language access. A Spanish-speaking parent from Queens said she feels uncomfortable at the school because they do not provide

<sup>18</sup> See *infra* Part II of this report.

interpretation at school events. She said that when her child is in a school performance, she wants to attend the event, but feels left out because she cannot understand. Two service providers in the Haitian community noted that the school voicemails are in English only. One of these service providers said, “Parents call the school and get a voicemail in a language they don’t understand and get discouraged.”

*A Spanish-speaking parent described attempts to visit her child’s school in Queens twice, but she was turned away both times because no one in the school spoke Spanish or offered an interpreter. As a result, she has not attended any parent meetings and is unable to resolve problems that arise in the school.*

According to parents, there are some schools that provide the translation and interpretation services they need to participate in school functions, but these services are usually only provided for Spanish-speaking parents. A parent from Queens reported that the parent meetings at her school are conducted in Spanish, with interpretation provided in English for English-speaking parents. On the

*A Spanish-speaking parent from Queens said she feels uncomfortable at the school because they do not provide interpretation at school events. She said that when her child is in a school performance, she wants to attend the event, but feels left out because she cannot understand.*

whole, participants said that translation and interpretation services are more comprehensive and more commonly provided for Spanish-speaking parents, and that those who require services in other languages face much larger hurdles. A provider in a community organization working with Arab, North African and South Asian parents said that Bengali- and Arabic-speaking parents are still not being served. Arabic-speaking parents in one school were given a booklet about the PTA

that was in English and Spanish, and it was “pretty useless” to those parents. A service provider in Brooklyn noted that language services for Spanish-speaking parents are good, but services are not very good for Bengali- and Urdu-speaking parents. A service provider in the Haitian community said that despite years of advocacy for translation and interpretation services, families with whom he worked still did not receive notices translated into Haitian-Creole. He added, “We speak Creole in Haiti, but most people don’t read Creole.... [Those] who can’t speak English, who only speak Creole, are most likely unable to read or write in their own language.” A number of providers noted that many parents are not literate in English or their home languages, and thus written notices, even when translated, were not the best way to get information to these parents.

Many parents and service providers said that parents do not trust DOE staff members who serve as interpreters for them. While immigrant parents certainly need interpretation services, they feel that DOE interpreters are biased, and many use someone they know and trust from a local CBO or a family member. One provider in Queens said, “Parents do not expect to get anyone at the school who will reliably translate for them.” Similarly, a service provider in the Arab and Latino communities said that parents generally find their own interpreters for parent-teacher conferences because they do not trust that the DOE will have someone to interpret for them and they are more comfortable talking to a family member. One provider told us that interpreters provided by the schools are often not neutral and described an occasion where he visited a school with a parent and had to take over the interpretation because the interpreter was just saying “what he wanted.”

*Parents do not expect to get anyone at the school who will reliably translate for them.  
—Service Provider in the Korean community*



### C. Schools Often Do Not Encourage Parents' Input or Respond to Their Concerns

Parents generally reported that schools only attempt to contact them when school staff have problems, but when parents raise concerns or seek to solve problems, schools are unresponsive. With some exceptions, parents do not know about parent coordinators at their schools or do not find them helpful in addressing their concerns. They also said that they do not have access to principals and that there is nowhere to turn when there is a problem at the school.

When our focus groups discussed these issues, many parents talked about feeling extremely frustrated, isolated and alienated when trying to resolve school-related problems. A moderator of a focus group in the Russian community observed, “Parents on the whole expect more from the school than they feel they are getting. They want the school to get to know them and their children as individuals, to be able to better serve them. But, if they are not satisfied, they feel like they face huge difficulties in changing the situation. The ‘School System’ seems like something gargantuan and faceless and they don’t know what to do or who to talk to or how to start.”

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—Moderator of a focus group with Russian parents

Parent coordinators are supposed to be the first contacts for parents when they have concerns, but when we asked parents about their experiences with parent coordinators, they often were unclear about their roles, did not know who the parent coordinators were at their schools and did not use parent coordinators to resolve problems. A few parents said that their parent coordinators are wonderful resources, but their helpfulness is limited by the responsiveness of principals. A service provider in the Latino community in Manhattan said, “[A] good [parent coordinator] is a phenomenal resource, but a bad one is totally useless and even harmful to the community.” A service provider who works with Arabic and Latino parents said that when parent coordinators speak the language of the parents, parents will use them, but otherwise they will not. A service provider in the South Asian community reported

*[Parents] understand that [the parent coordinator] is there to help parents, but that many times he is unable to help, because he doesn’t have the authority and the principal refuses his requests. Often times, he’ll request for the principal to meet with a parent and the principal refuses.*

—Moderator of a focus group in Manhattan

that the parent coordinator is often hard to reach so parents go to their own respective community leaders for help instead. Similarly, a service provider in the Filipino community said that parents do not use parent coordinators because they find it very difficult to get in contact with them. Parents in a focus group in Manhattan had a positive view of their parent coordinator, calling him a “road up” and “the voice of the parents.” As the focus group moderator noted, “They understand that he is there to help parents, but that many times he is unable to help, because he doesn’t have the authority and the principal refuses his requests. Often times, he’ll request for the principal to meet with a parent and the principal refuses.”

As helpful as some parent coordinators may be, they are not substitutes for access to principals, and participants generally felt that principals were inaccessible or unresponsive to their concerns. Many parents said that they were unable to access the principal when they needed to resolve a problem and often had to wait for long periods of time for an appointment. Over one third of survey respondents indicated that they disagreed with the statement “I feel like I can talk to the principal if I need or want to.” One mother from Queens reported that she waited a whole day outside the principal’s office to be seen by him. Even parents who were able to speak with the principals were not satisfied with the results. Several parents in one focus group in Brooklyn agreed that, “Principals hear what you tell them, and then do nothing.” In contrast, parents who were actively involved in their schools seemed to have fewer problems speaking with principals. A focus group member from Queens said she had no problem meeting with the school principal. Other parents in the group countered that perhaps that was due to her role as PTA president in the school and stated that they are not treated as well by the principal.

*Principals hear what you tell them, and then do nothing.*  
*—Parents in a focus group in Brooklyn*

Without the assistance of a parent coordinator or access to the principal, many parents who tried to resolve problems in their schools were unable to get help. As one parent in a focus group in Manhattan put it, “There is an invisible wall at the school that we can’t penetrate to express our concerns.” For example, a parent in a focus group in Brooklyn described a problem she has with her child’s teacher: the teacher only allows bathroom visits or drinks of water at pre-determined times and forces the children to eat during lunch. Her child is afraid to go to school, and the parent does not know how to resolve the problem. Many parents complained that they are unable to get vital information about their children because school staff could not answer questions or clear up misunderstandings. For example, one parent from Manhattan told a story of her son being hurt in school and being sent to the hospital. When she called the school to find out how he was hurt, no one was able to answer her questions.

In addition, parents said that if they are outspoken or are strong advocates for their children, they can sometimes resolve problems, but the school staff will label them as difficult and retaliate against them or their children. For example, a grandmother who participated in one of our focus groups and is active in her grandchild’s school in Manhattan feels that she has been labeled “problematic” because she often speaks up about her concerns with the school. She said she was not told about an important meeting where DOE officials came to visit the school because the school staff were worried that she would speak her mind. Another parent explained how her son has been retaliated

*One mother explained why more parents don’t complain about problems at the school: “It’s not being afraid for yourself, but of retaliation against your child—for fear for the children.”*

against because she raised concerns about his math class: “In the beginning of the ninth grade, my son was given very difficult math homework that he could not do. When I spoke to the teacher, he said he couldn’t do anything for my son, and although I continued to complain to him and the head of the math department, the teacher assigned even more difficult problems. The teacher now speaks to my son in a mocking tone in class and insults him in front of the other students when he gets an answer wrong.” A service provider in the Arab, North African and South Asian communities told us about one school where parents

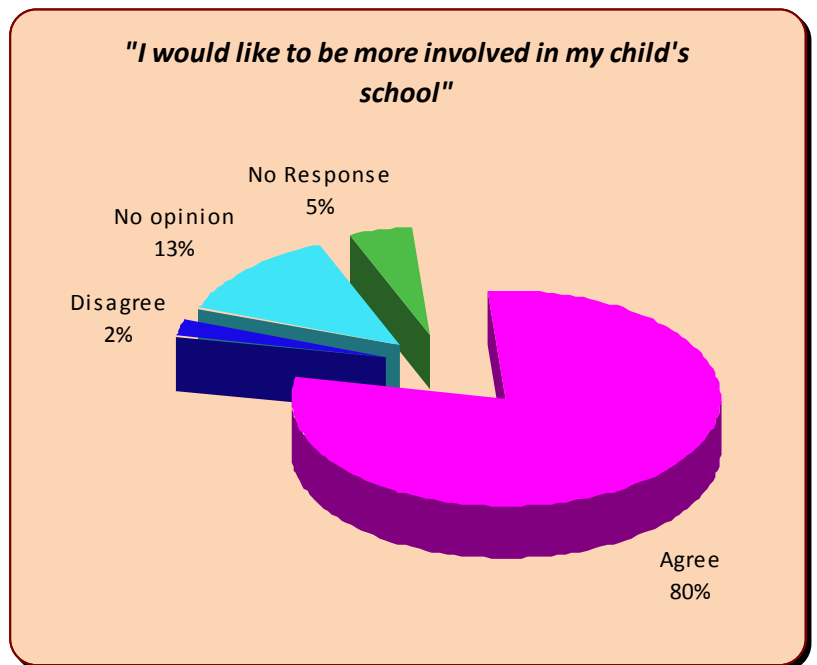
involved themselves in the PTA and tried to voice their desires and concerns. In response, the PTA was completely shut down, and the school now makes major decisions without consulting parents. One mother explained why more parents do not complain about problems at the school: “It’s not being afraid for yourself, but of retaliation against your child—for fear for the children.”

Because of their frustration at being unable to resolve problems by speaking with school staff, many parents turn to community organizations for assistance instead. Many community organizations commented that parents come to them after trying to resolve problems in the school on their own. A community organizer in the Filipino community stated that parents often attempt to solve problems themselves, but end up at her organization when nothing gets done at the school.

**D. Many Parent Associations and School Leadership Teams are Not Accessible to Immigrant Parents**

Even though our survey revealed that 80% of respondents “would like to be more involved in [their] child’s school,” the vast majority of participants indicated that immigrant parents do not participate in parent events, associations or school leadership. A few providers told us that parents do not know how to get involved in the schools. Many parents told us that they want to be more involved in the schools, but they feel that meaningful opportunities do not exist and that language barriers prevent them from doing so.

When asked about immigrant parent involvement in parent associations and school leadership, service providers and organizers said that some immigrant parents are unfamiliar with these leadership bodies or the roles that they play in the schools in New York City. A community organizer working with the Latino community noted that some parents feel comfortable visiting the schools, but others are not confident. The lack of confidence is not just a result of language differences, but is because they are unfamiliar with the system and do not know what questions to ask or when and how to be involved. A service provider in the Haitian community said that parents in her community do not attend parent meetings because “they do not understand the role that meetings play in society in New York City. They think that if they send their kid to school, feed them and make sure their homework is done on time, that’s all the participation they are supposed to do and the rest is up to the educators.” A service provider that works with parents in the Arab, North African and South Asian communities said that parents in their community are not as involved as parents born in the United States because they come from countries where such involvement is not expected of them. She also noted that PTAs are a very American thing, and thus many parents do not know about the role of the PTA.



When parents do attempt to get involved in parent associations and school-related activities,

they often find that language barriers prevent them from participating. As one service provider in the Haitian community said, “Language automatically disqualifies parents from the school leadership teams, PTA president and even attending PTA meetings.” Parents said that many schools did not provide bilingual services for parent meetings, thus making them feel unwelcome. A service provider working with Arab and Latino parents in Brooklyn said that there are never interpreters at PTA meetings. Spanish-speaking parents in a focus group in Brooklyn reported the same problem. As a parent in Queens told us, “I go to PTA meetings at my daughter’s school because they have an interpreter. But I never went to my son’s school’s PTA meetings because they speak only English. The Principal at my son’s school asked me, ‘You participate in every school activity. Why don’t you attend PTA meetings?’ I told him it was because there was no interpreter at the meeting. He found an interpreter for me, and I attended the PTA meeting at my son’s school for the first time.”

*Language automatically disqualifies parents from school leadership teams, PTA president and even attending PTA meetings.*  
 —Service provider in the Haitian community

Exacerbating the language barriers, parents in our focus groups explained that PTA members are often unwelcoming or hostile to immigrants. One Spanish-speaking parent from Manhattan said

*A Spanish-speaking parent from Manhattan attended a parent meeting in her school where an interpreter was provided for her and several other Spanish-speaking parents, but the other parents complained of the noise caused by the interpretation so the interpreter stopped. After this incident, she never went to another parent meeting.*

that she attended a parent meeting in her school, and there was an interpreter provided for her and several other Spanish-speaking parents, but the other parents complained of the noise caused by the interpretation so the interpreter stopped. After this incident, she never went to another parent meeting. A service provider who works with mostly Yemeni and Latino parents in Brooklyn said, “In this community, the PTA is unwelcoming to immigrant parents, giving them the cold shoulder and being condescending. PTA is mostly

American-born parents, and they have no patience for immigrants, for the extra time and effort involved in reaching out and involving them.”

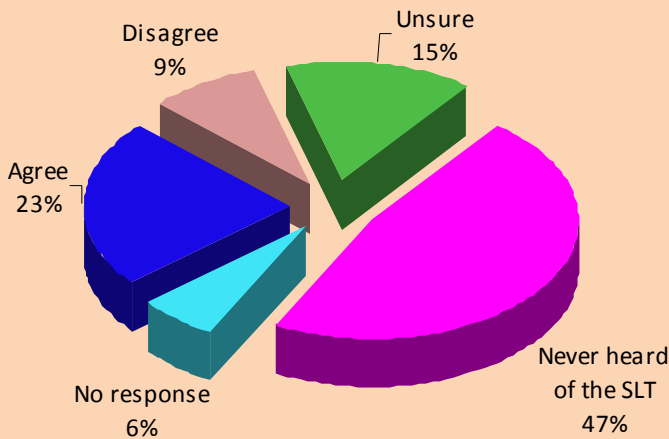
Other parents who attempted to participate in PTA meetings said that the PTA did not address their concerns or cover topics that were relevant to them. Spanish-speaking parents at a workshop in their community in Northern Manhattan said that when they went to their school’s PTA meetings, the agendas had been set without prior input from all parents and were not translated into Spanish until after the meetings. They also said that the discussion at the meetings did not include issues that are of priority to all parents. For example, they had wanted to discuss fundraising done by the PTA to better understand the process, make it more transparent, and ensure that low-income parents could contribute to efforts even if they could not make monetary contributions. They also had hoped to address the lack of bilingual staff at the school, particularly in the front office, that makes it difficult for them to call the school if an incident happens with their child. None of these issues, however, were addressed at the meeting.

*One grandmother in a focus group, for example, signed up to volunteer in the dual-language program, but has been on a waiting list for three years.*

Finally, participants told us that they were not given opportunities to volunteer at the school and were not aware of SLTs. In fact, nearly 50% of survey respondents indicated that they had never heard

of the SLTs. Many parents in a focus group in Manhattan said that they had received training from Learning Leaders designed to help parents volunteer at the school. Since then, many of them have offered to volunteer at the school and been turned down. One parent said, “The course was very good, but how does it help us if we haven’t been able to put it in practice?” One grandmother in this focus group, for example, signed up to volunteer in the dual-language program, but has been on a waiting list for three years. Our conversations with parents and service providers show that the barrier to greater immigrant parent participation is not a lack of interest, but a need for more inclusive practices and more opportunities and support for immigrant parent involvement in school activities, leadership and decision-making.

***"I've been encouraged to run for the School Leadership Team in my child's school"***



of the SLTs. Many parents in a focus group in Manhattan said that they had received training from Learning Leaders designed to help parents volunteer at the school. Since then, many of them have offered to volunteer at the school and been turned down. One parent said, “The course was very good, but how does it help us if we haven’t been able to put it in practice?” One grandmother in this focus group, for example, signed up to volunteer in the dual-language program, but has been on a waiting list for three years. Our conversations with parents and service providers show that the barrier to greater immigrant parent participation is not a lack of interest, but a need for more inclusive practices and more opportunities and support for immigrant parent involvement in school activities, leadership and decision-making.

## PART II

### CREATING PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND IMMIGRANT PARENTS

To develop recommendations on how schools can be more inclusive of immigrant families and increase immigrant parent involvement, we sought suggestions from the parents and CBO staff members who participated in our interviews, focus groups and surveys, and we researched how other school districts addressed these issues. We also selected best practices from family involvement literature and research that speak to the difficulties raised by participants in our inquiry. This paper is not intended to be a summary of available research, however. Instead, these recommendations are tailored to offer guidance to the DOE and individual schools on how to address the specific dynamics in the New York City public schools and how to bridge the divide between school staff and immigrant parents.

Ultimately, what is needed is a change in the culture of schools and the DOE to be more inclusive of immigrant families and more aggressive in its approach to parent participation. In this section, we will first describe the key reforms needed to lay a foundation for this change, and then we will list strategies for the DOE and individual schools to use in addressing the barriers identified in Part I of this paper and building partnerships between schools and immigrant parents. These strategies are organized into the following categories, which mirror the problems identified in Part I and detail how the DOE and schools can:

- a) Create a more welcoming atmosphere for immigrant parents in the schools;
- b) Ensure that immigrant parents and schools can communicate with each other;
- c) Make schools more responsive to parents; and
- d) Facilitate immigrant parents' participation in meaningful school decision-making and leadership.

### LAYING A FOUNDATION THAT MAKES PARTNERSHIPS WITH IMMIGRANT PARENTS A DOE PRIORITY

Increasing immigrant parent participation in New York City schools is a challenging but essential task. In school districts that have prioritized immigrant parent involvement, such efforts have resulted in greater teacher awareness of students' cultural and community issues, greater parent involvement in their children's schooling, stronger school-parent relationships, and greater immigrant parent involvement in school governance.<sup>19</sup> Individual principals and schools must play a critical role in implementing practices tailored to the communities they serve, but the role of the DOE administration should not be underestimated. In this section, we provide recommendations for how the DOE can make involvement of immigrant parents a priority and provide the foundation for parent involvement initiatives at the school level.

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<sup>19</sup> Melissa Marschall, *Local School Councils and Parent Involvement in Chicago*, The Evaluation Exchange, Volume XIV No. 1&2 at 9 (Spring 2008) [hereinafter Marschall, *Local School Councils*].

**1. Change the parent involvement framework from one of parent engagement to mutual responsibility and partnership.**

Federal Department of Education guidance on parental involvement requires the DOE to educate its staff on how to work with parents as “equal partners.”<sup>20</sup> The DOE, schools, parents and community organizations all have roles in developing true partnerships between families and schools. As stakeholders, these groups must work together to create partnerships in which all groups are active and accountable to one another. The DOE should model this framework at the central level by institutionalizing opportunities for parent and community input and strengthening parent and community roles in policy development.

*I’ve heard it said that when children do not succeed it is because parents do not make them do homework, parents do not follow through. If you say it’s their fault it doesn’t matter if you do anything. I think you have to turn things around. If kids are failing in school, you are failing as a school. You have to ask: What else can we do to give students opportunity to get their work done?*

*—Principal of a Community School in Manhattan*

**2. Create a citywide advisory committee, such as a Family Partnership Advisory Committee, to examine current parent involvement efforts and develop recommendations for effective parent partnerships with diverse communities.**

In recent years, the DOE has conducted surveys of school environments to get parent feedback. Given the distrust that many immigrant parents have toward the DOE and school staff and the barriers to communication outlined in Part I, however, the DOE needs to examine whether this mechanism effectively solicits input from immigrant parents. We recommend that the DOE work *with*

*parents, including immigrant parents, to develop effective ways to gather parent input and feedback on family participation and develop policy recommendations based on that input. To facilitate this collaboration, the DOE should create an advisory committee that includes parents (including immigrant parents), CBO representatives, relevant central DOE staff, school staff and*

**CASE IN POINT**

*In the Boston Public Schools, a taskforce composed of researchers, central office staff, parents, and representatives from CBOs was created to investigate the state of family and community involvement. The committee did extensive information gathering, analyzed the resulting data and made recommendations to the district on how to improve parent and community involvement in schools.<sup>21</sup>*

administrators and researchers or educators with expertise in family involvement. This advisory committee could gather input from parents and research on best practices to promote family involvement, develop recommendations geared towards creating better partnerships between schools and parents and monitor progress. Such an advisory committee could annually review family involvement plans at the school and district levels, identify barriers to greater participation, evaluate

<sup>20</sup> See U.S. Department of Education, *Parental Involvement: Title I, Part A Non-Regulatory Guidance*, at 27 (2004) [hereinafter US DOE, *Parental Involvement Guidance*].

<sup>21</sup> Abby Weiss et al., *Implementing Family and Community Engagement: Opportunities and Challenges in Boston Public Schools*, The Evaluation Exchange, Volume XIV No. 1&2 at 10 (Spring 2008).

strategies for more effective family involvement and revise policies if necessary to increase involvement as required by law.<sup>22</sup> While the DOE currently has a Chancellor’s Parent Advisory Council, this body does not focus primarily on family involvement and includes only PTA leaders. The advisory committee that we propose would include a cross-section of relevant stakeholders and focus on fostering partnerships between parents and schools.<sup>23</sup>

**3. *Launch a “listening campaign” focused on the experiences of immigrant families.***

While our inquiry was limited in scope, it yielded valuable insight into what needs to be done to improve parent participation in schools. The DOE should initiate its own effort on a larger scale through a “listening campaign” targeting immigrant families, but open to all families who wish to be heard. Under federal law, the DOE must, with the involvement of parents, identify barriers to greater participation for certain parents, including those who speak limited English and/or are racial or ethnic minorities.<sup>24</sup> While the DOE has made some efforts to get feedback from parents through parent surveys and town hall events on particular topics, there has not been a comprehensive effort to hear from parents and gather their input on family involvement policies and practices. Thus, unlike the “Ask Martine” events held by the DOE in 2007, this campaign should be focused on gathering suggestions from parents. Such a campaign could be coordinated by the advisory committee recommended above and include telephone calls to parents, events in community spaces, focus groups, and interviews with service providers and parent coordinators. In addition to giving a more nuanced picture of what efforts would be needed, this campaign could help build trust between parents and the DOE, build relationships between the DOE and CBOs and ground the DOE’s efforts in community input.

**4. *Develop a model immigrant parent partnership plan and pilot it in several schools around the city.***

Using the recommendations below and additional recommendations developed by any advisory committee formed, the DOE should develop a model parent partnership plan for schools and support its implementation in several pilot schools around the city. The pilot programs would allow the DOE to determine the effectiveness of the model and make necessary improvements before citywide implementation.

**5. *Create yearly benchmarks and evaluation methods to measure the success of parent involvement efforts and ensure accountability.***

In order to ensure that new policies and practices are effective, the DOE should gather current baseline data of parent participation in individual schools and school districts and then develop benchmarks for improvements. These benchmarks can be used to set realistic goals, measure

<sup>22</sup> US DOE, *Parental Involvement Guidance*, *supra* note 20, at 18 (Parental involvement guidelines established under No Child Left Behind suggest the use of a district-wide parent advisory council to comply with such requirements.).

<sup>23</sup> Chancellor’s Regulation A-660 <http://docs.nycenet.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-31/A-660.pdf> (last visited Feb. 2009) (The Chancellor’s Parent Advisory Council is not solely focused on parent involvement. It works on a broader array of school-related issues such as school improvement and the operation of schools.).

<sup>24</sup> No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, 20 U.S.C. § 6311, et seq., § 6318, et seq. (2009) [hereinafter NCLB Title I].



progress and increase transparency. They can also be used to evaluate the effectiveness of district and school parent involvement practices, as required by federal law.<sup>25</sup> The DOE should work with the Family Partnership Advisory Committee, recommended above, to develop strategies to measure immigrant parent involvement in a way that does not involve improper inquiries into parents' immigration status.

**6. *Compile a list of promising practices in other districts and schools and disseminate this list to schools.***

We have included as Appendix D-E a list of resources and contact information for the schools and districts profiled here, but this list is not exhaustive. The DOE should compile a more comprehensive list of resources and promising practices and make this list accessible and available to schools.

**7. *Work with the teachers' and principals' unions to disseminate information and ideas about working with immigrant families and reinforce school and citywide efforts.***

The DOE should work with teacher, principal and security guard unions to disseminate information to school staff about working with immigrant families. This strategy has been used in Montgomery County in Maryland and has been a good way to get information out to school staff from a friendly source. The DOE should also utilize the Principal's Weekly email distribution as a means to inform principals on how to make their school environments more welcoming for immigrant parents.

**BRIDGING THE DIVIDE BETWEEN  
SCHOOLS AND IMMIGRANT PARENTS IN NEW YORK CITY**

**A. Create Welcoming Schools**

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*All school staff should be trained on how to treat parent presence as  
"something good and not a problem or headache."*

*—Service Provider in Northern Manhattan*

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Building trust and relationships between school staff and immigrants parents is an essential first step in increasing immigrant parent participation and building successful partnerships. Schools must think creatively about how to make parents feel comfortable in the school building, and the DOE should develop resources and provide support so that schools can tailor their efforts to the populations they serve. These efforts should be developed in collaboration with parents and be implemented by all school staff.

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<sup>25</sup> *Id.*

### Citywide Strategies

**1. Issue a statement from the Chancellor emphasizing that the New York City school system is a safe zone for immigrant families.**

Executive Order 41, signed by Mayor Bloomberg in 2003, ensures that immigrants may access city services regardless of immigration status. It also requires city officials to keep information about immigration status confidential unless they are required to disclose by law. The DOE should develop an official statement that reflects how the Executive Order applies to the schools. The statement must make clear that the DOE is not connected to federal immigration authorities and will not inquire about or disclose the immigration status of families. The statement should be widely disseminated in the schools and translated into, at minimum, the top eight languages spoken in the schools other than English. It should be incorporated into communications with parents, such as welcome packets and information about parents' rights, and reinforced through professional development and training for school staff.

#### CASE IN POINT

*In May 2008, fear of immigration raids in San Francisco prompted the Superintendent to send an automated phone message to all parents notifying them that a Latino family had recently been picked up by immigration authorities in the city and assuring them that the district would "not allow any child to be taken away from the school."<sup>26</sup>*

**2. Issue a statement reaffirming that existing prohibitions on discrimination protects parents, including immigrant parents, as well as a directive barring retaliation against parents and children who express concerns in the schools.**

The statement should reaffirm the DOE's existing anti-discrimination policy<sup>27</sup> and make clear that discrimination by school staff against parents on the basis of race, color, ethnicity, national origin, language, alienage or citizenship status is prohibited. While there is currently a mechanism to report discriminatory acts in the schools, the complaint form is available only in English and is not well publicized. The DOE should collaborate with parents and CBOs to develop a meaningful complaint procedure that is parent-friendly and available in the top eight languages other than English. The DOE should also issue a directive prohibiting retaliation against students or parents, to address the fear parents have of being retaliated against for raising complaints in the schools. The anti-discrimination statement and directive on retaliation must be clearly articulated and disseminated to all the schools and accompanied by staff training. The Respect for All<sup>28</sup> trainings could be used as a platform to disseminate this information.

<sup>26</sup> Jill Tucker & Jaxon Van Derbeken, *ICE raids on homes panic schools, politicians*, San Francisco Chronicle, May 07, 2008, at B-3.

<sup>27</sup> Chancellor's Regulation A-830 <http://docs.nycenet.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-45/A-830.pdf> (last visited Feb. 2009).

<sup>28</sup> Respect for All is part of the DOE's efforts to increase awareness about the city's cultural diversity and foster respect for differences. The campaign includes training for school staff, and posters and brochures to be distributed in the schools that explain the DOE's efforts, which can be found here: [http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/47C3401D-BEAA-41E4-BC8E-C595E9A9CA44/38176/respect\\_for\\_all\\_brochure\\_English.pdf](http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/47C3401D-BEAA-41E4-BC8E-C595E9A9CA44/38176/respect_for_all_brochure_English.pdf). The Respect for All efforts are a result of a campaign by the Dignity in All Schools Act (DASA) Coalition, as well as the Asian American Legal Defense Fund, the Sikh Coalition and the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families, to address harassment, bullying and intimidation in city schools.

**3. Hold annual planning summits with CBOs that work with immigrant families to generate and implement outreach strategies for the upcoming year.**

The DOE and the Family Partnership Advisory Committee recommended above should host these summits and develop them in collaboration with CBOs. At least one summit should be citywide and focus on citywide communications with parents. Other summits should take place in each district and should include local school staff, including parent coordinators, so that schools can begin to identify and build relationships with CBOs in the communities they serve. The primary purpose of the summits should not be to delegate outreach to CBOs, but to draw on CBOs’ expertise to develop effective outreach strategies. As a staff member of a CBO in the Latino and Arab community noted, “[Schools] do try to involve immigrant parents, but the DOE doesn’t know how complicated it is. Sending home a flyer about a training isn’t going to do it.”

**4. Create a family-friendly checklist and guide for schools to use to create welcoming environments for parents of all backgrounds.**

The DOE should work with the Family Partnership Advisory Committee recommended above to develop this checklist. The checklist would guide school staff and PTAs on how to take a closer look at the school environment and how it impacts parents visiting the school. The checklist should include questions such as whether there are welcome signs in many languages, what policies and procedures exist for front office and school staff, whether there is a family waiting or resource room for families when they visit and what the school entrance looks like both outside and inside. Parents should also be included in a walk-through to assess these aspects of the school so that their perspective can be incorporated. The checklist should be accompanied by a guide with tips, tools and resources for how schools can improve their family friendliness. The guide should encourage as much parent participation in the process as possible and suggestions for how schools can work with parent volunteers to improve the school environment.

**CASE IN POINT**

*The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction created a resource guide on how to create family centers in the schools. The guide includes a “Schools that say, ‘Welcome’” checklist to determine how welcoming schools are. The guide also articulates the district’s parent involvement principles, highlights schools in the district that have successfully created welcoming schools, includes a tool to measure a school’s family-school-community partnerships and provides other resources and step-by-step guides.<sup>29</sup>*

**5. Develop a “parent friendliness” training module and provide this training in professional development courses.**

As federal guidance on parental involvement in schools notes, “[W]ith the assistance of parents, schools and [districts] must educate teachers, pupil services personnel, principals, and other staff in the value and utility of the contributions of parents and in how to reach out to, communicate with, and work with parents...and build ties between parents and schools.”<sup>30</sup> The guidance suggests

<sup>29</sup> *Organizing a Successful Family Center in Your School: A Resource Guide* (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction) Apr. 2005, <http://dpi.wi.gov/fscp/pdf/fcsprntc.pdf> (last visited Feb. 2009).  
<sup>30</sup> US DOE, *Parental Involvement Guidance*, *supra* note 20, at 27.

involving parents in the development of this training to improve its effectiveness.<sup>31</sup> The DOE should develop a training program in conjunction with parents, for example with the Family Partnership Advisory Committee recommended above, and the training should be given to all school staff. Such training should include information about immigrant parents in particular to ensure that practices are welcoming to all. The DOE should also develop a training module for teachers, counselors, parent coordinators and parent volunteers on how to conduct home visits, recommended below, with an eye toward ensuring cultural and linguistic sensitivity. As one participant in our focus groups said, “Staff development should include a focus on improving internal school culture in relation to immigrant parents, to understand where parents are coming from and how they come to this country perceiving the school system.”

#### **6. Create an Immigrant Family Resource Center in each borough.**

This office would be for newly arrived students and their families and would provide an orientation for parents to the school system, review paperwork for enrollment, conduct the home language identification survey, provide information on the ELL program options and the parent preference survey for ELL parents, and enroll students in schools. Center staff would be able to speak the languages represented in each borough and would receive referrals from schools, parent coordinators and District Family Advocates to troubleshoot problems that arise with immigrant families. These staff members could also refer parents to appropriate agencies to resolve non-education-related matters as a way to build trust with immigrant parents. The DOE should work with local CBOs to develop these positions, hire staff that will be linguistically and culturally competent and provide ongoing training and support.

#### **CASE IN POINT**

*The Montgomery County, Maryland school district has a Division of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) for parents and students whose primary language is not English, which houses an International Student Administration Office and a Parent Outreach Services team of 21 parent outreach workers. The International Student Administration Office is the first stop for newly arrived students, and its staff review students' immunization records, proof of residency in Montgomery county and transcripts; translate transcripts and report cards and put them in a format used in the United States; and facilitate enrollment by bringing these packets of materials to the enrollment/registration center. The Parent Outreach Services team works to minimize linguistic and cultural barriers so that immigrant parents can access educational resources and services. Outreach staff speak twelve languages other than English and are hired based on a social work and counseling background in addition to language and cultural competency. The staff visit schools and take referrals from schools to help immigrant families with school and non-school related matters.<sup>32</sup>*

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*

<sup>32</sup> Montgomery County Public Schools, Division of ESOL and Bilingual Programs, <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/curriculum/esol/index.shtm> (last visited Feb. 2009).

### School-Based Strategies

**7. Create parent identification cards so that parents can more easily access schools.**

Parents are often denied access to schools for lack of identification. Many immigrant parents are scared to visit schools for this reason alone. Schools should create identification cards for parents so that all parents can easily visit their children's schools. Schools should then accept either the school-issued card or currently accepted forms of identification from parents.

**8. Create and support a Parent Welcoming Committee in each school.**

Schools could work with a group of parent volunteers, which includes immigrant parents, to welcome parents at the front door and serve as parent liaisons, advisors on how the school can create a welcoming environment, and mentors for parents who want to get involved in school activities. The parent welcoming committee could also work with school security staff to assist them when parents visit the school to ensure that they are directed to the right place and can easily gain access to the building. This group could also serve as a multicultural advisory committee of the parent association described later.

**9. Use a space near the front desk, or other easily accessible and visible area, to create a Parent Resource Center or Family Center in each school.**

A Parent Resource Center is a space where flyers, newsletters, announcements and other school and community information are readily available to parents. Information should be provided in the languages spoken by parents and should include information on how to get translation and interpretation services. Schools should also explore creating a larger "family center" in their schools or nearby local community spaces. Family centers are spaces that have learning and other resources for parents and serve as a meeting space for parents and school staff. Such a center is a space where parents and all school staff can build relationships with each other, and its presence sends a message to parents that they are an important part of the school.<sup>34</sup>

#### CASE IN POINT

*Recognizing that not all parents have a driver's license or other form of official picture ID, a middle school in St. Louis created a "Very Important Parent (VIP)" card for parents. Parents would visit the school when they enrolled their child to get their picture taken, fill out their name and receive a laminated VIP card.<sup>33</sup>*

<sup>33</sup> Henderson, *Beyond the Bake Sale*, *supra* note 5, at 64.

<sup>34</sup> Vivian Johnson, *Parent Centers in Urban Schools: Four Case Studies*, Center on Families, Communities, Schools & Children's Learning, (Boston University) April 1994 (a study of parent centers in two schools in Boston, MA and two in San Diego, CA); *School Parent Center: A tool to open school doors for increased parental involvement*, Center for Effective Parenting) 2004, [http://www.parenting-ed.org/educator\\_resources/School%20Parent%20Center%20-%20REVISED.pdf](http://www.parenting-ed.org/educator_resources/School%20Parent%20Center%20-%20REVISED.pdf) (highlighting parent centers in schools throughout Arkansas); Jennifer Medina, *Report Cites Chronic Absenteeism in City Schools*, The New York Times, Oct. 21, 2008 [hereinafter Medina, *Chronic Absenteeism*].

**10. Work with all school staff and school safety officers to ensure that their actions support school efforts to welcome immigrant parents.**

**CASE IN POINT**

*The Julia Richman Education Complex, which houses six schools in Manhattan, uses a Building Council (BC) to design rules and procedures to ensure that the complex is governed fairly and equitably. Security staff regularly attend BC meetings to discuss problems and propose solutions. The collaboration between security forces and school administrators ensures that school welcoming policies are implemented by all staff in the building.*

In order to create welcoming and family-friendly schools, the entire school community should be involved. The responsibility cannot lie solely with parent coordinators, or even front door staff, as all members of the school community interact with parents. Schools should include safety officers in the development of family-friendly policies and train all staff to implement family-friendly policies in the school.

**11. Hire school staff that have ties to and speak the language(s) of the communities the school serves.**

Many service providers said that schools should make a greater effort to have more “faces that look like” immigrant parents in the school and increase the cultural sensitivity of school staff. A service provider in the Filipino community said parents need advocates and culturally sensitive people who understand the needs of the Filipino community. A service provider in the Arab community noted that Arab parents wish there were more Arabic-speaking administrators and teachers in the school. Service providers also noted that in schools where staff were from the community and spoke the languages of the community, immigrant parents were much more involved.

**CASE IN POINT**

*A service provider in the Korean community said that she went to a PTA event at a school that employed Korean staff, and a lot of Korean parents attended the event, but this is not the case at other schools. A service provider in the Haitian community said that P.S. 189 in Brooklyn has Haitian-Creole- and Spanish-speaking staff and really makes an effort to hire individuals who can address the needs of the multilingual and multicultural population at the school. She noted that while not all school officials need to speak the languages of the community, they do need to understand the linguistic needs of immigrant communities.*

**12. Distribute a welcome letter or packet to parents at the beginning of the school year in the languages spoken by families in the school.**

The welcome packet should be translated into all relevant languages and should explain the functions of SLTs, PTAs and other governance bodies and opportunities that exist in the school for parents and students (such as tutoring, counseling, Learning Leaders programs and workshops). These packets should also include information on parents’ rights (including the non-discrimination, non-retaliation, and immigrant safe zone policies recommended above) and information on complaint procedures. It could also include the asset map suggested below. These packets could be supple-

**CASE IN POINT**

*A parent in a focus group in Queens said that her child’s school provides a welcome packet to parents in Spanish and English when children are first enrolled in the school. The parent explained that the welcome packet includes an explanation of the SLT and PTA, information on Learning Leaders and volunteer opportunities, and opportunities and resources for parents and students in the school, such as tutoring, counseling and workshops. The parent said that this welcome packet is one of the reasons she feels very informed and welcome in her child’s school.*

mented by follow-up phone calls by the parent coordinator or members of the parent welcoming committee inviting parents to a school open house or other school events.

**13. Inform parents of their rights and ways to report incidents of discriminatory or retaliatory practices.**

Schools should disseminate know-your-rights information to immigrant parents, including information on how to report incidents that violate those rights. To ensure that immigrant parents feel comfortable reporting their complaints, there should be a multicultural parent advisory committee of the PTA, recommended below, that works with school administrators to develop complaint procedures and resolve complaints.

**14. Create and distribute an “asset map,” which is a list of neighborhood resources that support families or provide learning environments for students outside of the school.**

This map would include local CBOs, service providers, public institutions such as libraries and museums, community gardens or parks, and local media outlets. The map would be a good project for a parent coordinator to develop with parents and/or students, and would be a resource for families and school staff. It could also be used to identify CBOs who may be willing to partner with school staff to enhance parent participation.

**CASE IN POINT**

*A parent coordinator in the South Bronx, who is from the community she serves, maps community assets each year. She invites parents on a health walk and pilates class, and while they walk, she shows parents where they can find health, education, social services and other resources.*

**15. Provide workshops and other learning opportunities for immigrant parents.**

**CASE IN POINT**

*Many schools in New York City, such as P.S. 188 on the Lower East Side of Manhattan and Newcomers High School in Queens, provide workshops and learning opportunities for parents, covering topics such as adult literacy, English as a Second Language, and health and wellness.*

Schools should provide workshops for parents, especially workshops on issues relevant to the immigrant community. These workshops can be developed and conducted by CBOs and held at schools. They can also be held at CBOs with support (such as financial or staff support) from schools with subsequent meetings held at schools. Topics for workshops could include: tips for helping

children succeed in school, an orientation to the school system in the United States and New York

City, advice on helping children gain access to higher education, information on education rights and responsibilities of parents and students, strategies for navigating the school system or helping children with homework, and an introduction to parent-teacher conferences. Schools could offer learning opportunities for parents on non-education-related matters as well, such as adult ESL classes, literacy classes, computer classes, financial workshops, and health fairs. Such learning opportunities would help draw immigrant parents into the schools and make the schools learning centers for the community as a whole.

**16. Hold meetings at CBOs or in other community spaces if working with large immigrant populations who are not likely to attend events at the school.**

**CASE IN POINT**

*During one of the focus groups in Manhattan, parents began discussing a problem with teachers allowing students to drink water only at certain times. One parent said her child would hide under his desk to drink water from a water bottle she gave him during the hot summer months. None of the parents had complained about the problem at the school, but after hearing that other parents share the same concerns, a few decided that they would complain together. The moderator noted that, “Even though there was a lot of negativity toward the school atmosphere, the act of sharing and seeing that other parents had the same concerns seemed to generate a lot of positivity.”*

One service provider said that schools need to provide more meetings in the community and use CBO facilities because many parents are more likely to attend, feel comfortable and share their experiences in such settings. Meetings at CBOs can be supplemented with follow-up meetings at the school co-hosted by

CBOs. Federal guidance on parental involvement encourages school districts to develop appropriate roles for CBOs in parental involvement activities.<sup>35</sup>

**17. Explore using home visits and phone calls to parents to develop relationships and build trust with immigrant families.**

Federal guidance on parental involvement suggests the use of in-home conferences as one means to maximize parental involvement in conferences and school activities.<sup>36</sup> The DOE should develop a system that permits school staff to incorporate home visits as part of their work schedules. Schools can also rely on school social workers and parent volunteers to help with home visits or phone calls to parents. In addition to building relationships and trust, home visits can also be used to distribute or promote activities and resources to improve students’

**CASE IN POINT**

*An elementary school in Dorchester, Massachusetts improved students’ reading skills by training parents to do home visits. Parents visited the homes of each new student and brought books for each child in the family in both the family’s native language and English. As a result, 95% of families in the school regularly took part in the home reading program.<sup>37</sup>*

<sup>35</sup> US DOE, *Parental Involvement Guidance*, *supra* note 20, at 29.

<sup>36</sup> *Id.* at 28.

<sup>37</sup> Henderson, *Beyond the Bake Sale*, *supra* note 5, at 68.



academic skills such as reading and math.

**18. Explore partnering with CBOs to provide services such as outreach, translation, child care, or food for school meetings.**

Schools could explore partnering with CBOs to provide services needed by the schools’ parents, students or staff as a means to strengthen ties to families and the community. Many CBOs that have the trust and respect of the community are already providing these types of services for parents. Often CBOs are eager to help parents connect with schools, but they have limited budgets and resources. Schools could provide additional resources to CBOs to supplement their services or better integrate them into schools. As a CBO staff member noted, “The DOE needs to collaborate with us more because the community trusts us more.”

**CASE IN POINT**

*In Northern Manhattan, for example, members of the Center for Immigrant Families have formed a community catering cooperative that has been hired by District 3 to cater two large-scale Community Education Council meetings. This exchange of resources has not limited the ability of CIF to present their critique of school-related policies. For example, at one of the meetings they catered, CIF presented its assessment of the effectiveness of a new admissions policy in furthering equity in the district.*

**19. Re-make schools as centers of their communities, bringing in social services and other community partners that involve families more comprehensively.**

**CASE IN POINT**

*New York City has many community schools. One example is P.S. 188, a pre-Kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade community school located on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. The school is located next to a housing project and is across the street from a homeless shelter. School staff provides an after-school program for every child and workshops and trainings for parents. The school has five social workers that provide counseling and referrals to families, a health clinic that delivers services for students and referrals for parents, and dental and vision services. The school is currently developing a job training program that would incorporate the after-school program into a course to prepare parents to work as professional child care providers.<sup>39</sup>*

A community school<sup>38</sup> is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. Schools become centers of the community and are open to everyone — all day, every day, evenings and weekends. Using public schools as hubs, community schools knit together inventive, enduring relationships among educators, families, volunteers and community partners. Health and social service agencies, family support

groups, youth development organizations, institutions of higher education, community organizations, businesses, and civic and faith-based groups all play a part.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> A community school is a particular school model. See Coalition for Community Schools’ website and reports, <http://www.communityschools.org/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=6&Itemid=27> (last visited Feb. 2009) for more information.

<sup>39</sup> Children’s Aid Society’s community schools in Manhattan, <http://www.childrensaidsociety.org/communityschools/locations> (last visited Feb. 2009).

<sup>40</sup> *Id.*

***B. Break Down Language and Communication Barriers***

The many reports that have been written about improving language access in the schools<sup>41</sup> offer a wide range of recommendations on how to accomplish this goal. This section addresses specific concerns raised in Part I of this paper that continue to limit language access and communication for immigrant parents.

**Citywide Strategies**

- 1. Use an auto-dialer system to provide important citywide information about schools and events to parents in their native languages.***

**CASE IN POINT**

*The San Francisco Unified School District in California uses an auto-dialer system to get important information to parents in many languages. Similarly, in the Berkeley Unified School District, an auto dialer system was used to inform parents about the city’s immigrant sanctuary policy.*

Using the language preferences indicated on the home language surveys that parents fill out when they enroll their children in school, such a system could make automated calls in families’ home languages. This system could be used to inform families about events such as parent-teacher conferences, open schools week, native language forums and upcoming exams.

- 2. Develop a standing committee of CBOs and parents to work with the Translation and Interpretation Unit at the DOE.***

The committee could develop strategies to address immigrant parents’ concerns with DOE interpreters and to gather feedback on DOE communication with immigrant parents. This committee could also aid the DOE in ensuring that the language they use to communicate with parents is in fact plain language, as per the recent Executive Order No. 120.<sup>42</sup>

**CASE IN POINT**

*The San Francisco Unified School District’s Translation Unit has a standing committee with CBOs on Limited English Proficient (LEP) parent communication. The committee has developed an evaluation system for services provided and supplied feedback on how to write important documents in parent-friendly language.*

- 3. Develop a training program for all DOE staff who serve as interpreters.***

Many participants expressed distrust or suspicion of DOE interpreters, which deters parents from using interpreters when needed. All staff that serve as interpreters should be required to complete

<sup>41</sup> See, *supra*, note 13.

<sup>42</sup> New York City Executive Order 120, <http://home.nyc.gov/html/imm/html/executive/eo120.shtml> (last visited Feb. 2009).

**CASE IN POINT**

*The Center for Immigrant Health (CIH) of New York University School of Medicine works to facilitate the delivery of linguistically, culturally, and epidemiologically sensitive health care services to immigrants in New York City. The Center works with the New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation to provide training to bilingual health care staff on basic skills needed for face-to-face interpreting in health care settings. Training courses focus on listening, analysis, and memorization skills; interpreting techniques, medical terminology, and colloquial language; and ethical guidelines and decision-making. The program enhances linguistic and cultural competence, as well as knowledge of medical concepts and conditions.*

an interpreter training program that ensures that they are fluent in English and another language, knowledgeable of education-related vocabulary, and informed on the rules of ethical interpretation.

**4. Explore training volunteer interpreters from the community.**

Volunteer interpreters could help reduce the expenses associated with translation and interpretation and would be a good way to link schools to the community. In San Francisco, for example, a non-profit organization called SF School Volunteers has partnered with the Translation Unit of the Board of Education to establish a pilot program to train volunteer interpreters for Spanish- and Cantonese-speaking parents. The program aims to increase the capacity of schools to provide translation and interpretation services. It is a two-year pilot program that was launched in seven or eight schools where the Translation Unit works with volunteers to develop a training curriculum. The training program is then provided to volunteers and school district staff who want to learn how to be an interpreter. The basic curriculum includes important vocabulary, as well as role plays of situations such as parent-teacher conferences, community events and parent meetings. Volunteer interpreters then serve as interpreters in schools and help to ensure that translated documents from the district’s central clearinghouse are accessible and used effectively by school staff. Volunteers also help modify documents to the extent necessary to meet the needs of individual schools and communities.

**5. Provide training and support for school staff on how to access translated documents posted on the DOE’s website.**

While the DOE’s Translation and Interpretation Unit (T&I Unit) has created an archive of translated documents on the DOE’s website,<sup>43</sup> many schools do not know about the archive and do not know how to use the documents in their schools. Training is needed to ensure that school staff are aware of this resource and know how to use it effectively.

**CASE IN POINT**

*In San Francisco, the Technology Department and Translation Unit of the BOE do a joint training at monthly principals’ meetings on how to access the clearinghouse of translated documents available online.*

<sup>43</sup> NYC DOE, Translation and Interpretation Unit Archives, <http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/Translation/Archives/Default.htm> (last visited Feb. 2009).

**School-Based Strategies**

**6. Explore using different modes of communication with parents.**

At the beginning of the school year, schools could ask parents their preferred mode of communication (e.g., mail, e-mail, phone, sent home with child) and could maintain communication with the parents in their preferred mode throughout the year.

*A better way to communicate with the Haitian community is to talk to them. We are a verbal people, so voice communication is the best way to reach out to them whether it be over the phone or in person.*  
 —Service provider in the Haitian Community

**7. Explore ways to make written communication more effective.**

Participants often complained that notices given to students never reach parents. Some parents suggested mailing home important documents instead of giving them to children to take home. Another parent suggested a correspondence notebook, as is done with elementary school children in Puerto Rico, which children would take from the home to school and back daily. The notebook is a place for teachers to send notes and notices home, and for parents to write notes to the teachers.

**8. Record school voicemail in all languages spoken by parents in the school.**

**CASE IN POINT**

*Newcomers High School in Queens records messages in the languages spoken by parents in the school, including Spanish and Chinese.*

When parents call a school and get a voicemail or answering service in a language they do not understand, they are unable to initiate basic communication with schools. Schools should record voicemail or answering services in the languages spoken by parents in the school. To the extent that there is a uniform voicemail message in schools, OFEA and the Translation and Interpretation Unit could work with

schools to ensure that the basic information is available in the languages spoken by parents in the school community.

**9. Make an effort at the school level to hire bi/multi-lingual parent coordinators or outreach staff who are members of the community or are familiar with the needs of the community they serve.**

Parent coordinators are designed to be the liaison between the school administrators and parents. Therefore, it is essential that they are able to communicate with the communities their school serves. Schools that

**CASE IN POINT**

*Recognizing the need to reach out to a new African immigrant population in the community, P.S. 55 hired a full-time caseworker who speaks three African dialects to work with immigrant parents and mitigate cultural misunderstandings between parents and school staff.<sup>44</sup>*

<sup>44</sup> Kim Nauer et al., *Strengthening Schools by Strengthening Families: Community Strategies to Reverse Chronic Absenteeism in the Early Grades and Improve Supports for Children and Families*, (The New School Center for New York City Affairs) October 2008; Medina, *Chronic Absenteeism*, *supra* note 34.

serve communities where a significant portion of families communicate in a language other than English should make an effort to hire a number of bilingual staff members so that many staff members will be able to communicate with parents.

**10. Provide interpretation at school events and all workshops for parents, and publicize the availability of these services.**

Ensure that school events, particularly events involving students, are bilingual or provide interpreters. As one participant said, parents always want to attend events where their children are performing, but if they cannot understand what is being said, they feel left out.

**CASE IN POINT**

*A community organization in Brooklyn, La Union, incorporates student performance pieces into other events to get parents involved in their school-based campaigns.*

**11. Explore providing translation and interpretation services in conjunction with local CBOs.**

The DOE currently contracts out translation and interpretation services to various companies. Some of these companies have not developed trust in the communities they serve. Schools should explore identifying CBOs in their community that are able to provide translation and interpretation services and contracting out such services to these groups. As one service provider in the South Asian community said, “Schools and groups like ours need to collaborate more to fill the gaps in translation and interpretation services. The school should make it a duty to reach out to neighborhood CBOs, but they do not bother to use our connections to the community.”

**C. Make Schools More Responsive to Parents**

With some exceptions, parents and service providers expressed frustration with principals and school staff perceived as inaccessible and unresponsive to their concerns. Creating a more welcoming school environment and improving communication with immigrant parents will go a long way towards improving issues of access and responsiveness. Additionally, schools and the DOE should ensure that concerns raised by parents are addressed and resolved.

**Citywide Strategies**

**1. Strengthen existing complaint procedures to enable parents to resolve problems and hold schools accountable.**

While the DOE has an official parent complaint procedure and the complaint forms are now available online,<sup>45</sup> many parents do not know about it, and the complaint form and explanation of the complaint procedure are currently not available in any language other than English. Complaint forms and procedures must be made accessible to immigrant parents. The DOE should explore ways to disseminate complaint procedures to parents at schools, such as placing materials and

<sup>45</sup> NYC DOE, Office of Family Engagement and Advocacy, Complaint Form, <http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/OFEA/KeyDocuments/OFEA+Complaint+Form.htm> (last visited Feb. 2009).

forms in the school-based Parent Resource Center recommended above, or providing materials and forms to CBOs to assist parents in filling out complaints when necessary. The DOE should also tie the complaint procedures to principal accountability, so that schools that do not resolve parent complaints are identified and given support on how to improve their resolution procedures. The DOE should explore recording and incorporating aspects of official complaints into the school report cards, such as recording the number of complaints received about school facilities, family friendliness, academic programs, or other school-based problems. Such measures would reassure parents that their concerns are being taken into account and help schools and the DOE identify common problems and areas for improvement.

**2. Give parents a role in hiring and training parent coordinators, and consider hiring parent coordinators affiliated with CBOs.**

Parents should have a role in recruiting, selecting and training parent coordinators for their schools. Currently, parent coordinators are hired by and report to the principals, which can often limit their effectiveness in helping parents. Parents should be involved in the selection of parent coordinators in the schools because they are the community the position is designed to serve.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, schools should collaborate with CBOs in recruiting, hiring and training parent coordinators. When the DOE initially created the parent coordinator position, many schools in the city already had parent coordinators that were affiliated with local CBOs.<sup>47</sup> Due to the relationship many CBOs have with immigrant parents in the community, hiring parent coordinators that are associated with CBOs should be encouraged. At minimum, CBO involvement in the recruitment and training of parent coordinators would help build trust between parents and the school.

**School-Based Strategies**

**3. Solicit parent input on important school policies and when appropriate, modify policies based on their feedback.**

Many parents with whom we spoke said that schools only contact them when there is a problem with their child. Schools should reach out to parents in positive ways and ensure that parents can also let schools know when there are problems or concerns. To make parents feel comfortable giving input and show them

**CASE IN POINT**

*P.S. 188 developed a parent survey to try and determine, among other things, homework practices and what supports students had in the home. Because it was hard to get parents to fill out the survey, the school offered dinner at parent meetings and took advantage of open schools night, and the parent coordinator organized focus groups with breakfast. Based on the results of the surveys, teachers of each grade then met to develop a homework policy, which they presented and discussed with parents during parent-teacher conferences.*

<sup>46</sup> Medina, *Cost of Parent Coordinators*, *supra* note 15. When the parent coordinator position was first created, schools were supposed to form hiring committees, composed of mostly parents, which the principal would collaborate with in hiring a parent coordinator. It is unclear whether schools are still required to form such committees to hire parent coordinators or whether parents are given any formal role in hiring for this position.

<sup>47</sup> See Medina, *Cost of Parent Coordinators*, *supra* note 15. The DOE initially allowed 100 principals to contract the parent coordinator position to CBOs.

that schools want to know what they think, schools should ask for parent feedback on important policies. This effort would signal to parents that their concerns are not only welcomed but actually sought after by the school. School policies based on parent input would increase the likelihood that policies are inclusive and reflect the concerns of everyone affected, encourage parents to be supportive of the policies and make many school policies more effective in practice.

**4. Hold events or regular open office hours when principals, assistant principals and other relevant school staff are accessible to parents.**

**CASE IN POINT**

*A service provider working in a Spanish-speaking community in Northern Manhattan noted that many schools in the area have set up “breakfast with the principal” to make principals more accessible.*

Participants in a focus group in Brooklyn said that parents would like to have an opportunity to have their questions answered on a regular basis, and they would like to know that at a certain time and place each

week, there will be someone present who speaks their language and can answer questions. They would also like to see a scheduled time, once a week or once a month, when they can reach their children’s teacher without the teacher becoming upset or brushing them off because s/he is busy.

**D. Facilitate Immigrant Parent Leadership in Schools**

Our inquiry found that many immigrant parents in New York City are uninformed about parent involvement opportunities. Additionally, immigrant parents are often uncomfortable participating in school leadership, either because they do not feel welcome or require more information and additional leadership skills in order to be equal participants in parent meetings. While many of the recommendations detailed above will provide tools and opportunities for increasing immigrant parent involvement in leadership, leadership development is an essential element to ensure that immigrant parents can truly participate in schools.

**Citywide Strategies**

**1. Create a training module for immigrant parents that orients them to the school system and builds their skills to take on parent leadership positions.**

**CASE IN POINT**

*Immigrant parent leadership academies have been developed and implemented by both CBOs and school districts in Los Angeles, Miami, Montgomery County, and San Francisco. There are even CBOs in New York City that conduct such training, such as the Center for Immigrant Training and Education and Lutheran Family Health Centers. The Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) has also developed an immigrant parent training module as part of their National Parent School Partnership Program, which can be used by districts and schools.<sup>48</sup>*

<sup>48</sup> Henderson, *Beyond the Bake Sale*, *supra* note 5, at 126; Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, National Parent School Partnership Program, Parent Training Manual, <http://www.maldef.org/leadership/programs/psp/>.

Training can be done on the citywide, district, borough or school level and in conjunction with local CBOs. Unlike the parent training already offered by OFEA, this training module would focus on orienting parents to school leadership opportunities and developing the skills and expectations required to fill those positions or to participate more generally in school and parent association events.

**2. Create school governance structures that give more decision-making power to parents and provide for meaningful parent leadership in schools.**

Currently, SLTs and PTAs have limited decision-making power, and as a result, many parents do not view participation in these bodies as opportunities to participate meaningfully in schools. In fact, the State Education Department recently ruled that DOE regulations giving final decision-making authority to principals over the blueprint for the school’s operation, known as the Comprehensive Education Plan, violated state law requiring that parents, teachers and administrators share decision-making regarding school-based planning.<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, federal law allots funds to schools for parent involvement efforts in particular and requires that parents participate in the decisions about how the district distributes those funds to schools and how schools spend those funds.<sup>50</sup> The DOE should review the role of school governance bodies and explore creating structures that give parents decision-making power concerning issues like approving school budgets, evaluating principals and other school staff, and adopting new school policies and procedures.

**CASE IN POINT**

*In the Chicago public school system, there is a decentralized governing structure that has facilitated involvement of parents and immigrant parents in particular. Local School Councils (LSCs) at all schools, comprised of parent and community members, have the authority to enact school improvement plans, adopt school budgets, and evaluate principals. A study on Latino parents’ participation in the Chicago public schools credits this governance structure with institutionalizing resources for immigrant parents, such as the Bilingual Parent Resource Center and a Parent Training Unit, which provide training and technical support to parents and schools about bilingual services.<sup>51</sup>*

**School-Based Strategies**

**3. Create more opportunities for immigrant parent volunteers, and ensure that potential and current volunteers receive support.**

For immigrant parents, volunteer opportunities that take into account their backgrounds (such as asking parents fluent in particular languages to help in a bilingual program) would add positive

<sup>49</sup> See Elizabeth Lazarowitz, *Schools official says Bloomberg gave too much power to principals*, Daily News, January 6, 2009; United Federation of Teachers, Press Release: *State backs parents in appeal of city rule changes on school leadership teams*, January 6, 2009, [http://www.uft.org/news/issues/press/state\\_backs\\_parents/](http://www.uft.org/news/issues/press/state_backs_parents/)

<sup>50</sup> NCLB Title I, *supra* note 24; US DOE, *Parental Involvement Guidance*, *supra* note 20, at 16-18, 28.

<sup>51</sup> Marschall, *Local School Councils*, *supra* note 19, at 9.



**CASE IN POINT**

*The Austin Independent School District is currently developing a model after-school program in conjunction with the University of Texas, Texas Center for Education Policy. The program is being designed to be culturally relevant to the Mexican-American community in the district and will eventually be parent-run. The District plans to hire a community liaison to help cultivate parent leadership so that the after-school program can be run and directed by parents in the community.*

value and help build constructive relationships. In addition, an active group of immigrant parent volunteers would facilitate many of the other suggestions listed in this paper and foster an environment where different languages

and cultures are celebrated. A parent in a focus group in Queens said, for example, that she feels very comfortable in the International school her child attends because the school worked hard to get parents involved and provided many opportunities for parents to come to the school and volunteer at school events and fieldtrips. Parent volunteers could be used for a variety of activities suggested here, such as translation and interpretation, home visits, phone calls to parents about upcoming activities and events, welcoming parents at the front door, providing guidance to parents visiting the school and staffing after-school programs. Parent volunteers should be connected with a mentor and be given translation or interpretation services when necessary. Valuable support could also come from CBOs and other organizations, such as Learning Leaders.

**4. Hold at least one PTA meeting in the beginning of the year in the native language of parents who do not speak English, and make PTA and SLT meetings multilingual.**

In multilingual schools, introductory meetings should be held in parents’ native languages to ensure that all parents are included. These meetings could inform parents of the role of the PTA and the goals of the PTA over the year and invite parents to join the PTA. Holding the meetings in the native language of parents who speak languages other than English would send a strong message that those parents are not only welcomed by the PTA but encouraged to join. These meetings could also explain the role of SLTs and serve to recruit parents for that group as well. After these initial meetings, where possible, schools should hold bilingual meetings or create a committee of the PTA that holds meetings in parents’ native languages so that parents who speak a language other than English can be full participants. As a Spanish-speaking parent in Queens noted, “PTA meetings interest me, but I don’t feel comfortable with English and a translator is not the same as you, yourself, being able to express yourself.” If parents in the school speak many different languages and committees in various languages are not feasible, interpreters should be provided.

**CASE IN POINT**

*Newcomers High School in Queens has invested in interpretation equipment to provide simultaneous interpretation into Spanish and Chinese at PTA meetings. Parents are given headphones according to their language and are able to have the full meeting interpreted for them simultaneously.*

**5. Create a multicultural advisory committee of the PTA to participate in general parent involvement efforts and help recruit immigrant parent leaders.**

One service provider told us that parent associations “are always having fundraisers for dances,

## CASE IN POINT

*According to a recent article in The New York Times, the Jericho, New York school district noticed that Korean and Chinese parents were not involved in school events or PTAs, and it created a multicultural advisory committee to address this issue. More than two dozen Chinese and Korean parents now attend the multicultural advisory committee and ESL classes offered in the schools, and more Asian parents are attending PTA meetings and taking on leadership roles as a result. In an elementary school in Northern Manhattan, parents formed a committee for Spanish-speaking parents where they can communicate directly with one another about the issues that impact low-income parents and students of color at their school. The intention of the committee is to meet separately from the PTA and have a representative from the group attend the PTA meetings to share the concerns raised during the committee meetings.<sup>52</sup>*

fairs, which is great but...[they need] to be more focused on the kids, on parents, on strengthening the relationships between kids, parents and the schools.” To bridge the cultural gaps that stand between many immigrant parents and others on parent associations, schools could create a multicultural advisory committee of the PTA. If it is difficult to identify parents willing to serve on such a committee, schools could ask local CBOs

with ties to the immigrant community to help start them. The committee could explore ways to make parent meetings and events more relevant to and inclusive of immigrant parents and devise approaches to tackle difficult issues of discrimination and other mistreatment in the school.

**6. Explore making PTA schedules and meetings more flexible and accommodating to immigrant parents and parents with different work schedules.**

Some parents in focus groups suggested that meetings be held in the morning and evening to accommodate more parents. Alternatively, meeting times could alternate between morning and evening to accommodate all parents. In addition to scheduling changes, schools could offer child care services and meals at PTA meetings so that parents can easily attend. A parent in Queens said, for example, “I would like to participate in PTA meetings, but I have a young child that I cannot leave alone and I have no one that can watch him for me.” CBOs could provide child care and food services.

**7. Partner with CBOs to inform parents about SLTs and recruit members.**

CBOs could assist schools in developing more effective outreach and information about SLTs. Additionally, the Chancellor’s Regulation creating SLTs lists CBO members as optional SLT members.<sup>53</sup> Schools should reach out to CBOs in the community that work with parents, particularly immigrant parents, and invite them to collaborate in strengthening the SLT.

<sup>52</sup> Winnie Hu, *School District Tries to Lure Asian Parents*, The New York Times, November 12, 2008.

<sup>53</sup> Chancellor’s Regulation A-655, <http://docs.nycenet.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-30/A-655%2012-5-07%20%20FINAL.pdf> (last visited Feb. 2009).

## CONCLUSION

Immigrant families are a vital part of our city and have much to contribute to our schools. Without their participation, our schools will not be responsive to their needs and by extension, the needs of immigrant students. As long as the DOE continues to struggle with successfully educating and graduating immigrant and ELL students, research showing the direct connection between parent participation and student success cannot be ignored. As illustrated in this report, school districts across the country, and individual schools within New York City, have begun to prioritize family partnerships and explore creative ways to ensure that immigrant families are welcome members of the school community. It is time for New York City to address immigrant parent involvement in a comprehensive way and take a lead in the nationwide movement to strengthen family involvement in education.

**APPENDIX: A****NEW YORK CITY ORGANIZATIONS:**

**Arab Women Active in the Arts and Media (AWAAM):** AWAAM provides comprehensive leadership opportunities in community organizing, art and media skills to young women and girls. Their goal is to empower a generation of young women with the community organizing and media skills necessary to act as leaders within their communities, which have endured increasing hardship in recent years. As Arab and Muslim women, they endeavor to position themselves as producers rather than objects, of the mass media. Website: [www.awaam.org](http://www.awaam.org)

**Center for Immigration Education and Training at LaGuardia Community College (CIET):** CIET is housed in the Division of Adult & Continuing Education at LaGuardia Community College and provides comprehensive educational and training programs designed to help low-income immigrant English language learners to improve their economic status and become effective participants in the life of New York City. The Center offers free ESOL classes designed to help immigrant adults meet the challenges of the roles that they are called on to play as workers, parents and as citizens of New York City. Website: [www.lagcc.cuny.edu/ciet](http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/ciet)

**Center for Immigrant Families (CIF):** CIF is a collectively-run and popular education-based organization for low-income immigrant women of color and community members in uptown Manhattan. They organize to transform the conditions of injustice they face and the multi-layered impact on their own lives and that of their communities. Their major campaign is for justice and equity in OUR public schools. Website: <http://c4if.org>

**Center for Immigrant Health (CIH):** CIH's mission is to facilitate the delivery of linguistically, culturally, and epidemiologically sensitive healthcare services to newcomer populations. The Center strives for the elimination of ethnic and racial disparities in healthcare. Website: [www.med.nyu.edu/cih](http://www.med.nyu.edu/cih)

**Chinese Progressive Association (CPA):** Based in Manhattan's Chinatown / Lower East Side, CPA works towards social and economic justice for Chinese Americans. CPA involves community residents in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. Their educational, advocacy, service, and organizing programs seek to raise the community's living and working standards. Website: [www.cpanyc.org](http://www.cpanyc.org)

**Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF):** CACF is the nation's only pan-Asian children's advocacy organization and aims to improve the health and well-being of Asian Pacific American children and families in New York City. Website: [www.cacf.org](http://www.cacf.org)

**Council of Peoples Organization (COPO):** COPO is an organization focusing on issues that low-income South Asian Brooklyn residents face, especially in light of the backlash they face as South Asian Muslims after 9/11. Website: [www.copousa.org](http://www.copousa.org)

**Filipino American Human Services, Inc. (FAHSI):** FAHSI is a community-based organization dedicated to serving the most vulnerable segments of the Filipino community of New York—particularly youth, women, recent immigrants, and the elderly. Website: [www.fahsi.org](http://www.fahsi.org)

**Haitian Americans United for Progress (HAUP):** HAUP is a not-for-profit community-based-organization with the purpose of assisting low-income immigrant minority families and individuals to meet their needs and help them access tools and resources to live healthy and productive lives. Website: [www.haupinc.org/home.htm](http://www.haupinc.org/home.htm)

**Haitian Bilingual and ESL Technical Assistance Center (HABETAC):** HABETAC at Brooklyn College is funded by the New York State Education Department and is the only state-funded technical assistance center specifically designed to address the high needs of the Haitian ELLs and their families. The center provides professional services to administrators and teachers of schools where there are Haitian students. Website: <http://depthome.brooklyn.cuny.edu/africana/habetac.htm>

**La Unión (Fifth Avenue Committee):** La Unión is an organization of people of the global south working to advance the social, economic, and cultural rights of the communities where they now live and the communities they left behind. The 600 members of La Unión are predominantly from the Mixteca region of Mexico and immigrants from across Latin America. In addition to organizing adults, La Unión also has a youth organizing arm, Youth Action Changes Things (YACT), to empower the children of their members to achieve their goals and seek justice for themselves and their families.

**Lutheran Family Health Centers:** Lutheran Family Health Centers is a federally qualified health center network dedicated to reducing barriers and improving access to health and community services for the underserved communities of southwest Brooklyn. In addition to its medical, dental, and behavioral health services, the network offers a comprehensive array of educational and family support services. Website: [www.lutheranmedicalcenter.com/OurFacilities/LutheranFamilyHealthCenters/](http://www.lutheranmedicalcenter.com/OurFacilities/LutheranFamilyHealthCenters/)

**Make the Road New York (MRNY):** MRNY promotes economic justice, equity and opportunity for all New Yorkers through community and electoral organizing, strategic policy advocacy, leadership development, youth and adult education, and high-quality legal and support services. Website: [www.maketheroad.org](http://www.maketheroad.org)

**Metropolitan Russian American Parents Association (MRAPA):** MRAPA assists immigrant children and parents in adjusting to the American public education environment. They encourage parents to be active in their local PTAs, advocate on behalf of Russian-speaking children with disabilities and help their families learn the system of special education. Website: [www.cojeco.org/left/memberorganizations.htm](http://www.cojeco.org/left/memberorganizations.htm)

**New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC):** The NYIC is an umbrella policy and advocacy organization for more than 200 groups in New York State that work with immigrants and refugees and has become a leading advocate for immigrant communities on the local, state, and national levels. Website: [www.thenyic.org](http://www.thenyic.org)

**Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation (NMIC):** NMIC is a community-based-organization that serves the Washington Heights and Inwood communities. Their mission is to provide resources and support to their community's poorest residents, empowering them to secure economic stability and to be active participants in their community. Website: [www.nmic.org](http://www.nmic.org)

**YWCA Queens:** YWCA Queens is recognized as one of the groundbreaking nonprofit organizations reaching out to newly-arrived Asian and other immigrants. Its goal is to preserve and strengthen families and their traditions while serving as a bridge to the mainstream culture and community. Through delivering essential services to immigrant women and their families, they play a critical role in providing comprehensive services and programs to each individual and family, and to the community at large. Website: [www.ywcaqueens.org](http://www.ywcaqueens.org)

## ORGANIZATIONS OUTSIDE NEW YORK CITY:

**Asian Pacific American Legal Center:** The mission of APALC is to advocate for civil rights, provide legal services and education and build coalitions to positively influence and impact Asian Pacific Americans and to create a more equitable and harmonious society. Website: [www.apalc.org/index.php](http://www.apalc.org/index.php)

**Asian American LEAD (AALEAD):** AALEAD's mission is to increase the opportunities and ability of low-income Asian American children to move out of poverty and become successful, self-sufficient adults. AALEAD firmly believes that education is the key to meeting this goal, but understands that children need additional family, school, and personal supports, not just academic assistance, to succeed. Consequently, AALEAD uses a five-pronged approach to youth development, offering each child after school intervention in a safe space, mentoring, family support and educational advocacy. Website: [www.aalead.org/about.html](http://www.aalead.org/about.html)

**Chinese for Affirmative Action (CAA):** Chinese for Affirmative Action (CAA) was founded in 1969 to protect the civil and political rights of Chinese Americans and to advance multiracial democracy in the United States. Today, CAA is a progressive voice in and on behalf of the broader Asian and Pacific American community, advocating for systemic change that protects immigrant rights, promotes language diversity, and remedies racial injustice. Website: [www.caasf.org](http://www.caasf.org)

**Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE):** FINE is a community of thousands of educators, practitioners, policymakers, and researchers dedicated to strengthening family–school–community partnerships. Website: [www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/fine-family-involvement-network-of-educators](http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/fine-family-involvement-network-of-educators)

**San Francisco School Volunteers:** San Francisco School Volunteers is the largest source of volunteers for San Francisco public schools and aims to share responsibility with teachers and families to create a world-class education for students of every background and income level. Website: [www.sfsv.org](http://www.sfsv.org)

**Texas Center for Education Policy:** The purpose of the center is to bring researchers together whose work has direct bearing on policy issues of the day and to in turn bring them together with the larger stakeholder education communities statewide. Website: [www.edb.utexas.edu/tcep/](http://www.edb.utexas.edu/tcep/)

**APPENDIX: B****GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

**Chancellor’s Parent Advisory Council (CPAC):** This council’s role is to advise the Chancellor on DOE policies and is comprised of Parent Teacher Association leaders.

**Community-Based Organization (CBO):** CBOs are private non-profit organizations which are representative of a community or significant segments of a community and which provide educational or other services to individuals in the community.

**District Family Advocate (DFA):** In 2007, the DOE placed DFAs in all districts throughout the city to assist parents who still need assistance after consulting with their parent coordinators or principals. They work with superintendents, principals, parent coordinators, and local district leadership teams to help address families concerns or questions.

**English Language Learners (ELLs):** ELLs are students who speak a language other than English at home and score below a State-designated level of proficiency in English upon entering the school system. Schools must provide ELLs with programming to help them gain English proficiency. The DOE provides three types of English language acquisition programs to ELLs: Transitional Bilingual Education, Dual Language, and English as a Second Language Instruction.

**English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL):** ESOL refers to the acquisition of English as an additional language for people from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

**Local School Council (LSC):** These councils exist in every school in the Chicago Public School system, and are comprised of parents and community members. They have the authority to enact school improvement plans, adopt school budgets and evaluate principals.

**Native Language Forum:** A series of information sessions launched by the DOE in 2007. They are designed to give parents information about school-related matters in their native languages. The DOE has held these session in each of the top eight languages, other than English, spoken by parents of children in the New York City schools.

**Office of Family Engagement and Advocacy (OFEA):** In 2002, the DOE changed the Office of Parent Partnerships to the Office of Parent and Community Engagement, and then, in 2005, it became the Office of Parent Engagement. In 2007, it became OFEA. OFEA is the DOE’s central office that works to serve New York City public school families by helping parents answer questions and solve problems. They have also launched programs and initiatives to improve relationships with families and school communities. <http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/OFEA/default.htm>

**Parent Coordinator:** This staff position was created in all New York City schools to create a welcoming environment for parents and engage parents in the school community. The parent coordinator is part of the administrative team and is under the supervision of the principal.

**Parent Teacher Association (PTA):** PTAs are the main way for parents to get involved in their

children's schools. PTAs are school-based organizations, open to all parents, that usually include teacher and school administrative representatives as well. PTAs have oversight over school budgets and school-based planning, and often play a role in coordinating parent activities in the school.

**Respect For All:** This is a DOE initiative to increase awareness about the city's cultural diversity and foster respect for differences. The campaign includes training for school staff, and posters and brochures to be distributed in the schools that explain the DOE's efforts, which can be found here: [http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/47C3401D-BEAA-41E4-BC8E-C595E9A9CA44/38192/respect\\_for\\_all\\_brochure\\_English1.pdf](http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/47C3401D-BEAA-41E4-BC8E-C595E9A9CA44/38192/respect_for_all_brochure_English1.pdf)

**School Leadership Team (SLT):** SLTs are school-based organizations that are formed to solicit feedback on the school and oversee budgets and school-based planning. SLTs are composed of the Principal, PTA President, UFT Chapter leader, and must include an equal number of parents and staff. High school SLTs must also include two students.

**Title I of No Child Left Behind:** Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act is the largest federally funded program for elementary and secondary schools. Its purpose is to provide federal funds to schools with high concentrations of children living in poverty with low academic achievement. In addition to providing funding, Title I requires that schools and districts receiving funding make adequate yearly progress and mandates a set of consequences for schools that fail to make progress. More information can be found at: [www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml](http://www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml).

**Translation and Interpretation Unit:** This unit provides DOE schools and offices with an internal resource for accessing written translation and oral interpretation services. It also is an important part of the DOE's language access initiative, which aims to enhance the organization's ability to communicate with and better engage limited-English-proficient parents of New York City school-children.



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Tucker, Jill & Van Derbeken, Jaxon, *ICE raids on homes panic schools, politicians*, San Francisco Chronicle, May 07, 2008, at B-3.

**APPENDIX D:****DISTRICTS HIGHLIGHTED**

Austin Independent School District: <http://www.austin.isd.tenet.edu/>

Boston Public Schools: <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/>

Chicago Public Schools: <http://www.cps.k12.il.us/>

Jericho Public Schools: <http://www.jerichoschools.org/>

Montgomery County Public Schools: <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/>

San Francisco Unified School District: <http://www.sfusd.edu/>

Saint Louis Public Schools: <http://www.slps.org/>

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction: <http://dpi.wi.gov/>

**NEW YORK CITY SCHOOLS HIGHLIGHTED**

International Network of Public Schools: 50 Broadway, Suite 2200, New York, New York 10004

Phone: 212.868.5180

<http://www.internationalsnps.org/>

Julia Richman Education Complex: 317 East 67th Street, New York, NY 10065

Phone: 212-570-5284

<http://www.jrec.org/>

Newcomers High School: 28-01 41 Avenue, Queens, NY 11101

Phone: 718-937-6005

<http://schools.nyc.gov/SchoolPortals/30/Q555/default.htm>

P.S. 055 Benjamin Franklin: 450 Saint Paul's Place, Bronx, NY 10456

Phone: 718-681-6227

<http://schools.nyc.gov/SchoolPortals/09/X055/default.htm>

P.S. 189 Lincoln Terrace: 1100 East New York Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11212

Phone: 718-756-0210

<http://schools.nyc.gov/SchoolPortals/17/K189/default.htm>

P.S. 188 The Island School: 442 East Houston Street, Manhattan, NY 10002

Phone: 212-677-5710

<http://schools.nyc.gov/SchoolPortals/01/M188/AboutUs/Statistics/facilities.htm>

**APPENDIX E:****FAMILY INVOLVEMENT RESOURCES**

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Children's Aid Society's community schools in Manhattan, [www.childrensaidsociety.org/communityschools/locations](http://www.childrensaidsociety.org/communityschools/locations).

Coalition for Community Schools' website and reports, [www.communityschools.org/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=6&Itemid=27](http://www.communityschools.org/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=6&Itemid=27).

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