

ETHNIC AND COMMUNITY MEDIA FELLOWSHIP

Building capacity in
mission-driven media
to promote parent
involvement in
student education

Report by
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with Jennifer Cheng



NEW YORK CITY
2008-2010

NEW YORK COMMUNITY MEDIA ALLIANCE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Ethnic and Community Media Fellowship – Developing an Education Beat 2008-2010

Juana Ponce de León, Executive Director, New York Community Media Alliance

September 15, 2010

REPORT

Background

In the fall of 2007, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation approached the New York Community Media Alliance seeking help to organize education forums in immigrant communities in New York City. At issue was parental participation in the children's education and the foundation was considering strategies to address the low rates of involvement and erode at cultural and language barriers that appear to be at the crux of the problem.

The NYC public education system, the largest in the country and arguably the most complex, given the diversity of the student population and the fact that more than 150 languages are spoken among them, make the task on addressing the students' education issues daunting.

Although the DOE has put great effort in trying to involve immigrant parents in their children's education, a July 2009 report by Center for NYC Affairs, *The New Marketplace – How Small-School Reform and School Choice Have Reshaped New York City's High Schools*, states: "For many immigrant parents, the very idea of high school choice is a foreign one. They aren't used to the notion that parents have options. Some are fearful that advocating for their child may be seen as a challenge to authority. Mothers, in particular, may not be accustomed to advocating for their children in the way that the New York City high school application process often requires. Many women from Latin America, South Asia and the Middle East are taught to be deferential both to their husbands and to school officials, making it difficult for them to assume the activist role necessary to take advantage of school choice."

Lourdes Ruiz, a Brooklyn mother from Ecuador whose daughter was rejected from all seven schools she applied to, said, "Here, I am like a blind person."

Immigrant parents have the right to request and receive school information in a language they can understand, yet a 2009 report by Advocates for Children, *Empty Promises*, shows that many of the parents remain shut out of school activities and leadership opportunities. "[O]ver one third (37%) of the parents surveyed did not receive translated notices to attend parent-teacher conferences. Sixty percent of parents surveyed were not aware of the translation and interpretation services available to them." Parents are uninformed and hand-tied at a moment when school reform is affecting English-language learners adversely and putting immigrant children at risk of not completing their high school education.

According to the AFC report: "The DOE's new small high schools, charter schools, and multiple pathways programs to serve overage students have all failed to account properly and adequately for the needs of ELLs and have, in many cases, excluded ELL students (13% of the student population). This exclusion of ELLs has come at a severe cost. While the general graduation rate climbed to 52.2% in 2007 from 46.5% in 2005, the rate for ELLs dropped from 28.5% to 23.5% over the same period. As of 2007-08, there were only 17 ELL-focused schools in all of New York City. Such a limited number of schools cannot serve the needs of the more than 41,000 ELL high school students in the City."

The Strategy

NYCMA proposed an alternative strategy to community forums for the delivery of information on the public school system and the school reform spearheaded by Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Schools Chancellor

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Joel Klein, and committed to developing a sustainable media model to facilitate the provision of this important information to immigrant and ethnic communities that would have traction beyond the life of the grants secured to support this work.

The model, addressing the need for parents to become informed and involved in the student's education, makes deliberate use of an information infrastructure already in place, the local newspapers serving immigrant and ethnic communities, to deliver well-sourced, pragmatic and frequent information on education, vetted by community leaders – oftentimes, publishers, editors, and journalists have leadership roles in their communities – in a language they understand, to help empower parents to become advocates for their children's education.

NYCMA believes in the vigorous promotion of independent community publications, with special emphasis on publications serving low-income communities, communities of color and immigrant communities. In New York City the ethnic and community print media alone consists of close to 350 weeklies and 26 foreign-language dailies, reaching a readership of approximately 3.5 million city residents, including more than 90 ethnic communities; the network is an important and extensive media player. Although not uniformly progressive, these publications can be characterized as mission-driven and play a critical role in organizing, advocating and promoting civic engagement in the communities they serve. Sixty percent of these publications are distributed regionally and 40 percent are distributed nationally. In particular for ethnic publications, their growing online presence broadens the reach of their coverage to national and international audiences, where their extended communities reside.

The New York City Mayor's Office on Immigrant Affairs estimates 1.8 million city residents have little or no English-language skills, a fact that helps to underscore the vital service that the many ethnic newspapers provide their communities by bringing news on policy, services, and social issues to readers who are not consumers of English-language mainstream media. This flow of information makes it possible to help integrate immigrant communities, marginalized by language and culture, to the larger society, and who often do not access services offered by community organizations that work on public education issues.

The Objectives

- To build the editorial capacity of the publications – by informing the informers and promoting networking opportunities with leaders in the education field inside the DOE and advocacy organizations – to provide well-sourced and frequent coverage on education to their readers.
- To empower parents to involve themselves in their children's education more efficiently, by informing them how the public education system functions, and of their rights and their children's rights to a good education.
- To develop a replicable ethnic and community media model focused on public school education that addresses the language and cultural barriers that hamper parent involvement in their children's education.
- To provide insight to supporting foundations, government agencies and advocacy groups on concerns and issues on education in immigrant communities and communities of color through Fellowship coverage translated into English and disseminated through NYCMA's award-winning weekly online publication, ***Voices That Must Be Heard***.

The Premise

Sustained coverage on public education in local newspapers can bring vital information to immigrant and low-income communities, helping parents to familiarize themselves with the education system and to alleviate

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some of the cultural and language barriers, and economic demands, which presently impede full engagement in their children's education. As well, repeated coverage will brand the newspapers as a place to go for education information vetted by community editors and journalists, who serve as advocates and interpreters of broader society for community members. Making deliberate use of a communications vehicle through the Fellowship sidesteps anecdotal reporting on education, developing a novel issue-oriented model that can be replicated. Offering scholarships to participating journalists represents an investment in the participants' careers and in the editorial capacity of the newspapers, which often cannot dedicate staff time and resources for in-depth reporting projects. Journalists with strong investigative reporting skills and with access to public education information sources can produce nuanced and in-depth information to their readers. Promoting print-publication coverage also takes into consideration that Internet access is not universal in immigrant communities and communities of color.

Because the fellowship gathers journalists from a diversity of ethnicities to focus and investigate issues together, it promotes collaboration that blurs cultural boundaries and enriches the quality of education coverage. The publication of Fellowship articles translated into English in ***Voices That Must Be Heard***, NYCMA's award-winning online weekly publications that reaches 20,000 subscribers, makes the perspectives and analyses on public education emerging from immigrant and low-income communities available to a broad spectrum of stakeholders in New York City – government agencies, advocacy groups, mainstream and progressive media journalists – and beyond, doing away with the segregation of these fundamental community voices and broadening the discussion on public education issues.

Project Description

The 20-month program – Fellowship I and Fellowship II – conducted over the course of three years, exposed participating editors and journalists to the issues involved in current public education reform efforts in New York City. The Fellows met with Department of Education officials, community advocates (including critics of the current reform agenda), school administrators and nonprofit organizations involved in shaping the education system. In addition, the Fellowships included site visits to three different school models in order to provide participants with an opportunity to observe first-hand what happens during the school day and to speak to students, teachers, and principals within the school environment.

Fellows gained in-depth understanding of the issues informing school reform, the various reform models being implemented in New York City, the challenges facing different student populations, the data used to evaluate reform efforts, and study the early evidence indicating what is and is not working. Fellows also were familiarized with community, parent and student resources within the public school system and informed of ways in which parents and community members can have a voice in the changes schools are undergoing.

In order to enhance the Fellows' investigative reporting skills, the program provided close mentoring by an editorial leader who helped in the development of the journalists' stories, conducted group evaluation of a selection of articles generated through the Fellowship, and critiqued the articles based on their substance, sourcing, clarity of expression and possible impact.

In the second year of the Fellowship, the integration of radio broadcasting training into the program was seen as a necessary next step to bring multimedia skills to print journalists and encourage the use of radio and podcasts to expand coverage on public education and school reform issues. People's Production House conducted this training and will help disseminate these radio pieces produced during the Fellowship to an extended network of independent radio networks nationally. Completion of the 11 radio pieces is expected by November 21, 2010.

Find the full syllabus on page 13.

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Outcomes

The 2008-2009 Fellowship increased education coverage from 40% to 100% in the participating publications, with a total of 140 articles generated. Although the 2010 Fellowship involved six fewer journalists than the previous year – it will conclude in the third week in November 2010 – it has kept up the coverage gains, with parallel increases in education reporting in the second group of participating publications. The anticipated number of articles for the second Fellowship will exceed 65. In addition, the second Fellowship participants generated 11 radio broadcast pieces to be disseminated through public access radio, and through a developing project of Internet radio, the Ethnic News Radio, which will have its portal at the NYCMA website. A selection of the articles were published in ***Voices That Must Be Heard***, NYCMA's award-winning weekly online publication that culls articles from this media sector, translates them into English when necessary, and is sent out broadly to mainstream and progressive media, government agencies, advocacy groups, and journalism schools.

Short-term expected outcomes

Publication of over 200 articles and 11 radio pieces; growing the coalition of education reporters from 17 to 29; building capacity for education reporting; informing hard-to-reach parents on education; providing access for the reporters to school and education policy makers and administrators, education advocates and labor.

Capacity added-value

Because the ethnic and community publications, in the main, lack of resources to have dedicated staff to develop specific beats, the Fellowship has sought to develop a “culture” for reporting on education, by providing the participants editorial and informational resources, training on use of digital investigative reporting tools, in multimedia reporting and use of social media to enhance their reach.

Informational added-value

Currently there are 30 ethnic/community publications representing 18 ethnic communities – including *Sing Tao Daily*; *World Journal*; *Diario de Mexico*; *Nowy Dziennik-Polish Daily News*; *Haitian Times*; *Bangla Patrika*; *Irish Echo*; *Norwood News*; *Our Time Press*; *Indian Express*; *Vercheniy NY*; *Aramica*; *City Limits*; *Sada-e-Pakistan*; *Weekly Thikana*; *Virtual Boricua*; *Novoye Russkoye Slovo*; *Zaman*; – that have stepped up reporting on education issues since March 2008.

Social added-value

Cumulatively, these print publications reach 750,000 readers in New York City's immigrant communities and communities of color, who are now receiving nuanced, frequent, well-sourced information on public education issues and school reform in a language they understand. The four online publications that participated in the Fellowship – *Virtual Boricua*, *City Limits*, *NY de Día*, and *indousnewsonline.com* – cumulatively receive 22,000 distinct hits a week. An anecdotal survey of the participating print publications indicates that the slow yet certain growth of their online presence augments their readership anywhere from 33%, as reported by *Indousnewsonline.com*, to a tenfold increase in traffic as reported by the *Haitian Times*, to a 200-300% growth in readership at *Nowy Dziennik-Polish Daily News*. This growth in readership leverages Fellowship output by reaching immigrant communities and communities of color beyond the NY metro area. The publications are branded as trusted sources for information about schools and education.

Partnerships

NYCMA's partnerships enriched the Fellowship. Our collaboration with the New York Times Company Foundation and Independent Reporters and Editors to produce the Watchdog Workshops for Ethnic Media in April 20, 2009 and collaboration with CUNY Graduate School of Journalism in spring 2010, provided training in multi-media investigative reporting skills with professionals at the top of the industry. Fellow participation in these workshops was mandatory. Bolstering the Fellows' investigative reporting skills is paramount, not only because it makes them better journalists, but to help liberate them from a characteristic reliance on reiteration

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of mainstream media reporting in their own publications. This is particularly significant at this historical juncture when the impact of the economic downturn and the shift to online news formats of corporate media have resulted in the erosion of editorial staffs. In collaboration with Free Press, People's Production House and Prometheus, the Fellowship program integrated coverage on the Stimulus and educational opportunity for NYC public school students. With the George Washington Williams Ct. for Investigative Journalism, and with support from the Proteus Fund (Media Democracy Fund), we are developing a focus on Internet access and the impact on school children who do not have it, in order to bring state of media ownership and media policy into the framing of public education issues.

What the Fellows Say

2008-2009

- *Education Fellowship has given us a chance to realize the importance of reporting on education for the immigrant community. We never had more than one or two stories in a year about the education. Since I am in the Fellowship, almost every week we are publishing an education story and our readers are grateful to us. The response has been tremendous, by giving the Bangladeshi community a new opportunity to use Bangla Patrika as very useful tool to understand the NYC education system and watch the performance of their children. **Abu Taher – Bangla Patrika***
- *Being part of the Education Fellowship has developed my interest for education. I did not have any clue about what was going on in this field. The fellowship has created an enthusiasm for shedding light on the Department of Education policy for the Haitian community and a healthy interest in informing about the performance of the Haitian kids in the system. The training is well-suited for those who want to search public records, do effective interviewing, and develop their sources. I learned what it takes to produce a good story at the experience levels desired by editors. As a newspaper manager the Fellowship had provided a stimulus to run more education stories which has helped the newspaper play its role as a community-building institution. **Darlie Gervais – Haitian Times***
- *I have been covering education for years. But the Education Fellowship still does a lot to enhance my understanding of the education system. New York's education system is not only the largest in the country, but also the most complex one. The speakers invited to address the fellows are a good combination of DOE representatives, advocates, researchers and educators and they are true experts in their own field. They helped building up a strong foundation of knowledge for me which makes covering education much easier. The fellowship assignments of four stories also help a lot. As a fast pace daily newspaper, we normally don't have the luxury of many rounds of exchanges between the reporter and the editor to make a story perfect. The fellowship assignments provide an opportunity of doing stories in the old-school way which journalism should be like. I had never covered primarily education related stories in New York, and this fellowship is really getting better as we progress with the monthly workshops/editorial meetings, and meetings and interaction with DOE officials/experts. I am beginning to better understand education related issues, producing stories that I feel are not only satisfying to me as a journalist, but am confident would make for interesting material for our readers. Also, we have done some stories based on press releases sent by the DOE. **Rong Xiaoqing – Sing Tao***
- *As a newcomer to the US last year, the fellowship has taught me everything I know about the NYC education system. I now understand how the system works, the key players and issues, meaning I am well placed to report thoroughly and insightfully for the benefit of my newspaper's community. The bi-weekly meetings with leaders in the education field, policy makers and advocates have been a rare chance for us all to get our questions answered and make those players aware of the concerns faced by our communities. The in-depth editorial process has helped me see how to plan, develop*

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and write structured and engaging stories, fully supported by all the necessary facts and sources. This training applies to all of my reporting, not only education, greatly improving the quality and credibility of my work. The stories I have published on education have received attention and praise among our readers, pleased that our newspaper is looking at the system from their perspective. I fully intend to continue reporting education once the fellowship is over, and I hope the organizers will ask the same questions about our coverage in one, two years from now. **Rachel Millard – Aramica**

2010

- *This is a great program, which gives me the opportunity to have in-depth thoughts about the educational issues in Chinese Community. And my articles also bring the elected officials attention to this area. One of my articles talked about how the government put business development before school development. After reading my article, the local city council member brought the issue to the Chancellor, and asked him when they would build news schools in Flushing. I'm very proud of it.* **Jia Xu – World Journal**
- *The Education Fellowship has helped Nepszava Szabadsag put education issues in New York into perspective as prior to the Fellowship there was no reporting on education issues whatsoever for the Hungarian community. Personally, the Fellowship has improved the quality of my reporting, and I am more aware of how to make the stories more interesting and professional for our audience. It has contributed to more local stories being published as opposed to those about Hungary, and has made the readership more involved in education issues. It has raised the awareness of several parents who did not know information or knew it inaccurately before we reported on it. The radio training was extremely useful as well as it will help the newspaper produce radio pieces to further engage the community in matters of local interest, especially education.* **Bojana Varga – Népszava Szabadság**
- *The New York Community Media Alliance 2010 Ethnic and Community Press Fellowship Developing an Education Beat built my newspaper's coverage of education. New York City's school system is a complicated and daunting topic to cover. The fellowship demanded concise and effective stories from the get-go, while exposing fellowship members to many of the newsmakers and inside policy people in the Department of Education. This was counter balanced by seminars with union leaders and non-profit agencies that interact with the DOE on a consistent basis, and may have views on policy that differ from the administration. While the training and experience would have been worth it alone, the generous stipend provided through the fellowship made the time and effort required for the program possible, and the articles produced for the fellowship quickly went to the top of my clips pile. Their value quickly became measurable, as they have aided me in making the next step in my career – as the education beat reporter for a mid-sized daily newspaper. Additionally, the radio training the fellowship provided me has exposed me to a new area of journalism – podcasting and producing a story for broadcast. I wouldn't have known where to start had I pursued this on my own. Thanks to NYCMA and their wonderful staff for a rewarding experience.* **Daniel Bader – Manhattan Times**
- *NYCMA Fellowship expanded my education reporting horizon. Especially guest speakers were very diverse from NYC chancellor to UFT teachers to family advocate lawyers. These are the people that I usually couldn't have for my reporting unless it was for the Fellowship. New information, new perspectives, new dialogue came from every session we had. Definitely, all these deepened the knowledge for my reporting. In general, my reporting came to have lots of dynamic layers with the help of the fellowship. Working with such a diverse group of fellows was a plus. Most of them are immigrant reporters, and each one of them has a different story on the same issue along with core similar issues. The radio component is preparing me for another level of Journalism. It's new, and took some time to learn and adjust to it, but in the end, it paid off. Radio reporting opened my ears to another way of reporting. Hope next fellowship has video reporting component.* **Jinhwa Jo – Korea Daily**

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- *Both my writing and reporting skills have greatly improved due to the Education Beat fellowship. I have become much better at interviewing sources and really thinking about the role of those interviews will play in both my written and radio pieces. Prior to this fellowship, I was more of a writer, however, this fellowship through Garry's editorial sessions and Deepa and Abulai's sessions, have really shown and sharpen my technical understanding of reporting. The speakers were beyond phenomenal. These are people that we otherwise would not have access to, yet every month they were sitting in an intimate setting with us providing us real, concrete information about policies and issues. The skills and resources provided are invaluable in my advancement as a reporter.* **Nadege Fleurimond – Haitian Times**

What the Editors Say

- *Education is one of the most important issues in the Chinese-American community. The NYCMA Education Fellowship program is very fruitful and meaningful and has brought our education coverage to a higher level. After attending the education Fellowship program, our reporters wrote more in-depth stories about education. The response from our readers has been positive and encouraging.* **Rick Ho – General Manager, Sing Tao**
- *The fellowship has been phenomenal. Nadege has gotten lots of calls and tips from people who want to follow up on other stories. The challenge for the Haitian Times is that we don't have the funds to hire a reporter even on a freelance basis to do these stories.* **Garry Pierre-Pierre – Publisher, Haitian Times**
- *The fellowship program has augmented our coverage of education, giving us stories that we would not have been able to do on our own. It has encouraged us to find CUNY graduate journalism students to cover education as a beat, much as Noor has done for us.* **David Greaves – Publisher, Our Time Press**
- *The Educational Fellowship program contributed to enriching the education coverage in our paper. We have an education section every Tuesday. We do not publish more educational pieces, but the quality increased enormously.* **Tomasz Deptula, Senior Editor, Nowy Dziennik-Polish Daily News**

Coordinators Program Evaluation

Although it is very difficult to measure the actual impact of stepping up coverage of education issues in ethnic and community publications, NYCMA program coordinators, and the NYCMA board members consider the use of the local newspaper critical to promoting engagement of parents in their children's education. As the reports cited above indicate, in terms of DOE efforts to reach immigrant parents, a proper evaluation would require funds to survey school administrators and parents who are readers of the local newspapers involved in the Fellowship program. It can be surmised, however, that overworked parents who cannot keep appointments with teachers and school administrators, and parents with little or no English-language schools are getting more information about the school system and education issues than prior to the launching of the fellowship program. Participating journalists also speak of the value of the program to enhance their reporting skills and make them better reporters. In some cases, seeing their articles published on the front page of the newspaper has validated their effort and ours.

"The Fellowship as structured is fundamentally sound. The Fellows are deeply interested in the subject and they show great enthusiasm in conceptualizing, reporting and writing their stories, which have impact on their respective communities. But given the discrepancy in their English writing level, it is necessary to have one-on-one sessions as well as group meetings. I believe both approaches are essential. Some of the fellows hesitate to participate in class because of their limited English proficiency. It is a priority to

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call on everyone and insist that their English abilities are fine and that shouldn't be an excuse not to share their knowledge with the rest of us. E-mail and phone conversation are an integral part of communicating with the fellows.

"It is important to note that the ostensible purpose of this program is not to turn these journalists into Associated Press or American reporters. The fellows come from various countries, consequently, we make an effort to learn each fellow's style of journalism and integrate it with some of the best practices of American journalism. Our goal is to provide them with some journalistic tools and skills that allow them to publish articles that will educate their readers and help them understand the complexities of the NYC education system." **Garry Pierre-Pierre – Fellowship Editorial Leader**

Access to Information

There were several problems encountered at the start of each program session. The initial selection of story ideas was weak primarily due to a lack of familiarity with the subject at hand that prevented the journalists from identifying issues beyond the common ones brought on by language and cultural barriers, which have been the focus of several studies. This lack of familiarity was attributed, in part, to the journalists' inability to get the DOE to respond to their queries – several journalists felt that they were simply not taken seriously and certainly were not given the attention offered journalists from mainstream publications. As the Fellowship progressed, however, the framing for the stories improved vastly, primarily due to the editorial training and access to resources provided by the program. For example, with the increasing reliance on online communication by the DOE to access their programs, such as payment for student lunches by the parents, one Chinese journalist indicated that parents in the Chinatown community were unable to understand how to use the online features, and reported that access to Internet or a computer cannot be taken as a given (the article can be found on page 47). On the issue of bullying, which received a great deal of focus from the Fellows, our Korean reporter produced an article describing what bullying looks like, informed on steps taken by the DOE to address this problem in school; and provided insight from Korean psychologists on why Korean students were vulnerable to harassment (the article can be found on page 138). In the past, such an article would have merely pointed to a victim or victims of bullying to report the incident and parental and community outrage.

Scheduling Issues

Although the journalists are contacted repeatedly and reminded of time and place for their seminars, the demands on their time as full time reporters interfered with their getting to the meetings on time. I am uncertain that there is much we can do to remedy this situation. It must be said, however, that absences were unusual.

Next Steps

The quick shift of media to online formats underscores the urgency for ethnic and community media to claim real estate online in order to scale up the readership across media sectors and ensure Internet diversity. To that end, NYCMA is in the process of designing an Internet needs-assessment survey of immigrant communities in New York City in collaboration with Fiscal Policy Institute and People's Production House, and has approached NYU Steinhardt School of Communications and Global Affairs to help design an online presence needs-assessment for NYCMA member publications. Of particular interest for NYCMA is the development of Internet radio stations, which will promote increased capacity and interactivity for publications and the communities they serve; as well, NYCMA will take the initiative to join ethnic publications to a network of Internet radio stations that is national and international, thus bringing on the ground news and perspectives to a broader audience.

NYCMA continues to work in close partnership with the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism in the development and outreach for multi-media training of ethnic journalists funded by the Ford Foundation, and help ensure that the programs have traction in the ethnic media.

Covering New York Schools: A Journalist's Road Map – an interactive digital informational hub

Because of a general lack of resources and small staff at many of the newspapers, and the need to balance a fulltime job with a demanding Fellowship program, it became clear that there was a need to make access to public education information easy. Following several evaluation sessions with program coordinators, interviews with Fellows, and with the NYCMA board, it became evident that the existence of an interactive digital hub to house resources, contacts, etc., for reporters, would be an effective solution to help coverage on education issues for this media sector. The digital model could be replicated in cities across the country with large immigrant populations. NYCMA is presently developing a proposal for the **Journalist's Road Map** that will link journalists to established online resources for education reporting, making connections and creating short-cuts so that reporters won't have to start each story 'from scratch.' It will support collaboration among the city's local journalists as people develop and share sources, stories, and ideas. Its content resources will help journalists understand how the system works, in New York City, New York State and the US, and establish a vibrant, online community that thrives on daily updates and information-sharing. The Road Map template can be adapted to individual states, going forward, in markets where local journalists write for and about a wide range of ethnic communities.

PROGRAM SYLLABUS

Ethnic Community Press Fellowship on NYC Public Education 2008-2010

Fellowship Description

The Fellowship aims to promote critical thinking on public education issues and to develop a public education beat in NYC ethnic and community newspapers to help inform community members. Fellows are expected to produce a series of articles on public education for the newspapers where they are on staff.

The 20-month fellowship will expose participating editors and journalists to the issues involved in education reform efforts today in New York City. The Fellows will meet with Department of Education officials, community advocates (including critics of the current reform agenda), school administrators and nonprofit organizations involved in shaping the education system. In addition, the fellowship will include site visits to three different school models in order to provide participants with an opportunity to observe, first-hand, what is happening during the school day and to speak to students, teachers, and principals in the school environment. During the 10-month program, fellows will gain in-depth understanding of the issues informing school reform, the various reform models being implemented in New York City, the challenges facing different student populations, the data used to evaluate reform efforts, and the early evidence indicating what is and is not working. Fellows also will become familiar with community, parent and student resources within the public school system and will become more informed about the way in which parents and community members can have a voice in the changes schools are undergoing.

The long-term goal of the Fellowship is to help develop an education beat for ethnic and community newspapers, where resources are limited, and to promote insightful and nuanced reporting for communities that rely on these periodicals as a main source of information, particularly for readers with limited or no English language skills.

Finally, in order to enhance Fellows' investigative reporting skills, the Fellowship's leaders will evaluate and critique written articles based on their substance, sourcing, clarity of expression and possible impact.

Fellowship Requirements

Language and Skills: Fellows must be fluent in English and recommended for participation in the program by their editors or publishers.

Attendance: Seminar will take place two times a month for 10 months. Generally, one of the seminars each month will be dedicated to a speaker and/or site visit, and the other will be a discussion with the Fellowship leaders of the participants' articles. There will be two months in which the discussion seminars will be more abbreviated in order to accommodate additional speakers. Participants are expected to attend all sessions.

Reading and Writing: Fellows are expected to research both the speakers and the issues to be discussed prior to attending each session where they will interact with invited speakers.

Fellows must write one article every six weeks and submit articles after publication for translation and evaluation.

PROGRAM SYLLABUS

Ethnic Community Press Fellowship on NYC Public Education 2008-2010

Fellowship Seminars

1. **OPENING SEMINAR:** An introduction to the program, its goals and its format, followed by a historical snapshot of reform efforts of NYC public schools.

Speakers: Juana Ponce de León, ED of NYCMA, Andrew White, Pres. of NYCMA Board and Garry Pierre-Pierre, Program Leader, followed by Norm Fruchter, Director of Community Involvement Program at Annenberg Institute for School Reform. Juana and Garry will set the stage for the fellowship by introducing and explaining the goals of the program as well as the format, speakers, school visits, and writing critiques. Norm Fruchter will then provide historical perspective on the challenges facing NYC schools and the various campaigns to reform them.

2. **TODAY'S REFORM AGENDA AND LANDSCAPE:** A primer on recent education reform efforts in NYC. What has been tried, what was the result, and what is currently under way?

Speakers: Joel Klein, Chancellor of the New York City Department of Education; Randi Weingarten, President, United Federation of Teachers.

3. **WHY HIGH SCHOOL MATTERS:** An examination of the role of high schools in preparing students for college and work. What should high schools be doing and how are they going about it?

Speakers: John Garvey, Dean of the Teacher Academy and Collaborative Programs, City University of New York; David Conley, Director of the Center for Educational Policy Research, University of Oregon.

4. **UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT HIGH SCHOOL REFORM MODELS:** An introduction to small schools, small learning communities, transfer schools, early college high schools, and charters.

Speakers: Garth Harries, CEO of the Office of Portfolio Development, New York City Department of Education; Michele Cahill, Vice President of National Program Coordination and Director of Urban Education, Carnegie Corporation; Bob Hughes, President of New Visions for Public Schools.

5. **SPECIAL POPULATIONS: ELL STUDENTS:** An introduction to and examination of ELL in New York City public schools. *Site visit to Internationals Network School to be combined with seminar.

Speakers: Claire Sylvan, Executive Director and Founder, Internationals Network for Public Schools; Representative of NY Immigration Coalition.

6. **SPECIAL POPULATIONS: SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS:** An introduction to and examination of special education in New York City public schools.

Speakers: Elisa Hyman, former Executive Director of Advocates for Children and now a private lawyer representing special education students; Current Representative of Advocates for Children; Katherine Locker, director of the Children's Services Education Unit within ACS.

PROGRAM SYLLABUS

Ethnic Community Press Fellowship on NYC Public Education 2008-2010

7. **SPECIAL POPULATIONS: OVERAGE AND UNDERCREDITED STUDENTS:** An introduction to and examination of the large population of students who are overage and under-credited and the reforms being implemented to meet their needs. *Site visit to transfer school run by Good Shepherd Services to be combined with seminar.

Speakers: Michele Cahill; JoEllen Lynch, Architect -- with Michele Cahill – of NYC DOE Multiple Pathways Program; Sister Paulette Lomonaco, Executive Director of Good Shepherd Services.

8. **TESTING, STANDARDS, AND ACCOUNTABILITY:** What are the standards and what is the “standards movement?” How can we make sure that the standards mean something and that students get the support they need to achieve the standards?

Speakers: Jim Liebman, Chief Accountability Officer, NYC DOE; Ann Cook, Co-Leader, New York Performance Standards Consortium.

9. **PRINCIPALS AS LEVERS OF CHANGE:** In the current Joel Klein/Michael Bloomberg reform landscape, principals in New York City schools now act as de facto chief executives. Principals work with their staff and parent and teacher committees to set budgets, choose advisors and partnership organizations. What does this mean in practice? How can principals change our schools? *Site visit to school run by principal in New Leaders for New Schools training program to be combined with seminar (likely to be a College Board school).

Speakers: Eric Nadelstern, CEO of the Empowerment Schools Support Organization, NYC DOE; Jon Schnur, CEO of New Leaders for New Schools; Jean DesRavines, Chief Officer for Cities and Policy, New Leaders for New Schools.

10. **THE ROLE OF PARENTS AND STUDENTS:** How can parents and students have a voice to help bring about change in their own schools?

Speakers: Eric Zachary, Co-Director of the Community Involvement Program at the New York University Institute for Education and Public Policy; Members of Community Collaborative to Improve District 9 Schools; Kavitha Mediratta and Amy Rubin of Community Involvement Program at Annenberg Institute for School Reform; Members of the Urban Youth Collaborative, Sistas and Brothers United, and Make the Road by Walking.

11. **UNDERSTANDING STATISTICS AND RESULTS:** A solid understanding of the available data and the various measures being used is crucial for anyone seeking knowledge about education and the impact of reforms on students.

Speakers: Jennifer Bell-Elwanger, Director of DAA in the Office of Accountability, NYC DOE; Representative of Research Partnership for New York City Schools; David Herszenhorn, Journalist, New York Times.

PROGRAM SYLLABUS

Ethnic Community Press Fellowship on NYC Public Education 2008-2010

RADIO REPORTING TRAINING INTENSIVE

Conducted by People's Production House

Who We Are

The radio trainings will be conducted by People's Production House, a community journalism organization based in New York City, led by co-directors Deepa Fernandes and Kat Aaron. Fernandes is the former host of WBAI Radio's Wake Up Call and Pacifica Radio's Free Speech Radio News, and the author of *Targeted: National Security and the Business of Immigration*. Aaron was a producer for Wake Up Call and a reporter for Free Speech Radio News. PPH has trained hundreds of radio reporters around the country, including youth, seniors, and members of community organizations in New York City, Washington D.C., and the Gulf Coast.

Training Overview

PPH will train the fellows in broadcast-quality audio recording, writing and reporting for radio, and digital audio editing. These new skills, which encompass the fundamentals of broadcasting, will enable the fellows to create a range of radio pieces, including news stories, headlines, sound collage, edited audio interviews, and short documentaries, establishing a solid base for radio programming not restricted to any specific language.

The training will take part in three phases:

1. Audio Recording
2. Reporting for Radio
3. Digital Editing

PHASE 1: AUDIO RECORDING

The first training in audio recording will be spread over two days, two weeks apart. In the first session, the fellows will learn how to use high-quality audio recorders to record interviews and ambient sounds. The fellows will also learn the critical but underappreciated skill of identifying and avoiding unwanted background noises, which can render even the best interview useless for radio play. The recorders will be affordable and small – something a reporter could throw in her bag as she went out in the field to cover a story. After the first session, the fellows will go out and record interviews and sounds in the field. In the second session, we hone their skills by reviewing and critiquing their audio.

PHASE 2: REPORTING FOR RADIO

The next step is a full-day training in reporting for radio. The PPH trainers will help the fellows translate their print skills into writing for broadcast, a specific and unique mode of journalistic writing. The fellows will learn how to write around ambient sound and interview clips, and how to write scripts for news headlines and features. We will also address script-writing for narrative documentary. The trainers will provide examples of audio pieces of varying formats and their accompanying scripts.

PHASE 3: DIGITAL EDITING

The final sessions will train the fellows in digital audio editing, and voicing a script. We will use free and open source software, which the fellows can use in their home newsrooms. Using sounds the trainees have recorded, we will teach them how to load the sound into the computer, and how to identify, select and isolate clips. The first session will focus on basic audio editing: cutting, pasting, and deleting sounds. The second session will teach the more advanced skills of multi-track editing, which allows reporters to layer and mix sounds. PPH will also teach the fellows how to read and record their scripts, focusing on enunciation, pace, and tone.

PROGRAM SYLLABUS

Ethnic Community Press Fellowship on NYC Public Education 2008-2010

PHASE 4: ONGOING TA

PPH staff will provide phone consulting to the fellows after the trainings. This is an important element of the course, to make sure that as they start implementing their newfound skills, they have people to remind them of what they forget and fill them in on the things they didn't know to ask at the outset.

Distribution Initiatives

Distribution is critical to the work of training print reporters in radio reporting: it makes no sense to make media for change if no one hears it. Over 200 public and community radio stations have played our material and very excitingly are committed to airing the on-going work produced from this new project.

The following are mechanisms of distribution available through PPH's radio contacts in the field:

- Pacifica Radio and its 180 affiliates are major distribution partners. Over the past year, Pacifica has accepted PPH feature pieces for several national broadcast specials. Our most important broadcast collaboration is with WBAI in New York, which has played every PPH produced piece. The morning program of WBAI, Wakeup Call, will air each piece produced in full. Reporters will also be able to pitch the morning shows of the main Pacifica stations in California, Texas and DC. These opportunities are unpaid, but provide an audience in the millions.
- The national daily newscast of the Pacifica network is Free Speech Radio News. Once trained, the reporters will be able to pitch headlines, mini-features and full-features to the daily newscast as freelance journalists and be compensated at the FSRN feature rate for their reporting. PPH reporters regularly file for FSRN.
- PPH reporting is regularly featured on the public and community radio program Making Contact. If work produced fits into the theme of a Making Contact show, reporters can pitch and be compensated as freelance reporters for their work. Making Contact airs on community and public radio stations around the country.
- Reporters can file their pieces for the PPH monthly show that airs on WBAI radio, the last Tuesday of each month.
- In the realm of on-line distribution, reporters can post their pieces to their own websites and PPH will feature the pieces on its site. We can work with individual news outlets that the reporter works for to help establish an audio component for their site.



FELLOWS

JOURNALISTS FROM THE 2008-2009 FELLOWSHIP [click on a publication in green to access its website](#)

Virginia Alvarado	<i>Diario de México</i> , Mexican
Lotus Ching Yin Chau	<i>Sing Tao</i> , Chinese
James Fergusson	<i>Norwood News</i> , Local
Darlie Gervais	<i>Haitian Times</i> , Haitian
Ari Kagan	<i>Vecherniy New York</i> , Russian
Ansar Lovlu	<i>Weekly Thikana</i> , Bengali
Shuang Luna Liu	<i>World Journal</i> , Chinese
Peter McDermott	<i>Irish Echo</i> , Irish
Rachel Millard	<i>Aramica</i> (issues), Arab
Mary Alice Miller	<i>Our Time Press</i> , African American
Sujeet Rajan	<i>Indian Express</i> , Indian
Aleksandra Słabisz	<i>Nowy Dziennik</i> , Polish
Abu Taher	<i>Weekly Bangla Patrika</i> , Bengali
Robert Waddell	<i>Tiempo NY</i> , Latino
Yana Wasielewski	<i>Novoye Russkoye Slovo</i> , Russian
Rong Xiaqing	<i>Sing Tao</i> , Chinese
Mohsin Zaheer	<i>Sada-e-Pakistan</i> , Pakistani
Helen Zelon	<i>City Limits</i> , Independent



JOURNALISTS FROM THE 2010 FELLOWSHIP [click on a publication in green to access its website](#)

Maryam Abdul-Aleem	<i>Amsterdam News</i> , African American
Daniel Bader	<i>Manhattan Times</i> , Local
Mehmet Demirci	<i>Zaman Amerika</i> , Turkish
Jeanmarie Evely	<i>Tremont Tribune/Bronx News Network</i> , Local
Nadege Fleurimond	<i>Haitian Times</i> , Haitian
Maria Fernanda Hubeaut	<i>New York de Día</i> , Latino
Jinhwa Jo	<i>Korea Daily</i> , Korean
Jaisal Noor	<i>The Independent</i> , Independent
Bojana Varga	<i>Népszava Szabadság</i> , Hungarian
Sudhir Vyas	<i>IndoUS News Online</i> , Indian
Jia Xu	<i>World Journal</i> , Chinese



SEMINAR SPEAKERS

The following individuals spoke at the Fellowship seminars on behalf of the organization they represented.

- » **Joel L. Klein** New York City Schools Chancellor
- » **Ann Cook** New York Performance Standards Consortium, Co-Chair
- » **Jean Desravines** Cities and Policy for New Leaders for New Schools, Chief Officer
- » **Claire E. Sylvan** Internationals Network for Public Schools, Founder/Executive Director
- » **Deycy Avitia** New York Immigration Coalition, Coordinator of Education Advocacy
- » **Dr. Marcia V. Lyles** NYC DOE, Deputy Chancellor for Teaching and Learning
- » **Eric Nadelstern** NYC DOE, CEO of Empowerment Schools Support
- » **James S. Liebman** NYC DOE, Chief Accountability Officer
- » **Maria Santos** NYC DOE, Executive Director of Office of ELLs
- » **Michele Cahill** Carnegie Corp. of New York, VP for nat'l programs/prog. dir. of urban edu.
- » **Rachel Forsyth** Good Shepherd Services, Director of Transfer Schools
- » **Theresa Crotty** Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation, Executive Director (IA)
- » **Linda Wernikoff** NYC DOE, Executive Director of Office of Special Education Initiatives
- » **Kim Sweet** Advocates for Children of New York, Executive Director
- » **Katherine Locker** NYC Admin. for Children's Services, Attorney Director of Education Unit
- » **Garth Harries** NYC DOE, Chief Executive for Portfolio Development
- » **Robert L. Hughes** New Visions, President
- » **Stephen Engel Phillips** Adolescence Education, Program Coordinator
- » **College Director** Brooklyn College Teaching Fellows Program
- » **Norm Fruchter** NYU Institute for Education and Social Policy, Executive Director
- » Annenberg Inst. for School Reform at Brown Univ., Dir. of Community Involvement Program
- » **David Conley** University of Oregon's Center for Educational Policy Research, Director
- » **John Garvey** CUNY's Teacher Academy and Collaborative Programs, Dean
- » **Elisa Hyman** of Advocates for Children, former Executive Director
- » now private lawyer representing special education students
- » **Sister Paulette Lomonaco** Good Shepard Services, Executive Director
- » **Jon Schnur** New Leaders of New Schools, CEO
- » **Eric Zachary** ... Community Involvement Prog. at NYU Instit. for Edu and Social Policy, Co-Director
- » **Kavitha Mediratta** ... Community Involvement Program at Annenberg Institute for School Reform
- » **Amy Rubin** Community Involvement Program at Annenberg Institute for School Reform
- » **Jennifer Bell-Elwanger** NYC DOE, Director of DAA in Office of Accountability
- » **Jenney Medina** New York Times, Journalist covering education
- » **Leo Casey** The United Federation of Teachers, Vice President of Academic High Schools



ORGANIZATIONS

REPRESENTED DURING THE SEMINARS

Click on an organization in green to access its website.

- » [Multiple Pathways to Graduation](#)
- » [Advocates for Children of New York](#)
- » [New York City Administration for Children's Services](#)
- » [New Visions for Public Schools](#)
- » [Good Shepherd Services](#)
- » [Internationals Network for Public Schools](#)
- » [Teaching Fellows Program at Brooklyn College](#)
- » [Community Involvement Program at NYU Institute for Education and Social Policy](#)
- » [Annenberg Institute for School Reform](#)
- » [United Federation of Teachers](#)
- » [NYC Department of Education:](#)
 - [Office of Accountability](#)
 - [Office of English Language Learners](#)
 - [Empowerment Schools](#)
 - [Teaching and Learning](#)
 - [Office of Portfolio Development](#)
- » [New York Immigration Coalition](#)
- » [Urban Youth Collaborative](#)
- » [Make the Road by Walking](#)
- » [People's Production House](#)

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BUDGET CUTS

Access to Department of Education administration and community leaders had a clear impact on the quality of the reporting. Rather than writing articles that merely reiterate data from a DOE report or a piece from the mainstream media, the fellows captured the topic of budget cuts through the voices of not just parents, but also school officials, students and community leaders. Beyond numbers and incidents, they frame a bigger picture and examine the more abstract issue of how budget cuts could influence standards of teaching and ultimately impact the students and their communities.

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LOCAL

LITTLE ROOM FOR ART IN DOE PLAN FOR TWO SCHOOLS

BY DANIEL P. BADER, MANHATTAN TIMES

JUNE 15, 2010

Will Craig decided to send his two girls to P.S. 153 on Amsterdam Avenue near W. 147th Street because of its Arts Intensive Institute (AII), choosing the school's arts program over its gifted and talented program.

The Washington Heights resident is not alone.

The parent resource site Insideschool.org specifically mentioned the AII program as a draw from outside the school's zone, noting that students from P.S. 153 have been accepted to programs at the Juilliard School.

Nearby on W. 153rd Street, parents of students at M368, Hamilton Heights School, also love their arts program.



Beth Venn, a founding parent of the young school and co-chair of the school's leadership team, believes the Hamilton Heights program is a model for the city.

Several times a week, students at Hamilton

Heights have special arts instruction – projects that are woven into the curriculum of the class. The instructors come from two groups, the Children's Arts Carnival, a local organization, and Studio in a School, who sit down with teachers and plan out lessons that complement what the students are already learning.

This year, the school lost the funding for the program, and parents are actively fundraising to bring it back.

"It was really a big thing, and it's really a loss not to have that," Venn said.

Aside from the never-ending funding issue, the future of arts education at the two schools is in jeopardy by a plan by the Department of Education. The DOE has decided to co-locate the two schools by moving the Hamilton Heights School into the P.S. 153 building on Amsterdam Avenue.

In its proposal, the DOE put it this way:

"To ensure that there continues to be sufficient space in M153 for both Hamilton Heights and P.S. 153, beginning in 2010-2011, P.S. 153 will need to monitor its kindergarten enrollment to ensure that it only enrolls students residing in the zone. By doing so, P.S. 153 will gradually reduce in size by approximately 1 section per grade, or approximately 125 students, which will allow Hamilton Heights to be fully housed in M153."

Three programs accept out-of-zone students at P.S. 153, a district-wide Gifted and Talented program, a district-wide Universal Pre-K

program and AII.

“The arts program when it was created was designed as a district-wide program,” said Craig, who is now co-president of the parent-teacher association. But something happened with the paperwork. “It never got set-up,” he said.

Officially, it’s a zone-only program and after the two schools are combined, no new students will be accepted from outside the zone.

But regardless of funding or enrollment, a vibrant arts program at either school might not be possible.

According to the DOE plan, for at least a year, until out-of-zone enrollment at P.S. 153 drops, there will be no room for “cluster rooms” like a science lab, dance studio or an art room for either school, scuttling any program regardless of enrollment or funding.

Craig believes that losing or trimming back the art program will hurt his school in other ways, too.

“The children of these parents tend to do well,” Craig said. “We’ve got this great arts program that helped the school improve citywide.”

Craig admits, however, that by the numbers, the proposal seems reasonable at first. “According to the statistical formula they’ve created, it makes sense,” he said. “They can prove every child has the square footage they need.” But, he said, “It doesn’t include elements that are essential to a child’s educational process.”

Parents at Hamilton Heights aren’t happy with the proposal for other reasons too. Led by an energetic parent group, the K-5 elementary school started in 2000 as Hamilton Heights Academy, and was granted full school status in 2007, but there wasn’t a building for it. The young school is currently located in two buildings, a leased site on W. 153rd Street and shared space with P.S. 28, Wright Brothers School, on W. 155th Street.

“It’s frustrating,” said Venn. “We’re an excellent school. ... They need to give us the room to grow.”

Venn feels a little cheated. Why grant full status to the school if the adequate space isn’t going to be provided?

“It’s going to be bad in both schools,” Venn said. “They’re not supporting both schools. ... It really affects the kids.”

Venn also believes the numbers don’t work. For example, she said, to get the students from both schools into the cafeteria once a day for a meal, the first class would have to have lunch at 9 a.m. and the last class wouldn’t eat until 2 p.m., just before dismissal.

“There’s no way to physically get these kids into the lunch room,” she said.

The facilities aren’t big enough for the school, said Craig. Originally, P.S. 153 was built with 39 classrooms, and a gymnasium, cafeteria and playground with enough space for children from 39 classrooms. Then a 10-classroom extension was built onto the school, taking up a quarter of the playground – leaving a tiny place for a combined projected population of over 1,000 students to play in.

Hamilton Heights parent Ingrid Rodriguez said the parents she’s spoken to don’t like the decision.

“It’s like the majority are not okay with it,” she said. “It’s good because it’s all going to be in one building; it’s bad because we need our own space.”

She feels like her school will be an interloper in the new building.

“Why invade their privacy? Why invade their school?” she asked.

A number of parents worried about how next year will work are looking elsewhere to send their kids to school.

“I love Hamilton Heights so my kids will go there no matter what,” Rodriguez said.

“[But] this school right here is going to lose a lot of families.”

INDIAN

NY SCHOOL BUDGET CUTS TO AFFECT EDUCATIONAL STANDARD

BY SUDHIR VYAS, INDO US NEWS ONLINE

AUGUST 24, 2010

Cuts. More cuts and still more cuts. Governor David A. Paterson's 2010-2011 budget proposal calls for the largest cuts to state primary education in New York's recent history. Are cuts to New York's education the only answer to the financial mess in which the average New Yorker finds himself today?

No. A large number of students, parents, teachers and teacher associations claim that "cut in school education funds will only give temporary relief. Instead of cutting funds for education, newer avenues must be sought to increase revenue for the city and state."

The proposed budget calls for \$1.4 billion in cuts to formula-based aid to local schools. Also, the governor, through a gap elimination adjustment, would ensure school districts serving low-income populations would be spared from harsh cuts.

There is an all-around pain as a result of the cut. Some 275,000 education jobs could be eliminated in the coming school year due to budget cuts. As many as 8,500 teachers in New York City could lose their jobs if the proposed cut is enacted. Another 2,600 non-teaching staff, including student support staff, administrators, and other employees, such as custodians, kitchen workers and bus drivers, would also be laid off.

Union representatives, education advocates and parent associations said they are angered by the amount of money that could potentially be cut from schools and the snowballing effect that it

may have on New York's students.

New York State United Teachers President Richard Iannuzzi said in a statement: "The proposed cuts would jeopardize student progress while stalling the state's ability to create jobs. The next generation of New York's workers must come from New York public schools and universities. Employers are going to demand it, and state policymakers must ensure New York can meet that demand," said Iannuzzi.

According to the Teachers Union president, the governor's proposed cuts would take a devastating toll on schools. The proposals will open the floodgate for a poor educational system and means to teach the students. Legislators from both parties clearly understand the impact this proposal would have on the ability of schools to meet the needs of students," he said in a statement.

Gail Gadsden, parent leader with the Alliance for Quality Education and the Coalition for Educational Justice, said in a statement: "Preparing students for college and a career is an issue of educational justice today, but, with the biggest cuts in our state's history, we would be taking a huge step backwards that will not only be more expensive later down the road but would instantly hurt our children across the state."

Peter Smith, an eighth grade student at a downtown Manhattan school, said: "Give my education back. Why don't you stop the war and divert the funds for the schools and our teachers?"

We are the future of tomorrow's America so protect us. Money for jobs and education, not for war and incarceration is what a present day student wants," he moaned.

Echoing the sentiments of Peter is Mr. Prakash Dave, a father of two school-going children and living in Queens: "Kids didn't start this budget crisis," he said. "We're mindful this is a very challenging time, in the state and all over the country, but we've got to push harder for education."

Mary Macullar, a school teacher in Queens, said that "the budget cuts would have devastating educational consequences not just on the system but also on the children. The cuts would mean closing down some classes and this gives rise to burgeoning class size as a result of which the teacher would not be able to put the kind of attention on a child as he or she would have done otherwise. Please do not play with our children's future," she said.

However, the worst criticism of the budget cuts for the school came from Jitendra Shethia, an Indian businessman in Jackson Heights who has donated money to many schools in the area. "Constructing schools or paying teachers their rightful dues delivers just as much economic stimulus as a new bridge or road; indeed, the economic multiplier effect is probably greater in low-income communities than in America as a whole. America became the most important economy in the world due to its emphasis on broad education at a time when Europe educated only the elites. Yet that edge has disappeared, and America is the only country today where parents are more likely to graduate from high school than their children. If we want to maintain America's economic greatness, then we need roads and bridges, yes, but we also need a more educated work force," he said.

Billy Easton, Alliance for Quality Education executive director, said, "Governor Paterson has rightly called on New York to create a 21st century knowledge-based economy, but \$1.4 billion in cuts to our children's schools will leave New York woefully behind in the knowledge race."

Mrs. Jaya Shah, a single mother whose son,

Keyur, is a ninth grade student at PS 64 Robert Simon School, in downtown Manhattan, was of the opinion that "cutting school funds and laying off teachers" would affect her child's demanding college preparation. "The cuts also mean the loss of many art and physical education programs. The laying off of more teachers would result in an increase of class size, which again will have an adverse effect not only on the quality of education but also on the teacher-student relationship."

According to Mr. Pradip Kothari, "we migrated from India leaving behind a flourishing business, a lavishly furnished house and a settled life and came to the United States with the sole aim of providing an excellent school education to our two children. But with each passing day, the scene at the school is deteriorating and I am feeling if coming to the U.S. for a better and brighter future for our children was a wise decision. The facilities at the schools are dwindling, the teachers are no more committed – and I do not blame them. They too are a worried lot as they do not know what lies in store for them tomorrow morning. The once bright, shining American school system is buckling under its own weight," he lamented.

New York State School Boards Association Executive Director Timothy G. Kremer said, "For New York to develop economically, create new jobs and introduce new technologies and other innovations, we will need a highly educated workforce. Public education is and must forever be the state's number one priority."

But the big question is: Will the politicians let that happen? Who cares for the people when it comes to their political gain?

LATINO

IS THE ART OF EDUCATION AT RISK?

BY MARÍA FERNANDA HUBEAUT, NEW YORK DE DÍA

AUGUST 25, 2010

More than ever in public education, tests and statistics are the protagonists of a system that fails more than succeeds.

“We have to be careful with statistics, because sometimes, just for one point less, a student loses the possibility of getting the special education he needs to solve his learning problems. This is something educators, administrators and the Department of Education have to consider at the moment they evaluate the child and his performance,” says the Spanish teacher, Denis Gereritz, at the Renaissance Charter School in Jackson Heights, Queens.

This comment seems to contradict the incredible assessment of Schools Chancellor Joel Klein and the figures of his special report, claiming that today, “more New York students are reaching math and English standards in all the grades.”

Last year, Mayor Michael Bloomberg affirmed, “the state test scores showed two-thirds of city students were passing English and 80 percent were passing math.”

Today, reality shows that statistics do not reflect the truth about students’ performance because the numbers are inflated – the test has become easy and, once more, the DOE recently adjusted its achievement levels.

In the middle of all these changes and undefined policies, parents, teachers and kids seem to be lost and feel uncomfortable.

Argentina Rodriguez, the mother of two

children, is very stressed by this situation since her 7-year-old son has difficulties with both math and reading. “The teacher has no patience, the school does not help and I had to get help outside the school. I have not received any help, or any explanations, even though my son’s tutor, whom I paid \$20 per hour, has talked to the teacher. The [school] told me my son could not repeat his grade, and I am making a big effort to help him. I have no access to the administration and they will not meet with me. Children need more help, more programs such as art and music, and school support,” says Rodriguez, who is aware that there are problems not only with the classroom but also with the school administration.

“The educational system is corrupted. Before, the focus was the welfare of the child and his education. Today, the business of education is more important,” says Dominican teacher Jacqueline Báez, who has been in New York’s public education system for more than 20 years. “During the last five years, exams have multiplied; there are more exams than days of class. This involves a system of evaluators, contractors, intermediaries who have nothing to do with education. So, I wonder, where does the teacher’s role belong? If everything is supervised and controlled by these people, how can we talk about creativity and pedagogy when we are mere intermediaries who have to apply what they decide? They invest in technology to measure statistics, but they do not invest in pedagogical

and educational training for teachers. This is becoming really nasty; too many cooks spoil the broth,” said Báez.

What is more, Governor David Paterson, Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Schools Chancellor Joel Klein are aiming to take up the role of the union in the schools, by supporting young teachers – in their majority, white and without experience and who accept extreme work conditions – and making it impossible to support and protect the older teachers who earn more money and have more rights.

“With this reform, the system is changing to the point that the union will not be able to protect us anymore. Currently, the principals are more managers than academics. They obviously have a lot of power and if they do not like you, you have to go. It is not like before anymore when the school district had the power. Bloomberg does not acknowledge the public education system; everything is an economic strategy centered on productivity, where all the exams reflect just numbers meant to justify power and money, not the development and growth of the child,” states Báez.

“All this is very unfair. I trust in the ability of my child, but they have to help him to do his very best. Many times, my son does not want to go to school, and I do not know how to help him anymore,” tells Rodriguez.

This is a feeling that frustrates everybody who is involved in the educational system, explains Báez.

“Is that the only thing that matters? To go to school to pass exams, and if you do not pass them, you are worthless? The child feels pressured by his family, the teachers and the school. He knows that if he does not meet their expectations and passes the exams, the school could even close. The child should feel satisfied in school, with the desire to learn, to grow, but instead he feels like a number, a letter, and a statistic. It is an injustice that everything depends on results and not on the processes. In a fast-changing world like ours, an education built like this will not help any child to achieve their goals.”

AFRICAN AMERICAN

POLL: MAYOR GETS F FOR SCHOOL CONTROL

BY MARYAM ABDUL-ALEEM, AMSTERDAM NEWS

SEPTEMBER 9, 2010

Education reform has been moving in a new direction in New York City public schools ever since Mayor Michael Bloomberg won mayoral control of the nation's largest school district on a platform of education reform and accountability in 2002.

But now that the new school season has rolled around, a new report card has come out on the Bloomberg administration's pledges to reform the school system in the form of a new poll, and it doesn't look pretty.

Although many educators and parents have advocated against the signature education reform policies, people are still displeased with the mayor's management of the public school system, which he repeatedly said stood on the principle of accountability.

The new poll found 49 percent of people unhappy with the mayor's job under mayoral control, with only 38 percent saying they approved of his management.

The Department of Education says the mayor has made substantial progress so far and credits him with raising standards and making changes in classrooms. But with the results of test scores dipping dramatically after the tests were recently recalibrated, in essence erasing much of that progress and closing the achievement gap purportedly made, many are still unclear on the mayor's education reform policies on testing, teacher evaluations tied to exams, and school closings.

The mayor said when he came into office, the school system was failing "badly. And that means we were failing our children," he said in a speech in 2007, during "Ceasefire! Bridging the Political Divide," a conference at the University of Southern California. "Tinkering at the margins for decades had done nothing. In New York, we needed to get at the source of the problem - the inefficient, ineffective and unaccountable Board of Education," he said then.

For that reason, the mayor said he wanted to close the lowest 10 percent of underperforming schools by the end of his term as part of his policies aimed at raising graduation rates and improving the quality of education. The DOE has so far closed over 90 schools, and in January, the mayor and NYC's Schools Chancellor Joel Klein wanted to close 19 schools, mainly large high schools, for their low graduation rates, and replace some of the large high schools with smaller schools in the same building.

Although closing schools that are failing is a priority for the mayor and the DOE, a judge ruled in March that closing the 19 schools was in violation of a new state law mandating a detailed impact statement on the effects the closures would have on the community, which was not provided.

Auditoriums were packed with parents who overwhelmingly opposed the closings. The NAACP and the United Federation of Teachers, along with other advocates and groups, filed a

lawsuit to stop the closures and won a temporary victory when the schools were allowed to stay open at least for another year. The city appealed the judge's decision.

James Eterno, a union representative and a social studies teacher at Jamaica High, said some schools could become too big and lose track of its neediest students, but Jamaica High, one of the 19 schools the mayor wanted closed, wasn't one of them.

"New York is a very big system with over a million students, so there's a place in a system this big for small schools and large schools," he said, reasoning that Jamaica should be allowed to continue to exist, because it offers a diversified experience with a variety of academic courses that smaller schools couldn't provide.

Jamaica High had suffered from cuts to its educational operations over the years, which may have contributed to its low graduation rates that put the large historic school on the DOE's radar, Eterno said.

The money that would go into the new schools could be used to improve Jamaica with lower class sizes and lowering guidance caseloads, Eterno continued. These resources, which are lacking, could help boost graduation rates for students who face a multitude of issues, such as being English language learners, or battling societal and economic pressures that could affect a student's ability to graduate in four years.

"But they have their agenda," he said, referring to the DOE. "Well, they want everybody graduating as fast as possible within four years, so we have to adapt. We're trying but it's not so easy. They should give us credit for improvement and growth."

Eterno, who has taught at Jamaica for over 20 years, used an analogy to express the condition of some English language learners by saying that if you "put me in Italy where I don't know any Italian, and put me in an Italian high school, it might take me a little bit longer to learn the language. That shouldn't be held against those kids or the school because it takes extra time."

However, Deputy Chancellor Eric Nadelstern, who heads the DOE's Division of School Support and Instruction, told a group of journalists at

an education seminar organized by New York Community Media Alliance that he believes smaller, themed schools is the solution to fix the city's graduation rates in public schools instead of "throwing money at large, failing schools."

However, students of Jamaica High said they enjoyed their experience.

A previous student, of Jamaica High, who attends New York City College of Technology in downtown Brooklyn for computers and information systems, said he and his friend, James Simons, had a good learning experience at Jamaica because of the teachers and athletic activities, which he credited for building up students' characters alongside academic studies.

Simons, 19, who is enrolled at Delaware State University, said he was attending the university because of the education he received at Jamaica High.

"So, the education they gave me, I was able to take that and go to college with it," he said.

Both students said they wanted the historic high school to stay the way it was, which Eterno called a "comprehensive school."

LOCAL

BRONX PUBLIC SCHOOLS FALL SHORT ON PLAYGROUND SPACE

BY JEANMARIE EVELLY, TREMONT TRIBUNE

OCTOBER 4, 2010

Bronx sixth-grader Sterling Stuckey can remember when the park down the street from her school, MS 3 in East Tremont, was filled with green grass, a spot where she and her classmates could play tag during recess.

But they haven't used these fields for years, she said, as the ballparks have fallen into neglect. The grass is gone, and the dust that has taken its place gets stirred up during a routine ball game.

"We haven't really been in the park because of the dirt and the rocks," Stuckey said. Her school's yard, which the middle school has to share with an elementary school, is too "small and boring," she says.

Stuckey isn't the only urban student to lament the lack of outdoor space in her community: 60 percent of New York City public schools have no playgrounds, according to the Trust for Public Land, a nonprofit that builds parks and playgrounds in underserved communities.

There's no mandate for New York City schools to provide an outdoor recreational space, says Department of Education spokeswoman Marge Feinberg.

"There is no requirement," Feinberg wrote in an e-mail message. "Many of our schools have playgrounds, and some built 70 years ago without playgrounds use the NYC Parks Department playgrounds as part of a joint operating agreement."

But what if those parks don't meet the needs of the students who rely on them, like Stuckey and

her classmates? A survey of Bronx public school facilities from former Bronx Borough President Adolfo Carrion's office shows that a large number of schools don't have proper playgrounds or a place for kids to exercise outside.

Of the 213 school officials who participated in the 2008 survey, 40 said they had no playground at all. Numbers of others complained that they have no play equipment, that the schoolyards are too crowded or in poor condition, or that temporary classrooms—set up to relieve schools that are overcrowded with students—are taking up what used to be the school's only outdoor space.

All in all, 94—or nearly half of the survey's participants—said they had no playground or that their space is unusable or in poor shape.

"A playground is as important as having a desk," said Alison Risso, communications director at KaBOOM, a national nonprofit that advocates for play space for children and has built playgrounds in Brooklyn and the Bronx.

The group doesn't normally build on school properties, Risso said, since they see providing an outdoor space as part of a school's obligation to its students.

"We think that should come from school funding," she said.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg's administration has made efforts to increase the number of parks and playgrounds in the city. According to Bloomberg's PlaNYC "Schoolyard to

Playgrounds” program, the city wants to open 256 new playgrounds, with \$56.7 million in funding, by the year 2012.

Those playgrounds, if materialized, won’t necessarily be on school grounds. The School Construction Authority’s list of anticipated construction contracts over the next six months lists seven playground projects; just one of these is in the Bronx.

In the meantime, students at PS/MS have taken matters into their own hands—they’ve been campaigning since last fall to renovate the dirt-filled ballparks themselves.

The project is part of the South Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation’s Community Justice Project, which asked the students to pick something about their community they’d like to change; they picked the park.

Their work scored them a presentation with Bronx Parks Commissioner Hector Aponte, who told the kids the city was too cash-strapped to help fund their goal of planting grass in the park’s five acres.

So on a sunny afternoon this May, a gaggle of middle-school students set to work, painting a set of peeling bleachers with a new coat of bright green paint, and planting flowers alongside the park’s dusty baseball field.

“Right now, I think it looks a lot better,” said sixth-grader Natalie Mendez. “But we still have a lot of work to do.”

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT and PROGRAMS

While having people other than teachers, principals and school officials in a student's academic life may not always reflect what immigrant parents are used to, it parallels how many immigrant and ethnic communities function: when those with power have other priorities, people rely on those around them, those more accessible and willing to help. In the NYC education system, schools and local communities use extracurricular activities to enhance their children's education. These articles demonstrate that Fellowship journalists did not limit themselves to barriers students faced — instead, with increased access to resources, their articles looked at how, with the help of local advocates and programs, students overcome those barriers.

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MEXICAN

MEXICANS AMERICANS MENTOR COMMUNITY CHILDREN TO ENSURE ACADEMIC SUCCESS

BY VIRGINIA ALVARADO, DIARIO DE MÉXICO

MAY 1, 2009

Juan Suarez, a 34-year-old cook in the West Village, worries that his two children won't realize there is more to life than waiting on customers. Beyond President Barack Obama, he said, "they don't have a role model to follow."

Uptown, Robert Smith, a professor of sociology and public affairs at the City University of New York (CUNY), is working to make sure Mexican-American children like Suarez's, will have plenty of people to look up to. For nearly a decade, Smith has worked with a voluntary task force of young Mexican Americans to identify low-income children of immigrant families, and to connect them to role models in their communities. The hope is that this will build bridges between the Mexican community and the educational system, especially with CUNY.

Through the Mexican Mentorship Project at Washington Irving High School in Union Square and the Mexican American Student Alliance (MASA) in the South Bronx, Smith and MASA president, Angelo Cabrera, along with their fellows work as mentors for young immigrants, helping with homework, raising money for educational programs and teaching workshops that help students prepare for college. The volunteers don't get any salary – just the satisfaction of knowing that they are helping others in need. The Mexican Mentorship Project currently serves between 75 and 80 students.

Smith said that Mexican students really want to succeed in school, but they lack concrete

knowledge in how to do so – how to study for tests, which classes to choose to prepare for college. Also, he said, "there are myths about higher education in the community – for example, that you have to be rich to afford it, or that you cannot go if you don't have [immigration] papers. Neither of these things is true at CUNY."

Since the Department of Education's statistics show that more than 11,000 Mexican-born children are enrolled in the New York City Public Schools, and thousands more are of Mexican descent, these organizations have a lot at stake in building a growing community. Indeed, Smith, the author of the 2006 book *Mexican New York*, estimates that there are more than 500,000 Mexicans in New York now, up from only 40,000 in 1980. In 2006, Mexicans surpassed Dominicans as the group giving birth to the most babies in the city, according to the City Planning Department.

The mentoring projects are sponsored by the Mexican Educational Foundation of New York (MexEd), which Smith co-founded. He said that Mexicans in New York show contradictory trends. While about a third of Mexican girls and a fifth of boys are upwardly mobile in terms of education and work compared to their parents, Mexicans drop out of school at alarming rates. The Census shows that Mexicans in New York City have the highest percentage of 16- to 19-year olds who haven't graduated from or enrolled in high school:

47 percent compared to 22 percent of Puerto Ricans, 18 percent of African Americans and 7 percent of whites. Furthermore, Mexicans are losing huge numbers in high school itself: While 95 percent of boys attend school at age 14, only 26 percent are still enrolled at age 18-19. For girls, the numbers go from 96 percent to 31 percent.

“This is an educational hemorrhage,” said Smith, “but it does not have to continue. Stopping it is the single best investment we can make in the future of New York City.”

MASA mentors students from first through twelfth grade in math, English, writing, reading and science, as well as PSAT and SAT preparation. They also teach civic and cultural awareness in order to form a new generation of responsible citizens that care about social issues.

MASA currently provides mentorship projects at St. Pius V Catholic Church to more than 35 students three days a week. And more than 20 parents are enrolled in a homework aid program for English language learners.

“We want to help our children to embrace education and give them tools to better their lives,” Cabrera said. “This is why the role model program is important – because it serves as a reference to the community, so that we know of people who have achieved their academic goals.”

Manuel Castro, director of the Northeast office of Poblano Migrant Affairs, an organization that works with Mexican immigrants from the state of Puebla, Mexico, thinks the community can take advantage of something they know how to do well: build from the community.

“Mexican immigrants have managed to come this far because they used the experiences and knowledge of family and friends that came here before them,” he said.

Castro, who is an anthropology graduate of Hampshire College, said they need to use the same process with the youth mentorship programs. “We need to make sure those who have gone through the education system and have gone to college pass on experiences and knowledge to those who have not,” he said. “This way, our youth can successfully reach and complete college.”

The Department of Education of the City of New York has recognized the success of similar

programs based on tutoring and mentoring. In January 2007, during a celebration of National Mentoring Month, Chancellor Joel I. Klein said, “It would be a tremendous gift to New York City if more caring adults stepped in and got involved.”

Steve Ruszczyk, 30, has been a mentor to James Garcia through the MexEd program for six months. Ruszczyk is a Ph.D. candidate in Sociology at CUNY. He said that through his relationship with James, a high school senior, they have learned about each other’s culture – which is particularly important for his own development as a sociologist.

As for James, he will be the first of three brothers in his family to seek a college education. “It has been so good for me,” he said. “He has taken me to the most well-known libraries and colleges in the city and helps with homework whenever I need help.”

James said he wants to follow in his mentor’s footsteps. After graduation, he hopes to study accounting at CUNY’s Baruch College, in New York.

For some Mexican families who are new to the country, however, these programs have been hard to find.

Suarez, who has a son in the sixth grade at I.S. 89 and a kindergartner at P.S. 3, is not familiar with the city’s education system. He wishes his children had a mentor to help them solve problems, “someone who knows about education in this country and could give them a different point of view,” he said. “I try and let them know about education. It really is the only thing I can do to try and get them ahead, so that they devote their lives to something other than being behind a counter.”

“My legs hurt and knees fail from standing up for so long; same with my wife who works cleaning houses. At times my back has cramps from working so much,” Suarez said.

Life is extremely hard for the Suarezes who must work 80 hours a week to raise a family of five, which at times is frustrating. “It’s enough to support my family here, but I don’t have enough to send more money to my mother in Mexico; however, I think my kids will have a better chance with their studies and with work by being born in

this country. They will have a better opportunity to find a less taxing job.”

Jonathan Sanchez, originally from Veracruz, Mexico, said that the only role models are his teachers and parents. Sanchez, an eleventh-grader at Robert Cleveland High School in Queens, would be glad to join a mentoring program for Mexican children. “People can help those who come behind them so that their path can be easier,” he said.

Smith and Cabrera say that in order for the mentorship program to serve more students, they need more funds. Donations can be made online (at mexednyc.org or by sending a check to Smith at Baruch College School of Public Affairs).

With any hope, those involved in the mentor programs say, efforts such as theirs might help Mexican-American students catch up with their peers.

“For parents and students, having a free mentorship program within the community will ... reduce the educational gap with other ethnic groups,” Cabrera said.

POLISH

ART MURAL MOTIVATES STUDENTS IN SCHOOL

BY ALEKSANDRA SLABISZ, NOWY DZIENNIK

MAY 5, 2009

At the unveiling of the newest part of the mural at Intermediate School 259 William McKinley, Ledia Duro, an eighth grader, spoke of the artwork's themes of Greek mythology, as well as its connection to contemporary art and art deco in New York City's architecture, and to movies that draw on the experiences and culture of the 1930s.

It was clear that Duro, 13, knows more about art than the average educated adult.

"Three years ago, I did not care much about social studies or literature," Duro said. "Then after I began to develop an interest in it, I gained confidence in myself and in school."

Duro said the change is all due to her involvement in the mural.

The creation of the mural, a 2,500 square foot painting that now covers the walls of the school's third floor hallway, has involved approximately

400 of the school's 1,400 students. Teachers and school officials use it as a motivational and teaching tool to help students fully understand the material they studied--they're more inclined to enjoy learning, and to appreciate the knowledge they learned from class. As a result,

students feel accomplished and integrated in the school community.

Chancellor Joel Klein, who attended the mural's unveiling at the school in Dyker Heights, was impressed and praised the schools' administrators for this innovative idea.

"Education is in the DNA of this school," Klein said. "I wish other schools went out of their way to inspire and challenge their students."

The school's administration, desperate for something to motivate their students after having tried many other options, came up with the idea of the mural. A few other school programs were



created to motivate students, including rewarding them with cell phone minutes, movie tickets, pizza parties and even money.

Some critics have argued that such incentive programs do not bring lasting results.

Polish parents have typically been the most outspoken critics of these motivational tactics, strongly adhering to the idea that learning is a reward in itself, and since studying is a child's only responsibility, they should not be rewarded with anything more than good grades for doing a good job.

Parents of IS 259 students involved with the creation of the mural praise the positive influence the project has had on their children.

"Thanks to his engagement in the mural, my son reads a lot more and has improved his analytical thinking skills. It is easier for him to understand more complicated books like *Eragon*," says Karolina Szymborska, mother of Remi Szyborski, 12, a painter in the mural project who often stayed after school to work on his painting. Remi has always been a good student, but since he became involved with the mural, his grades have improved, with scores in the 90s. "Working on a team with students from other cultures has also broadened his horizons," Szymborska says.

Students at William McKinley are not paid or rewarded in any materialistic way to come work on the mural. They do not even get credit for it; nonetheless, they still willingly participate in the project. Some come to school at 7 A.M. to work on the mural before classes begin at 8:35 A.M. Others work on it during lunch, after school or come in on Saturdays.

"Working on a mural is a great experience; we are all proud of it. It shows what we have learned in class," said Aleksandra Kunat, a seventh grader.

Kunat, 12, emigrated from Poland four years ago and has progressed well enough to write on the mural. She composed two poems, "Snow White" and "Prometheus," and one essay comparing *My Fair Lady* to *The Devil Wears Prada*, which were used on the murals.

The mural engages students with different talents – from those able to paint, draw and write, to students gifted with construction skills. Some students contributed by performing odd jobs like

drilling or cleaning up.

"I saw people painting the mural and I said, 'Wow, this is beautiful, I want to get into this,'" said Amal Husein, 13, who has worked on the project for two years as a painter and writer.

In English class, students discussed a poem about Greek mythology and then wrote about it. They would submit the piece to the teacher for revision, and then rewrite it if necessary. In art class, the students studied various works of art and painting techniques that were used on the mural.

"We want them to have an understanding of many things on many levels," said Thomas Buxton, an English teacher who has overseen the work on the mural, along with art teacher Roma Karas. "It seems to work well -- the kids know more about our history, and more about Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel than adults. We are way ahead of the game."

The project, Buxton said, is the response to Principal Janice Geary's request that the teachers come up with a curriculum that fused literature and art. The school ended up with a curriculum that not only covers city and state requirements, but creates enthusiasm and interest in education. As a result, IS 259's teachers alter the curriculum according to the mural's annual theme.

The following academic year in 2006-07, the theme was "Rhapsody in Blue," depicting elements of 1920s America. For the past two years, the mural has been focused on Greek mythology, Greek architecture and their connection to contemporary movies.

"It is constantly a reinventing-yourself process, which involves finding new books for the kids to read that are appropriate for the grade level, finding new art material that is appropriate for them and that they can handle," Buxton says.

Most importantly, school officials say that they are seeing evidence that having the mural on the curriculum is boosting efficiency in the educational system since reading scores of students working on the mural have been increasing. While school-wide reading scores rose by 15 percent, scores for the students who were involved with the mural increased by 22 percent.

Progress is visible. For the 2007-2008

academic year, the school report card rose by 15 percent.

“That is what we are looking for,” Buxton said. “We want to see their writing improve and their reading skills go up, and also allow the kids to have a good time while learning.”

While the data demonstrates a minute change, the children say they feel as though they have grown a lot.

“My grades went up last year from a low to high three. And I am hoping to get a four this year,” said Abdul Alsulaimani, an eighth grader.

An aspiring doctor, Alsulaimani said working on a team helped him open up to people: “With that skill, I will now make a better doctor,” he said.

Other students praise the mural, saying it keeps them “on their feet,” occupied and away from trouble. “This has had a great impact on our lives, and speaking personally, this mural changed me because I wasn’t the greatest kid. After I started working on it, I just locked away all the bad things in my life,” Husein says.

The success of the mural is being noticed by other instructors at surrounding schools. Painting is being used at IS 259 as a language tool and a learning tool for English language learners. They have started their own mural on the fourth floor corridor depicting America through its musical tradition, culture and other social aspects.

“Working on the mural helped me learn English and about U.S. history and culture,” said eighth-grader Maria Perea, who arrived in the United States three years ago and whose poems are on the murals. “Writing poems was hard at first, but after a while, I came up with so many ideas.”

“This is probably the greatest thing I have seen educationally, because it is not just hard work,” Assistant Principal Gina Votinelli said. “It allows them to connect. And they are learning to be responsible, which they would not learn in the classroom.”

MEXICAN

PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS: DANCING TO ACADEMIC SUCCESS

BY VIRGINIA ALVARADO, DIARIO DE MÉXICO

AUGUST 30, 2009

For Eddie Morales, 11, a Mexican-American sixth-grader in P.S. 95 in Brooklyn, the slow movements, the force and sensuality of the tango were replaced by the fast-paced cadence of the fox trot in his dance hall class – a class that he takes very seriously.

“I would like to be a dancer like the children in *Billy Elliot*,” affirms Morales, who relates to the new musical show on Broadway, winner of 10 Tony Awards this year, about a child who struggles with the realities of a working-class world and his wish to become a classical dancer.

Programs such as the dance hall class at Brooklyn’s P.S. 95 are part of a city-wide curriculum, which experts indicate helps develop intellectual, academic and artistic skills in students, thereby providing students with a well-rounded education.

In the past year, the Department of Education has created art programs in more than 1,234 schools in New York City, with a budget of \$308,567,174 – \$149,000 short of last year’s budget.

Cuts to the budget destined for arts education, which local agencies were forced to undertake in response to the national economic crisis, seem ironic in a city like New York, long considered a “Mecca of the Arts” in the United States.

Nevertheless, 73 percent of the elementary schools, like the one that Morales attends, offered dance lessons. Dance promotes discipline, self-esteem and character development, all important

factors in the academic formation of the students, say experts. And for some students, in addition to a form of expression and creativity, dance represents an escape valve from problems and bad company.

“We did not know about these dances, of the elegance with which the steps are executed and how this can lead to a track in a dance career. Some of the children have taught us; they are our teachers so we can learn a little of the dance,” says Blanca Morales, Eddie’s mother.

Eddie Morales had his first fox trot lessons when he was only four years old. Now 11 and in the sixth grade, he states he feels strongly inclined to follow a career in the world of dance.

Some teachers view the decrease in the arts programs as part of a lack of understanding on how important the arts are in building self-confidence in students who face fears and insecurity from a young age.

Joseph Almeida, a sixth-grade teacher at the KIPP Infinity Charter School, located at 625 West 133rd Street in Manhattan, considers dance to be an extremely powerful tool to help people express emotions and energy. “It is a way to really help students develop community relationships,” says Almeida.

“We are a global society focused on productivity, on what you can produce, what skills you have for the work force; there is no place for dance,” said Almeida, a graduate of Georgetown University, where he belonged to

a hip-hop team. “Dance is a valuable tool to connect to human skills and make better students. The moment we think differently on how we test students in schools and on what we actually want as outcomes, then dance will have a huge place in education, one that it actually deserves and that students need.”

At KIPP Infinity Charter School, dance is part of the core curriculum, as important a subject as math and science, according to KIPP Principal Joseph Negron, who believes that both study and the arts make up a full education.

The school started four years ago with just a fifth grade class and 80 students. Today, there are sixth, seventh and eighth grade classes, and it is considered one of the top schools in the New York City public school system, with 280 students enrolled, 75 percent Latino and 25 percent African American.

“Give them a chance to show other talents that they have,” said Negron, who says many of the school’s teachers come from Ivy League colleges, such as Harvard University and Georgetown, and other colleges from around the nation, and whose commitment to do wherever it takes has brought success to the students.

Negron explained, “Some of them are not very good in academics but they are amazing dancers and this makes them feel good about themselves and gives them a chance to be creative, to practice a lot of stuff we talk about in the classroom, like self control, to get a grip. We talk about how the same life skills applied to dance also apply to studying.” For this principal, dance represents hours and hours of practice for a 10-minute show or a five-minute dance piece and likens it to the many hours of practice and study for one math test.

“The arts have the power to impact positively on the life of many people,” assures Michael Balderrama, who is Mexican American and the dance captain of *In the Heights*, a Tony Award winner for best musical in 2008.

Balderrama knows well what he says; his personal history illustrates how dance can change the course of a life. “For a little while, I had a very problematic youth. Dance saved me from falling off a precipice from which few emerge. To dance,

I had to learn discipline, commitment, and know my capacity and limitations,” he says. Balderrama is co-director of R. Evolución Latina, a nonprofit organization that teaches dance in public schools throughout the five boroughs, with classes taught by professional dancers from Broadway shows.

For school children, dance class represents a life lesson and a dare to face new challenges. Gianni Polanco, 12, and a student at KIPP Charter School, commented about the dance program he took the previous school year with R. Evolución Latina: “What I have learned there is that you should always be daring enough to go out of your comfort zone.”

“I learned to never give up and to just have fun when I was dancing. I was tired, but I kept dancing. I liked the dance moves. All of my friends and I started to practice, we tried our best to perfect the dance, and over time we did,” said Arsthly Diaz, 11, who also took part in the same program as Polanco.

According to the DOE, 89 percent of the city’s public schools in all five boroughs received collaboration from one or more of the 396 nonprofit organizations dedicated to the arts. Of the 1,275 schools, 782 offer dance lessons: 73 percent of the elementary schools; 57 percent of the middle schools; and 42 percent of the high schools. Presently, 49 percent of the 782 schools have equipped studios and a space to teach the fox trot, tango, cha-cha-cha, cumbia and merengue.

KOREAN

BRINGING DISCIPLINE TO GYM

BY JINHWA JO, KOREA DAILY

JUNE 4, 2010



“Yes, Master!”
“Too weak, I can’t hear you!”
“Yes, Master!”

Those interactions took place during a recent Martial Arts class of 6th graders at East-West School of International Studies.

Wearing white uniforms, the 6th graders were shouting at the top of their lungs, but showed their age as they giggled after looking at each other. The Master was not happy with them. “Take your shoes off now. One, two, three!” shouted Regina Im. Suddenly, the students became quiet and lined up as ordered.

Since last semester, East-West has been the first New York City public school to offer Tae Kwon Do, the Korean martial arts, as a regular physical education class. After 10 weeks, the 6th graders earn their yellow belts.

This fall, five other schools, including PS 242 and Fordham Leadership Academy, will offer Tae Kwon Do as part of its physical education curriculum—a result of rigorous persuasion by Korea Tae Kwon Do, an educational organization that promotes Tae Kwon Do in NYC public schools.

It wasn’t easy. At first, even demonstrations of the martial art in the school weren’t permitted. Principals were not familiar with the concept, and parents weren’t too excited about having their children learn martial arts. They asked, Why martial arts? Isn’t it too violent or aggressive? But the principals and teachers were asked to focus on the discipline.

Ben Sherman, principal of East-West, sees the great benefit beyond physical strength. “Kids can learn to control themselves while building confidence as well,” he said.

Regina Im, who teaches the Tae Kwon Do class at the school, emphasizes: “It’s amazing it takes such a long time for them to line-up and be quiet at the same time. As time goes by, however, they learn to be a part of the group. Not any more of the ‘me, me, me’ stuff,” she said.

The model comes from the Massachusetts public school system. Since 2007, about 20 schools have embraced Tae Kwon Do as physical education classes. As a partner of First Lady Michelle Obama’s program, ‘Let’s Move, Let’s Read,’ it’s only growing. In May, more than 100 students demonstrated Korean martial arts at the heart of Times Square.

Ms. Pina-Council, principal at Rebecca M. Johnson School, in Springfield, MA, witnessed the change among students. “You know, American kids are spoiled, no discipline. But after Tae Kwon Do, kids learn how to behave,” she said.

Behave well and academic grades will be higher.

A survey by AAHPERD (American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance) shows that 91 percent of adults believe physical education classes do not interfere with a child’s academic performance but actually enhance it. They also think discipline and teamwork guarantee a bright future for children.

Bringing discipline to gym wasn’t easy in the beginning. The powerhouse behind Tae Kwon Do class at public schools is the U.S. Tae Kwon Do Education Foundation. Founder Kyung Won Kim recalls, “Whenever I approached principals, they always thought about Kung Fu and the martial arts image, not holistic values of inner strength and self-control.”

After four year of volunteering to offer free classes, principals started to see the benefits of it. Teamwork, a sense of group, self-control, and listening to others are just a few of the benefits. Problems still persist, however. Every Tae Kwon Do class is still free. It means schools don’t pay a penny for masters or uniforms. It’s all volunteer-based. Masters donate their time and the Korean government donates uniforms.

But there is a lack of physical education classes in NYC public schools, despite NY State regulations issued in 1982 and again in 1995, which mandated that kindergartners to 3rd graders must have at least 120 minutes of physical education weekly. For 4th to 6th graders, it’s three times as much. Schools are ill-prepared to tackle the child obesity epidemic that is sweeping the nation.

Regulations are only being applied in theory.

When the city randomly surveyed 150 elementary and middle schools in 2008, it found that 93 percent of 3rd grade and 88 percent of 4th grade classrooms violated the regulations. Fifty-seven percent of elementary schools offer physical education class only once a week. Why? Educators all agreed that they don’t have enough funding,

are unable to hire teachers, and that they don’t have proper facilities. With budget cuts, the situation is getting worse.

But when it comes to Tae Kwon Do, the real challenge is not money; it’s lack of masters who can teach. Requests from schools surpass the number of masters available. Every summer, the U.S. Tae Kwon Do Education Foundation invites masters from Korea to teach in the public school system – in English. Masters from Korea are great at Tae Kwon Do, but not in English. This is why Ms. Im plans to train second-generation Korean masters here in America. She said, “The language barrier isn’t a problem for them, and they can easily obtain teacher licenses too. That’s the future.”

Students aren’t interested in behind-the-scenes issues like this. They are only excited about a new kind of physical education class. And to some kids, Tae Kwon Do isn’t too exotic. David Sing, who earned a black belt, was excited to practice Tae Kwon Do at school. “I’m going to share the skills with classmates,” he said.

And Ms. Im is still committed. She said, “It’s hard to teach classes all day not making any money. I know it makes no sense business-wise, but we have to do it; somebody has to do it.”



LOCAL

THE QUEST FOR A HEALTHIER SCHOOL LUNCH

BY JEANMARIE EVELLY, NORWOOD NEWS

AUGUST 26, 2010

French Fries are not vegetables. That's the message that Tyshawn Davis, a teacher at IN-Tech Academy, wants to drill into his students. The apples in the school cafeteria sit untouched for days on end, he said, until they're thrown away.

When asked what vegetables are being served for lunch that day, Davis said both his students — and the cafeteria workers — pointed to the deep-fried potatoes.

"There's no nutrition taught to these kids at all," he said.

In many neighborhoods in the Bronx, access to fresh fruits and vegetables is often limited to the corner bodega. The health problems associated with poor nutrition, such as diabetes and obesity, are pandemic in New York City and across the country.

Many advocates say a key to eradicating this, and in changing the way young people think about food, is to start with what's dished up in our school cafeterias. New York City's public school system serves 860,000 meals a day, according to the Department of Education.

"The way the

cafeterias are described are really like reheating centers," said Milyoung Cho, of NYC Health Equity Project, which has conducted food research projects with students in Brooklyn and the Bronx. "On the website, they say they're serving x, y, and z, but when you go to the cafeteria, they're only serving fries and pizza," Cho said.

Marge Feinberg, a spokeswoman for the DOE, said that there are 80 kitchens throughout the Bronx where actual cooking takes place, and another 120 "modified kitchens" which serve only pre-cooked foods. The DOE also relies on satellite locations equipped with refrigerators and warming units to supply food to some schools, she said.

Cafeterias must work from a list of foods approved by the DOE, which has contracts with 28 food vendor companies.

"A lot of it is processed, packaged food," said Heidi Hynes, director at the Mary Mitchell Family and Youth Center in Crotona, which runs a DOE-supported afterschool program. (The center has its own kitchen that turns out fresh, hot meals daily—since the



program pays for its food supplies independently of the DOE, they are not subject to the same food requirements.)

Experts say reform is difficult for New York City, the biggest school district in the country.

“Just by nature of it being so large, I think there’s some lack of control there,” said Kate Adamick, a food systems consultant and professional chef who specializes in reforming school lunches.

“And because the people in charge are just so busy getting food on the plates every day, I don’t think there’s anyone there to step back and look at the whole picture in a very holistic, comprehensive way,” she said.

The Department of Education, under Mayor Michael Bloomberg, has made strides to improve school nutrition – banning soda and other junk food from school vending machines and trying to incorporate more fresh fruits and vegetables onto lunch trays.

Educators in the Bronx are trying other tactics. At Discovery High School in Kingsbridge Heights, science teacher Steve Ritz had his students growing their own fruits and vegetables as part of their Living Environments class. The gardens and indoor green walls were a hit, and produced enough produce to feed hundreds of students and guests at two separate healthy luncheons they hosted last spring.

Perhaps Ritz’s tactics will catch on. Bronx Borough President Ruben Díaz, Jr. organized the first ever Bronx Food Summit in May—a day of workshops and panel discussions about nutrition, as well as hands-on classes for parents to learn how to cook fresh fruits and vegetables for their families, or start their own herb gardens at home.

The goal, Díaz told the crowd, was to help lead the Bronx into a future where high school cafeterias had their own salad bars and elementary students tended to vegetable gardens during science class. A future, perhaps, where French fries aren’t the only vegetables on a student’s cafeteria tray.

“Imagine,” Díaz said, “walking and picking a strawberry off the wall and eating it.”

INEFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Given the staggering diversity of NYC public schools' student population, it is no secret that the DOE faces a critical challenge when trying to engage immigrant parents, particularly those who have little or no English-language skills, in their children's education. The Ethnic and Community Media Fellowship developed from the need to relay to immigrant parents information on the public school system and find an informational vehicle in the local newspapers to supplement the DOE's efforts. Added to the list of more common issues, such as getting school news or teacher communications in English only, the focus on language issues was made more acute with the additional need of digital literacy to pay for school lunches and to vote in Community Education Committees – where immigrant parents could begin participation in school administration.

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CHINESE

MYLUCHMONEY.COM BECOMES MYLUNCHMONEY.COMPLAIN

BY LOTUS CHAU, SING TAO

NOVEMBER 7, 2008

Last year, the Department of Education in New York City launched mylunchmoney.com, a site that allows the city's public schools to collect lunch money online. The DOE encouraged all public schools to computerize the process, step by step, and arrange meetings with parents to explain how to use the mylunchmoney.com website. However, while the website itself is good, the schools' process to familiarize parents with navigation of the website has left parents and students frustrated.

"Amy Lau, go see the principal after lunch."

After Amy Lau, an eighth-grade honor student at MS67 in Little Neck, received the message, she felt nervous all day long wondering if she was in trouble. After seeing the principal, she found out that her lunch money account was short \$30. The principal requested she ask her parents to put in the lunch money as soon as possible.

Her father, Tony Lau, spent almost half a day trying but still could not log in to his daughter's account on mylunchmoney.com. Finally, he gave her cash to give to the school for the lunch money. After Amy handed the principal the money and explained the difficulty her father encountered, he told her to instruct him to log on to the program at MS 67, not JHS 67; that was the reason her father could not access her account.

Lau, a professional with a college degree, said that when the DOE created this program, they listed MS 67 as JHS 67 but when the DOE

changed all the junior high schools to middle schools, they did not change it on the website. That's why he could not log in to mylunchmoney.com and put in his daughter's lunch money. "It was such a small change in the name, but the DOE did not pay attention and it made parents and students so frustrated. Think about the recent immigrants or people who aren't familiar with computers," Lau said.

Anita Chang, a parent from another middle school, said she gave her son \$8 to \$10 a week before the mylunchmoney.com program, but now she puts \$30 to \$40 in the account every month. Everytime she adds money to the account, she has to pay a \$1 processing fee, so she always puts in more than \$50 to avoid the processing fee, or just in case she forgets to put in money. On top of that, she is never sure how her son uses the lunch money. Sometimes, her son tells her, he treats his classmate. The school never sends a statement on how the student is spending the money. "As parents, you worry about teenagers, especially how they use money nowadays."

Richard Wong, who has four kids in public school, said he also wants to avoid the processing fee and is afraid of forgetting to put lunch money in the account, so he too always puts a large amount of money into his kids' accounts. "It has become a burden to me, but you can't just ignore it. Kids need food. You just have to deal with all this," he said.

Even though the DOE is trying to computerize

the process, says Lau, it does not guarantee an improvement to the quality of life in school. For example, in MS 67, there are close to 1,000 students in the school and the cafeteria space is limited. The school arranges three different lunch hours: sixth-grade students eat at 11 o'clock; seventh-grade students eat at noon; but eighth-grade students eat at 2 o'clock. "Can you imagine a 12- or 13-year-old kid eating their breakfast at 7 o'clock in the morning and then eating their lunch seven to eight hours later? Why does the school make the kid starve everyday?"

He complained to the teacher but other than receiving sympathy, nothing changed. "It looks like the DOE cares more about strategy than the kid's health, and their policy always ends up making the parents frustrated," Lau complained.

CHINESE

NEW IMMIGRANTS STILL FIND IT HARD TO VOTE IN CEC ELECTIONS

BY LOTUS CHAU, SING TAO

JUNE 25, 2009

Schools Chancellor Joel Klein and Deputy Mayor Dennis Walcott announced the opening of the election period for the City's 34 Citywide and Community Education Councils (CECs). For the first time, the CEC election is open to all New York City public school parents, who are invited to cast "straw votes" beginning April 6, 2009.

According to State law, only parents who are officials of Parent-Teacher Associations may vote in the official CEC elections held in May. This year, in response to parent advocates and in an effort to ensure that CEC selections reflect the view of more parents in each district, the Department of Education modified the election so that the official CEC electors can make their selections based on the results of the all-parent straw vote. Parents can vote for their CEC members by visiting powertotheparents.org. The election will run from April 6 through April 22, 2009.

The chancellor and deputy mayor hope minorities and new immigrant communities get involved in the election. They were joined by Chung-Wha Hong, of the New York Immigration Coalition, Chelsea High School of Fashion Industries Principal Hilda Nieto, and Vanessa Leung, of Asian American Children and Family Alliance, for the announcement.

CECs are elected parent bodies that provide support to their local schools and consult with the Department of Education on educational policy in their districts. There is a CEC in each

of the City's 32 community school districts as well as a Citywide Council on Special Education and a Citywide Council on High Schools. In March, more than 500 public school parents applied to be candidates for their CECs. Families in each district then had an opportunity to meet their candidates at local question-and-answer forums. A list of all CEC candidates, along with brief biographies, can be found online at powertotheparents.org.

"Joining your local Community Education Council is one of the most important ways parents can advocate for the children and help shape their district's educational policies," Chancellor Klein said. "We have changed the election process to make it more inclusive than ever before, so that all parents have a say in who gets chosen for this important role."

"Our administration is always looking for ways to support and bolster parent involvement in schools," Deputy Mayor Walcott said. "This is a great way to do that, and I hope all parents take advantage of their opportunity to cast their straw votes in this week's election. The more people who participate, the more the selections in May will reflect the actual preferences of those families that CECs will represent. And because the elections process is all online, voting is now easier than ever before."

"Four parents from my school are candidates for the Citywide Council on High Schools," said Principal Hilda Nieto. "So it is especially

important to me that my parents have the opportunity to vote. We have sent information about the election to all of our parents, and made sure that there are computers available in the library for parents who don't have a home computer."

However, Ling Ng, a former school district member representing Lower Manhattan, still believes that it is hard for new immigrant Chinese parents to get involved in this election. "First of all, they choose spring break [for the elections] when so many families are out of town, or the libraries are closed because of the Easter holidays, and people have a hard time accessing a computer if they don't have one at home," said Ng.

Other than English, for those who are not fluent in the language, the website election content is offered in nine other languages – the ones most frequently used in the City.

Vanessa Leung, deputy director of Asian American Children and Family Alliance, agrees it is difficult for new immigrant Chinese with little knowledge of computers to vote in the CEC election. She also criticized the DOE, saying it should reach out to the minority communities and consult on ways to better serve parents whose computer and English-language skills are limited before setting up the website. She still encourages new immigrants to try to vote this time around, and promised to work with the DOE to improve the process for next year.

This year's CEC election is the first public election in the nation to be held entirely online. Running the election on the web will make it easier for parents to vote and also dramatically reduce election costs. The final selection process by Parents Association and Parent-Teacher Association leaders will take place in May, and results will be announced at the end of the month.

Although we won't know the results of the CEC elections until the end of May, new immigrant parents who care very much about their children's education doubt that their voices will be heard.

BENGALI

OBSTACLES FACED BY IMMIGRANT STUDENTS IN GIFTED AND TALENTED EXAM

BY ABU TAHER, WEEKLY BANGLA PATRIKA

JUNE 27, 2009

While American-born children may find it difficult to pass the Gifted and Talented exam that exclusively selects New York City's talented students from the rest, immigrant children who take the test have even higher chances of failing despite the fact that it is offered in their native language.

After the latest scores of the Gifted and Talented test were reported in early May, the parents of numerous Bengali children spoke of the obstacles immigrant children face while taking this exam.

"For immigrant kids, this is an extra challenge, and very few can endure such a challenge," said Habibur Rahman, a Bronx father whose daughter Maksudah Habib, a 5th grader at PS 106, scored low on the test.

"Children who are growing up with multiple languages have a hard time understanding and answering questions asked in one exclusive language," Rahman said.

The exam results allow school administrators to recommend children whose scores are above average to the Department of Education's Gifted and Talented program. That special curriculum, available only at 35 selected schools citywide, provides a more rigorous education and gives children deemed to have exceptional capacities and talents the opportunity to challenge themselves.

The test is available in various languages, including Bengali, allowing bilinguals or newly

arrived immigrant students an opportunity to be selected for the program.

However, Bangladeshi parents say that the language used in the translations is too sophisticated for small children, who are not fluent in either language, to comprehend. As a result, highly intelligent children are unable to enter the Gifted and Talented program, because they do not understand the test, and end up not having an "exceptional" score.

These parents, and their supporters, want Department of Education (DOE) officials to reform that aspect of the test. If bilingual students are to benefit from the opportunity to participate in this program, the department should amend the current testing system and its translations.

"There is something wrong when our kids, who do so wonderful when they interact with us cannot communicate with their instructors," said Taslima Ahmed, whose daughter Sumayaia Ahmed, a kindergartner at PS 78, is considered a bright child but scored low on the exam.

Will Havermann, an education system spokesman, said the city would address the problem: "If there is any problem, we will address the issue, and to expand the program, we will work extensively."

Parents and their supporters say there are problems, for certain. First, some children in the community do not even know that the Gifted and Talented exam is available in Bengali. Second, some children of immigrant parents do not

speak English or Bengali fluently, but rather a combination of both languages. As a result, they cannot understand the grammatically correct sophisticated Bengali the exam uses.

Abul Kalam Azad, a professor at Long Island City High School who teaches Bangla and works with bilingual students, said the DOE should employ better trained and experienced professionals to translate the instructions into simple and coherent language for the young children.

“[The DOE] translates some words using such ancient and obsolete words that are no longer in use in contemporary Bengali,” Azad said. “I bet educated people will find them difficult to comprehend. If the translation is meant to make the test comprehensible for young children, I would say it rather complicates the test for them.”

Havermann could not immediately say how many children who took the exam in Bengali scored well enough to be admitted into this year’s Gifted and Talented program.

Testing for gifted and talented students from kindergarten and first grade took place in January and February, and was taken by 14,822 children. Of that number, 1,345 students entering kindergarten were offered admission to one of the six Gifted and Talented programs.

Score reports and applications for eligible students were mailed to the families in early May. Students who ranked in the 90th to 96th percentile are offered admission to their district’s Gifted and Talented program, while those that score in the 97th to 100th percentile are offered admission to the citywide program.

Five-year-old Sahla Taher, a kindergartner at PS 78 in Queens, took the test -- she did not make the cut.

“After taking the test, my daughter came home upset. She told me that she could not follow the instructions, and was looking for the actual question the whole time since she could not follow the instructor,” Sahla’s mother, Mary Jobaida, said. “When I asked her how she answered the questions, she said that she used her imagination of what kind of questions may come with the kind of answer sheet she got.”

The DOE uses instructors who read

questions aloud to a group of five students from kindergarten and first grade. Students are not given any questions or instructions on paper; they are only given a sheet to fill out their answers.

On the Bracken School Readiness Assessment (BSRA) portion, Sahla ranked in the 98th percentile, with 85 correct answers out of 88 in six sections, including colors, letters, sizes, comparisons, and shapes; on the other hand, in the Otis-Lennon School Ability Test (OLSAT), a test that includes 60 questions for kindergartners -- 30 verbal and 30 non-verbal (reasoning) -- she ranked in the 79th percentile, answering 25 non-verbal and 15 verbal questions correctly.

Sahla got the same score last year when she took the test as a pre-K student. On both occasions, she ranked in the 87th percentile overall. Students must score in the highest percentiles on both portions to be admitted into the program. By taking the average of the OLSAT NCE scores -- an applicant takes the test three times -- and one BSRA NCE scores. The final number is then placed on a score curve to determine the percentile.

Miss Williams, the test’s coordinator at PS 78, said the verbal part is the most difficult for the bilingual children, and suggested that parents read out loud to their children at home to get them used to listening.

Still, some Bangladeshi parents find that strategy futile.

“If I read out a book to my daughter, it will not be accent-free, and my daughter will still face the same problem when she hears the instructions from a native speaker,” Jobaida said. “She comprehends what I say. She is quick to follow my instructions, but not with the G&T instructors.”

Salina Babul, whose daughter, Tazin Fahim Banu, attends the selective Bronx High School of Science, said she would be happy if the DOE changes the way it runs the Gifted and Talented children’s exam: “My daughter is very bright, and I always knew that. But she never did well in her G&T test due to the lack of communication problem with the instructors.” She then added, “Now that she is grown up, and understands English well, she was accepted at a specialized high school.”

INDEPENDENT

SPIN AND SUBSTANCE: THE NUMBERS BEHIND THE DOE'S "GOOD NEWS"

BY HELEN ZELON, VOICES THAT MUST BE HEARD

JULY 22, 2009

Mayor's Bloomberg's third-term election campaign showcases his administration's education gains as strong evidence for his success: High-school graduation rates have risen and more elementary and middle school students are judged "proficient" on state tests of core academic subjects. Yet the gains celebrated by Bloomberg and Klein – and carefully promoted by the Department of Education press office – are challenged by outcomes on national achievement tests, largely regarded by academics and researchers as the 'gold standard' of educational assessment. National measures do not demonstrate the gains that state tests show. And meager gains made by students who are English Language Learners, who comprise one in four public school students citywide, are touted as major accomplishments – despite striking needs in a significant population of students.

Looking at the data behind the good-news reporting of the DOE reveals less-substantial gains for many high-need students. Achievement gaps between the races, especially in reading, persist despite seven years of Bloomberg's "Children First" reforms. Yet, public reports touting a "narrowed" achievement gap paint a glossy, positive image for the DOE's efforts. The data tell another story.

Knowledge or test prep?

On July 14, the U.S. Department of Education

Institute of Education Sciences (IES) released the most recent National Assessment for Education Progress (NAEP) report, based on standardized tests conducted across the United States in 2007. Despite seven years of test-driven accountability measures, as mandated in the No Child Left Behind Act (and echoed by Bloomberg-era accountability reforms), race-linked gaps persist, especially in English. Gains made in the early grades erode by middle school. White students still outpace their black counterparts in English and in math, and race-linked gaps, while narrowing slightly, haven't closed enough to be statistically significant, according to the NAEP report. (The IES plans to release a companion report comparing Hispanic-white test scores in September.)

The NAEP has been administered since the early 1990s, yet for 8th graders' English scores, no significant change was seen in any of the 50 states. "We must simultaneously raise the achievement of all students, while closing gaps in achievement between different groups of students," said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. "The progress has been too slow. The achievement gaps are still too wide."

This stands in sharp counterpoint to the good-news message of the DOE, after the May 2009 release of the most recent state test results. According to Schools Chancellor Joel Klein, "We're continuing to narrow the shameful racial and ethnic achievement gap, especially in the

eighth grade, where it has been most persistent.” Yet black eighth-graders score, on average, 26 percent below white students. A similar gap is evident for Hispanic students, who earn, on average, 27 percent less than white students.

It’s not untrue to report that the racial gap is narrowing – more than 30 percentage points separated black and Hispanic students from white students in 2002, when Bloomberg was first elected. But celebrating small gains obscures the significant challenges faced by the city’s schools. The NAEP discounts similar changes as statistically insignificant, yet to the DOE, the changes represent substantive gains, proof that “our schools have made a remarkable turnaround since 2002,” according to the mayor.

New York’s scores on the NAEP solidly reflect the national average – our students are doing neither much better nor far worse, on average, than other students in the rest of the country. (This has been true since the NAEP was first administered, starting in 1990.) City officials discount the NAEP as an accurate measure of student achievement: Deputy Mayor Dennis Walcott dismissed the difference between flat NAEP scores and rising state scores, saying, “Our students are not prepared for the NAEP, which is why they don’t do as well as they do on state tests.” Walcott’s explanation – that students fare better on tests for which they are prepared, rather than instruments that assess general knowledge – unwittingly implicates the DOE’s focus on preparing students for its own tests over national measures, which presume a “portability” of real knowledge: What a student truly knows and understands should be evident whether the student has been formally prepared for a test, or not.

English language learners languish

More than 40 percent of city students are current or former English language learners; serving these students well is an important mandate of the DOE, and one that’s too often short-changed.

Even in its structure, the DOE groups programs and services for English language

learners with those designed for students with special-education needs, inexplicably pairing the complex needs of able, non-native-speaking students with the highly specific requirements of students with intellectual, emotional, and physical challenges.

English language learners struggle in New York City’s schools: Only about one in three graduate in four years. About one in seven earn a more rigorous Regents diploma. (The ELL grad rate reached a new low, 23 percent, in 2006.) Yet the DOE promotes gains posted by ELL students, while downplaying the context that illustrates the gravity of their challenges: “The 2008 graduation rate rose by more than 10 percent,” for English language learners since 2007, according to DOE’s press release to the media. A 10 percent gain nearly outstrips a similar rise in the graduation rate citywide – yet it masks a dramatic shortfall: Only 35 percent of ELL students earned a high-school diploma last year, compared with 25 percent, or one in four ELL students, in 2007. Again, positive gains are emphasized, while the enormity of the challenge – two of three ELL students do not graduate high school in four years – is consistently underplayed.

Drilling down into the graduation statistics, ELL students who do graduate do not earn the rigorous diplomas that many (but not all) native speakers merit.

Overall, 40 percent of general-education students earn Regents diplomas, which require higher scores on Regents exit exams than the Local diploma. Within that citywide average, about a third of black and Hispanic students earn a Regents credential. Proportionally twice as many, or nearly two-thirds, of white and Asian students get their Regents. Yet only 17 percent of ELL students who graduate in four years earn the more demanding credential. All students who do not earn Regents credentials – about six in 10 high school graduates, and two thirds of graduates of color – graduate with Local Diplomas, which certify completion of New York state and city high school requirements but do not universally confer college-readiness. Thus, a majority of students, predominantly students of color, meet

basic minimums, but are not well-prepared for the challenges of college or other post-secondary education.

The difference is especially critical for high school students enrolled since 2008 – current 9th and 10th graders – who are required by State and City regulations to earn Regents diplomas. (The less rigorous Local Diploma is being phased out, but wide gaps between the races, as documented by 2008 graduation rates, is forcing New York State Regents to re-evaluate the more stringent academic requirement: “The Regents will ...consider whether to continue implementing the phase-out of the local diploma,” according to representatives of the New York State Education Department.)

The DOE’s consistent “good news” pales in a context of struggling English language learners, and in a landscape where just about half of New York’s black and Hispanic students graduate high school with any diploma in four years. If the Local Diploma phase-out continues as planned, without revision by the Regents, it’s likely the recent rise in graduation rates will plummet to new lows – and that’s a significant piece of “bad news” the DOE isn’t eager to promote.

AFRICAN AMERICAN

**CHARTER SCHOOL CHALLENGE BY
ST. NICHOLAS HOUSES RESIDENTS**

BY MARYAM ABDUL-ALEEM, AMSTERDAM NEWS

SEPTEMBER 16, 2010

Even though it was a hot evening in a hot room with little ventilation, the agenda for the day was an even hotter topic for the 23 people who gathered to mobilize against the new Harlem Children's Zone Promise Academy Charter, scheduled to come to the St. Nicholas Houses in 2011.

"The New York City Housing Authority has been meeting with residents of St. Nicholas Houses for months on this plan, and there have been many supporters and a few opponents of this plan. Many of the issues raised are issues that NYCHA has already addressed or will be addressing very shortly," said New York Housing Authority spokesperson Myriam Ayala, responding to the group's opposition to the new school in an e-mail message.

But on that humid June evening, for the people assembled at the meeting, the proposed school plan was viewed with scrutiny for a number of reasons, ranging from the loss of open space, to the opposition of a charter school on public housing grounds, to the opening of the cul-de-sac on 129th Street.

"My position was in opposition the whole way from the word 'go,'" said Tyrone Ball, the vice president of the St. Nicholas Tenant Association.

The charter school moving into the St. Nicholas Houses is the civil rights issue of our time, numerous opponents said at the meeting held at Salem Community Center. The charter school was being created on public land and would change the composition of the houses, said Dr. John Derek Norvell, a public housing activist.

Many said they weren't against good schools or charter schools in general - although there were some at the meeting who were against the proliferation of charter schools in the Harlem community overall. Most seemed to agree that the issue was over the charter school being built on NYCHA grounds and the changes that would follow that evening.

A panelist for a training workshop for ethnic and community media journalists, Barbara Gross of the NYC Coalition for Educational Justice, said members of her advocacy group like to say that there are around 5 percent of students in charter schools, but charter schools take up 95 percent of the conversation. According to Gross, charter schools are often held out as the solution for failing schools when that's not always the case.

"Some charters are great. They are real models of innovation, and we should learn from them. And there are others that are fairly mediocre in their outcomes, and still others that are not doing very well at all," Gross said. Even as charter schools are growing, "there is tremendous controversy around charter schools. There's a big school reform movement. Some folks believe it's a movement to privatize public education."

Gross said most charter schools don't have unions, whereas every other public school has to be unionized. Charter schools that are public schools are funded by public and private money and controlled by private entities, which allows the schools more freedom on their curriculums.

Gross said the Coalition for Educational Justice thinks the support for charter schools from the Department of Education was at the expense of traditional public schools when schools co-locate and there are issues of space allocation and tension among parents and staff.

Often, charter schools share space with other schools in “traditional school” buildings that have created problems over space allocation.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Schools Chancellor Joel Klein are in support of charter schools as a way to impact public education and close the achievement gap, especially for at-risk children. However, the Harlem Children’s Zone is one of the “better” charter schools, which many parents have advocated. The Harlem Children’s Zone has been held up as a model for educating children by President Barack Obama. Its president and CEO, Geoffrey Canada, has been trumpeted by Oprah Winfrey and many others for his vision to transform communities one block at a time.

In an e-mail, Canada said, “We understand that some residents of the St. Nicholas Houses have concerns about our proposed school and community center since it represents a big change for the neighborhood. However, we believe that the building will offer the children at St. Nicholas a terrific opportunity to improve their chances of academic success and will be an incredible resource for everyone who lives there.”

“We as public housing residents are losing our rights,” said Dr. Norvell. “Our rights are being thrown under the bus: constitutional rights, human rights, the rest of it. And they cannot give away public land. The public land belongs to all of us, so we really need the help from the churches. We need the help of the mosques, the Muslim religious institutions. We need the help of all the institutions here in Harlem.”

Ball, a housing advocate, said he was more concerned about environmental issues that would be created on the grounds during and after construction, such as air quality, rodent and pest control and the elimination of two gardens, “and what [happens] when you’re taking out gardens to put in parking lots,” Ball later explained in a phone interview. “Then, what happens to the people who have asthma and people who have other respiratory

conditions, and the older people, the small children, when you’re introducing exhaust fumes into an area like that?”

Ball continued to give voice to the group’s concern over the street being “torn up and how that affects and impacts people, especially people who live right where the cul-de-sac is at.” The school’s plan calls for creating a street.

The city would spend \$60 million and Harlem Children’s Zone will raise \$40 million for the project. It will house 1,300 students in grades K-12. Children of St. Nicholas Houses are expected to get priority in the admissions process.

Ayala explained, “NYCHA and the Harlem Children’s Zone will be releasing a construction mitigation plan before construction begins that will address debris and rodents. We plan to have monthly meetings on any issues that arise during construction.” The NYCHA representative also said the community garden would be relocated.

However, residents currently opposed to the school want these issues hashed out before construction begins. Even though the popular charter school will create community programs for residents of the houses and provide access to its facility to those in the greater Harlem community, some were still not that impressed.

As the group debated a name to identify their united voice against the project, the outspoken Sandra Thomas suggested “Citizens for the Preservation of St. Nicholas Housing” because, at a previous meeting on the proposal, “they said that we were an isolated community, and I stood up and said, ‘We’re not isolated. We are part of this community and we kept this community thriving.’ So with the citizens, if there are other people who want to involve themselves, it’s open to all,” she said.

The group’s plan of action has been to contact elected officials and create a petition drive. And along with trying to gain media attention, the St. Nicholas Houses Preservation Society staged a petition signing event at St. Nicholas Family Day so everyone could be aware of what was happening to the housing grounds.

** Maryam is a resident of St. Nicholas Houses.*

CHALLENGES FACING STUDENTS

As officials cut back on funding for everything from specialized textbooks to bilingual education, minority, immigrant and low income students face even more difficulties, oftentimes navigating a world that functions in a culture with which they are unfamiliar and in a language they have yet to understand.

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INDEPENDENT

LANGUAGE COMPANIES SHUT BY NEW DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION POLICY

BY HELEN ZELON, CITY LIMITS

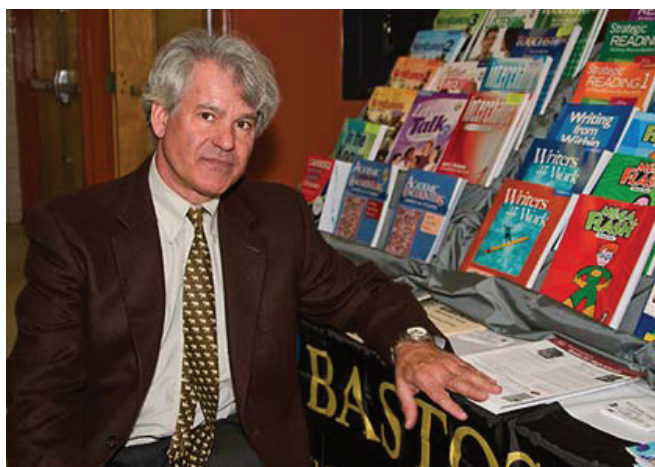
NOVEMBER 10, 2008

Connie Attanasio, of Middle Village, Queens, has a master's degree in education and has been in business for 25 years providing books for students learning English and the teachers who guide them. Harlem-born Jesse Harris has been distributing language books and materials on African-American themes to city schools from his Bronx business since 1971. Genaro Bastos, an adjunct professor of sociolinguistics and language acquisition at Queens College and New Jersey City University, is a book provider, too, delivering works from his business in Woodside, Queens to the city's schools since 1980.

These small business owners – and dozens of others like them – have built relationships over decades with teachers, principals and other educational leaders. As minority entrepreneurs, they typify the kind of success that Mayor Bloomberg celebrates as the lifeblood of the city. Yet they say their businesses soon will be forced to close due to new procurement regulations enacted by the Department of Education in order

to save money. Like all city agencies, DOE is under the gun to cut spending in the wake of the state budget crisis.

“Once this is implemented, I’ll be out of business,” said Bastos. “All my efforts have been spent serving school districts in New York City. Now, schools are no longer my customer; the customer is New York City. They change the rules, and now, you can no longer play the game. There’s no way I can survive.”



Polyglot and penny-pinching

Two in five New York City public school students speak a language other than English with their families. One in nine are formally classified as English language learners (ELLs); at least as many have attained basic proficiency but still require academic support. Dr. Pedro Ruiz, coordinator of the New York State Department of Education's Office of Bilingual Education and Foreign Language Studies, sums up the size of the challenge by simply calling New York “a bilingual state.” The city's limited-English proficient (LEP) students, who according to Ruiz speak over 170

different languages, account for three-quarters of that population statewide; in other words, this particular textbook market is centered in NYC far more than in Rochester or Troy.

Until now, schools have relied on local vendors – practically all of whom happen to be minorities – for guidance in finding the best books for students learning English. The vendors in turn researched, developed and honed lists of books from publishers worldwide, bringing titles to the New York market that overseas publishers lack the resources to promote.

Under new Department of Education bidding guidelines, most of these established vendors are no longer eligible to compete for DOE contracts, because they don't meet new minimum thresholds of \$5 million per year in sales. The new rules also require deep purchasing discounts and sophisticated technological capacities – impossible targets for people like her, says Attanasio, who heads an Ad Hoc Committee of Minority Business Owners formed in response to the new DOE regulations.

“We don't operate for the benefit of our suppliers. We operate for the benefit of the public schools,” said David Ross, the DOE's chief of procurements. Ross says the first part of the department's new contract, which was awarded in October, already has reduced the DOE's \$57 million total annual book tab by \$6.8 million. (The balance of the contract will be awarded later this month.) “Big and middle-size players were able to compete; the smallest players weren't able to compete for the award.”

“We made an award to two vendors, as a competitive bid within the parameters of municipal law – although we're not required to do that,” Ross said.

A different set of rules

Ross' assertion that DOE procurement is not bound by municipal law is correct. The inclusion requirements for city government support of minority and women-owned businesses do not apply to the Department of Education, because the DOE is not actually a city agency. It is,

according to the corporation counsel, a separate entity – a kind of orphan corporation that floats in its own legal universe, insulated from city, state and federal oversight regarding purchasing, reporting directly to Mayor Bloomberg and Schools Chancellor Joel Klein.

“For procurement purposes, DOE is not a mayoral agency,” says Bloomberg spokesman Jason Post. “The enabling legislation of mayoral control specifically exempted procurement, so DOE follows state rules.” Still, the ousting of minority and women vendors runs counter to provisions of city, state and federal law, including Local Law 129, which Mayor Bloomberg signed in 2005 requiring city agencies to buy more goods and services from firms that get city certification as M/WBEs – Minority or Women-Owned Business Enterprises. Although DOE receives city, state and federal funds, the fact that it is neither fish nor fowl – neither an agency of the city nor the state – means it is not bound to uphold city, state or federal anti-discrimination law in its procurement practices. DOE does require its vendors to have affirmative action plans on file and be equal opportunity employers, however, and it encourages proposals from women- and minority-owned businesses, says spokeswoman Marge Feinberg. But the financial and technical requirements of the procurement regulations dictate the terms of who may apply.

Mayoral control of the schools, which is due for review in 2009, grants DOE its protected status – a status that has a variety of critics well beyond small business interests. “The Bloomberg administration takes the unusual and questionable position that its education policies are not subject to state or city laws that it wishes to ignore,” says Udi Ofer, advocacy director of the New York Civil Liberties Union. “Bloomberg also refuses to submit his proposed education regulations to a public comment period, as required by state and local law. Under Mayor Bloomberg's rationale, education policies are under his own authority. This is an unacceptable and undemocratic approach to education policy-setting, and must be considered as the state explores whether to extend mayoral control.”

The biggies “don’t speak the language”

Because “the smallest players” were excluded from the textbook bid, the educators and academics who for decades have developed products for the city’s ELL population are being pushed out, and replaced with mammoth corporations located well outside of New York. To date, the DOE has awarded contracts to BookSource, based in St. Louis, and to the Tennessee-based Ingram, described on its website as “the world’s largest wholesale distributor of book product” as well as a technology and shipping leader.

It’s not just the local business people who object to the change. The state education department’s Pedro Ruiz counts himself among the critics. “Students need support for different materials in different languages that the large corporations do not offer,” he says. Big companies may offer works in Spanish and Chinese – “but what about Portuguese, Bengali, Russian and Urdu? These small vendors are the ones that have the materials. They have been working very closely with the communities, with teachers and with parents, looking for materials that exist around the world.”

The new regulations mean sharp cutbacks in personalized service. “The personal connection makes the difference,” says Pat West, principal of PS 90 in the Bronx, who has worked for years with Jesse Harris. “Sometimes we don’t know what we want. He brings things we might be interested in. He has introduced me to some authors that our librarian has had come in to talk to the kids. We invite them in, through his contacts.”

Harris says he built his business “coming in, sitting down with teachers, talking about materials. We’re not salespeople – we’re consultants, we talk to teachers at 7 at night, after hours. We go into areas – in Bed-Stuy, East New York – where the principal can’t talk during the day. At 7 pm, it’s dark. Sales

reps won’t go into those areas. If they don’t meet at a principal’s conference, forget it – those schools are not being served.”

“All of us, it’s not just a business,” says Batsos. “It’s not just a pair of shoes. It’s a product of education that’s valid and important, not just a profit-making venture. We bring materials of the highest quality to New York City schoolchildren.”

“Who’ll put together these collections?” Attanasio asks, referring to series of books organized on a single theme. Her staff includes DOE veterans who’ve served as directors of literacy and heads of English as a Second Language programs; Attanasio was assistant director of the Bilingual Bicultural Mini School in East Harlem before leaving the public schools. “We

represent companies where the faces of our kids are found in the artwork in the books.” The big corporations – according to the smaller players – can’t duplicate small vendors’ grassroots networks and relationships.

Business is business

The ethics of pushing out minority business owners isn’t the issue, says David Ross of the DOE. The issue is economics: Significant savings will accrue, along with easier, faster, cheaper and better book ordering for the city’s schools. To ease the transition, the DOE has required all current, small-business vendors to “cut over” or migrate their lists to a database that will permit Ingram and Booksource to place and fill new orders. The small vendors have not been compensated for this service, which Jason Henry, DOE’s chief administrator of purchasing, valued at “less than half of a percent” of the roughly \$57 million that DOE spent on all textbooks last year. The half a percent comes to about \$285,000, nearly equal to the \$300,000 being spent by DOE on outside trade-books consulting by Accenture. DOE procurement officials say they will reconsider refunding some of these fees.



“This is a total abuse of power,” says Bastos. “The educators are being left out.”

“Hundreds of companies have been put out of business because they depend solely on New York City,” says Harris. “It’s mind-boggling. How can the mayor stand up in front of me and say, ‘I want to be your mayor’ and take the bread out of my mouth?”

The state education department is aware of the city’s procurement practices, but has not yet responded to either the DOE or to Attanasio’s Ad Hoc Committee of Minority Business Owners on the issue. Late last month, the State’s Bilingual/ELL Committee of Practitioners met with Regent Betty A. Rosa, in charge of LEP/ELL programs, and Senior Deputy Commissioner Johanna Porter to discuss the DOE’s revised bidding practice. Outgoing New York State Education Commissioner Richard Mills’s office confirms receipt of a letter from Attanasio’s group but will not commit to a formal response.

“Hopefully, in meetings with the NYC chancellor, Commissioner Mills will bring up this issue to see what can be done,” said Pedro Ruiz, but time is critical. Henry and Ross of DOE say that the final parts of the contract will likely be awarded before the end of November, after which, small vendors say, their businesses will close.

Improving outcomes for ELL students is a primary goal of the Klein-Bloomberg administration. According to DOE statistics, fewer than one in four ELL students graduate from high school. “For students to improve, they have to have access to good materials,” says Bastos. “They have to have access to people with expertise. How do we provide educational access to all these students?”

LOCAL

A QUARTER OF BRONX SCHOOLS ARE WITHOUT GYMS; EDUCATORS SEEK NEW WAYS TO PUT PHYSICAL EDUCATION ON THE MENU

BY JAMES FERGUSON, MOUNT HOPE MONITOR

FEBRUARY 18, 2009

Last summer, Inside Schools, an organization that reviews the city's public schools, described PS 226 in the Bronx as “cheery” and “calm” with “colorful artwork and student writing lining the pastel-colored hallways.”

But the 450-student elementary school, located on Sedgwick Avenue in University Heights, also has its downsides. Many teachers are inexperienced due to high staff turnover, and students don't have a gymnasium to run around in, play sports, and otherwise let off steam.

In the Bronx, PS 226 is far from alone. In fact, 23 percent of the borough's public schools are without a gym, according to a report released last May by Bronx Borough President Adolfo Carrión Jr.

Thinking Outside the Box

Worried about students' health – 42 percent of Bronx kids in kindergarten through fifth grade are overweight or obese – some schools are taking matters into their own hands.

At PS 226, teachers have launched a gymnasium fund. They hope to raise \$3 to \$4 million privately, so that they can build a gym in the school's playground. So far, they've held several fund-raisers – including a celebrity golf tournament in Los Angeles – and raised about \$1

million, which includes a \$500,000 commitment from Bronx Council Member Maria Baez. Health teacher Robert Romano, whose brother is actor Ray Romano of *Everyone Loves Raymond* fame, is leading the effort.

Most inner city schools don't have such well-connected staff. Take CIS 204, an elementary school on 174th Street in Morris Heights. The school looks impressive – it's located in a former synagogue, a throwback to 50 years ago when the neighborhood was largely Jewish. But overcrowding is a major issue, and there is no recreational space, inside or out.



During recess, students make do with a stretch of cordoned off street, weather permitting. Or they play in nearby Half-Nelson Playground. It's

a situation that's far from ideal. Crime is high in this part of the Bronx, and in 2005, an annual basketball competition held in the playground was cancelled indefinitely because gang members from the Bloods, Crips, and Latin Kings kept showing up, according to the organizer, Tyrone Brown.

Other schools have enlisted the help of outside organizations, such as The Sports & Arts in Schools Foundation (SASF), a non-profit based in Queens, which has received funding from the City Council to connect schools with nearby – and often underutilized – community centers.

In the 2007-08 school year, the program served 2,000 students from 40 schools in Brooklyn and Queens. And in December, two Bronx schools – PS 168 on Morris Avenue and PS 754 on Jackson Avenue – enrolled. Students are bused to Bronxdale Community Center on Rosedale Avenue in Soundview, where they play basketball and other sports in what is a state of the art gymnasium.

“These facilities are not used between the hours of 9 and 3:30 when kids are at school and parents are at work,” said George Greenfield, an instruction supervisor for SASF. “They're empty. That's the gist of our program, to get kids in there.”

This year, another seven Bronx schools have signed on. Like PS 168 and PS 754, all are part of District 75, a citywide district that caters to students with special needs. (Often, District 75 schools are particularly squeezed for space, said Greenfield, because many are located in – and thus share facilities with – larger schools.)

Jesse Mojica, Carrión's director of education and youth, calls the program “extremely interesting.”

“We have to explore innovative ideas like this one... so that physical education isn't compromised in the interim as we fight this battle [for new gyms],” he said.

Carrión's Demands

To gather data for the report, Carrión's office e-mailed a survey to the Bronx's 363 public schools. In all, 209 schools responded – 49 of

whom reported having no gymnasium. Many said they use a multi-purpose room instead, such as a cafeteria.

The problem isn't unique to the Bronx. Citywide, 18 percent of schools are in the same position, according to a 2003 study by the City Council's Education Committee. Mojica says it's an issue “that's been in existence for decades and decades,” due to miserly funding and the city's failure to appreciate the positive impact exercise has on children's health and their performance in the classroom.

Other findings from Carrión's report included: 22 percent of Bronx public schools don't have outdoor physical education facilities, such as playgrounds; more than 90 percent of elementary schools and 49 percent of secondary schools don't provide enough physical education hours to meet New York State requirements; and 21 percent of schools don't have a certified physical education teacher on staff.

Carrión's report, titled *More than Child's Play: The Need for Improved Physical Education Policy and Infrastructure in Bronx Public Schools*, carried a series of recommendations for the DOE, such as allocating funds in the 2010-2014 Capital Plan to build gyms for schools that don't have them; hiring certified education teachers for all schools; and ensuring all schools are meeting the hourly requirements for physical education as mandated by the State.

“The DOE has both a legal and a moral obligation to ensure that students have access to sufficient physical education programs and facilities,” Carrion said in his report. “In order to assure a healthy future for our youth, the DOE must take a proactive role in addressing the lack of adequate physical education in our public schools.”

Marge Feinberg, a DOE spokesperson, said the department has read Carrion's report, but refused to commit the DOE to any of its recommendations.

“We share Borough President Carrión's concerns,” she said in an e-mail, “and that's why we have worked hard over the past five years to improve physical education in New York City schools and give more students access to high

quality programs.”

Feinberg said \$232 million of the 2005-09 Capital Plan is being spent on upgrades to gyms, swimming pools, and playgrounds, and that “we are continuing this work in the next Capital Plan.”

Still, she admits that the “economic picture is bleak right now.”

Jumping Out of Their Skins

Mojica says the DOE “has been a willing partner in listening to us,” and that a number of Carrión’s recommendations popped up in the draft of the 2010-2014 Capital Plan the DOE released in November (and updated in February). But most of the \$215 million put aside for “physical fitness upgrades” will mostly be spent on just that: upgrades to existing facilities, not the building of new gymnasiums.

“There are concerns,” Mojita said.

Romano, PS 226’s health teacher, says the DOE hasn’t given his school any cause for hope. “They haven’t said anything,” he said. “We’re not top of their priority list.” PS 226, like CIS 204 in Morris Heights, doesn’t make an appearance in the DOE’s 185-page draft.

Romano called the fact that his school doesn’t have a gym “insane.”

“The lack of it really affects these kids, both emotionally and mentally, and physically,” Romano said. “They have all this energy, and it translates into a lack of focus, because [in the classroom] they’re jumping out of their skins.”

Naturally enough, he continued, parents are wary about letting their children play outside in a neighborhood that is rife with drugs and gangs. Instead, they prefer them to watch television and play video games, he said. Subsequently, many local kids never get to run around – let alone play sports.

To help raise money for the new gym, teachers at PS 226 had a video* made, which they plan to show to potential funders. In it students, parents, and teachers explain how the facility would benefit the school as well as local residents, who will be able to use it in the evenings and at weekends.

Says one local dad in the video: “I think it’s a

shame that we have criminals in jail that under laws have to have a gym, but our kids don’t get [one].”

* Click [here](#) to see the video teachers at PS 226 made to help raise money for a new gym.

“A quarter of Bronx schools are without gyms; Educators seek new ways to put physical education on the menu” was the **THIRD PLACE WINNER** in the **BEST COVERAGE ON EDUCATION ISSUES** category at the **2009 IPPIES AWARDS**.



HAITIAN

SHOULD WE BE DONE WITH BILINGUAL EDUCATION?

BY DARLIE GERVAIS, HAITIAN TIMES

MAY 26, 2009

When Yves Raymond began teaching 30 years ago, he planned to work in education until retirement. Last year, Raymond's long career as an educator came to an abrupt end when Department of Education officials decided to do away with the automatic assignment of students with limited English skills to a bilingual program.

"I thought I was useful to the Haitian students, but there is no need anymore," Raymond, of Brooklyn, said. "I don't feel I wanted to stay in the system where I was a high-paid substitute, especially in my last year."

Raymond retired in November from his position as a substitute teacher. He had also left three years ago his position as a Creole bilingual coordinator at Erasmus High School after 23 years. He is one of 15 certified Creole bilingual teachers whose careers have come to an end with the advent of smaller, specialty schools created to improve school performances and to increase attendance. Haitian immigrant children are now dispersed throughout the system, and no longer form the ethnic cohorts they once did. Parents who just move to the United States and are looking to enroll their kids have to search many districts before finding a school that fits their children's need.

Today, 12 new small schools have replaced three major high schools in Districts 17, 18, and 19 in Brooklyn where a majority of Creole-speaking Haitian students live. They no longer offer bilingual programs including Creole, which

results in the decline of enrollment of Haitian immigrants with no knowledge of English and children out of school for the first semester because their parents did not find the proper school for them.

In Brooklyn's Erasmus High School alone, about 900 places in bilingual and ESL classes have been lost, said Raymond.

"The small schools don't have the numbers anymore to offer the bilingual program," explained Raymond, who also taught chemistry at the school.

A call made to the DOE sends immigrant parents to a placement center in their area that does not provide the proper language help for their minority children. After spending 30 minutes on the phone on a recent Monday, one parent, an East Flatbush resident, was given four placement centers after explaining that she needed to place her 12-year-old boy in school. She will have to go to PS 159, PS 315, the Cchool of Science and Technology and another enrollment center in District 22 in the Canarsie area.

Bilingual programs have long been plagued by controversy. While there has never been any irrefutable proof that they are the best way to teach immigrant children English, still some educators and advocates for bilingual education continue to argue that the English-only approach fails children. They insist that programs that develop children's native-language skills show beneficial effects both on their English-language

development and on overall academic achievement.

“It is important to have a transition period. When the child becomes comfortable, it is easier to try to adapt,” Raymond said. “At the beginning, you want the communication between the child and the parent to continue.”

By law, schools need 15 to 20 children to start a bilingual class. Immigrant students now receive ESL instruction briefly, with sessions as short as 15 minutes for a small group or a little extra attention in the classroom, all from a teacher unlicensed in ESL.

“Bilingual programs provide the cultural, linguistic, and psychological support a child needs to adapt in the new school system and continue learning without interruption,” said Jean Plaisir, an education professor at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, who still teaches bilingual education to student teachers. His students range from teachers in early childhood to college.

On the front lines of the bilingual program elimination is the former Erasmus High School, long-time stronghold that catered to a large population of Haitian children in Flatbush – the heart of the city’s Haitian enclave. The school, largely West Indian and black, has been dismantled into five small schools, none of which offer a bilingual program for Creole-speaking students.

Like Erasmus, Prospect Heights and Tilden High School also had in the past large contingents of Haitian children forming a critical mass that qualified the schools to operate a bilingual program in Creole. Plaisir said that students in the programs routinely outperformed peers at other schools on standardized tests.

“The majority of children in the New York City public school system come from immigrant backgrounds,” Plaisir said. “It is the state’s responsibility to provide an education to those children.”

States and the federal government balked at continuing to fund bilingual education after numerous problems with the programs came to light in 2000. The city’s bilingual education program was found to have substandard teaching and children who stayed too long in that category. That year, anti-bilingual initiatives were passed in New York, California, Colorado, Arizona and Massachusetts.

“A good bilingual program tries to reach a balance and create a bilingual and multicultural child who, at the end, will be good for the country,” Raymond said.

Another fault with the bilingual program was its enrolling of children born in the United States who critics said should have been placed in regular all-English classes.

Fredline Blanc, 18, has been enrolled in a Creole bilingual program since she was four years old because her parents are Haitian. Program coordinators in her school place her now in an ESL program after being for years in a Creole bilingual program.

“The classes in Creole did not help me,” said Blanc, who was born in Haiti and took the mandated Creole class for 12 years. “The ESL class really helps me with my English.”

Blanc is now a senior at Sheepshead Bay High School and is still obligated to take English as a Second Language class. She will continue taking the class until her college years if she does not pass an English proficient exam in May.

Twenty-one-year-old Sterline Mary Cevile, a junior in college, was born in the United States but spent three years in a bilingual education program.

“Being in the bilingual program had helped me explain to my parents in Creole how to help me with my homework,” she said.

Department of Education officials said most Haitian students are in ESL programs at schools that receive extra funding to educate them.

“Parents have the choice to ask the school for the type of English Language Learner program they want for their children,” DOE spokeswoman Melody Meyer said.

“There will always be pupils who need bilingual support in the country. Those children will not disappear. They [the DOE] will have a problem on their hands,” Plaisir said.

After spending more than 20 years at Erasmus and three years as a mentor in region 3, Raymond was tired of spot-filling for absent teachers at the new small school that could not afford to hire him despite his long-time experience.

“When you are teaching bilingual classes, you feel you are doing something extra. You feel you are helping. That was gratifying,” he said.

HAITIAN

EARTHQUAKE SHINES LIGHT ON NYC BILINGUAL PROGRAM

BY NADEGE FLEURIMOND, HAITIAN TIMES

MAY 26, 2010

Ruthnie Constant, a 15 year old, vibrant, yet mentally chattered little girl, is one of the many victims of the earthquake tragedy that ravaged Haiti on January 12. The 7.0 magnitude quake not only left over 200,000 people dead, it also left over 1.5 million people without a home, and many of them children who ended up in the NYC school system.

As the New York City school system grappled with the technicalities on how to accommodate these children, Ruthnie stated her only solace was the prospect of getting back in school to be among other school children, to be normal again. So as she picked at her barely eaten meal, she did smile when the conversation switched to school. As ready as she was to be a new student in New York City, the Department Of Education officials were not ready for her.

In speaking to Ruthnie, one thing was clear: she could not bear to go back to Haiti. Not yet anyways. While she was not ready for such a scenario, however, she was ready for something. She was ready to go to school. Though not a New Yorker, she knew she wanted to be in Brooklyn. "That's where they told me all the Haitians were. I want to be close to them, and I want to go to school with other Haitian kids, so I can feel as if I am closer to home."

But the process of school enrollment has been a challenge for Haitian students after the earthquake. Hundreds of Haitian kids, who have found themselves grappling with the New York

City public school system, have not been able to enroll in school as they had hoped. At least not without a struggle.

Nicole Rosefort, director of HABETAC (Haitian Bilingual and ESL Technical Assistance Center) at Brooklyn College, said that her workload has definitely escalated due to the earthquake. The influx of Haitian students entering the school system has been a struggle for the DOE as many schools do not accept students in the middle of the school year. "Not only do we have to worry about finding a suitable school for the kids, suitable meaning that the school will be able to accommodate the language needs of the student, but, often times, you will find a school and they have no space or they do not accept students mid-term."

This is definitely understood, as it could be disruptive to the education process for all involved to have children coming in at all various levels and at various times throughout the year. But Rosefort contends that students deserve the right to be educated, at any given point, no matter when they come into the system.

Rosefort added: "HABETAC's purpose is to address the unmet educational needs and concerns of Haitian students and their families, thus we have been addressing those needs through our various workshops and providing assistance to our parents as it relates to the education system."

The city set up the Enrollment Center as a way

to streamline new enrollment; however, according to community leaders, this has not been the case. Students have had to wait weeks to get placed in schools. Oftentimes, the enrollment center may send a child and their parent to a school, only to be told that there is no space at that particular school. Community leaders and teachers have stated that they often have to rely on calling in favors to various principals in order to get a child enrolled.

Darnell Benoit of Flambwayan community services, said “What Haitian students are facing post-earthquake is not different from what they faced pre-earthquake.” According to Benoit, the Department of Education has not been meeting the needs of Haitian immigrants for quite some time, especially those who arrive here at a later age, the 14- to 21-year-olds.

“In the public education system, when, as a new immigrant, you enter at an early age, things are okay. Even if you have difficulty learning English, you have time to learn English,” Benoit said. “But it’s a major issue for those entering directly into high school. Our community used to have six thriving bilingual programs; they no longer exist, because the city has phased them out. The Department of Education insists that there is still a bilingual program at Clara Barton High School. But it does not exist.”

Benoit said that there are many things that can be put in place to ensure that the process is streamlined and made more to service the children it is meant to serve. “I don’t understand why a process cannot be created where every school sends a list of all its enrollees after the first week or two of the school year so that the enrollment center knows how many seats are available at each school.”

When asked why there are not better bilingual education programs, Schools Chancellor Joel Klein said: “I would love to have more bilingual programs to ensure every Korean student or every Haitian Creole speaker has translation equipment in schools, however, there is just not enough money.”

But to students like Ruthnie who await the prospect of school to establish a certain level of normalcy back into her interrupted childhood,

the road to school may not be as smooth as she imagines. And when she arrives, she may find that there are no structures in place to help her adapt to her newly adopted home.

INDEPENDENT

STUDENTS WIN LAST CHANCE FOR DIPLOMA

BY JAISAL NOOR, THE INDYPENDENT

JUNE 23, 2010

Samuel J. Tilden High School, one of the last schools in Brooklyn to offer bilingual instruction in Haitian Creole and English, will close its doors this summer despite more than three years of struggle by a coalition of community advocates against the city's Department of Education.

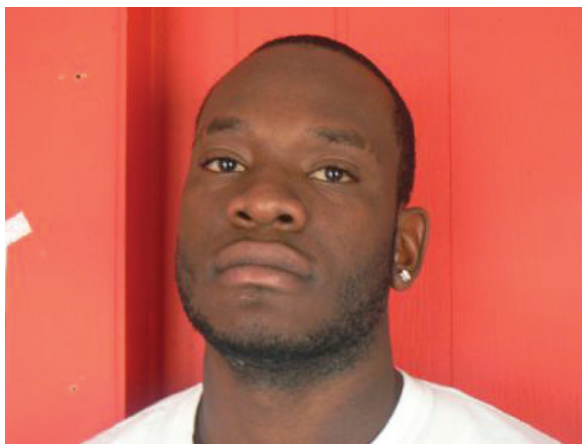
John Lawhead, an English instructor at Tilden for the past six years, says 50 of the school's 123 seniors may not pass their Regents exams in time to attend graduation later this month. While the New York City Department of Education

(DOE) will now offer English language Regents prep classes to Tilden's students this summer, advocates say summer school alone is not an effective remedy to this structural problem.

"It's extremely discouraging because it clearly takes tremendous efforts — more than three years of full-time activism — to extract the most minor concession of the DOE," said Leonie Haimson of the education nonprofit Class Size Matters. "I find it unbelievably perplexing why they wouldn't want these students to graduate."

Many of the school's Haitian-Creole speaking students, who make up the majority of the student body, have already left the school because they did not think they could earn their degrees in time.

"I have friends who gave up and dropped out of Tilden because they knew they couldn't graduate by June," said Jerome Djisy, a senior at Tilden.



It often takes students who are learning English as their second language five or six years to complete high school, especially since many of them need to learn reading, writing and language skills, Lawhead said.

However, Tilden's English Language

Learner (ELL) instruction — which featured classes taught in both English and Haitian Creole, allowed students to learn English more quickly.

In 2006, the school graduated ELL students at a 25 percent higher rate than similar schools.

Come fall, senior students at Tilden who are over 17 years of age will be funneled into GED prep classes or Young Adult Borough Center programs, which critics say lack necessary language instruction.

The summer classes are a direct result of an extended community effort spearheaded by Darnell Benoit, the executive director of Flanbwayan, The Haitian Literacy Project, which mobilized Haitian community members to ensure that Tilden's senior class would graduate.

Jerome, 20, says he and his sister, Mackenzie, 18, who came to Brooklyn from Haiti in 2007, are prepared to attend summer classes at Tilden if necessary.

“We will do whatever it takes. We are going to keep on studying and I know we are going pass our exams,” Jerome said.

The school has changed substantially since Jerome began attending Tilden in the fall of 2006.

“It was a great school when I started going there, people would fight sometimes but everyone was learning really well,” said Jerome, who came to East Flatbush, Brooklyn in Sept. 2006 from Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

The DOE targeted the school for poor performance after Tilden’s four-year graduation rate hovered below the standard 50 percent to 45 percent from 2002 to 2005.

As has happened at many other “failing” schools throughout the city, Tilden’s best students were siphoned off to smaller public schools, funding was decreased and students were faced with overcrowding as four smaller public schools moved into Tilden’s building from 2007 to 2008.

As of 2007, Tilden no longer offered bilingual education — nor did these newly-created small schools, despite laws requiring them to do so. In bilingual education, classes are taught in students’ native language, which differs from English as a Second Language (ESL) programs.

After hearing similar concerns about the “phase-down” of Lafayette High School in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, which stopped offering bilingual instruction in Chinese and English in 2007, Advocates for Children launched an investigation.

A scathing June 2009 report entitled *Empty Promises: A Case Study of Restructuring and the Exclusion of English Language Learners in Two Brooklyn High Schools* documented how students were systematically pressured to leave the ELL program and settle for GEDs, and only the students with the best test scores were allowed to transfer to other schools.

“The DOE will not get a second chance with the hundreds, probably thousands, of ELL students who have not received proper ELL services, have been forced to attend large failing

high schools and have been pushed out of school,” Advocates for Children concluded in its report.

The DOE did not respond to a request to comment for this article.

Jerome and Mackenzie’s summer plans will be determined when their test scores are released soon after *The Independent* goes to print. They are both confident that they have passed their last Regents exam, which was in English.

“I think the schools in Haiti are better, because you learn through memorization. Here, it’s all about tests,” Jerome said.

TURKISH

THE CHALLENGE OF BEING NEW

BY MEHMET DEMIRCI, ZAMAN AMERIKA

OCTOBER 8, 2010

Afra Dildade Ozalp and Isiksah Basarir, both teenagers who moved to New York from Turkey for different reasons, found that their problems were quite the same. On their first day of school in New York, neither of them had the courage to go to the bathroom because they didn't speak any English. They were new to the school as well as to America.

Dilek Ozalp is on her balcony waiting for her daughter to come home from school. Watching the buses going by, she says in a small, worried voice, "She comes home around this time everyday."

The Ozalp family's American story started two months ago, when they move from Istanbul to Staten Island. Afra Dildade, 14, is the oldest daughter in the family, and she is in ninth grade at Staten Island Curtis High School. The new life that welcomed the Ozalps in New York is a challenge for every member of the family. They feel a bit homesick even though they have relatives living close by. It seems life here didn't start easy for them – first the language problem and then others followed, one after another – but despite everything, Afra says, "I love New York."

The general opinion would be that for a teenager like Afra, there could be a lot of adaptation problems after a radical change in her

life, but her mother Dilek, as if contradicting this opinion, says, "She was so happy to find out that we were moving to New York she didn't have any uneasy feelings." Unlike the rest of the family, language wasn't a barrier to communicating with other people for Afra. "I wasn't scared



because I couldn't speak English. I knew I would communicate with other people in some other way." On her first day of school, she sat in class with a Turkish friend. "I should say I was really excited. Because I didn't speak any English, everybody asked my friend questions and she translated them for me. Everyone was curious

about my headscarf and why I was wearing it.”

There are 1.1 million school children in New York City. According to a Home Language Identification Survey (HLIS), 440,412 (41.8 percent) speak a language other than English at home. Department of Education data show that 65,075 new immigrant students were admitted to N.Y.C. public schools this year and the DOE has put into place various ways to help these immigrant students make the transition. Every school has tutoring and counseling while each school focuses on different activities depending on the needs of the students. For instance, Staten Island Curtis High School provides a translator for the first math class so that new foreign students don’t fall behind because they don’t understand English perfectly yet.

Onul and Dilek Ozalp were nervous when they made the decision to move to the United States with their three children, and especially nervous about Afra; but to their surprise, their oldest was the quickest one to get used to life here. “We recognized that Afra is a lot happier here. She became more social,” Onul Ozalp says. They think that maybe a new start in life has been good for her. “Her grades were dropping in her previous school in Turkey, but here, apart from school hours and meals, we don’t have any problems at all.” The only thing that has been strange for the parents was noticing that there is little friendship between classmates here, unlike in Turkey. Their two youngest children, on the other hand, had a really hard time adapting to life here. “The younger kids didn’t want to go to school after their first day,” they commented.

For the Ozalp parents, the most challenging thing about their children’s school life is reading and understanding all the papers that come from school, such as the kids’ grades or notes from teachers. Onul says that he’s trying to pay attention to his kids’ classes as much as he can and, in general, the topics they study are easier than in Turkey. “For instance, our youngest, Rana Dilbeste, was able to get a really good grade from her math class even though her English is not good,” he asserts.

Child psychologist Burcin Ogrenir believes young children can be greatly affected by big

changes, like moving to another country, although she doesn’t see a lot of cases like that. She indicates that families should consult with their children before making life-changing decisions, “otherwise, kids could have big problems with their social and school life in the new place.”

Two years ago, Isiksah Basarir, another high school student, also made a radical change in her life and moved to New York to live with her big sister. Isiksah, who is 16, says she never liked the school she went to in Turkey. “I was encouraged to come to America because my sister was here,” she said, adding she had no expectations when coming to America. She entered 10th grade this year, but Basarir regrets that she didn’t repeat 9th grade even though she studied it in Turkey. She says that she wished someone had guided her and explained things better, then, perhaps, she wouldn’t have as many problems with her classes. Her first days at school here were hard. “I sat at my chair not knowing what to do. A teacher helped me find my class. Everybody was a stranger to each other but students who were from the same countries would talk among themselves,” she said. “The classroom was crowded and nobody said hi to me. On my second day, I remember that I cried,” she says, not being able to understand what was going on around her and not being understood.

Serseray, Isiksah’s sister, thinks that her sister’s biggest hardship was not having someone to talk to as a friend. “I knew it was really hard for her, but there wasn’t much to do. There is always grouping among students in school, everybody talking to their friends from their countries. She is going to Abraham Lincoln High School and there was not one Turkish kid in the school.” She states, “The teachers couldn’t be blamed because it is a big school; they don’t have a chance to pay attention to every student in the school.”

Serseray finds the education system here very confusing. She asserts, “If a student has a problem and doesn’t demand a solution, nobody really guides you in any direction. For instance, if a kid has an absence at school, someone from school calls you but it is an automated machine. In Turkey, the teacher would even know the names of the students’ parents. Here, everything

is automated. There is a lack of interest; therefore, new students can experience a lot of problems. In my opinion, nobody really cares if students learn something or not. You have to fight to get something. I think teachers in Turkey are more mature about many problems. They think of the student's future."

Isiksah says she is still having difficulty with logistical problems, such as not being in one classroom but having to run from class to class, or seeing the bathrooms always locked. Afra Dildade agrees that she faces the same problems and feels they make it harder for her to get used to the system here.

PARENTAL POWER BEYOND DOE

Journalists highlight cultural attitudes that inform parents who take their children's education into their own hands, not relying on just what the Department of Education offers. Beyond navigating the difficult process of school choice, parents look to their ethnic community to organize programs to give their children an academic advantage and to keep them rooted in their cultural traditions. From fundraising for native language classes inside and outside of schools, to transporting their kids across state lines to participate in Chinese academic contests and competitions, parents are advocating for their children's education within their own comfort zones.

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CHINESE

CHINESE GROUPS SUPPLEMENT DEMAND FOR CHINESE PROGRAMS

BY SHUANG LUNA LIU, WORLD JOURNAL

JANUARY 31, 2009

On a recent Sunday afternoon, Huang Shu Jing, 10, is in a classroom, carefully listening to her teacher at the Chinatown Chinese School and taking notes, silently repeating what the teacher just said.

In New York City, there is an increasing number of children of Chinese immigrants, like Jing, who are yearning to learn their native tongue. But such classes are not offered in the New York City school system, even in Chinese strongholds like Flushing, Queens and Sunset Park, Brooklyn.

In contrast to the thriving community Chinese school, the Department of Education provides limited Chinese language classes. Only four schools have dual language programs, K94 in Brooklyn, PS 184 and the High School for Dual Language in Manhattan, and PS163 in Flushing; and only 30 schools provide bilingual programs in Chinese and English, not to mention, admission is very competitive. Whether learning in a local community Chinese school, or in a public school, interest in Chinese studies will continue.

In many cases, students finish their daily schoolwork, and start to learn Chinese, mostly in private after-school programs, including weekends. The problem goes beyond elementary school. At the prestigious Stuyvesant High School, many students have to wait an entire semester to be registered in the Chinese class because of the long waiting list.

Part of the problem stems from the fact that

decades ago, Chinese was not a popular language even among Chinese American students, according to officials. This trend of learning Chinese is tied to the rapid development of China and Asia. With a booming economy and China's looming status on the world market, being able to speak Chinese has become a sought-after asset for Chinese Americans as well as non-Chinese students.

Furthermore, second generation children have become more interested in their language and culture unlike previous generations, who shied away from learning the Chinese language.

"China has a large population and China is more important than ever," said Chen Yu Min, a student from Chinatown Chinese School. "I want to speak Chinese."

With the popularity of martial arts movies and Chinese food, more children want to know Chinese culture, visit China or make Asian friends. Moreover, many students are aware of the employment opportunities that exist overseas, and learning Chinese would give them an advantage. As a child in elementary school, Wang Yan Juan, now a high school student, refused to take Chinese classes when her parents asked her to. Now she regrets not heeding her parents' advice and she is taking lessons with children who are considerably younger than she is. Wang wants to be a psychiatrist for the Asian community; she knows language is a useful and powerful tool.

Chinese students are not the only ones

attending private Chinese classes. Other immigrants and native-born Americans have begun to do so as well. This interest in learning their native language appears to be a Chinese phenomenon. For instance, most Mexican-American children who speak Spanish cannot read or write in it. They learn it through conversation with their parents.

Many parents have vivid memories about asking their children to maintain their language heritage. Mrs. Yu remembers how 10 years ago, when she asked her two daughters to learn Chinese, she tried to use a reward system of buying them gifts or taking them out as an incentive. But, the girls thought they were American and would rather spend their weekends being teenagers instead of in a classroom learning Chinese. It wasn't until they were in high school that the girls figured out that no matter how fluent their English was, no matter how many non-Chinese friends they had, they would have to accept the fact that they were Chinese and that it was a pity to not be able to speak the language of their heritage. Both girls minored in Chinese when they were in college, and with help from their teachers and their parents, the girls have made a big improvement in their Chinese studies.

Chinese parents are always very engaging in their children's education. Most parents want their children to be able to communicate with their families in China.

Weng Xiu Wen, an American born 17-year-old Chinese girl, has been studying Chinese since she was five. She likes Chinese history and music. Under the guidance of an after-school Chinese teacher, she can feel the deep sorrow from reading the song and poem, *Shen-Shen Man*.

Chinese teacher Zhao Mei, who has been teaching Chinese for 20 years, thinks that it can be difficult to teach children. "Parents, teachers and students make up the three basic elements that are necessary to achieve success in Chinese studies," he said. At times, the teacher even has to use different methods of teaching with kids in the same class. While some parents are just trying to find an after-school or weekend babysitter for their kids, other parents are very strict with the studies.

The method of teaching is the key to attracting students to learn Chinese. Years ago, the teaching of Chinese was dull, and students often couldn't use the Chinese in their daily life. According to the principal of Chinatown Chinese School, Huang Jiong Chang, at that time, students preferred writing Chinese rather than reciting it. The reason was simple; children could write or more precisely, draw the characters from their memory, while reciting required understanding and speaking, which was more difficult.

Experienced bilingual educator and the former Department of Education supervisor of non-public bilingual studies, Dr. Sophia Hsu believes that Chinese classes in American schools should utilize American teaching styles, such as holding speech contests or singing competitions in order to get students excited; or teaching Chinese through dance, calligraphy, chess, arts and crafts, and social games. These various ways can entice students to learn Chinese while providing them with a break from their stressful studies. Many Chinese schools have been trying to use these new methods. Dr. Hsu is glad to see it.

Dr. Hsu also hopes different Chinese schools will communicate with and help each other. In the New York metropolitan area, Chinese schools are using a variety of materials and textbooks, some in traditional Chinese, some in simplified Chinese.

"Chinese studies are just getting started," Dr. Hsu said.

POLISH

PRESERVING POLISH HERITAGE AND LANGUAGE IN SCHOOL

BY ALEKSANDRA SLABISZ, NOWY DZIENNIK

MARCH 23, 2009

For nearly a century, the Maria Konopnicka Polish Supplementary School in Greenpoint thrived by offering weekend classes in Polish language, literature, history and geography to students from kindergarten to high school.

But in recent years, the number of students has dwindled as Polish immigrants leave enclaves like Greenpoint, Brooklyn for other parts of the New York metro area.

“Five years ago, we had 400 students, now we have 250,” said Danuta Bronchard, principal of Konopnicka Polish Supplementary School located on the premises of the St. Stanislaw Parish. “While the second through fifth grades are pretty full, the first grade has only 28 children, half of what it was the previous year.”

The lack of students is a nightmare for Alicja Ptasznik, principal at Gen. Wladyslaw Sikorski Polish School in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn. The classes in her school are far from crowded because of the declining number of older students, particularly in grades fifth through eighth. In order to boost the school’s finances, Ptasznik decided to open a pre-school group. With just 70 students, however, the revenue stream is rather slim and the bills are substantial.

“Bensonhurst used to be very Polish, now it is becoming Russian. Poles have been leaving the neighborhood,” Ptasznik says. “Some of them have left for Poland in the recent wave of returns to the old country. Others put some money aside and moved out to quieter places, where they could



afford to buy homes. We should be happy that our community is becoming more affluent and that Poles can afford to buy houses in nice areas, but their migration threatens our school with extinction.”

These schools have served as a way to keep young Poles connected to their parents’ language and culture. Some people fear that if they close down, such ties may be severed forever.

Parents say that the New York City public school system ignores Polish language education – the focus is on teaching Spanish and Chinese, they say. As a result, they have to supplement their children’s ties with Poland through private tutoring.

Ptasznik worries that if the trend continues, the school will face serious problems. Every child represents more money in a school budget that has to cover rent, modest salaries for the teachers and expenses involved in organizing trips for the kids.

“This is almost voluntary work for everybody,” said Ptasznik. “The school is a non-profit institution so we do not care about profit, but we need money to operate.”

These two schools, along with similar ones outside New York City and in New Jersey, are struggling as the areas in which they are located undergo gentrification. The outflow of Poles makes them struggle for survival and forces the principals to be increasingly inventive to attract students.

“We can never be sure how many students will register in a given year and how many of the registered will stay the full semester. It’s not infrequent that students enrolled in September are taken out of school in November because the family moves to New Jersey, Long Island or even Pennsylvania,” Ptasznik added.

Gentrification is not only affecting Bronchard’s school but all of Greenpoint – a well-known Polish neighborhood in Brooklyn. Ten years ago, when Poles were settling down there in huge numbers, another Polish school was established in the area, the St. Cyril and Methodius School, which today has close to 360 students.

A major key factor that boosts enrollment at the St. Cyril and Methodius School is that it is one of two New York City schools to offer classes all the way through the 12th grade. “Parents are willing to drive their teenagers from other neighborhoods so that they can finish high school in the Polish school,” said Waldemar Rakowicz, principal of the school in Maspeth, Queens, one of the schools offering classes through high school. “We get students from all over Brooklyn, and from as far as Staten Island and Connecticut. Sometimes even if they move away when the kid is in a lower grade, they are so attached to the school and teachers that they continue sending their kids to our school.”

Aside from the negative effects of gentrification, Polish schools also struggle with a declining interest in attending a Saturday Polish class when students reach the fifth grade. Principals go to great lengths to make their programs attractive by offering art, dance or computer classes, as well as sponsoring the boy scouts and girl scouts; some even prepare students for national math contests. Nevertheless, once a student becomes fully immersed in the American school system, it becomes more difficult for parents to talk them into attending Polish classes

on a weekend.

“The parents’ or grandparents’ motivation is crucial here. It works well when kids are smaller, but past the fifth grade, students see that their American friends have off during the weekend and it becomes harder to convince them to sit in class on Saturdays,” says Andrzej Popadiuk, principal of the Polish School in Borough Park. His school is growing each year thanks to the inflow of Poles into the area; however, while the youngest grades are crowded – this year, the pre-school class is the largest ever – Popadiuk admits that by the eighth grade, 35 to 50 percent of the students give up attending the Polish classes.

Despite the difficulties of some of the schools, The Polish Supplementary School Council (PSSC) remains optimistic that their schools can thrive.

“We are taking into consideration the possibility of fewer kids signing up for classes at our institutions in the future; however, as of now, we have not observed a fall in the number of kids registered in all the Polish language schools on the East Coast,” said PSSC spokesperson Barbara Szenk, who is a teacher at the Polish School in Clark, New Jersey.

Last year, the number of children registered in all 60 schools under PSSC rose to 8,030 from 7,458. This academic year, there are 8,851 students registered.

Szenk and others say that another demographic change plays a huge role in the prosperity of Polish schools: a reduced immigration from Poland in recent years has tipped the ratio of Polish-born and American-born students. “When we first opened our school 10 years ago, the ratio of kids born here and in Poland was 50/50. Now 70 percent of my students are American-born,” says Waldemar Rakowicz, from the Polish School in Maspeth, Queens.

The Poles, who decided to stay here, are more assimilated into American society. They speak better English and often marry non-Poles. Their children are born Americans, and Polish is a second language for them.

“I was shocked one time when I told my students that they could speak only Polish in class; I got perfect silence,” said Malgorzata Sulewski, who formerly taught at the Bensonhurst school.

ARAB

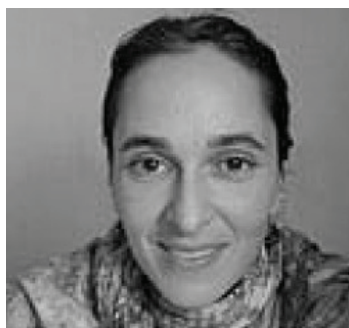
ARAB-AMERICAN PARENT VOLUNTEERS MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN CITY SCHOOLS

BY RACHEL MILLARD, ARAMICA

MAY 22, 2009

On a recent Wednesday at Public School 102 in Bay Ridge, a group of twelve fourth grade students gathered in a classroom for the last Book Club session of the semester. One by one, each stepped forward to recite a pre-assigned passage from the term's chosen book, *America Street*, as proud teachers and parents watched.

Rana Abu-Sbeih, a Palestinian-American mother of three, whose nine-year-old daughter attends PS 102, was in that audience. Abu-Sbeih, as a school volunteer, has led the student run Book Club named 4GR. "It's enriching for the students," said Rana, 33, "and for me, volunteering helps me understand the place where my children go six hours a day, five days a week."



The PS 102 Book Club is only one of many volunteer activities coordinated by Learning Leaders, a nonprofit organization that undertakes projects like the Book Club and places people in positions as tutors, mentors and translators citywide. According to Learning Leaders, from the 12,000 volunteers, 30 percent of them are non-English speaking and work in 800 out of the city's 1,499 schools.

Schools citywide are increasingly looking

for support from immigrant volunteers like Abu-Sbeih, who understand the linguistic and cultural heritage of immigrant students, which schools are trying to address. From the volunteer's perspective, they say their work helps them be actively involved in their children's schools.

At PS 102, Abu-Sbeih's continuous presence helps other Arab-American parents understand and integrate themselves into the school system.

"There is always someone in the schoolyard who approaches me and says, 'I have this problem, who do I talk to,'" Abu-Sbeih said. "They see I am involved in the school and that I speak English and Arabic, so they find it easy to turn to me."

PS 102 has hosted the Book Club for the past two years. Abu Sbeih has been a Learning Leaders volunteer for three years and used to work as a one-on-one tutor, but began volunteering with the Book Club after her youngest son was born last year and finding childcare became a challenge. She now brings her infant son with her to the weekly meetings.

"I think the Book Club is good for the students as it helps them to learn about other cultures," said Abu-Sbeih. "The books the students are reading are about young people from many different nationalities and their experiences. So the stories bring up a lot of sensitive issues which are important for the students to talk about," she said.

According to Spokeswoman Yalitza Vazquez,

the immigrant volunteers at Learning Leaders have found plenty of ways to use their foreign-language skills in supporting those students classified as English Language Learners.

“Sometimes it helps to build a sense of comfort simply for students to know that this person speaks their language and is in the school building,” Vazquez said. “In the process, the volunteers themselves learn English.”

Elia Moghaady started volunteering with Learning Leaders in 2006, helping out in the office at PS 166 in Long Island City.

She has a range of duties, including organizing extracurricular activities, making flyers announcing school events, and translating school documents for Arabic-speaking families.

“The work has helped me understand what is going on inside the schools,” says Moghaady, 32, whose two sons attend PS 166 in 2nd grade and kindergarten. “I get close to my children, to the office and the principal. I learn more details about my children’s education and their school exams.”

Moghaady, who moved to New York City from Egypt eight years ago, says the work has also improved her English. “I was shy when I first joined, but I soon learned how to converse more fluently and how to voice my opinions,” she said.

Learning Leaders has worked in engaging immigrant parents in the public school system since 1956. It is one of a number of non-profit organizations working with the Department of Education to support



schools. These organizations are increasingly engaging immigrant volunteers in the educational system because of their potential to address unique challenges and issues pertaining to immigrant students.

Another organization is Pencil, which

partners schools with volunteer businesses that support schools with managerial advice, equipment and any other skills and resources they may bring. At the request of the school’s principal, Pencil works with the Department of Education to place businesses with schools.

About 500 such partnerships are already on their way citywide.

Berena Cabarcas, principal of the International Community High School in the Bronx, said she was able to use her Pencil partnership to help engage Yemeni boys at her school. Pencil partner Luciana Fuser Bittar invited a Yemeni-American friend to the school, who met with Yemeni parents and students and then took the students out on several field trips over the year.

“He spoke to the students about his own experiences of how he came to this country with nothing and how he now has so many partnerships and friendships,” Cabarcas said.

“Attendance has gone up since, and the boys became much more invested in school.”

Pencil Communications Manager Jenn Roberts says that other schools have requested partners from among



the Arab-American community because of their ability to address unique challenges faced by students of that heritage.

At the all-girls' middle school K609 in Parkville, Brooklyn, Arab-American students spoke of how they had been engaged and inspired by their school's partnership with global law firm Bakers Hostetler, which organizes regular meetings between the students and professional women.

"I remember that the lawyer at my meeting said: 'If we work together, we can all succeed,'" said Mana, 12.

"It was interesting to see how a fashion buyer introduces the company to the people and advertises the clothes," said Hanoun, 13.

Principal Mariela Graham said she hoped the partnership would spur her students to achieve greater academic success.

"We want students to remain focused on their studies and sometimes showing them where they could be in 15 years is a kind of motivation they don't often get," she said.

Small and big businesses can sign up with Pencil. Fatima Shama, senior education advisor to Mayor Michael Bloomberg, said the partnerships are a way for the many small business owners in the Arab-American community to have an impact in city schools.

"Groups such as Pencil can help organize small-business owners to help them come back and work with our schools," she said.

"Pencil makes it easier for well-meaning and interested people not in the education system to be involved in schools, to find a way to have some influence and help schools in a manageable way," agreed Principal Graham.

One small business in Bay Ridge, the Green Spa of New York, did just that. It signed up with Pencil and was partnered with PS 217, where Principal Franca Conti wanted to help her students relax.

"Our children are under a lot of pressure, they are uptight and they cannot relax," said Conti, during the 4th and 5th grade final exams in January 2009. "These children are very, very tense, so practicing yoga will help them tremendously."

She added, "We also consider how the

children will apply this in their daily lives, and we would like to teach children how to deal with stress and be physically fit."

PAKISTANI

AUTISM IN THE PAKISTANI COMMUNITY

BY MOHSIN ZAHEER, SADA-E-PAKISTAN

OCTOBER 7, 2009

When Mohammad Bilal Mirza found that his then one-year-old son Fahad Baig did not maintain proper eye contact, he took him to the doctor who told him that his son had autism. Immediately, Mr. Baig and his wife Ms. Yasmin got involved with their child's disorder.

They immersed themselves in their son's disability, treatment, development and education. Now, six years later, Fahad 7, has not only been moved from a special education school to a regular public school in Brooklyn where he will join his two elder brothers, according to his parents, the disorder is barely visible.

Parental involvement matters a lot in the treatment and education of a special needs child but Mr. Baig paid a heavy price for this involvement by spending most of his savings and dedicating full attention to his son.

Autism is a disability that affects the way a person develops. It causes problems with social relationships and communication. Symptoms usually appear before the age of three and can lead to delays or problems in various skills from infancy to adulthood.

Mr. Baig, who drives a cab to earn his living, said, "My wife and I gave four out of six years to our child during his treatment and education. During this entire period of four years, I did not even work, and depended on my savings and paid all my attention to my son.

"Now, on the basis of my experience and observation, I would advise others that parental

involvement helps a lot."

Amjad Nawaz and Muhammad Ahmad Jan are another example of parental involvement. They got involved in the education and treatment of their special needs child and found it very helpful.

Amjad Nawaz's son, Hamza Amjad Siddiqui, who is now 13, was born with a cleft lip and palate problem and later was diagnosed with autism. He started his special education in New York, then moved to the Melmark School, located in Berwyn, Pennsylvania and then moved to The Judge Rotenberg Center (JRC) which is a special needs school in Canton, Massachusetts.

One of the reasons Hamza moved from one school to another was his parent's desire for greater improvement.

Likewise, Mr. Jan had to go to court to get his daughter Mariam Jan, 8, moved from a special education public school to a private school located in Westchester, New York.

"There are significant numbers of cases of autism or other disabilities in the Pakistani American community," Mr. Baig noted and further said that immigrant parents facing these issues also need help in term of awareness, their involvement and understanding the role they need to play.

Vanessa S. Leung, deputy director of the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF), an advocacy organization dedicated to improving the health and well-being of Asian Pacific American children in New York City, said, "In a lot of immigrant communities, including the Asian

American community, children with special needs are a very challenging and difficult issue to deal with. The system to navigate to ensure quality and timely resources and services for a child with special needs is very complicated.”

“The New York City school system for special education needs to be improved and it should have more schools with residential facilities for special needs children,” said Amjad Nawaz, adding, “If there would have been more schools with higher standards, then my son would not need to move from one place to another.”

Asian American students make up 12.4 percent of the New York City public school system’s student population, according to CACF.

How many out of these 12.4 percent are South Asian or Pakistani American special education children? No statistics are available. But according to the parents of Pakistani American special needs children, they know there are many cases in their community.

According to the organization Angels with Special Needs and the National Institute of Mental Health and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), between two to six per 1,000 children have some form of autism/PDD: “These disorders are four times more common in boys than in girls, although Rett’s Disorder has only been reported and diagnosed in girls. The causes of autism or PDD are unknown. Currently, researchers are investigating areas such as brain development, structure, genetic factors and biochemical imbalance in the brain as possible causes. These disorders are not caused by psychological factors.”

It is of utmost importance that parents of children in special education are aware of their children’s rights and are active participants in making decisions about their children’s educational programs. Understanding of the intricate system of referrals, evaluations, program and services, decisions, and reviews and reevaluations is already quite difficult without the cultural barriers and limited English proficiency which many immigrant parents face.

“Thank god my wife and I had no language barrier but this is not the case with all of the Pakistani community,” Mr. Baig pointed out. “I want to tell those who have English proficiency issues that

help is and could be available at hospitals, clinics and schools, etc.”

When asked about those who have to work to earn their living and could not afford to involve themselves fulltime and tend to their special needs children, Mr. Baig replied, “There are services and rights for these people and their special needs children. They just need to know about them.”

Poverty among Asian Americans in New York City is serious and widespread, although the general public is largely unaware of it, according to a census-based report released by the nonprofit Asian American Federation. The fact that Asians are the fastest-growing major race or ethnic group in the city magnifies the issue. Poverty is particularly severe for senior citizens, as well as Cambodian, Bangladeshi, Vietnamese and Pakistani Americans.

“Our findings counter the widely held perception of Asian Americans doing well financially,” said Cao K. O, executive director of the Asian American Federation. “Almost one-fifth of Asian New Yorkers lived in poverty and close to half of this largely working-poor, immigrant population was in the low-income bracket in 2006.”

“Information on disabilities and special education is not easily accessible to Asian immigrant parents who lack proficiency in English. In addition, cultural stigmas around disabilities and hesitation to seek outside help may result in delayed access to services,” said the CACF in its report.

“My million dollar advice to the parents, who have a special needs child, is to never get shy or hesitate to acknowledge that you have an autistic or special needs child. As soon as you know, take your child to the hospital or doctor for an evaluation and treatment; otherwise, you will be playing with the future of your child,” Mr. Baig said.

Kim Sweet, executive director of Advocates for Children of New York said, “Unfortunately, parents of children with autism continue to struggle to get the help they need in the education system. For parents who are from other countries or don’t speak English, the system can be especially confusing and difficult to navigate. There are many different approaches to educating children with autism, and it is a challenge to find what works with your particular child, persuade the DOE to do it, and monitor that it is actually being done.”

“Also, most autism therapies require very high levels of parental participation, so bilingual therapists would be very important for these students and are often hard to find,” she noted.

On the other hand, Mohammad Bilal Baig admitted that the system is complex and hard to understand due to language barriers and its complexity, but he urged that the more parents get involved, the more it would be helpful for their child.

“My son Fahad Baig, when evaluated for autism, was at a higher level of the disorder, but after four years, he is on the bottom level, meaning he has dramatically improved,” Mr. Baig said. “In the beginning, he used to spin around all the time and laugh a lot for no reason. But now he is a cool and calm child. I found him better with his studies than his two elder brothers, though both of them proved helpful for him to learn and move forward,” he added.

Amjad Nawaz has one reservation. He said, “Autistic children used to be hyper, so rather than educating and treating them, they get cooled down with medication.”

According to the DOE, more than half of all school-age students with disabilities (52.2 percent) are now educated in general education classes with special education support, an increase of 7.5 percent since the mayor and chancellor announced the Children First reform in spring 2003.

Other than serving students in a general education setting, NYC offers students with severe disabilities special schools in District 75. According to its website, “District 75 provides citywide educational, vocational, and behavior support programs for students who are on the autism spectrum, severely emotionally challenged, and/or multiply disabled.”

Martine Guerrier, chief family engagement officer for the NYC Department of Education, strongly urges parents to learn about the educational options available for their children and to be fearless advocates for their children. “All parents who get involved and advocate for their children help to improve the educational opportunities for all children in the same class. If a parent needs help understanding their rights or what is happening in their child’s education life, they should contact

OFEA or call 311”.

Ahmad Jan, who learned a lot while taking care of his three special education children, said, “I acknowledge that the DOE does a lot on a priority basis for the special education children but there should be more focus on the teacher’s role and their training.”

He further added, “I fought in court and moved my daughter from a public school to a private school based in Westchester because I found that more attention was being paid to her there. She has been there for more than two years and we saw improvement.”

All three of Ahmad Jan’s children, Shija Jan, 16, Ali Jan, 13, and Mariam Jan, 8, are special education children and he, along with his wife have been taking care of them for the last 16 years.

One of the efforts being made in the country to increase awareness about autism is to celebrate World Autism Awareness Day and this year, President Obama said in his message on that day to “let us recommit ourselves to this cause and to the responsibility we have to support those with Autism Spectrum Disorder ASD and their families. For too long, the needs of people and families living with autism have gone unrecognized and underappreciated. That is why my administration supports increased funding for autism research, treatment, screening, public awareness and services for ADP”

“Asian American children are under represented in special education as compared to other racial groups. In the 2002-2003 school years, 4,079 Asian Americans received some level of special education. 1.3 percent of Asian American elementary and middle school students are in fulltime special education and 3 percent in part-time special education,” said the CACF in its reports, which further narrated that physical and mental disabilities can be seen as casting a negative light on the family.

A teacher of a special needs child of the Pakistani community, who is not authorized to talk to the media without prior authorization by the Department of Education says on the condition of anonymity, “Those who are aware of disability issues, when asked to get involved, often say to us that you are the expert and you know better what to do.

“The role of parents, and especially brothers and sisters, is more important. When schools and families work together, student learning and outcomes improve.”

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) strongly supports the parents’ right to be involved in the special education their child receives. As IDEA states: “Almost 30 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by strengthening the role and responsibility of parents and ensuring that families have meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children at school and at home.”

“Although awareness about autism needs to be increased, it’s hard to spare time for working immigrant parents in the community, but these parents have no choice but to get involved,” Mr. Baig said. He mentioned the example of Syed Anwar Wasti, whose youngest son, Shahmir, finds it hard to communicate with others.

“Shahmir used to communicate, with much frustration, through signs and one day, at a party, Mr. Baig’s wife noticed and suggested we take Shahmir to a doctor for advice,” Mr. Wasti said. “Once we started the process, a panel of experts and doctors visited us at home. They have been to my son’s school, kept him under observation for two weeks and finally came up with the conclusion that Shahmir needs help in speech.

“Now a speech therapy teacher comes to our home twice a week and goes to Shahmir’s school once a week. My son has improved a lot. It was hard for him to say even one word at the age of three but now, he has command over many more words and the happiest moment for us comes when he says, ‘I love you’ in one go.

“Credit goes to my friend who did not hesitate and pointed out the problem, and then to my wife who got completely involved once we knew the problem,” he added.

Mohammad Bilal Baig, along with his family and young son Fahad, is moving back to Pakistan.

“My sons have completed their primary education in the U.S. and now, they will have their higher education in Pakistan and then after a few years, come back to the U.S. and work for this country. Meanwhile, I will help my community with the issue of autism,” Mr. Baig said.

IRISH

SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

BY PETER McDERMOTT, IRISH ECHO

SEPTEMBER 15, 2009

Pauline O'Brien fondly remembers the school she attended in small-town Ireland.

"The doctor's child sat beside the child of the council laborer," she said.

It was hardly perfect. Most school systems reproduce inequities to one degree or another. But nothing quite prepared her for her role as a teacher in New York's system. She has since developed some sympathy for those theorists who say that at times, America's educational system has verged on a form of apartheid.

Yet, O'Brien doesn't believe Catholic schools or other alternatives are the right choices for immigrant parents in New York. "Public school teachers are better qualified and credentialed, for one thing," she said.

That's just one piece of information that parents hear. They are also exposed to countervailing arguments in favor of private schools. And they read about the in-vogue charters, which are run by private entities within the public system. Who and what should they believe?

Many experts would agree with O'Brien, at least if student academic achievement is the issue. They say U.S. studies have shown no compelling evidence that Catholic or charter schools offer middle-class and working-class students any real advantage over students from similar backgrounds that go to public schools.

Some of these same experts, though, have argued that Mayor Michael Bloomberg's reforms can't close achievement gaps. "The gains are real," said Norm

Fruchter, of Brown University's Annenberg Institute for School Reform, about test scores, "but the kinds of capacities they're producing are not the kinds of intellectual capacities that kids need."

He added, referring to the mayor and his education chancellor: "My main criticism is that the Bloomberg/Klein regime has looked to structural rather than instructional solutions."

In one sense, the debate over public or Catholic or charter may be beside the point if none of those systems are producing outcomes that society and parents want. Fruchter has had a decades-long association with New York's public schools as student, parent, teacher and researcher, yet he looks to other cities, such as Boston, that have reorganized teaching in the classroom. One version of that model has brought impressive results to the schools on the bases of the U.S. armed forces, he has argued in *Urban Schools, Public Will: Making Education Work For All Our Children*.

"Military schools are a demonstration that background does not have to determine achievement," he said.

In the relaxed atmosphere at military base schools, socio-economic and racial achievement gaps have been whittled down to nothing, precisely because they've reorganized the classrooms. And because there are so many of such schools, that success can't be ignored.

O'Brien, who teaches at a high school in Brooklyn, said that the emphasis on test scores, while beneficial in some ways, won't necessarily help

her special-education students in the long-term.

“But there have been great improvements in the system in the last few years,” she said.

‘Golden era’

According to the County Tipperary-born O’Brien, the roots of New York and America’s education problems are historical. “Funding has been tied to property taxes,” she said.

Fruchter said that 10 times the amount was spent on New York’s school infrastructure in real terms in the first half of the 20th Century than in the latter half.

He added that people look back on the 1950s, when the move to the suburbs was just beginning, as the “golden era” of the system.

“The failure rates were just as large,” he said of a time when a high-school diploma was not a requirement in the industrial economy.

Still, the New York City public school system was celebrated nationwide.

From the 1960s on, however, it became a “system for other people’s children.” Fruchter argued that if it had continued to serve key constituencies, and various elites, it wouldn’t have become an easy target for “scapegoating” in the media. “You would get a different quality of coverage,” he said. But with a large bureaucracy serving one million students, “there was a constant production of material for scapegoating.”

Arguably, Fruchter’s point has been made for him by Bloomberg’s recent election ads. In them, the mayor claims he took charge of a “dysfunctional and inept school system.”

Against that backdrop, the search for alternatives is hardly surprising. The most important of them historically, however, the Catholic school system, has been in crisis over the last decade. The Diocese of Brooklyn and Queens has seen enrollment drop at its schools from 55,000 in 1998 to 37,000 this year. One reason for the decline is that those from more established Catholic ethnic groups have been leaving the city while the newer immigrants of the same faith haven’t been able to afford tuition. Nonetheless, given that a further 88,000 students attend the schools of the Archdiocese of New York, which covers the other three boroughs and some

counties to the north, it’s clear the Catholic system remains a factor.

Irish immigrant parents generally cite safety, class size and the sense of community engendered by a smaller school as reasons for opting out of the public system.

Fiona Finneran, a native of County Leitrim, explained why she sends her 11-year-old son to a Catholic school. “It’s secure and it’s safe. You don’t worry even when they’re out of school,” she said. “They look out for each other. You have peace of mind.”

But it’s expensive. The basic [annual] tuition fee is \$3,600. “When all is said and done, though, it’s actually closer to \$5,000,” she said.

Finneran is satisfied with the standard of teaching, but said she knows there are good public schools and may send her second son, who is now 4, to one if the option of a Catholic school isn’t financially feasible.

She said that religion was an important consideration in her initial decision, but allowed, too, that she may have been unduly swayed by others’ opinions. “I was in Ireland for a few years, and when I came back, I heard some mothers portray public schools almost as if they were prisons,” she recalled.

Parents apply to charter schools for many of the same reasons they look to the Catholic system, such as class size and safety. Charters, often referred to as the new Catholic schools, may even allow an indirect religious dimension in state-funded education. This would be a good thing for people like the Rev. Colm Campbell, director of the Irish Center in Long Island City, who believes that not financing citizens’ education “is taking church-state separation too far.” He said that Catholics in Canada and Northern Ireland are entitled to state funding.

Sense of community

But while church groups in the black community have been involved in the creation of charters, and there have been proposals about charters using Catholic school buildings, generally speaking religion does not figure in parents’ discussion of them.

“Charter schools have gotten great write-ups

and reviews,” said Catherine, a parent from a border county in Ireland who has four children from 13 down to five. Two are in charter schools, and she’s waiting for openings for the other two.

“The education is great in public schools. I’ve no problem with it,” she said.

Class size and control of her children are the important issues for her in addition to curriculum. In her experience, with public schools, the older a child gets the more students there are in his or her class.

In the big public schools, Catherine said, students are bussed in from “undesirable neighborhoods,” bringing the dangers of children falling in with the wrong crowd.

“With two parents working, nobody’s home; there’s nobody to answer to,” she said. In the charter schools, “they’re on top of the kids,” she feels.

“And there’s more of a community,” Catherine said. “I know many more parents than in the public school.”

But Caroline Lee, a County Wexford-born mother of sons aged 7 and 4, said she was happy with the answers she got from her public school on issues such as teacher turnover, their qualifications and those of the principal.

“I couldn’t get any answers from the Catholic school,” she said.

“My husband and I wanted to bring up our children up in the Catholic faith,” she added. “As my son was getting close to starting school, I put a lot of thought into where to send him.”

She came to feel that the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine program was adequate for religious education.

Fr. Campbell acknowledged that many parents avail of the archdiocese’s after-hours CCD program. “But for others, having a strong set of values as part of their child’s education [in school] is a big issue,” he said.

Lee countered that snobbery is often a more important consideration. “It’s almost toxic,” she said, adding that many Irish-, Italian- and Polish-American families are susceptible to peer pressure.

“The attitude is that if you send your kids to public school, it’s because you can’t afford to send them to Catholic school,” she said.

Lee also said that some parents opt for Catholic

schools because they’ve never really explored the alternatives.

Ann Cook, co-director of the Urban Academy, a small transfer school in Manhattan, said: “People make assumptions that they can’t have this or they can’t have that.

“But you can’t be passive. You have to be proactive,” Cook said. “You have to be involved if you want your kids to get an education.”

Turning the corner

Cook advocates progressive education and an “enriched learning environment,” which ideally devotes 30 percent of its curriculum to the arts, rather than the three percent average of New York’s schools, and one in which a child learns not just to read but also the pleasure of reading.

The Urban Academy accepts students who have struggled everywhere else. It has negotiated an alternative to the Regents examinations with the New York State Department of Education. Ninety-seven percent of its diverse student population go on to four-year colleges within a year of graduation.

Cook noted that the children of the privileged aren’t subject to obsessive test-scoring, citing the president, whose daughters attend a progressive Quaker school in Washington D.C.

Brown University’s Fruchter likewise is a critic of the “audit and inspection” approach of New York City Hall.

“By 5th grade, kids need to turn the corner and be developing more complex skills and precisely those that I don’t think we’re developing in the middle grades at all,” he said.

He added that school systems need to find ways to help teachers, who are “neither artists nor geniuses,” differentiate instruction and “give them the data about where their kids are, so they can do something about the range of skills that are in their classrooms.”

Fruchter said: “The military’s schools have figured out ways to do that.”

KOREAN

KOREAN LANGUAGE CLASS HOLDS CULTURAL PROGRAM TO RAISE MONEY

BY JINHWA JO, KOREA DAILY

APRIL 13, 2010

Jue Tae Kim, the ex-president of the Korean Parents Association at Stuyvesant High School is on a mission.

"I have 100 tickets to sell," he said with a sigh.

He's talking about Norimadang, the Korean cultural program held annually at the prestigious high school. Since 2007, Korean students performed at the Norimadang event just to share their culture with everyone. However, since last year, this event turned into a stressful fundraising tool to keep Korean-language classes.

Mr. Stanly Teitel, a principal at Stuyvesant decided to cut more than 30-40 elective courses last year under the pressure of a 35 percent budget cut. The Korean-language class was one of them. Stuyvesant used to have 10 foreign languages classes; seven of them were regular classes, and three, including Korean, were electives.

When KPA learned about it, they expressed their concerns, but nothing changed. They complained and got the same result. So they went to New York City Department of Education officials who suggested that they fund it themselves. The DOE said that keeping Korean-language classes would cost at least \$30,000, which KPA agreed to fund, and Mr. Teitel retained the Korean-language classes for the 2009-2010 school year, the only language class

that survived among the electives, with a fragile promise of one year.

The KPA at Bayside High School is now discussing whether to offer Korean-language classes as an elective as well. With the lesson they learned from Stuyvesant, they suggested that they would fund the class if the school allows it to happen.

Jae Hong Lee, the Korean-language teacher who used to teach at Stuyvesant, said, "Assistant principals are positive about Korean classes, but we are still waiting for the final call from the principal." If things go well, Bayside might start Korean-language classes in September of this year.

The KPA at Bayside High can't afford \$20,000 a year, which would only cover two classes per semester. So they turned to the

Korean Education Center (KEC), which offers financial support for Korean classes in the United States. They are still waiting for an answer.

Chris Kang, KPA president at Benjamin N. Cardozo High School, is pushing to make Korean language class go from an elective to a mandatory class. Kang said, "We offered to the school that we would fund it ourselves, but they haven't answered us yet."

The only public school in NYC that offers



Korean as a regular class is East-West School of International Studies. Founded in 2006, East-West focuses on three Asian languages and cultures: Korean, Japanese and Chinese. Even with its core establishment philosophy, Principal Ben Sherman had to cut some of the classes due to budget cuts.

According to the 2009-2010 NYC DOE High School Directory, there are eight schools that offer Korean as an elective foreign language class. Five of them are in Queens, two are in the Bronx, and one is in Manhattan. Based on the same directory, Korean ranks eighth among languages offered. The most popular is Spanish, followed by French and Chinese.

Numbers matter. The future of Korean classes depends on how many students demand it.

Ji Sun Lee, who's been teaching Korean at Stuyvesant, has been pushing to open Korean classes to non-Korean students. At Stuyvesant, the rule is that only Korean students can take Korean classes. However, a few Chinese students strongly expressed their interest, and were accepted. She says, "When non-Korean kids are learning Korean, the future of a Korean-language class is more promising."

At East-West, taking a Korean class is a cool thing among non-Korean students. Osman Sigh, who took Korean classes, said proudly, "I am reading Korean street signs to my friends. They are pretty amazed."

Parents are the best supporters for the language classes. "As long as there are Korean parents, Korean classes will exist," says Lee. She understands the financial burden on parents, but she says, "It was they who started Korean classes, and it is also they who keep the classes going."

Even though Mr. Kim raised money for the Korean-language classes, he isn't so sure if it was the right move; the stress has become an annual headache for him. Now, the KPA is worried about keeping Korean classes for the 2010-2011 school year. They must raise at least \$30,000 for Norimadang this year.

"Maybe it got off on the wrong foot," he said. But he quickly added, "But without that, we couldn't have saved Korean-language classes either." Korean parents funding Korean classes was "the second best decision," he believes.

With the looming budget cuts, reviving Korean classes with the DOE's budget seems impossible. Schools Chancellor Joel Klein encourages parents to fund classes if they can. There's the possibility that affluent parents would be able to support more classes than the less affluent, but that doesn't stop Klein. "I don't want to lose supplementary dollars from parents," he stated.

How about students who take Korean classes? Eugene Kim, an 11th grader who's been taking Korean classes since last year, acknowledges the significance of keeping Korean classes at Stuyvesant. He said, "Korean class is the only way to preserve Korean culture. Korean people have very little representation here." This is exactly why Korean parents want Korean classes in public schools. They want to build a proud identity for the younger generations through learning their own language.

Eugene also knows very well the students' role in this issue. In the end, it's students who take the classes, not parents or teachers. Both parents and students consider Korean language class important. But there's a gap.

Asked what would happen if there's no Korean class, after a thought, Eugene said, "It wouldn't affect much."

CHINESE

CHINESE COMMUNITY BENEFITS FROM CONTESTS AND COMPETITION

BY JIA XU, WORLD JOURNAL

OCTOBER 5, 2010

Participating in contests is becoming a popular way for Chinese parents to prepare their kids to compete in a rapidly growing society. English contests, speech contests, math contests – no matter what kind of contest it is, in the New York Chinese community, it will always attract hundreds of participants, some even coming from as far as Florida or Illinois.

Their children's education is always the top priority in most Chinese families. Parents try everything to help their kids succeed. "There are two reasons why parents send their kids to the contests: one is to build up their skills; and the other is to evaluate the kids' level among their peers," said Bohsiang Chen, president of ACS Academy, which has organized many contests. And the good thing is that even though the parents know their kids will not be the top winners, they still view the contests as great opportunities to help their children gain experience.

Martine Guerrier, chief family engagement officer at the NYC Department of Education, believes that community contests not only help kids in academics, but also help them to know each other and build a presence in the community. "The contests will give them great encouragement," said Ms. Guerrier.

"As a principal, I cannot say how much these community-based contests will help students get into college; however, as a parent, I'm very sure it is very useful to the kids," said Jie Zhang,

principal of Queens High School for the Sciences at York College.

Ms. Zhang recalled that her son Danny Zhu, who is now a Harvard student, attended a math contest organized by the *World Journal* over 10 years ago. Danny won first place in the contest, and his score was far ahead of the student who came in second. "Before the contest, we just thought he was a smart boy, but we didn't know he was so smart. The contest really opened the door for my son. After that, we started to bring him to different contests, and he always placed first," said Ms. Zhang.

But Ms. Zhang also thought these contests were good for the students who did not win. "The American education system always encourages children, which makes children feel very confident in themselves. But eventually, they will face failure at some stage because not everyone can go to Harvard or Yale. And the failure in these community contests will give them a taste, but won't hurt them on record," said Ms. Zhang, adding that she always encourages her students to participate in the contests.

These contests are more helpful and meaningful for new immigrant parents, who lack access to mainstream contests and whose kids cannot speak fluent English. "My daughter just came here and barely speaks any English, so I sent her to participate in the Chinese speech contest to build up her confidence in speaking in public, and she did a good job. I'm so proud of her," said

Jessica Chow, whose daughter moved to New York City from Shanghai.

And kids feel that they learned a lot from the contests. “I used to feel that I was not as good as the kids my age because I could not speak English. Since I won the award in the Chinese speech contest, I feel more confident in myself,” said Fiona Chow, Jessica’s daughter.

Sometimes, the parents even get surprising benefits from the contests. A mother from Missouri called the organizers of the Mother’s Day greeting card design contest to thank them for holding the event. “When my daughter designed the greeting card, she thought of all the good things I had done for her, and felt so grateful to me. This contest really made my daughter and I become much closer,” said the mother.

Seeing the need, many groups and companies are organizing contests to provide opportunities for the Chinese kids, including community organizations, tutoring organizations and media companies. The *World Journal*, the most influential Chinese newspaper in North America, is also one of the biggest sponsors for these kinds of events and organizes nearly 10 contests each year, targeting both children and teenagers. These contests include spelling bees, designing greeting cards for Mother’s Day and Christmas, poster design, painting, and English, math, and talent competitions. Each contest attracts at least 100 participants. Some, like the contests to design greeting cards, can draw up to 1,000 participants.

Both the Chinese Radio Network and Chinese American Parents Association hold speech contests every year, which have become a tradition in the community. The Chinese Radio Network contest has been around for 14 years. This year’s contest attracted over 100 participants between the ages of 5 and 18. “Although the original idea for the event was to encourage Chinese kids to speak in public who are too shy to do it – a trait that stems from Chinese culture – I have to say that this event has improved my company’s reputation in the community,” said Josephine Chain, the president of Chinese Radio Network.

The contests are so popular that they even attract non-Chinese parents to enroll their

children. Lynn Berat, the mother of nine daughters, sent six of them to attend the Chinese speech contest on Mother’s Day. Mark, a Hispanic boy, has been the winner of the speech contest organized by Chinese Radio Network for three consecutive years. Inspired by the contest, his Chinese is now even better than many Chinese kids born in America.

While many organizations like to hold these contests, there are also lots of sponsors willing to provide generous support to them, including community leaders, small businesses, and big companies like New York Life Insurance Company and MetLife. Thanks to their generosity, these contests are mostly free or only charge \$5 or \$10 to enter and usually offer great prizes – generally \$150 for the first place winner, \$100 for second place, and \$50 for third place. All contest participants get gifts to encourage them to come back, also making the contests an all-around happy community event.

“There are so many smart kids in our community with different talents. The contests provide them opportunities to discover these talents, and encourage them and their parents to work harder and achieve more,” said Peter Koo, owner of Starside Pharmacies, who has been supporting the contests for over 10 years. “You cannot push a kid good at painting to learn piano, and a kid loving music to play football. How can we find out what kind of talent the kids have? Through the contests.” Although the contests provide very little benefit to his business, Peter said, “I would like to see the kids from the Chinese community become somebody after they grow up.”

HUNGARIAN

THE SZECHENYI HUNGARIAN SCHOOL

BY BOJANA VARGA, NÉPSZAVA SZABADSÁG

OCTOBER 18, 2010

Agnes Toth has been helping out at the Szechenyi Hungarian School for the past seven years. Each Saturday, she goes to the school and leads the activities of the smaller children between the ages of 3 and 6. On this day, as all the other Saturdays, they start with a hands-on activity to settle down the children. The children really enjoy working with the paper, colored pencils and glue, and soon their creations are ready. All the talk is in Hungarian, except for a few comments from the children in English but they are also encouraged to use Hungarian. Agnes said that she first started helping out at the school when her granddaughter was enrolled. She had recently moved over from Hungary to join her daughter and son-in-law and wanted to do something meaningful with her time. As her English-language knowledge is limited, helping out at the Hungarian school seemed like the obvious choice. Most of the other teachers also work on a voluntary basis and got involved through their own children or grandchildren.

The schools maintained by the various ethnic groups are an important aspect of these communities, keeping the people in contact with each other, and trying to pass on the knowledge of the language and culture to the next generations. It is especially difficult as the second and third generations are more American than Hungarian in their ways, not to mention their knowledge of their parents' language. There are 20 Hungarian weekend schools in the United States

in 17 different cities. They teach students how to read, write and speak Hungarian, as well as offering such subjects and activities as Hungarian literature and history and traditional or folk music and dancing. The Szechenyi Magyar Iskola has been operating in its present form since 1973.

Kindergarten and school classes take place on Saturdays for children between the ages of 3 and 14. According to the school's principal, Istvan Horvath, "passing on the ability to speak Hungarian and the knowledge of Hungary's history and traditions is not one of the hardest tasks of the immigrant parents concerning their second and third generation immigrant children but most likely the hardest." At its inception in 1960, the school had been a regularly operating school with students attending classes Monday through Friday until 1973. It is currently only a weekend school with students attending classes and activities on Saturdays from 9 until 1 o'clock. There were 76 students enrolled in the past academic year. The Department of Education does not offer classes in Hungarian at the public schools as there are not enough interested students in the public education system. It does not provide financial assistance to these extracurricular activities, and most of their operational costs are covered by donations from the parents, members of the community and the church.

Teaching Hungarian to the students is a daunting task for the teachers, many of them

volunteering parents, as about half of the students speak English as their mother tongue. The younger children sing Hungarian songs and play games in Hungarian to help them master the language. There is story time when folk stories are read to them. The older students have Hungarian literature and history classes, some taught by professional teachers with certification, but more often than not by some of the parents, especially if they have a background in teaching.

After the classes, children can participate in various activities such as folk dancing and musical activities. They stage performances as well, usually within the Hungarian community but sometimes in collaboration with other ethnic groups. The children enjoy folk dancing as it gives them a chance to dress up in seemingly exotic-looking clothes and to move around a little bit after the classes.

Linda Kovacs was born here, her parents having migrated to the United States in 1956, after the failed uprising in Hungary against the Communist regime imposed by the Soviet Union. She spoke of her experience of attending Saturday school and her relation to her parents' mother tongue, typical of a lot of immigrants, in fluent Hungarian albeit with a slight accent. "My parents spoke Hungarian to me at home and I probably was able to speak it fluently when I was small, but when I went to kindergarten and later on in school, my friends and teachers all spoke English and I somehow stopped speaking Hungarian. At first, my parents did not think it was necessary to attend Hungarian school on Saturdays, but when I was around 8 and we visited relatives in Hungary they got the idea that it would be a shame for me not to be able to speak Hungarian."

As could be expected of an eight-year-old child, Linda at first refused to give up part of her weekend to attend school but she was soon to be persuaded otherwise.

"The first couple of Saturdays were a drag because I thought I would have less time to play during the weekends, but after a while I started enjoying the classes and the activities as we played a lot and I actually made a lot of friends," said Linda.

She is now grateful to her parents for

preserving her Hungarian knowledge and identity, and acknowledges that it would have been much harder or perhaps even impossible to learn the language to the extent that she did as a child as a grown-up.

According to Zsuzsa Nagy, the school's vice principal, accounts like Linda's are typical.

"Second- and third-generation immigrants tend to understand their parents' mother tongue to a certain degree but in an overwhelmingly number of cases they are unable to speak it, especially as they get older and are surrounded more and more by English speakers – which is also good, as they have to learn English to be able to succeed here in the United States. But it is important to help them retain their parents' language as well, and it is especially hard for immigrants with smaller communities where they are not surrounded by Hungarian speakers as is the case with the Hungarian children here."

The possibility of having a Hungarian school operating during the week with regular classes in English and special Hungarian language and culture classes seems remote at present, according to the Szechenyi Magyar Iskola's principal, Istvan Horvath. Perhaps there would be more parents interested in enrolling their children than at a weekend school as is the current situation, but that would not be the only problem as the financial resources are lacking as well as professional teachers and the necessary organizational apparatus.

Csilla Kis, a parent whose child attends the Saturday classes and activities, says she would consider sending her child to an English-language school where students would have the option of taking extra classes in Hungarian language and culture.

"The only drawback I see would be parents concerned that their children might not get a high quality education as in another, more mainstream and established school. A lot of the recent immigrants worry more about their children learning English as fast as possible than about them forgetting or not learning Hungarian at all," Kis commented.

Still, the possibility of a Hungarian charter school may not be completely out of the question.

PARENTS STRUGGLE WITH SCHOOL SYSTEM

Underlying the difficulties that many immigrant parents encounter in negotiating the NYC public school system is the lack of formal educational experience that is true for as many as 25 percent of immigrant parents. Although the journalists do not identify this in their coverage, the impact on both the parents' ability to help their children with homework, and their willingness or comfort in making demands of the school on behalf of their children is written everywhere. This lack of literacy compounds the already pervasive language and digital illiteracy and contributes to making an already daunting education system unapproachable or manageable.

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BENGALI

PARENTS' UNFAMILIARITY WITH NYC PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM PUTS MANY BANGLADESHI STUDENTS AT RISK

BY ABU TAHER, BANGLA PATRIKA

JANUARY 31, 2009

When Ripa Rais came to New York in 1996 from Bangladesh she knew not a word of English and little about American culture.

Rais was thrown into the classroom to sink or swim. She struggled at first and the school sent letters to her parents warning them of Rais' troubles. It did not help since Rais' parents too did not understand much about America.

Rais, now a student at Queens College, managed to graduate high school despite those early difficulties.

Abul Kalam Azad, a teacher at Long Island City High School, said the main purpose of the New York City public education system is to facilitate for many different of education needs. As well, the cooperation and involvement of the guardians or parents in the school system is essential to the children's education.

But it is a matter of great regret that Bangladeshi parents do not pay proper attention to their children's education needs, which cause the students to lag behind. Azad pointed out that parents can inform themselves on how their children are doing by looking at their report cards and notebooks. They also should consult with the Student Counselor if they find any problem in their kids' academic progress in order to ensure they can get the school's support to help their children.

Maibe Gonzalez, a spokeswoman for the Department of Education, said that there are a numbers of ways that parents can find

information. According to Gonzalez, one of the most useful methods is to work with the Parent Coordinator, a position created in each school to assist parents. If parents find problems understanding the education system, they can easily talk to the coordinator by phone during school time and get guidelines and suggestions. If the parent has limited English-language skills, the school coordinator arranges for an interpreter so to ensure the parents get accurate and appropriate suggestions.

"There is a New York City hotline – 311 – through which the parents can get the help they need. Interpreters are also available in the 311 system," Gonzalez said.

Gonzalez added that parents should reach out to the school coordinator before enrolling their children into any school, "If the parents make use of these services, their children will be able to get help to overcome their problems," she said.

But many parents say that these programs do not go far enough; that there aren't enough people in the school system well versed in the various immigrant cultures to help them translate the school system in ways that are meaningful for them. As well, in many countries, parents do not play an active role in their children's formal education – to do so is considered to be meddling into the school's affairs.

There were no programs offered by the NYC Department of Education to help students like Rais and thousands of new immigrants who enter

the school system. Many of the students have to learn on their own. While some eventually succeed academically, too many are struggling in the system.

“Immigration is a serious heart-rending curse for many families, who did not know what types of problems they would have to face in United States,” Azad said. “Family guidance is essential in the educational arena. But students of Bangladeshi origins are greatly deprived of this parent support because the parents are very busy trying to make a living, and because they lack previous experience playing that role.”

When Ria’s mother was asked about the academic life of her children, she blamed herself for the problems that they face in their student life. She said, other than a language problem, the curriculum and education system, which are complicated and complex, deterred her from helping her children. She did not know how to overcome that barrier.

Two of Akhlsur Rahman’s three children got off tract. He blamed their derailment to the school system, which he claims ruined his children – they are so independent that the parents no longer have any say on what they do. They lead their life according to their own choice. Parents have the right to punish them for their misbehavior or inattentiveness to their studies, said Rahman, but all peace is gone from the household due to his three children’s independence, who are in the eight, tenth and twelfth grades. They listen to no one. They do not inform the parents where they are off to after school. And his wife, Julekha, does not understand or speak English.

Dr. Showkat Ali, a Bangladeshi immigrant who is a professor at Long Island University, came to the United States in the 1980s. Though the struggle for survival was very harsh, he did not set aside his study and earned a Ph.D. in economics. He achieved this even though initially he was also ignorant of the education system of New York City. His daughter is now a student at the prestigious Stuyvesant High School in Manhattan.

“We help our children with their homework,” Dr. Ali said. “Unfortunately, too many Bangladeshi students are struggling because they lack guidance from the family or the school.”

RUSSIAN

A TOUGH CHOICE: RUSSIAN PARENTS FIND DIFFICULTY CHOOSING THE RIGHT SCHOOLS FOR THEIR CHILDREN

BY YANA KRASILNIKOVA, NOVOYE RUSSKOYE SLOVO

MAY 24, 2009

Schools that come in a variety of shapes and sizes, with subject-specific names that leave no room for interpretation, make choosing high school a challenge.

World Journalism Preparatory, Mathematics, Science Research and Technology Magnet High School, High School for Health Careers and Sciences are but a few examples of the 500 high schools and 600 programs within New York City's 1,499 public schools.

For most immigrants, the wide range of selective schools, charter schools, transfer schools, art schools, educational option schools, vocational schools and international schools can prove to be confusing and exhausting. Yet, choosing a school for their children will have a great impact on the quality of education for immigrant youngsters, and bears on the schools' enrollment process. In some cases, the effects on schools prove averse, prompting principals and teachers to find new ways of reaching parents who are deliberating on which school to send their children.

"It's challenging even for savvy New York parents to sort out all the schools and decide what works for their kids," said Nedda De Castro, assistant principal at the Internationals High School in Prospect Heights created for immigrant children living in the country for less than four years. "Imagine not really understanding how the system works or even what the benefits are."

"Within the Russian community parents usually choose a school recommended by word of mouth,"

said Vladimir Epshteyn, president Metropolitan Russian American Parents Association in New York City. According to the Department of Education, the community's 2,834 children account for 2 percent of English Language Learners in the school system, 563 of them in grades 9 to 12.

"Mayor [Michael] Bloomberg gave children a right to choose a high school," Epshteyn explained, "but it doesn't mean that everybody can use it. Students have to take a test to be admitted to a special or highly rated school. For gifted immigrant children it can be a big problem."

Immigrants from central Russia and other large cities from the former USSR care deeply about the quality of education and seek out the best schools for their children, in other words schools with a high rate of graduates admitted to colleges. However, people from Asian cities of the former Soviet Republic are not as advanced in terms of education and depend solely on recommendations from the Russian community.

Most children end up in the closest neighborhood schools. The children's own desire and initiative in researching schools are also factors in deciding which schools to attend.

The Mariyasins family, for example, immigrated to the United States from Moscow five years ago, with their then 9-year-old daughter, Inna. The girl had studied in one of the best elementary schools in Moscow and her mother wanted the same quality of education for her in Brooklyn.

However, Inna's mother, Faina Mariyasins, did

not speak English well. She enrolled Inna at Public School 177, the Marlboro School, in Brooklyn only because the admissions process was fast and easy. She states that the most impressive aspect of the school was not the school's curriculum but the fact that the admission officials understood her poor English.

It proved to be the right choice after all, Faina Mariyasin said, because a chess program there opened her daughter up to a network of people that guided the family's future choices. Chess tournaments Inna participated in led to socializing events, where Faina Mariyasin gathered information from other parents about junior high schools and their entry requirements.

For junior high, Inna attended IS 228, David A. Boody Intermediate School in Brooklyn, her second choice; she was not fluent enough in English to pass an entrance exam to her first choice. Again, that school worked out, because it had a chess program Inna enjoyed.

Inna had progressed well and when time for high school arrived, she applied to a dozen schools, and ended up choosing Trinity, a private school on the Upper West Side.

"If a student doesn't pass the entrance exam to a special high school, he will be offered the choice of a school with a related program and are limited to the district he lives in," Faina Mariyasin said. "This district requirement forces parents to cheat so their child can study in the schools that better suits him or her."

Not all Russian-speaking immigrants are as fortunate as Inna. For example, Kirill Oparin, who came from Kursk, a city in the western part of central Russia at, age 9, began his American education at P.S. 97, Highlawn School in Brooklyn.

"School was like a monkey house – frequent fights, students didn't pay attention to the teacher, they were chatting, listening to music and eating," Oparin said. "The teacher was just as bad. She didn't give us any homework, and taught the lessons reluctantly."

The boy complained to his aunt, who had lived in the United States for many years but still did not speak English. His aunt Irina met with the principal and Kirill was transferred to a new class, with a better teacher.

Now, 15 and a sophomore at New Utrecht High School, Kirill likes school. His older cousin

attended the school in Bensonhurst (Brooklyn) and recommended it to Kirill's parents. Their younger cousin also attends the school, whose Russian population has now reached to almost 10 percent of the student body.

"They don't have a lot of time to find out about education because they work hard," Kirill said of his parents.

De Castro, from the Internationals High School, said they did not have any Russian-speaking students until a boy from Uzbek boy living in Queens discovered the school and brought his siblings and friends.

"We have teachers who speak Russian, but we don't know exactly where to get in touch with Russian-speaking children and their parents," De Castro said. "One of the things about immigrant families is they work a lot. They have long hours; they are juggling a lot of things. It's very difficult to target the best time to reach them," De Castro said.

To spread the word, IHS advertises at high school fairs, conducts presentations in middle schools with a high population of English language learners (ELL), and attends open houses and informational meetings there. Word of mouth helps a great deal in recruitment, and has resulted in 33 Russian families out of the 400 in the district that have more than one child attending the school, De Castro said.

The lesson from all this is for immigrant parents to behave the same way as savvy New Yorkers who do not go to neighborhood schools, but research to find the best fit for their child.

Guidance counselors should be the first stop for immigrant parents, Department of Education officials say. The agency's website also provides the high schools admissions handbook in eight languages and the directory listing has nearly 500 high schools with their offerings and requirements.

Officials also tell parents to attend high school fairs, information sessions and open houses during the school year that give additional information to the parents. The Office for Family Engagement and Advocacy and the Translation and Interpretation Unit regularly hold citywide Native Language Forums where parents can get all the information they need in their native language.

For the directory of high schools and school choice guide, click [here](#).

PAKISTANI

IMMIGRANT PARENTS STRUGGLE WITH HOMEWORK, SAY DOE PROGRAMS NOT ENOUGH

BY MOHSIN ZAHEER, SADA-E-PAKISTANI

AUGUST 25, 2009

Suhail drives a cab seven days a week. He works the night shift, so his wife, Ms. Shahida, has to take care of their children's needs, which often involve help with their homework. For Ms. Shahida, who struggles with English and hopes to enroll in an English language class, helping her first and second graders can be hard.

"I get frustrated with this problem of homework," says Suhail, while speaking to Sada E Pakistan. He added that his wife couldn't pass the driving test for a learners permit because of her English level. "It's the same case with homework; she can not read it if it is written in English – helping the children is something else," Suhail said.

Many parents in the Pakistani-American community find themselves helpless when it comes to helping their children with homework. For one, in most cases the parents' first language is Urdu not English. Second, many parents were schooled in different education systems in another part of the world making homework assignments seem foreign even for those parents who speak English well.

The Department of Education (DOE) offers assistance to both students and parents having difficulty with homework. DOE officials have tried to involve parents in their children's learning process in addition to urging parents to network with other parents.

A survey conducted by MetLife, Inc. in 2007, "The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: The homework experience," which polled teachers,

students and parents, found that almost everyone believed in the value of homework. Homework was viewed as an essential part of student learning. Minority parents, in particular, had high expectations for the impact of homework, and were more likely than non-minority parents to believe that homework would help students in school as well as in the future.

In this survey of parents, nationally representative sample of 501 parents of children in grades K through 12 was interviewed. Interviews were conducted online.

Parents of children in elementary and secondary school believed in the relationship between homework and classroom learning. Nine out of 10 parents, 89 percent, agreed that doing homework helped students learn more in school. However, the racial/ethnic background of parents was a factor in their perceptions on this issue. Ninety-seven percent of Black and Hispanic parents believed that homework increased a student's capacity to learn, while only 85 percent of white parents agreed.

According to documents on the DOE's website, during the 2007-2008 school year, 205,353 students were eligible for Supplemental Educational Services (SES), and 80,350 students in 274 schools received after-school or home tutoring services, free of charge.

At PS 217 in Ditmas Park, a neighborhood in Brooklyn where a majority of the students are of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and South Asian descent,

more than half of the 1,300 students utilized the free after-school and home tutoring services that were available. The school was also designated “in need of improvement,” making it eligible for supplemental educational services like academic intervention.

Students who qualify can receive assistance in reading, language arts and mathematics free-of-charge, before or after school, on the weekends, or online. These programs are being offered to students in their homes, their schools, and in various community centers, but for limited time.

Asghar Chishti, whose three children go to PS 217, said free tutoring at home is good. Chishti wishes the services would last longer.

“My kids get 40 hours of free tutoring at home, but it’s not enough,” he said. “I shall have to hire a private tutor, as I did before, when the limited time offer [is] over.”

Some parents still feel left out.

Agha Saleh, whose two children attend PS 84 in Astoria, said free tutoring and after-school programs do not help immigrant parents.

“Although with the passage of time kids get used to doing homework themselves, sometimes they need help and at that point, we find ourselves helpless,” Saleh said.

Dial-a-teacher, one service that is being offered, allows children to have their homework questions answered over the phone, four days a week, from Monday to Thursday, between 4 p.m. and 7 p.m.

Shazia Ahmad, whose children are in first and third grades in PS 207 in Mill Basin, Brooklyn, found the hours that the service is available to be insufficient.

“Dial-a-teacher service is not available on Friday, that means four days in month one can not benefit from this service,” Shazia said, adding that Urdu-speaking immigrant parents had no use for this service because it does not provide help by anyone who can speak and understand Urdu.

While the DOE is a big promoter of homework, some are still questioning its usefulness. Harris Cooper, a homework researcher at Duke University, found there was little evidence that homework at the elementary school level had an impact on school achievement, and only modest benefits for junior high school students. However, Cooper found that homework at the high school level did have a great impact on achievement.

Despite these mixed results, many teachers and administrators believe that assigning homework offers other benefits besides high achievement. Homework teaches children to take responsibility for tasks and to work independently, advocates say. It teaches them to plan and organize tasks, manage their time, and to make choices and solve problems – all skills that serve children well in school and throughout their life as adults.

Arlen Benjamin-Gomez, a staff attorney at Advocates for Children, a pro immigrant students’ rights project, recalled his conversation with the principal of a Manhattan community school, which had done an informal survey on homework support during parent teacher conferences. The school devised a homework plan based on parents’ needs where children could do the homework for the classes in which their parents had little experience, at school, during homeroom, or in an after-school program. With subjects that their parents could help them with, students did that work at home.

“Schools can find creative ways to address the homework issue depending on what is going on in their community,” Benjamin-Gomez said.

In the Pakistani community, where reading homework is the most common problem, Benjamin-Gomez suggested that local schools create a homework guide for parents translated into Urdu. Parents could also set up meetings with their child’s teachers, and ask for an interpreter in advance, so as to discuss the reading problems and come up with a plan together, he said.

Benjamin-Gomez reminded parents that they have the right to interpreters and translated materials from their children’s schools, and that they should request these materials that might help them with their child’s education.

“Be careful about parent involvement. Consider the time and resources parents have before requiring their involvement,” said Mr. Cooper, adding that working parents may have little time for a direct homework role. Parents with little education may have an especially hard time mentoring their children, he said. Students who are doing well in school may get the most benefit from doing homework by themselves.”

MEXICAN

LOST IN TRANSLATION: PARENTS WHO DON'T SPEAK ENGLISH STRUGGLE TO PARTICIPATE IN CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

BY VIRGINIA ALVARADO, DIARIO DE MÉXICO

JUNE 30, 2009

Carmen Hernández remembers how happy and proud she was the day when the eldest of her two boys started school. However, that day marked the beginning of a long struggle for Hernández whose child seemed unable to make progress in class.

Year after year, the boy, Óscar Zempoalcecacl, lagged behind the rest of his class with very low grades. The mother, a Brooklyn factory worker, dreaded seeing the “F” that would often be marked on his report cards. The boy never managed to reach the level of achievement the teachers expected.

“What can I do to help?” Hernández remembers repeatedly asking Óscar’s teachers. The teachers agreed with her that her child needed some help, but they didn’t seem to have any specific advice – at least none that she could understand.

Finally, following one teacher’s suggestion, she reached out to an organization that supports public school students in the city. There, an attorney spoke to Hernández about rights she did not know she had.

“That’s when I learned I had the right to receive interpretation and translation services. Up until that moment, nobody at my son’s school had told me I had a right to ask for that,” Hernández states.

She was told she could ask for an interpreter when she spoke to the school staff. She eventually did ask for an interpreter to ask for her son to be transferred to a smaller school with smaller classes.

Óscar, it turned out, had been suffering from attention deficit disorder. He’s now 13, and his

grades have improved noticeably.

“Schools take no action unless parents demand it,” said the 37-year old Hernández, born in Zacatlán, a town in the Mexican state of Puebla. She has now joined other Mexican mothers at the La Unión organization, hoping to inform other parents about the city public school system.

One school, many worlds

Limited knowledge of English, exhausting work hours, lack of immigration papers, and fear of speaking out are a few factors, amongst others, that force Mexican parents to think twice before trying to benefit from the free translation and interpretation services that are provided at the city’s schools. A regulation implemented in 2006 states that the Department of Education must provide parents of Limited English Proficiency children, who make up about 53 percent of the student population, with “significant opportunities to participate and to accede to programs and services” critical in the children’s education.

Nicole Colina-Duigean, a spokeswoman for the Department of Education, said that: “The New York Department of Education is one of the most diverse organisms in providing translation and interpretation services in eight key languages across the city.”

In spite of the regulation, many parents say their concerns are simply lost in translation.

Some parents who have used the services

complain of inadequate interpretation. Besides the language barrier, the cultural disparity between Mexican and American perspectives on education has created an even larger barrier.

That has been the experience of another Mexican mother, 35-year old Elizabeth Mendoza, who got into trouble when she taught her daughter Adriana the multiplication tables.

“My daughter was told that she was cheating. Her test was taken away from her because math is not taught the same way here. It’s done in vertical line while in our country it’s done in horizontal line, and here in the United States that looks like cheating,” says Mendoza, adding that her limited English made it twice as hard to face Adriana’s fourth-grade teacher and school staff in her efforts to clear the misunderstanding.

Indeed, language is only one of many obstacles for immigrant parents in city schools, according to Adrián Franco, a Ph.D. candidate at Teachers College. Parental involvement is a challenge for many immigrants because the role of parents in the American education system is different from the role they have in schools in other parts of the world.

In the United States, parents and teachers are seen as jointly responsible for a child’s education. Parents are expected to attend school meetings, help their kids with homework and assist in their children’s academic development.

In other parts of the world, particularly in Latin America, teachers are considered experts and authority figures who do not need parents’ cooperation, said the Mexican-born Franco.

“In other words, the division between school and home is rigid and usually neither teachers nor parents dare to cross the line that separates them,” Franco said. “When immigrant parents arrive at school in the United States, they get a culture shock that is not easy to overcome without the participation of both sides – the school authorities and parents themselves.”

Resourcefulness required

Some parents with limited English proficiency say that although there is a language barrier that separates them from teachers, it is up to the parents to be resourceful and look for different options for their children’s education.

“You can find someone at the school who speaks Spanish – and it won’t necessarily be the person who cleans the bathrooms,” said Román Barroso, owner of a construction company. Barroso has often had to take time off work to go to his daughter’s school. The girl, an 11th grade honors student, suffers from frequent panic attacks.

“We were helped in many ways by the teachers, the social workers,” said Barroso. “Yes, there are many things to struggle with and I don’t speak English well. But somehow I’ve managed to overcome that.” He added, “We come to this country with many limitations, that’s true. But it’s our responsibility to break through the obstacles in the education system.”

The urgent need to help their children is one of the reasons that drive many immigrants to register in English classes. The Unidad de Voluntarios de Educación para Adultos (Volunteer Unit for Adult Education, or UVEA) is one group that has experienced this need firsthand. UVEA provides English classes to Mexican immigrants so they can better adapt to life in the United States, as well as help their children in school.

“I believe many parents go back to school in order to help their children with homework,” said Juan Castillo, a Mexican-born industrial engineer who founded UVEA.

While parents use the resources available or do what they can to understand what happens in school, advocacy groups promise to keep up the fight to ensure that all city schools provide suitable interpretation and translation services.

“We must ensure that the key documents arrive at the students’ homes in their own language,” said Deycy Avitia, of the New York Immigration Coalition.

Last year La Unión, a non-profit organization, surveyed 80 Mexican mothers in Sunset Park, Brooklyn in an effort to learn about their experiences with the education system. It found that many of them faced barriers for lack of translation and interpretation services.

“Our first recommendation for the Chancellor’s office is to establish a system that allows access to these parents’ languages, especially in schools with a large number of English-limited parents, so we can be sure there’s compliance with the regulations,” said Leticia Alanís, co-director of La Unión.

The group also wants a system to monitor the schools to make sure the services are being provided, especially in schools where the majority of parents are not English speakers. Moreover, the schools should have visible signs announcing the translation and interpretation facilities they are providing to parents.

Advocates hope that with more interpretation and translation services more immigrant parents will be encouraged to get involved in their children's education.

Things can be difficult for immigrant families even with an interpreter's help. Elizabeth Mendoza says she was not always satisfied with the quality of the interpretation provided by the schools.

"Sometimes the interpreter does not help as one would like, and sometimes there wasn't one available. In many cases my daughter was the interpreter," she says.

The use of kids as interpreters has frequently been criticized by advocates. In a 2007 report, Advocates for Children and other groups said they had found first-graders interpreting for their parents and said that on several occasions "parent coordinators pulled students out of their classes to interpret."

Mendoza's daughter, Adriana, has grown up interpreting for her mother not just in school, but also at the hospital and even in court.

"Children sometimes have to assume responsibilities that maybe are not suitable, but they do it because often there's nothing else that can be done," says Mendoza. Her daughter, 16, recently got an award for her good grades in high school. Once she graduates, Adriana wants to go to college to study to become an interpreter and translator.

INDIAN

REPORT: ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS NEED A LEG UP FROM DOE

BY SUJEET RAJAN, INDIAN EXPRESS

JUNE 30, 2009

When they settle in America and toil for long hours in back-breaking and often humiliating work, the biggest goal for most unskilled immigrants is free and good quality education for their children. Their biggest hope is that their children will, with that education under their belt, climb out of the morass of poverty and achieve the American Dream, making it all worthwhile.

However, new reports suggest that the children of unskilled immigrants who come from non-English speaking countries often do very poorly in the New York City public schools – with pathetic graduation rates. Lacking English-language skills and job training, the parents of such students are often helpless to participate in their children's education, as they themselves face significant obstacles.

The Department of Education (DOE) is not totally lackadaisical of this vital factor: over \$7 million in grants have been made to schools to improve instruction for English-language learners (ELLs) – which education advocates and experts applaud – but unless parents become intrinsically involved in their child's education, the grant itself would only be a stepping stone to success and not a guarantee of it.

A recent report released by Advocates for Children – a New York City advocacy organization whose mission is to promote access to the best education the city can provide for all

students, especially students of color and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds – says despite the fact that 60 percent children in New York City public schools are immigrants or the children of immigrants, immigrant parents are often shut out of their children's schools and thus unable to participate in their children's education effectively. The report, *Our Children, Our Schools*, done in collaboration with immigrant advocates and community groups throughout the city, shows that many immigrant parents remain shut out of school activities and leadership opportunities despite the DOE's recent efforts to increase parent involvement in schools.

"There is a common misconception that immigrant parents are not interested in getting involved in school activities, but 80 percent of immigrant parents we surveyed said they would like to be more involved in their children's schools," said Arlen Benjamin-Gomez, a staff attorney in the Immigrant Students' Rights Project at Advocates for Children.

Immigrant parents interviewed for the report described being blocked at the door by school security because they do not have official identification, intimidated by school staff who are unresponsive to their needs, and discriminated against because of their background or limited English abilities.

"I have tried to meet a mathematics teacher twice at the school where my son goes, but the

security at the school did not let me in both times,” says a parent of Hindu decent, living in Richmond Hills, Queens.

When asked if he had tried to talk to the teacher by phone, he says that the staff at the school became impatient with his accent and limited proficiency in English, and did not schedule an appointment for him. His son, now in eighth grade, has been struggling in several subjects – including math. The boy, he says, often struggles when doing homework and sulks when reprimanded for his poor grades.

Research shows that family involvement is directly correlated with student success, and immigrant parent involvement can play a critical role in reversing the decline in New York City’s English Language Learners (ELL) graduation rates, says the report.

Almost 150,000 New York City school students (14 percent) are in the process of learning English and are classified as ELLs. They constitute a sizable proportion of the student population. These students face huge obstacles in their journey towards academic success: not only must they learn a new language, but they must also adjust to a new country and school system – all the while trying to catch up with other students and meet promotion and graduation standards.

“Parents can be a powerful ally in the education of their children. If we’re not letting immigrant families contribute, then New York City is missing out on the skills and resources of a majority of parents, resources sorely needed in these tough economic times,” said Wendy Cheung, youth and parent coordinator at the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families.

At the core of the issue, says the report, is the inability of parents to get access to the schools in which their children are studying. Since many do not have government-issued IDs, parents are nervous and afraid of the people who work in the schools. These feelings often arise previous to any contact with the schools, especially when coupled with an unfriendly reception, discrimination by school staff and fear of retaliation against their children. Hence, schools become an unwelcoming

environment for immigrant parents.

In focus groups and interviews, surveyed parents explained that fear or apprehension is a major factor that limits immigrant parents’ participation in the schools. Parents reported that when they attempt to visit their children’s schools, they encounter barriers that begin at the front door. The presence of security guards at the front door requesting identification creates a physical barrier to parent access, particularly for immigrant parents who may not have official identification. As a result, parents often feel they are unable to visit or are discouraged from visiting their children’s schools.

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 that there are “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 they were treated differently from others.

Another parent in Queens said, “When you don’t speak English good, they are not very nice to you in the schools.” 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.”

Participants of the study said that translation and interpretation services are more comprehensive and more commonly provided for Spanish-speaking parents, and that parents 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.

A service provider in the South Asian community reported that the parent coordinator is often hard to reach so parents go to their own respective community leaders for help instead.

Another parent explained how her son has been singled out for retaliation 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 homework 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 South Asian community spoke about one school where parents involved themselves in the PTA and tried to voice their concerns. In response, the PTA was completely shut down, and the school now makes major decisions without consulting parents.

Another service provider that works with the same community 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; thus, many parents do not know about the role of the PTA.

One of the recommendations in the report is to have Schools Chancellor Joel Klein make certain that the New York City school system is a safe zone for immigrant families.

Executive Order 41, signed by Mayor Michael 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 it by law.

The report also suggests ways to make written communication more effective.

Surveyed parents frequently complained that notices given to students never reach the parents, and some 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, where children take a correspondence notebook from home to school every day. The notebook is a place for teachers to send notes and notices home, and for parents to write notes to the teachers.

The report highlights successful strategies being used in schools in the City and in other states and offers 48 recommendations on how the DOE and schools can strengthen partnerships with immigrant families: creating a standing citywide advisory committee on family-school-community partnerships; holding an annual immigrant planning summit with community-based organizations; and issuing a statement for immigrant parents that the New York City school system is a safe zone for their children.

The report also recommends: creating a parent welcoming /multicultural advisory committee; issuing identification cards to parents; employing non-written means of communication with immigrant parents; and collaborating with community-based organizations to reach immigrant parents.

The report also recommends strengthening parent leadership and decision-making opportunities in the schools.

"There is a direct correlation between parents who don't understand the school system and students who fare poorly in school," says Benjamin-Gomez.

In New York City, immigrants make up 36 percent of the city's population and 43 percent of its labor force. Therefore, fostering strong family involvement in education in New York City is vital, Benjamin-Gomez points out. And the impact of the Advocates for Children report is obvious when one takes into account that ELL students currently have some of the lowest graduation rates of any student population in the city.

The New York Immigrant Coalition recently lambasted the city and the DOE, citing the decreasing graduation rates and an alarming achievement gap for students learning English.

Immigrant advocates challenged Bloomberg's and Klein's claim of progress for ELLs in the City's report, *Diverse Learners on the Road to Success*, released last month: "Despite some significant efforts by the City to address the dropout crisis for immigrant students, the results aren't there," said Chung-Wha Hong, executive director of the New York Immigration Coalition.

"Unless the City steps it up, the ELL dropout

crisis will remain a huge shadow looming over the legacy of mayoral control. Clearly just as ELL students have to work harder, so does the DOE. It's time for the Mayor and the Chancellor to step up their efforts, invest in quality services for ELLs, and improve outcomes for ELL students," she added.

Statistics say that a quarter (23 percent) of ELL students graduate high school in four years – less than half the rate of students with English proficiency. This graduation rate demonstrates a three percent decrease from the 2005 four-year ELL graduation rate of 26.5 percent.

Also, only one-tenth of ELLs graduate with a Regents Diploma; in 2007, only 5 percent of ELL students in NYC met 8th grade English Language Arts (ELA) standards compared with 43 percent of non-ELL students. This gap has persisted and grown over the past eight years.

ELL enrollment rates swell in 9th and 10th grade due to increases in immigrant student enrollment in those grades; however, by the 11th grade, nearly half of ELLs disappear from school rosters. These students are likely to drop out or are pushed out of school into GED programs.

Groups acknowledge some important progress that has been made with elementary school ELLs and point to the high performance of former ELLs as proof that when provided with the help they need, these students can succeed. They call for growing attention to the needs of middle school and high school students learning English, particularly those who are at the highest risk of dropping out, like students with Interrupted Formal Education and immigrant youth.

"We need to engage in a robust dialogue about how the governance system of our schools will address the needs of all communities, how school reform efforts will include immigrant students, and how immigrant parents will be involved in decisions about the future of their schools," said Ana Maria Archila, co-director of Make the Road New York.

Klein had announced earlier this year that 110 schools will each receive up to \$100,000 in grants to improve instructional services for English Language Learners – a decision welcomed by

education experts and officials

"This \$7 million in grants for 110 schools will go a long way in helping English language learners grow and thrive in our public schools," City Council Education Committee Chair Robert Jackson had then said.

Chung-Wha Hong agreed enthusiastically, saying that the grants will "get us off to a strong start in improving educational opportunities" for the English language learners in the public schools.

HAITIAN

DOE ENCOURAGES PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT—SO WHAT’S THE PROBLEM?

BY NADEGE FLEURIMOND, HAITIAN TIMES

AUGUST 25, 2010

For years the woe for both educators and Department of Education officials has been how to get parents more involved in the schools and in their children’s education. With low graduation rates and low test scores plaguing the school system, Department of Education officials and other educators are pressed to look for ways to change the statistics.

Why is parent involvement important to begin with? “It makes a difference” says Florencia Chang-Ageda, a Brooklyn Borough President appointee to the Community Education Council – a DOE initiative to get parents into the schools. “Teachers pay attention to your child when they know the parent is there. It’s more individualized attention for your child and it also allows for issues to be resolved right away,” states Chang-Ageda.

Ms. Chang-Ageda used the example of a Haitian woman who had a child in the school system. “This woman for years was struggling with various issues with her daughter, yet she could not get any results. She was not that active in the school mainly because of a language barrier. Her daughter had emotional problems that she could not comprehend due to a lack of communication between her and school officials. And for many Haitian parents who want to partake in their kids’ school life, often times issues of language insecurity prevent them from doing so,” states Ms. Chang. “It’s very difficult for many of the parents to express themselves and contribute when

they don’t exactly feel confident to express their concern, or even confident they will understand the issues,” she explained, adding, what ends up happening is that parents stay away.

Othide Merand has reared five children in the New York City public school system. “I have been the one responsible for taking my grand children to school for all my 3 kids. They work long hours, so I am the only one with the time to take them to school, baby-sit and run around.” She looked almost tired just from the conversation, as she lamented about the ups and downs she has to deal with her grandchildren. Throughout her speech you heard care but more so exasperation. When asked how involved she is in her grandchildren’s lives, without hesitation she states “very.” She drops and picks them up from school. She cooks for them after school, and while she does not do their homework, she does ensure they do their school work. So when asked how active she is inside her grandchildren’s schools, she answered: “not that much.” I asked her if it was a language issue and she stated no.

A University of Maryland study by Chaung and Koblinsky (2009) attributed the lack parental participation to language barriers and demanding work schedules.

However, Rita Joseph, a Haitian-American teacher at P.S. 6 in Brooklyn feels differently about the matter. “It is not language because they provide interpretation services. In my opinion it is fear of the institution itself. In Haiti schools are

considered the ‘it’ place. They control everything. It’s an institution parents look to mold and shape their children into respectable members of society. I have parents who simply tell me do with the child as I wish when they give me trouble. That’s how much reverence they have for teachers and instructors. They look for us as teachers for guidance. They think we know things they don’t know.”

Which leads us to another problem facing Haitians in the system: The education gap between guardians and their children is also an issue. Ms. Joseph states, “Sometimes the children are the only ones that speak English in the household. Once I received a visit from a parent of one of my fourth graders who came to tell me to be sure to explain the homework thoroughly to the children, because when her daughter would come home, she asked her questions that the mother did not have answers to.”

Ms. Merand, in her self defense, stated that not once since she has been dropping her grandchildren at P.S. 189 has she been asked to volunteer or partake in school activities. With P.S. 189 being one of the few remaining Haitian-English bilingual education schools in New York, the school could offer a great model for Haitian-American parents to get involve. The school is very welcoming and offers a good level of comfort for Haitian parents, states an educator who would like to remain anonymous; yet, parents such as Ms. Merand, say they don’t have a sense that their participation is needed in the school.

Ms. Michelle Brunson, of the Community Education Council, District 17, offers another perspective. “I think many parents don’t understand that the PTA is for them. And, at times, that’s to the fault of other parents. Some parents make the PTA seem like a membership exclusive organization that others need permission to join.” Ms. Brunson further states that schools need to offer a more welcoming vibe to parents. Ms. Chang-Ageda too is proponent of this. “Schools like P.S. 399 and P.S. 22 have that community feel – parents, teachers, guards and students are part of one circle, as opposed to different entities. It is not surprising that every student in P.S. 399 received a 4 in the state exam,” says Chang. Parents are made to feel like they are

vital to the process.

Ms. Chang-Ageda says there are a number of ways for parents to get involved and points to the 32 Community Education Councils (CECs) in New York City. Each CEC represents a Community School District that includes public elementary, intermediate, and junior high schools. Each CEC has 12 members: nine parents selected by the district’s PA/PTAs; two members appointed by the Borough President; and one student member selected by the Community Superintendent. These councils and other school initiatives offer bilingual and translation services. The DOE provides parent coordinators within each school to bridge that gap between parents, students and teachers.

DOE has also instituted programs such as the Family Assessment Program, which works to ensure that families are provided the support to tackle major issues including runaways, psychological problems and other internal issues within the family unit. Programs such as The Native Language Forum and the Saturday Academy work to ensure parents are not hindered by language or time to learn about their child’s needs.

However, this information has to be known. Translation services are available.

“It’s simply our job to keep ensuring that parents feel the importance of playing a role. When a child understands or feels that at any given moment their parent can walk into their school, that make’s a difference,” says Ms. Chang-Ageda.

PROFILING ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLING

As the Fellows learned of the many models for schools available to their communities, they presented their readers with concrete options where parents and students could address the challenges and difficulties they face in conventional public schools in New York City. Schools for new immigrants, schools for over-age/under-credited students, and schools still offering bilingual curriculum were strongly emphasized in their reporting.

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ARAB

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE KHALIL GIBRAN INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY?

BY RACHEL MILLARD, ARAMICA

JANUARY 11, 2009

When the Khalil Gibran International Academy (KGIA) opened its doors two years ago, the Arabic-themed school seemed as if it wouldn't make it beyond its first year.

The principal, Debbie Almontaser, was asked to resign after making controversial comments and parents complained that there was inadequate funding, very little communication between them and teachers, and that the school was beset with discipline problems.

Now well into its second year, the school appears to be moving past its difficulties and is setting on achieving its mission: to teach a segment of New York City students a slice of Arabic life and culture, in addition to the so-called three Rs – reading, writing and arithmetic.

School officials declined to comment for this article, despite repeated requests for an interview. Melody Mayer, a spokeswoman for the Department of Education, said they would not comment because it would “open the floodgates to more media attention.” Furthermore, an impending lawsuit from Almontaser, who is suing the DOE after she left the school, impeded Mayer from making comments.

Almontaser stepped down as the school's principal in a firestorm of controversy in August 2007 after an article in the *New York Post* stated that she had “downplayed the significance” of t-shirts bearing the slogan “Intifada NYC.” Almontaser said that the *Post* had distorted her words and that she had been forced to resign by

the mayor's office.

Recently, *Aramica* met with Danielle Jefferis, KGIA program manager for the Arab American Family Support Center – KGIA's lead community partner – who works at the school full-time, and works closely with its students and families. Jefferis talked about how the school has settled down since last year and how it is adjusting to its new location on Navy Street, where the school shares the premises with P.S. 287.

The school, which was criticized for not having enough Arabic-language classes, now employs two full-time native Arabic speakers and students have one full period of Modern Standard Arabic language first thing every morning, with one lesson in Arabic culture per week. KGIA is the only dual-language public school in New York City to offer Arabic-language instruction. In other respects, it follows the DOE curriculum.

And while last year, the school was beset by a lack of facilities, a donation made early this semester from one of the school's support organizations has equipped the school with a computer lab designed for language learners with voice-recording software and word processing software, which can manage Arabic fonts.

One widely circulated rumor about the school was that the DOE was no longer committed to supporting it beyond the 8th grade. But Mayer, the DOE spokeswoman, denied the rumors and said that the school plans to add one grade every year. As the school expands to high school level

and needs more facilities, its location will be reassessed and might be moved, yet again.

The continued uncertainty is frustrating many parents who question the DOE's support for the school. "The DOE is making life very difficult for parents and students at both KGIA and P.S. 287," said Saba Mansour, an Arab-American mother of two kids attending another Brooklyn public school. "There's no way all of this disruption can ever be in the best interests of the students."

For some educators, the early problems the school faced are much more meaningful than just the symptoms of a challenging system. Edwin Mayorga, a member of the New York Collective of Radical Educators, a social justice teachers' organization which has worked closely with the KGIA, said he viewed the DOE's actions towards the KGIA as an indication of the poor acceptance of Arab and Muslim communities in New York City public life.

"This represents a concrete example of Arab and Muslims trying to create space and being denied," he told *Aramica*, linking this case to what he sees as other examples of discrimination in civic life against Arab- and Muslim-Americans and other immigrant groups, such as in policing and immigrants' rights.

"There is a question here," he said, "over which communities have power and legitimacy, are addressed and supported, and which communities are marginalized."

So far, the KGIA has notably few native Arabic students. Of a student body of about 60 – it is under-enrolled by 50 percent – only four are native Arabic speakers, according to Jefferis.

Why are so few children from Arabic-speaking families enrolled at a school which was envisioned as a place for Arabic students to be the best representatives of their culture to their non-Arab peers? And why are so few Arabic children at a school that many Arab-American parents would have called for, as a place where the teachers spoke their language and their culture was recognized?

Some members of the community fear that the original, negative publicity tying the school to terrorism and Islamic madrassahs discouraged Arab-American parents from sending their kids

there at all, sabotaging the school's success among the Arab-American community from the outset.

"I definitely think the controversy of the school was an obstacle to parents sending their kids there," says Linda Sarsour, acting director of the Arab American Association of New York and the mother of four young children. "I think the school has been under so much scrutiny that they have to put together some kind of marketing strategy to entice parents and prove to them why they should send their students there," she said, adding that the school's remote location made it very difficult for students to get there. In an effort to encourage greater attendance from the Arab-American community, the school has recently started advertising a potential special bus service to bring students from the densely Arab-American populated neighborhood of Bay Ridge, Brooklyn to the school's premises in the Navy Yard.

"Any sensible parent would be concerned about enrolling their child in a school facing the vigorous opposition that KGIA did on its opening day," said Dave Hall, a musician and active member of the Downtown Brooklyn Arab-American community, who has been invited to serve on a forthcoming community advisory board at the school.

Others suggested that the school's Arabic theme could in fact be a disadvantage, with parents not wanting their kids to be isolated from an U.S. upbringing.

"I agree that an Arabic-language school can be a good bridge between the generations, so that second- or third-generation immigrants can learn about their heritage," said Marie Eleham, a mother of two who moved from Syria 10 years ago, before her children were born. "But I would not send my daughter there; it's as if we are enlarging the gap between her and her home, making her feel an immigrant as her parents have felt since they came to this country. She should feel at home here: this is, after all, where she was born and raised."

She also highlighted a misconception about the school that might prevent other mothers from sending their kids there. "There is a belief among Arab-American Christians that this school

teaches the Islamic faith in addition to Arabic,” said Eleham, who is a Christian. “I don’t know the details of the story of the school, but I heard that its previous principal was a fanatic,” she added.

As a New York City public school, there is no religious education on the curriculum at KGIA. If Islam is mentioned by name, it is only in the context of teaching about Arabic culture and history.

“I imagine that many immigrant Arab parents want their children to assimilate and be among American kids,” agreed Mr. Hall, “but I’d like to suggest to Arab parents that the education their children will get at KGIA is equal to that of the best American public schools, with the added bonus of a strong Arabic-language program, which will serve them and their adopted country for their whole professional lives.”

INDEPENDENT

TRANSFER SCHOOLS – MANY ROADS, ONE DESTINATION

BY HELEN ZELON, VOICES THAT MUST BE HEARD

JUNE 24, 2009

With a cop's solid build and bristling, close-cropped hair, Cascades High School principal, Paul Rotondo, leads his school with the single-minded vision of a man accustomed to taking charge. His mission: Turning kids who've "turned off" to education back "on" to school.

Since 2005, the New York City Department of Education has invested over \$42 million in high-school alternative programs, like the one at Cascades High School, a transfer school that shares a 100-year-old Chinatown building with three other schools and a child-care center, where students' babies play as their young parents learn.

Alternative high school programs permit only about 10 percent of the city's 168,000 hardest-to-reach youth the chance to earn their high school diplomas. These programs have multiplied during the Bloomberg-Klein tenure like mushrooms after a summer rain, often in neighborhoods long linked with poverty and failing high schools.

Rotondo and his team plan each Cascades student's program individually, a task made feasible by the school's low student-teacher ratio (15:1) and increased per-pupil spending. The result is a highly personalized, deeply invested school environment, where students sign a contract for their participation – and where a 70 percent attendance rate, deplored at most good high schools, represents a human triumph. Kids are coming to school; they weren't before. "Kids with 14 percent, 28 percent attendance – previously, they were zeroes, they were not in

school. It's all relative," says Rotondo.

"It was different in my old school," says 17-year-old Khandese Capriz, who attended two high schools and dropped out before coming to Cascades. "Here, everybody knows each other." She especially likes the phone calls she gets, to urge her to come to school in the morning – and to hustle her back into the building, after lunch.

The phone calls don't come from Rotondo or any of his staff. Instead, they come from workers at Union Settlement's Rivington House, the school's community partner. Transfer schools, unlike traditional high schools, work in collaboration with community partners to give students opportunities to thrive and succeed at school: For many kids, it's their last, best chance at finishing high school – a goal that eluded many of their siblings and parents.

Rivington House organizes internships for eligible Cascades students (who need good attendance and passing grades); it plans college visits and prom, and offers career and college counseling. But mainly, the kids say, the CBO "ladies" care about them. That kind of constant, intensive attention, in the classroom and beyond, is integral to Cascades' success.

"They keep going and going, until you get there," said Khandese. "They call me 6 in the morning, every morning; they call at 9 o'clock; they call after lunch. If you don't answer, they call your parents. If your parents don't answer, they mail your house."

“It’s not just easy graduation – you have to earn the credits,” Kandese adds. “But outside, stuff is hard.”

For many students, life beyond school is the biggest challenge: Six Cascades students have toddlers across the hall, in the child-care center. Most are poor; many live in public housing; more than a few are separated from parents and siblings, in foster care, and a few have “aged out” of foster care and live independently, working and attending school. Kids struggle with depression and other mental health issues, says College and Career Counselor Fay Staley. Their families have problems, too – with money, work, alcohol, other substances, and with their fists.

“If we want the school to do well, we have to focus on the families, not just what’s happening in the building,” says Principal Rotondo. Asked if the school structures are strong and deep enough to stand in for the absent community, Rotondo asks, rhetorically, “Who else?”

Since 2007, the city has added a dozen new transfer schools. But accountability is lacking: Fully a third of the transfer schools are too young to report graduation rates. Save for one state-chartered school, none report how many students took Regents exams – required for graduation – or how many passed. For another third, their long-term survival, under the statistics-driven scrutiny of New York State, remains uncertain.

Sharon Rencher, executive director of the Office of School Improvement in the Division of Teaching and Learning at the DOE, says that “the traditional way of holding high schools responsible did not work for transfer schools.” Developing what she and New York State Education Department sources describe as “alternative accountability cohorts” took long months of work and negotiation with both the state and federal authorities.

“Transfer kids, they’re starting behind the eight-ball – they had always been at a disadvantage,” said Rencher. “Transfer schools were more frequently identified for improvement by No Child Left Behind and state requirements. They were not being fairly evaluated.”

Even though transfer schools are not held to the same accountability standards as the city’s

conventional high schools, transfer schools that don’t make strong progress can still find themselves on the state’s bad-schools list, where they can remain for at least two years. (Removal from the list requires two consecutive years’ progress.) Consequences – restructuring, principal firings, school closure – still follow the same timeline as for other, non-transfer schools. For all intents and purposes, as far as the city and state are concerned, the schools are classified as failing schools.

When failure means success

The city’s Progress Reports rate schools based on academic progress. The state, bound by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) targets, outlines Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) goals and sets minimal testing standards. Every year, some schools fall onto the state’s watch list – Schools Under Regional Review (SURR) – because they don’t make their targets.

Many city schools meet or approach those state and federal standards. Many transfer schools, by default, do not: With students overwhelmingly behind, it’s a virtual impossibility to hit targets for Regents exams and other goals set by the state. And that’s the case at Cascades High School, which is on the State’s SURR list of failing schools.

Cascades is in trouble because it hasn’t met targets for the English Regents exam.

Not enough students have taken or passed the critical test. Nearly 65 percent of the 2000 cohort graduated within six years, besting city averages, but AYP shortfalls plague the school’s test scores. Principal Paul Rotondo says letters from the state saying “your son/daughter is attending a failing school” unsettle parents, who worry the school will close. It’s another stress for already-stressed households.

Cascades isn’t the only transfer school on the state’s short list of failing schools. Also included there are Manhattan Night and Day Comprehensive – legendary school for ELL and older students, long favored by Brooke Astor and other deep-pocketed donors – and City-As-School, the innovative alternative-school and one

of only two transfer schools that earned an A on the city's progress reports. All of these schools predate the current administration. Bad rankings by the state mean all three schools risk the loss of their principals and eventual shutdown.

The state and the city's targets presume a conventional sense of high school progress to four-year graduation. Cascades kids don't fit that mold; often, they've been out of high school longer than they attended. Counting credits, they look like 9th graders; counting birthdays, they should be graduates.

"They're wrong," says Principal Rotondo, of state sanctions. "The state says I have to magically give them four years of classes in two. 'I'm not willing to make up numbers to get off the state's bad list.'"

Rotondo says the standards don't mesh with NYC graduation measures, because the city's 6-year graduation rate – not uncommon for returning students – "doesn't fit" within federal guidelines. Cascades got a high B on the city's progress report. "My kids are moving," says Rotondo. "They're doing well."

"If you're not on the bad [SURR] list, you're taking kids who need 10 or 11 credits to graduate – is that a transfer school?" challenges Rotondo. Some former transfer schools have re-opened as small schools, he said, which "creates a perverse incentive to cream off the top." The end result: "The neediest kids get the short end of the stick."

"If this was every high school in New York City, the Board of Regents would take it up tomorrow morning," says Rotondo. "But if a transfer school is doing the right thing, they should be 'failing,'" says Rotondo. Even so, there's a risk: "The end of the SURR process is my removal."

[SIDEBAR]

Dropouts in Waiting

Students who fall far behind are the same students who will drop out of high school in time, unless robust interventions lasso them back into school. These same students often face the biggest, deepest, and most persistent academic and social challenges.

More than half of at-risk high school students lack basic proficiencies – reading, writing, and math skills. Thirty-five thousand are new English speakers, or English language learners (ELLs), in DOE parlance. More ELL students drop out than graduate in four years; those who become English-proficient, though, earn diplomas at rates that parallel or even exceed their American-born peers.

Students with special needs make up about a tenth of public school students. Among at-risk students, one in three have special needs, which require a spectrum of services, from in-class support by special-ed teachers, out-of-class ("pullout") instruction by teaching specialists; and occupational and/or language therapies; to collaborative team teaching (CTT) classes (which mix able and challenged kids) and self-contained classes.

It seems logical that non-traditional high school programs, like transfer schools, would be designed to meet the needs of these challenged students. Yet only half of the city's current transfer schools offer services to ELL students; another fraction serve "advanced" ELL students only. Despite state requirements, most of the city's transfer schools do not work with ELL beginners.

Special-ed students face still grimmer odds: Advocates say that fewer than one in five transfer schools citywide offer classes for the least-impaired kids. Services for students with more profound needs are even more scarce. The DOE's 2008 high school directory lists only eight of 37 transfer schools with special-ed classes, including only two with self-contained classes. Most are not ADA-accessible, as required by government standards.

Students at the greatest risk of quitting school do not have the support the law requires – or the support they need to return to high school and earn their diplomas.

PAKISTANI

DOE'S INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS: A PLACE FOR RECENT IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

BY MOHSIN ZAHEER, SADA-E-PAKISTAN

JUNE 27, 2009

Sahrash Azam, 17, and Ayesha Azam, 15, are both traditional Pakistani Muslim students who wear scarves that cover the head and neck at all times [hijab] during the school day at International High School at Prospect Heights in Brooklyn. Both sisters moved to the United States in 2005 with their parents, and after studying one year at a middle school located on Ditmas Ave. in Brooklyn, they were referred by their teachers to International High School, where both are doing very well. Although it was not their first choice, the sisters agree that “this is the school for new immigrants like us with minimal English-language skills or late-entry English language learners.”

Sunbal Hussain, also a 9th grader at the school, was referred to International High School by her sister, Sumon Hussain, who is in the 10th grade there. Sunmbal says, “I found this school better than regular public schools.”

There are 16 Pakistani students studying at International High School, just a handful out of many new Pakistanis who immigrated to the United States with minimal English language skills, and who are not aware that they can learn English and become high school graduates at the same time.

According to the Pakistan Embassy in Washington D.C., there are 700,000 Pakistani Americans living in different parts of the United States, most of them based in Brooklyn, New York. Midwood, a neighborhood in South

Brooklyn, is also known as “Little Pakistan” because of its large Pakistani population. The community resides on Coney Island Avenue and in the surrounding area.

International High School, about a mile-and-a-half away from “Little Pakistan” at Prospect Heights, sits near the Brooklyn Museum and across from the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. The school is part of the Internationals Network for Public Schools (INPS), a nonprofit organization that develops and supports a group of small public schools that educate and graduate newly arrived immigrants and late-entry immigrant students from more than 90 countries.

The schools, which are part of the Department of Education (DOE), are open to New York City residents who have lived in the United States four years or less when entering high school and whose native language is not English.

When asked what newly arrived immigrants with minimal English language skills who want to go to high school should do, Zeshan, a high school student, said: “One needs to pass the GED test, which will be equivalent to high school.” General Educational Development (GED) tests are a group of five rigorous subject tests, which (when passed) certifies that the student has high school level academic skills.

Like Zeshan, who was raised in Brooklyn and was not aware of Internationals Network for Public Schools, Shahbaz Ahmed, who recently immigrated to the United States along with her

18-year-old daughter, did not know that this group of schools offers a good opportunity for her daughter to be educated despite her minimal English-language skills.

In fact, many immigrants, especially those who are entering as freshmen in high school, are not well-informed about these schools.

“We have nine more schools like the one at Prospect Heights in New York City and all of them are part of the Department of Education (DOE),” said Dr. Claire E. Sylvan, executive director of the Internationals Network for Public Schools (INPS). She further added, “INPS, in partnership with local schools, supports 10 public high schools New York City, three of which are in Brooklyn, and one in Oakland, California.

“Internationals have almost tripled the number of affiliated high schools since 2004, while sustaining a dynamic network in order to ensure the schools’ continued success in providing recent immigrant English Language Learners (ELLs) with a high quality education and pathways to college,” Dr. Sylvan told a group of ethnic reporters at a meeting at International High School at Prospect Heights.

A study about quality education for English Language Learners in New York City conducted by the New York Immigration Coalition states that English Language Learners nationwide face huge obstacles in achieving academic success. About two-thirds of children who have not learned English are living in poverty, compared to only one-third of English-proficient children.

The report further states that ELLs who were not born in the United States face additional obstacles: not only must they learn a new language, but they must also adjust to a new country and school system – all the while trying to catch up academically to meet graduation and promotion requirements.

The findings of the ELL report show that they are not a monolithic population. They come from a variety of backgrounds with a diversity of skills and needs that will impact the type of programs and services they need. Thus, in planning ELL programs, it is important that schools compile and analyze the specific needs of elementary, middle and high school ELLs.

Vanessa Jerome, a 9th grader at International High School at Prospect Heights, says, “you don’t feel ‘humiliated’ if you don’t speak English at our school and everybody is being treated equally.” She added that she learns a lot due to the friendly environment.

Maria Santos, executive director of the Office of English Language Learners in the New York City Department of Education (DOE), told a group of ethnic reporters that during the 2008-2009 academic year, 14 percent of student populations in public schools are ELLs, 41 percent report speaking a language other than English at home and 6 percent of the student population, almost 63,350, consist of newly arrived immigrants.

“Twenty-eight percent of ELLs are in high school (9-12),” she said, adding that 57 percent of these ELLs are native born and 43 percent are foreign born.

Ms. Santos urged the reporters to provide more detail about the high schools, so that parents, students and families could make well-informed decisions when choosing where to send their children to high school.

The New York Immigration Coalition emphasizes the needs of immigrant high school students and says in its report that high school ELLs also tend to be recent émigrés who often need targeted support to help them adjust and meet graduation standards in a shorter span of time. High schools that are successful with ELLs often incorporate trained guidance counselors and dropout prevention programs in their ELL plans.

Surprisingly, the high school graduation rate of INPS schools is higher than regular public schools.

“It’s because all the resources are being spent on a particular population of students,” said Deputy Chancellor Eric Nadelstern, who currently oversees the DOE’s Division of School Support.

“What I appreciate about Internationals schools is the holistic approach to the students. We don’t place instruction in one box and a student’s personal issues in another box,” says Lee Pan, principal at International High School

at LaGuardia Community College. “We can take care of students as one whole person. Similarly, at Internationals schools, there is no division of responsibility for teaching a student English and teaching him or her subject content.”

“English proficiency was a problem before coming to International School at Prospect Heights, but not anymore,” said Vanessa Jerome, adding, “I am looking forward to going to college after graduating from high school.”

“Schools in the network are much more focused on the future of the students,” said Ms. Nedda de Castro, assistant principal at the Prospect Heights school. “We put a lot of time in and out of the classroom helping our students explore, select, and apply for college and scholarships.”

Ms. de Castro told reporters that they expect every student to apply to college. “We also help each student complete their college financial aid forms. This year, we have at least five students who have been granted full scholarships to attend the college of their choice.”

Sahrash Azam, who has been at the school for three years, wears traditional Muslim outfits and a hijab, a Muslim head scarf. “It happened a few times that my schoolmates cursed but when they saw me, they apologized, because they even respect religious values at this school,” she commented.

When she came from Pakistan, she was good in every subject area except English. Now that she has overcome her English-language obstacle, she expects a bright future ahead of her.

“DOE’s international schools: a place for recent immigrant students”
was the **SECOND PLACE WINNER** in the
BEST COVERAGE ON EDUCATION ISSUES
category at the **2009 IPPIES AWARDS**.



POLISH

LIBERTY HIGH SCHOOL BILINGUAL PROGRAM A SUCCESS FOR IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

BY ALEKSANDRA SLABISZ, NOWY DZIENNIK

SEPTEMBER 1, 2009



Anna Laszko, 18, came to the United States almost three years ago to reunite with her father who had lived here for 10 years. She spoke little English and had no idea about the high school system in New York, so she enrolled at a school her father's friend recommended. "When I first came to school I felt a bit alone, but soon I recognized some Polish kids and it was easier, because we spoke the same language," she says. In the first year, she took a language class with

Miss Gorska, which was taught in both Polish and English. "The class teaches you the basics, helps you assimilate, and go through the transition to the new language," says Laszko, who is now in 11th grade and can easily communicate complex ideas in English.

Anna Laszko attends Liberty High School Academy for Newcomers in Manhattan – a public school that caters to newly-arrived, often non-English speaking immigrant students. It is

the only high school in New York City offering a bilingual Polish-English program along with a similar one for Spanish- and Chinese-speaking students.

Seven years ago, Liberty High evolved from a one-year language institution for newcomers into a four-year program with a regular high school curriculum. It helps students learn the language, transition to the American school system, and, sometimes, to school in general.

“Our commitment is to have them graduate in four, sometimes five, years by teaching them English, get all the necessary credits that they need to graduate, and prepare them for the five Regents exams they have to take in order to graduate,” says Robert Ball, one of the school’s guidance counselors.

The school enjoys an above-average graduation rate. “About 75 students out of 86 seniors graduated this June and another handful will graduate in the summer and in January,” says Melodee Khristen, the principal, admitting that some students do drop out, but among this group are students who moved to a different state or went back to their country.

Arriving in New York unable to speak English and not understanding the city school system, students find out about Liberty High by word of mouth, or are sent there from other high schools, which cannot accommodate them. Because it is considered a transfer school, in order to register, the students do not need to go through the DOE enrollment center; they can come directly to the school.

The school does not do screening. It accepts all teenagers who are 18-years-old and younger with various education histories, as long as they have not attended school in the United States and are willing to start in the ninth grade. The school accepts from teenage literacy students – ones with an interrupted education who may have only a fifth-grade education – to gifted students, who are well ahead of their peers at schooling.

“I was 12 when I arrived here from the Dominican Republic and had already finished eighth grade. In other high schools in the city, they wanted to place me in seventh or eighth grade. This was the only high school that accepted

me to the ninth grade, in spite of my age and lack of English,” says Liz de La Cruz, who was taught by her parents to read, write and do math before she went to school. Now, at 16, she is a senior and ready to graduate.

Liberty High has just over 400 students. The school size makes the students feel comfortable and makes it possible to give them the attention they need. “Coming to school here is like coming from one home to another. We know one another and the teachers know our names, unlike in other city schools with 1,000 or 2,000 kids,” says Anna Laszko. “They care and make us feel important,” says Raisa Cremona, a ninth grader, who came from Brazil a year ago.

The students come from 50 different countries and speak 30 different languages. It is in diversity, though, where they find equality and a sense of belonging to the school community. “We each feel we are part of the bunch,” says de La Cruz, who is attending Baruch College this fall, not only because it is an affordable college but also because she finds its diverse atmosphere similar to the one at Liberty. “I’d feel like an outcast if everyone was the same besides me, and if there are no people from different backgrounds there,” says de La Cruz.

Students at Liberty value the life lesson they get growing up in a medley of languages and cultures. “In regular schools, they also learn, but they are missing what we have here: that everybody is from a different country, and we are learning from one another,” says Cremona, who is considering a career in diplomacy because of her passion for languages and the exposure to other cultures she got at Liberty High.

It is in diversity also where they find safety. “In other schools, when you are a stranger from another country, they will try to provoke you or mess around with you. Here, we do not do that. It is a safe place, with no fights,” says Mohammed Bayo from Guinea. “We realize we are from different cultures; we respect that and we do not question beliefs other people have,” Cremona says.

Unlike other international schools that may be grouping the more advanced students with the newcomers, at Liberty High, the new students

are carefully assigned to groups depending on their level of English and education. “It’s a block-building approach that works well for our students,” the principal says.

When they first come to the school, speaking no English, they tend to stick to peers from their countries. Eventually, though, all end up mastering English. The bilingual and extensive ESL program enables students to transition smoothly into regular English classes as well as content area classes of mathematics, social studies and science. All courses at Liberty High are designed specifically for English Language Learners.

Some people argue that bilingual programs are a slow transition into the new language and culture; however, according to Izabela Gorska, a teacher who designed the bilingual Polish program at Liberty High, it may be true in the case where a student is kept fulltime for several years in a bilingual program. “At Liberty the students attend the bilingual classes only in the first two semesters of the ninth grade,” she says. They take the Native Language Arts, where they may read books in their native language but also are taught American culture, and become accustomed to the new school system. For World History, for instance, the students read American textbooks, but the discussions are conducted in their own language.

“From the psychological point of view, the bilingual class provides students with a chance to express themselves in their native language, which makes it easier for them to show what they know. That releases stress associated with coping with a high school curriculum in a foreign language, and builds their confidence,” Gorska says.

Speaking various languages and being immigrants themselves, the teachers are a match for the students. Many of them know what it is like to be a newcomer. “I came here 19 years ago not knowing the language, so I understand all the frustrations the students face. Coming to this country with three school-age children, I know how the parent feels having to talk to teachers and not understand them,” she says. She mentions that getting a degree in bilingual education completed her life experience with skills on how to teach this

specific population effectively.

School counselors and teachers assist the immigrant students in solving the many crises they are going through when they arrive to the United States. “Some of them may not have seen their father or mother since they were 2-years-old, so there are the bonding issues. The reunion is especially difficult if the parent has a new spouse and there is a new sibling involved,” Ball says. There is adaptation to the new school, a change of country, and adolescence and family issues. Finding new friends and missing relatives left back at home, and balancing between school and work are just some examples of the problems students confront.

“We work through the situation with the student. Sometimes listening and being there for the student is enough. At other times, we bring parents in to talk. We also try to find services in the community and refer certain cases out,” says Ball, who used to teach ESL and history. But teaching, he says, was “just a tip of the iceberg and I felt there were other issues in the way that I had to take care of.”

Following the state curriculum guidelines, the school adjusts the strategy and methodology of teaching to the particular group of students who comes in in a given year. “The population may change every single year. What we have this year may be completely different next year. We do not know what their language or backgrounds will be, what support at home they’ve had in terms of previous schooling. But our mission is to serve this population,” says principal Khristen.

But not all is perfect. De la Cruz mentions the lack of Advanced Placement classes. Others, both students and administrators, say they could use a bigger gym or cafeteria. “They need play time to get the energy out. We have physical education, but if we had a real gymnasium and a soccer field, that would be incredible,” the principal says. When students were asked if they would go to a school next door that has all the amenities, they reply: “only if everybody else went too.”

They develop their special talents and utilize the excess of energy in various after-school programs, like the drama and music clubs, bowling and the basketball team. Students run

their own newspaper and a student government, which advocates for improvements in the school and organizes student activities, like a variety talent show.

Liberty High received an A on the most recent report card and five points extra credit for closing the achievement gap. Almost 80 percent of Liberty High graduates go to college.

“We have had success stories. One of my former students, who began as a literacy student, now goes to SUNY. There are, of course, those who don’t make it that high,” says Ball.

“We get a lot of homework – a lot more than in our countries,” says Laszko, but admits that because they are English Language Learners, they need to make that extra effort.

SAFETY

Safety in schools is diverse and complicated. It is not just protecting students from bullying or violence, it also concerns matters that affect lives beyond the classroom, including the military, lack of healthy foods, and sex education.

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INDIAN

SIKH STUDENTS STILL BEAR BRUNT OF HATE ATTACKS

BY SUJEET RAJAN, INDIAN EXPRESS

APRIL 3, 2009

A new school policy put in place in September 2008 by Joel Klein, chancellor of the New York City Department of Education, after a spate of hate crimes and racial taunting of Sikh students has been taken seriously by principals of high schools and minority advocacy groups, with widespread efforts to preach tolerance, equality and respect for all. But fresh investigations this year reveal that a string of bullying and abuse continue against Sikh students.

Last summer, Sikhs in New York got incensed by a series of attacks against students from the community. Sikhs, for religious reasons, wear turbans on their heads and keep long beards, which to the uninitiated might bear an uncanny resemblance to members of the Taliban, including Osama bin Laden.

Under the principles of their faith, Sikhs are mandated to leave all hair on their bodies uncut, wrapping the hair on their heads underneath a turban. Most Sikh youth keep long hair, with teenage boys sporting a smaller turban, called a patka. Sikhism is the fifth largest religion in the world, with approximately 21 million adherents worldwide.

In June last year, Gurprit Kaur, a student at Public School 219 in Flushing, Queens, discovered that another student had cut off a portion of her hair and discarded it. This followed on the heels of another attack on a Sikh boy, Jagmohan Singh Premi, who was punched in the face after a student intentionally attempted to

remove his patka at Richmond Hill High School.

There were widespread protests; hundreds of Sikhs and their well-wishers marched to Richmond Hill High School. The protestors demanded that the city take action to specifically protect Sikh students from bias-based harassment. Council Member John Liu, a member of the Council Education Committee, expressed his displeasure, saying that the Department of Education's (DOE) "inaction in the face of repeated bias attacks in our public schools is utterly reprehensible."

According to Sikh advocacy groups, the two incidents last summer were not isolated, but part of a widespread abuse of Sikh students that rarely comes up in the mainstream media.

The Sikh Coalition found that children from the community are particularly vulnerable to bias-based harassment. They released a civil rights report, *Making Our Voices Heard: A Civil Rights Agenda for New York City Sikhs*, which found that more than 60 percent of over 400 Sikh students that the Coalition surveyed had suffered bias-based harassment or violence in city schools.

The DOE finally took action. Klein personally expressed regret to Premi, the victim at Richmond Hill High School, and announced the drafting of a new 'Chancellor's regulation' against racial bias. Last September, a no-tolerance bullying and racial harassment policy was put in place, with suspension from school for culprits.

So how well is the new policy working this

year?

The Sikh Coalition agrees that the policy has been put in place and schools are trying their best to implement it in spirit, but point out evidence that attacks continue against Sikh students, many of which go unreported.

Amardeep Singh, executive director of the Sikh Coalition, says that the organization has been busy this year as more schools are agreeing to have volunteers give presentations on Sikhism and on the religious practices of Sikh students. But he laments that attacks against Sikh students continue. “There have been some incidents but they have not been made public as of yet and we have been working with DOE officials,” said Singh, who made available for perusal some documents that suggest attacks against Sikh students. The official DOE data on all incidents of racial harassment of students, including against Sikh students, will be finalized only by the end of the school year – by the end of May – said Margie Feinberj, spokesperson for the DOE. She said that she was not allowed to give out any details before then.

“The regulation is working and there is a great deal of interest in the ‘respect for all’ program but there is no final data,” said Feinberj. “We are finalizing data but the regulation is useful to schools to curb bullying,” she added.

She said that principals across New York City schools brief faculty, students and parents through a newsletter on the new policy, and have placed emphasis on fresh training programs to schools to explain to staff and students about intolerance to bullying against minority students.

She said that all staff in the DOE’s 1,500 schools was trained last September on the new policy that was put into effect and all students are trained to honor the “discipline code and respect for all policies.”

At a press conference last September, attended by journalists from the ethnic media who focus on education issues, Klein said that the new policy was taught to all age groups, through the grades in the DOE. He had said that schools were told “to be tough” with those who bully other students.

Singh said that going forward with those

new regulations and policies, the Coalition was holding regular workshops and has published a set of glossy handouts in English and Punjabi, which were being distributed at several places, including city schools, to educate the masses about Sikhism.

“Nothing much has changed though,” he quickly added. According to documents and letters exchanged between some of the Coalition members and school principals and DOE, there are at least two glaring examples of racial abuse against Sikh students since the new policy was put in place.

One of the documents says that a Coalition member, Sonny Singh, learned about an incident of ongoing harassment of Sikh students at P.S. 161, after a meeting with a student at the gurdwara on 118th Street in Richmond Hill, Queens.

The document says that an 11-year-old fifth grader at P.S. 161, Alovepreet Singh, reported to Sonny Singh that he was harassed in November 2009, called derogatory names, and encountered unwanted touching of his turban from another student. He reported it to his teacher who he says did nothing about it.

“He’s very upset that no action was taken at all. Neither he nor any witnesses were interviewed nor any written statements were produced,” writes Sonny Singh in his report on the incident.

Alovepreet, he said, is also concerned about what other Sikh students at his school are encountering. He writes that the teenager told him about an incident he witnessed recently where a group of students were making fun of another Sikh boy, taunting him by calling him “egghead.” One of the harassers told the Sikh boy, “That looks like a baseball on your head. I’m going to go get a bat and hit it off your head.”

The Sikh Coalition took action following Sonny Singh’s report and a presentation was given at P.S. 161. Manbeena Kaur, a Coalition spokesperson, said that the principal at the school was “very nice and wanted to invite us back for future presentations to both the school and faculty.”

A letter written by the principal of P.S. 161, Jill Hoder, applauds the Sikh Coalition for giving

a presentation at the school, saying that “you delivered an assembly program that our students will not forget.”

She adds, “Now that the students have obtained a greater awareness of the Sikh culture, they will be better prepared to accept those who are different from them. I am assured that those who had been targeted for wearing the traditional patka will now feel better understood by their peers.”

Another incident occurred at M.S. 72 in Jamaica, Queens, on December 12, 2008. The Coalition was apprised by the alleged victim, an 11-year-old Sikh boy, at a gurdwara in Richmond Hill, Queens.

Jasleen Singh, 11, a seventh grade student, reported that he was violently threatened and harassed by a group of other students who called him derogatory names because of his religion and race.

Jasleen wears a patka. He reported that he was physically assaulted and pushed around, apart from being threatened. He also said that bullies often forcibly pull off Sikh boys’ patkas at his school.

He reported the incident to the principal and vice principal of the school but says they have not taken any action.

One of the “problem schools,” according to the Coalition, is Richmond Hill High School, which since June 2007 (when they released their report, *Hatred in the Hallways*, on bias against Sikh school children in New York City), has fared poorly when it comes to protecting Sikh students.

In April 2008, the Sikh Coalition discussed Richmond Hill High School in its report, *Making Our Voices Heard*. The Coalition found that over half of all Sikh students at Richmond Hill High who responded to their survey reported being harassed at school. It is the same school where Jagmohan Singh Premi was attacked last summer, prompting Klein to put the new policy in place.

In an interview, Richmond Hill High School Principal Frances DeSanctis said that the new policy put in place by Klein is working and no new incidents have come to light yet this school year. She is optimistic that some of the new rules she has put in place are helping the school cope

with racial attacks against Sikh students but denies that the school has ever been a problem one.

“The Jagmohan Singh Premi case was an isolated one,” said DeSanctis. Premi has transferred to another school, she confirmed. He never came back after the beating he received.

“Well, one of the first things we did was to have some training, for the staff and students, to create awareness in our classrooms about bullying, defamation and to show respect for all,” she said. “We have spoken about this constantly throughout the school year.”

She said that the school has put up barricades around the school to make sure the students stay in and outsiders cannot get in. They have put up numerous signs around the school to show tolerance and respect.

Although she did not have the exact number of Sikh students at the school, DeSanctis said that about 38 percent of a total of 3,500 students are of South Asian origin.

“The incident that happened, the Premi incident, was terrible. No kind of any bias will be tolerated in this building. Sikh students now feel comfortable,” she said.

ARAB

COLLEGE OR THE ARMY? DOE FACILITATES MILITARY RECRUITERS ACCESS TO NYC STUDENT DATA

BY RACHEL MILLARD, ARAMICA

MAY 18, 2009

Fatima Saleh remembers the afternoon last year when her son, Ahmed, 17, came home from school and told her he'd met with a U.S. Army recruiter during his lunch period. The recruiter asked Ahmed, then a senior at downtown Brooklyn's K429 high school, if he'd ever thought of joining the military. He told the teen, an Egyptian American, that with his Arabic language skills and cultural awareness, he could make a real difference in places like Iraq.

The thought of her boy going off to war stunned Saleh.

"He's too young to join the Army," she said.

Now that Army recruiters have access to a central database of student information, stories like that of the Saleh family are becoming all too common in New York City's Arab-American community.

Arab-American students, such as Ahmed, are particularly sought after because they speak the language and understand the cultures the United States engages in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In September of 2008, the Department of Education (DOE), made a policy change allowing army recruiters, seeking to fill a wartime quota of 80,000 new active troops and 26,500 new reservists annually, to contact students directly, unbeknownst to their parents and teachers. The move is drawing fresh ire in the city, adding to the longstanding debate over whether to allow military recruiters into public schools. It has also drawn calls for the DOE to abandon support for the Army-run

extracurricular program, Junior Reserves Officer Training Corps (JROTC).

The new DOE policy centralizes contact information for all high school students. Even though federal law requires schools to provide this information to military recruiters, the new policy makes it easier for recruiters, who no longer have to go to individual schools, where they often encountered resistance from principals. Recruiters can now contact students independently, often aggressively, targeting lower income or immigrant families to make pitches that are filled with false guarantees of paid college tuition or expedited citizenship.

Those opposed to the policy are focusing on letting students know about a form that keeps their information from recruiters. They say sometimes schools fail to distribute or explain this form.

"In my experience, students and parents don't know the opt-out form exists," says Sabira Ramsaran, 17, a student at downtown Brooklyn's K483 and a member of the YaYa network, a youth activist group in Manhattan focusing on what it calls counter-recruiting. "I've personally had to confront my principal about providing it," Ramsaran said.

K483 principal Shannon Curran said she felt that the opt-out forms had been sufficiently distributed and explained, through student advisory classes at the beginning of the year. She said she had received an e-mail about providing the form from Ramsaran, and said she "must have been unaware" of their distribution.

In a letter responding to concerns from the American Civil Liberties Union, DOE Deputy Chancellor of Finance and Administration Kathleen Grimm said that the DOE centralized the student database so that it could monitor the provision of opt-out forms, and lessen the number of school disruptions by recruiters approaching them individually for information.

The DOE's Lilian Garelick, who is responsible for ensuring that schools comply with federal law in providing the information to the Army, described the schools' response to the new system as generally "favorable," but said there has been no official survey to follow up on the provision of opt-out forms since the policy change.

The DOE has not kept track of the number of students who join the military each year either, nor of how many students have opted out of the database. It is now finalizing such data for the first time.

End Junior ROTC

Meanwhile, some recruitment opponents are targeting the Junior ROTC programs that are operating in nine city high schools. They say it's a de facto Army recruiting program.

Barbara Harris, a retired teacher and peace advocate with the Granny Peace Brigade, said she has met several times with City Councilman Robert Jackson, chair of the Education Committee, to discuss doing away with the JROTC in New York City. Harris believes there is no place for the military in schools. "Books, not bombs," is her motto.

JROTC representatives say the program is far from a recruitment path. They say it is designed to instill in students qualities such as leadership, personal responsibility and a sense of accomplishment. They allege that its members graduate at a higher rate and have less disciplinary problems than non-participants.

"Some principals will tell you this is the only bright spot in a criminal public education system," said LT. Col. Ret. Roy Campbell, head of JROTC at Xaverian High, a private school in Brooklyn's Bay Ridge neighborhood.

He said that criticism of the military's presence in schools rises out of philosophical and political differences on the role of the military and war.

"They [the critics] see death and destruction,"

Campbell said. "They don't see preservation of freedom and the promotion of civic duty and selfless service."

Recruitment opponents say their problem is not with the Army, but rather with a mentality that encourages students to join simply because they flee from other options that would enable them to afford college and have successful careers. Opponents say the DOE should ensure that students can make informed choices as they prepare to leave high school.

"A lot of students don't know that there are plenty of ways to pay for college," says Tracey Hobbs, 16, a student at Bedford-Stuyvesant Preparatory (K575). "There's lots of grants out there that people don't know how to access."

A key argument used by counter-recruiters is that college tuition is not 100 percent guaranteed after serving in the Army.

"We see from looking into the experiences of recruits that conditions are often applied to the provision of money for college at a later date," says Malika Evans, 17, a student at Manhattan's Urban Academy.

"There needs to be an advisor inside every school, equipped to talk to students about joining the military and other options," Ramsaran said.

Principal James O'Brien, of Brooklyn Community Arts and Media High, is launching a program there that will train 15 students to talk with their peers about career options other than the military.

"As our students become young adults and are making crucial life decisions, it is essential that we give them enough information to make good, responsible, safe and healthy decisions," O'Brien said.

Ahmed considered the military option, but after talking it over with his parents and finding out other ways to afford school, he set his sights on college and a career in marketing.

But making the decision was tough. Ahmed was especially torn at the prospect of one day being called upon to fight for Uncle Sam against fellow Arabs or Muslims in Iraq or Afghanistan.

Ahmed's mother is relieved.

"It's too much to think that he might go to war," Saleh said. "It's not what we imagined for our son when we came to America."

CHINESE

NO PASS AT SCHOOL FOR IMMIGRANT PARENTS WITHOUT OFFICIAL ID

BY RONG XIAOQING, SING TAO

JUNE 30, 2009

When X. Zang, a 36-year-old waitress from Fujian Province in China, listens to her co-workers talk about their American dreams, the image of her six-year-old daughter, Erica, always flashes through her mind.

“When I was younger, I dreamed of a lot of things, but when I had Erica, she became the only reason I wanted to stay in the United States. I want her to get a good education and get into a good college,” said Zhang, who wanted to be identified only by her first initial and last name.

Once a middle school drop-out who was forced out by her family’s financial woes, Zhang cannot help but imagine what Erica’s classroom looks like every morning when she sends Erica to her school, P.S. 1 in Chinatown. She always stops at the gate of the school building to kiss her daughter goodbye.

Never, not even once, has she entered the building because she is undocumented and is not able to present the official ID that the school’s security guards would require: “I really want to attend the school activities just like other parents do. I want Erica to feel I care about her education. But sometimes I feel like a fugitive who won’t be welcomed into the school,” said Zhang, who only has a Chinese passport as I.D. with no valid American visa on it. “I definitely don’t want to show it to any uniformed people,” said Zhang.

Zhang’s pain is shared by many other undocumented immigrant parents, a recently released report indicated. The report, conducted

by the advocacy organization Advocates for Children of New York, focuses on the barriers that affect immigrant parents’ involvement in their children’s education. The ID issue is at the top of the list, along with language barriers, lack of encouragement and responsiveness, and inaccessibility of parent associations and school leadership teams.

“Participants reported that when immigrant parents attempt to visit their children’s schools, they face barriers that begin at the front door. The presence of security guards at the front door requesting identification creates a physical barrier to parent access, particularly for immigrant parents who may not have official ID,” said the report, based on the interviews and surveys of dozens of immigrant parents and representatives from 10 community-based organizations.

“Parents’ involvement in school is very important to the success of students, especially for the English Language Learners whose dropout rate is high,” said Arlen Benjamin-Gomez, one of the authors of the report. “But parents need I.D. to get into the school to meet the principal, to attend school activities, or to pick up their kids. And many communities have a large undocumented population and sometimes even citizens may not have an official ID, especially in low-income communities.”

There are 500,000 undocumented immigrants in the city. Nobody seems to know the exact number of parents who don’t have any type of

ID. The ID issue has been bothering immigrant parents for a long time, as principals and DOE officials keep hearing such anecdotes. The issue has long been overlooked until the report brought it into the limelight.

Under the Bloomberg administration, the DOE has made some progress in enhancing parents' involvement in the recent years. It provides more translated documents to immigrant parents than ever before. Three years ago, it started to survey the parents annually, seeking their opinions about their children's schools. And in April, the DOE launched an online voting system, enabling parents, for the first time, to participate in the election of the Community Education Council members.

But the Mayor, who single-handedly controls education, seems to have his hands tied on the ID issue – he cannot help undocumented parents get an official ID, and neither can he loosen the security check at the school gate, which is necessary for the safety of students.

Nevertheless, advocates have come up with an innovative idea. The report calls upon the DOE to create a parent identification card that is recognized within the school system.

Benjamin-Gomez said this method has been tried successfully at a smaller scale – a middle school in St. Louis issued the so-called “VIP Card” to parents, which they can use as an ID at the school gate. A community organization in Brooklyn that serves Hispanic immigrants also created a similar membership photo ID for parents, which is often accepted at the school gate. Benjamin-Gomez said that now, it is a priority for her organization to push the DOE to weigh in.

The idea is highly commended by immigrant communities, including the Chinese. “A lot of people thought new immigrant parents were reluctant to get involved in their kids' education. That's not true. A lot of times, they are held back by the technical barriers such as the ID issue,” said Kenny Chan, executive vice president of Fukien American Association, an organization that serves the Fujianese, a subgroup of the Chinese community with a high number of undocumented immigrants. “If the DOE can help on this, I'm sure you'll see more Chinese parents

attending the PTA meetings and school activities.”

The schools like the idea too. At Erica's school, P.S. 1, 70 percent of the students are Asian and about half of them are from Fujianese families. The school encounters parents who don't have an ID every now and then, said Amy Hom, the school's principal.

If the parents could prove their identity (say by naming the teachers of the child), Hom said, she will make an exception and let them in. But many times, parents are just too frightened when they were stopped by the security guards and they'd simply leave without asking for help from the principal.

“If you don't allow parents to get into the building, you are sending a message that you don't care,” said Hom. “To issue school IDs to the parents is a good idea, but we cannot afford it. Our budget is tight. But if you could have the DOE do it, I'd be very excited.”

So far, the DOE response has been positive. “It's incredibly important to get parents involved in education. We've been working to make it easier. [Issuing parents an ID] is something we are strongly considering,” said William Havemann, a spokesman for the DOE. Havemann said the DOE has learned about the ID issue on an anecdotal basis and has taken notes of the recommendation of the report. But the agency has to think about the costs as well, and there is no timetable for it to move forward.

For Nancy Liu, mother of an 8-year-old boy who is in a similar situation as Zhang, Erica's mother, a solution soon would be good. “I hope this is not one of those things that get discussed and then forgotten. Kids grow up quickly. If [the DOE] doesn't take action quickly, it could be too late,” said Liu.

LATINO

CAN THE DOE RESPOND TO TEEN PREGNANCY ISSUE?

BY MARÍA FERNANDA HUBEAUT, NEW YORK DE DÍA

JUNE 30, 2010

She stood holding a baby in her arms while she sent text messages. The 14-year-old, slim and dressed like any other teenager, was attending the mothers' support group at Families in Action (Familias en Acción), an organization that helps teens learn how to care for their babies. She looked so young, like she should have been in school instead of at an organization, and it was surprising when she announced, "This is my baby son."

This scene is a common situation in our communities in New York City.

In the United States, 700,000 teenagers will become pregnant and more than half of children under the age of 21 will contract some sexually transmitted disease during the coming year, according to the organization Planned Parenthood. Furthermore, according to a statement by the research agency, Guttmacher, "this problem is growing among all ethnic and racial groups."

In New York, specifically in the Latino communities in Washington Heights and Harlem, this topic goes beyond public school. Even though nobody talks about it, "it is alive and manifests



itself daily," said Dominican psychologist Rosa Lavergne, director of the organization Families in Action.

"We have a mix of cultures in this area – Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Venezuelans, Afro-Americans – and we are trying to help them with our support groups, because there are families who need assistance to understand the system due to social, economic and cultural differences. Sex is a part of this reality," explained Lavergne.

Sex education in public school is still an issue with no solution and public authorities are reluctant to talk about it. Many calls to school administrations, teachers, and principals went unanswered.

There are many gaps, no concrete actions. Perhaps it is a response to the strong policy of morality and abstinence executed during the last decade. While New York City is known as the Mecca of liberalism, the subject of sex education in its public school system remains untouchable, despite the urgent need to address it.

Eric Nadelstern, New York City's chief school officer expressed: "America is a Puritan country. We do our best to provide sex education in high school, we provide condoms to the students if they ask for them and the parents don't say no,

but I agree with you, we do a terrible job. We also don't have the power of community support to protect our educators. That is the reason why we have an abstinence program; we get better community support. This is a critical and major issue."

The difficulty of addressing sex education also resides in the communities themselves, according to Lavergne. "In this community, we have a high number of pregnant teenagers between 13- and 19-years-old. Parents deny it until things happen." Lavergne refers to the difficulty that parents have understanding when their children are sexually active. Because they deny this reality and do not talk to them beforehand, bad consequences result. "This situation and the organization's workshops are a process through which we are analyzing their behavior and breaking past barriers so they do not feel guilty and can face the situation in a healthy way," she adds.

"The parents' mistake is not talking in advance with their kids and not knowing how to communicate," says Nérida Roa, a Dominican mother with two children, 24 and 15. "I remember when my son asked me, when he was 10-years-old, why people have sex and I responded without paying attention: 'To have fun.' And he told me: 'So I want to have fun too.' Then I realized that I should not address the topic so lightly. Therefore, I started to explain it to him more. When I had Tiffany, I was already prepared, but I still see her as being younger than she is. As a parent, one is always waiting for the right time, because one sees them always as children and they are not, and then one is surprised by how much they learn outside the home. Because of this, we have to participate in school and avoid surprises," says Nérida. She adds: "It is important to show support for these classes, even during this time when they have to cut the budget and can offer them only as electives."

Roa's daughter Tiffany talks to her mother, but she feels more comfortable at school "talking about it with her schoolmates because she feels that it is her own environment," says the mother.

"To give a condom to the parents so they give it to their children is an extreme step for some people. Some of them have never seen or used

one. We are not only trying to prevent pregnancy but also AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases," says Lavergne. She adds: "We have to listen to the youth, understand their codes, their music and their technology. There is the key, because they want to participate actively in their own learning process. They are more radical and they confront us directly, something that their parents' generation does not know how to take. For them, the school speech is a myth and just bla bla bla. The Internet provides a safe distance but at the same time, too much freedom too soon, causing problems especially for girls, because they become involved in relationships with older and married men. The attitude that 'you got yourself pregnant and now you have the baby,' together with cultural and religious pressure to avoid the subject of sex, have to stop. We have to humanize sex education so it can be something healthy that contributes to the development and protection of teenagers, so they can be responsible for their own lives."

Families in Action invite different types of professionals to interact with families and address the topics the community needs. Ana Jiménez, a social worker specializing in the topic of sex education, has offered a series of presentations to parents.

In the beginning, the parents are a little bit closed to the topic; they feel uncomfortable and joke about it," says Jiménez. "But when we start to tell them how the topic has been addressed previously, almost all the women at the workshop recognize that nobody has ever talked to them about it, not even at school. They have never had sex education; it was taboo so nobody talked about it. So when they came to this country and they see how sex education is taught to their children here, they feel uncomfortable and bothered because they feel they have to talk first with their children. There were certain things that they did not want to talk about, because they had not yet been talked about at home."

INDIAN

IMMIGRANT STUDENTS REVEAL ORDEAL AT SCHOOL

BY SUDHIR VYAS, INDO US NEWS ONLINE

AUGUST 13, 2010

Harshal Shah, a 17-year-old boy originally from India, walks into the Queens school with a brand new school bag, tiffin [Indian lunch box] and well-ironed clothes after having been dropped off by his parents. He has set himself new goals, has new ideas, a new vision and dreams of a bright future that lies ahead.

The first day passes off uneventfully, and at the end of the school day, he walks out wandering into the unknown. Days, weeks pass by and Harshal grows nervous. He keeps to himself at school and at home, his interaction with his parents has come to a bare minimum.

One afternoon, almost two months into the school semester, Harshal does not return home at the stipulated time. The daily check-in telephone call from his mother does not get any answer. Worried, she returns home early only to find the house door still locked. She calls up her husband at work and he too runs back home in time to see a dejected, tired and drained out Harshal walk in. He tells his parents he does not want to go to school the next day.

After persistent questioning, the 17-year-old breaks down. "It has been almost two months in school and I have no one to talk to. I do not enjoy school. Let's go back to India," he says leaving his parents totally numb by the suggestion made by the otherwise playful, talkative and fun-loving child. "School is no fun here. There is no one I can talk to. I am unable to make friends. I tried and tried but failed as I was left out. What do I

do? Where do I go?" he asked his harried parents, who are both working to make ends meet.

"I had observed that the boy was becoming reserved and his interaction was getting limited, but brushed it off as a passing phase which would go with time. However, after almost a month, Harshal's interaction with us almost stopped," observed Jyotsna Shah, Harshal's mother. "He would just answer us in one-liners or just avoid a conversation. Worried over the situation, I tried talking to him, but as usual he avoided my questions and conversation. Unable to understand the sudden change in my son, I decided to go and meet the school teacher who too came up with the same issue saying, 'The boy seems to be moody and does not interact with the other children.'"

If Harshal became reserved and kept to himself, prodding about how to cope up with the strange situation developing at school, 15-year-old Shahnawaz Mohammed was scared to the bone due to the couple of incidents at his IS 145 School in Jackson Heights.

"We migrated from Pakistan last year and I started going to school. After our introduction on the first day," recounts Shahnawaz, "a couple of students from my class and others surrounded me at the end of the day and called out to me saying, 'Hey Paki, what made you come here?'" Perplexed by the strange question, Shahnawaz replied, "I immigrated with my parents and my brother for a better life here."

“The reply evoked strange mischievous laughter from the boy and from then on, my ordeal started,” he said, with tears and fright in his eyes. “School life soon turned sour and I feared the worst. I asked my father to pick me up everyday after school, which he could do for a couple of days but later, gave up as it did not fit his schedule.

“The trek back home was scary and my worst nightmare came true on a Friday evening when I was surrounded by a couple of students who threatened me to fall in line – I still do not know what that means – or else face the worst day of my life. My dad reported the incident to the school authorities, who promised to look into the matter. But nothing happened and the harassment increased with each passing day, forcing me to leave the school and seek admission elsewhere.”

Harshal and Shahnawaz are just two of the countless children from the Indian subcontinent and immigrant families who are victims of a sudden drastic change of environment at school, at home and even socially. Despite their best efforts, they find themselves out of place in the new environment at school, with new settings, new teachers, new methods of studying, new medium of instruction and no one to give them a patient ear. After a tough day at school, these children do not find solace even at home as both the parents are at work and hardly have time to listen to the children’s concerns, problems, hopes and aspirations.

Anurag Patel, a child psychologist, is not surprised and says, “It is very common in immigrant children. Any group in the process of rapid change is beset with fears and apprehensions about the possible loss of the integrity of its culture. The individuals suffer conflicts and uncertainties about the adjustments that they will be required to make. There are millions of such children who feel insecure in a new environment. They feel at a complete loss.

“One of the biggest problems is the language barrier. The fear of speaking grammatically wrong English puts them off and keeps them back from interacting with others, even within the same age group, or with the teachers for fear of a reprimand. To make things worse, such children

do not find warmth at home from their parents, not because they do not love the child but due to their own pressing problems, both financial and social. They are so engrossed in their own daily problems that they forget about the child and his issues.”

According to the psychologist, “the issue has to be fought on two fronts: first, at home – with more interaction from the parents; and second, at school – with the teacher or student counselor who needs to walk the extra mile to ensure that these immigrant children are better understood, by accommodating their needs and answering their questions. A more humane approach is the only solution to the entire issue that has assumed ominous proportions.”

On the Shahnawaz issue, Mr. Patel said, “Nationality plays a big role these days, especially after what happened after 9/11.” He clarified saying, “Even though immigrants have made America their home, the link with their motherland remains intact and any adverse comment will be taken with a pinch of salt. Though children are innocent, those who are born and brought up here feel insecure; while they want to strive and be strong. Given their background, it is sometimes difficult. The immigrant child should create an environment around him whereby he is seen as a friend and not a foe, but school authorities should also play a more proactive role in this and ensure the safety of the child rather than allowing him to fend for himself.”

Repeated calls to Forest Hill High School (Q440) and Mrs. Goodman, the parent coordinator, were not returned.

KOREAN

DIVERSITY MIGHT BE THE ANSWER TO BULLYING

BY JINHWA JO, KOREA DAILY

AUGUST 20, 2010

Bullying has always been a problem in schools and even Gov. David Paterson wasn't immune. As a young boy, he was the victim of bullies until one day, he hit one of his attackers with his metal lunch box.

Now the governor has taken another sort of action against bullying. On Tuesday, September 8, Paterson signed the anti-bullying bill, the 'Dignity for All Students Act.' Under this law, school officials are obligated to report bullying-related incidents at school premises to state education department administrators.

Arne Duncan, secretary of the US Department of Education, hosted the first ever Bullying Prevention Summit in August. It gathered teachers, psychologists, and anti-bullying program professionals. Mr. Duncan pointed out that bullying is "ultimately an issue of school safety."

The New York City Department of Education (DOE) stepped up too. The DOE proposed to toughen the discipline code on cyber bullying this semester. If one cyber-bullies, he or she faces possible suspension.

Bullying is not foreign to Korean students. According to a recent report by the Korean American Behavioral Health Association, one out of three said they have experienced bullying. This report is based on the survey of 295 Korean kids in the New York metro area.

Korean students' bullying situation is not worse than the average American's. However, the

reason why they are being bullied is different. The majority of victims said they were bullied because of their nationality. It topped 29.1 percent. The second reason (24.4 percent) was appearance. However, bullies showed a different answer. They bullied kids because they were cowards.

Korean nationality and cowardliness cross the point, somehow. It's hard to deny the stereotype of Asian kids: shy, quiet, and easily embarrassed. For that reason, Korean kids have a long history of being the bullying victim. They would just endure the pain without a word.

Cyber bullying is growing, too. Twenty four percent of the respondents said they were bullied online or by text messages. The Pew Research Center released a similar result. One out of four kids said they were cyber bullied.

The problem is that kids don't necessarily know if they are bullied or not when it's cyber. They tend to think bullying is associated with physical attacks or public embarrassment.

Sung Min Yoon, who counsels mainly Korean American youngsters, notices this problem. One kid told him that she received online messages related to her boyfriend. Her friend wrote, "You're so stupid to have him as a boyfriend." She didn't think it was bullying, but Mr. Yoon thinks it is, especially when he anticipates its long term affect on her self esteem.

Even 'de-friending' on Facebook could be considered cyber bullying. Dr. Dorothy Espelage, a leading bullying scholar of University of Illinois

at Urbana-Champaign, says the definition of cyber bullying is still infant. “De-friending is cyber bullying? Or is it just freedom of expression? Lots of research needs to be done,” she explains.

Bullying gets complicated when the dating situation comes in. Recently, one kid from NYC who sent out his ex-girlfriend’s naked picture through text message got in trouble. The media called it cyber bullying. Dr. Espelage calls it sexual harassment. She said, “It’s illegal. I-L-L-E-G-A-L. I often advise kids that they can’t do this kind of thing if they want to go to college. If you’re a criminal, your future isn’t going to be easy.”

The NYC DOE has a pretty strong discipline code on bullying. It prohibits students from bullying for any reason from race, religion, gender to sexual orientation. Bullying includes physical and verbal intimidation through the use of epithets or slurs.

They try to teach the borderline between the legal and illegal. They are developing a special curriculum, a so-called ‘legal curriculum.’ It teaches children whether certain behavior is illegal or not.

Like this curriculum, prevention might be better than intervention. But how? Exposing kids to diversity might be the answer. Dr. Jin Yong Shin, who studied Korean Americans’ bullying situation, found different locations have different bullying rates.

For example, Queens has lower rates of bullying than Long Island. Why? Dr. Shin thinks it has to do with the Queens character, the most diverse mosaic of the five boroughs. She said, “Discrimination comes from how to define the difference, so when they experience diversity in terms of culture, people, race, religion and more, the possibility of bullying might decrease.”

SENSITIVITY TO CULTURAL TRADITIONS

An inevitable subject in the field of ethnic journalism is that of cultural traditions, especially in the context of the school system. The journalists bring to light cultural discrepancies that arise with parents, community leaders, and even teachers facing a new reality quite different from the one in which they grew up. Where do they draw the line between accepting their new environment yet still adhering to the traditions they know so well?

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BENGALI

MUSLIMS WORRY THEIR CHILDREN MAY HAVE TO EAT NON-HALAL FOODS AT SCHOOL

BY LOVLU ANSAR, WEEKLY THIKANA

FEBRUARY 6, 2009

Every morning, Mrs. Nasreen Ahmed Shilpi, a housewife in Jackson Heights, Queens, prepares breakfast for her eldest son, Mohammed Showkhin. She then sends her son, who is a tenth-grader at the Bronx Science High School, off with \$5 for lunch.

“We have raised him to eat food as per our own tenets,” Mrs. Shilpi, a Muslim from Bangladesh, said. “The foods which are served in school are not compatible with our religious rules. We are requesting the education department [to] serve Halal food to our children,” she said.

Muslim parents across the city worry constantly that their children may have no other choice but to eat foods that are not Halal during the school day. In Arabic, the word Halal means permitted or lawful; Halal foods are foods that are allowed under Islamic dietary guidelines. According to these guidelines gathered from the Qu’ran (the holy book of Islam), Muslim followers cannot consume the following: pork or pork byproducts, animals that were dead prior to slaughtering, animals not slaughtered properly or not slaughtered in the name of Allah, blood and blood byproducts, alcohol and carnivorous animals.

Most of the parents interviewed for this report in Brooklyn, Bronx and Queens said that they were worried about the food being served in the schools, despite reassurances from Department of Education officials that the school food is “healthy.” These parents said they want their

children to remain true to Muslim practices, but because they can’t always provide their children with lunch prepared as Islam mandates, they must send their children to school with some anxiety.

Individual schools tell Muslim parents, who are worried that they do not serve pork, that they make concessions for students who want to eat Halal foods. But some advocates want the school system to address the issue on a larger scale.

Twelve percent of the city’s 1.1 million students are Muslims. Already, there is a movement to have school closed on two Muslim holy days. In this light, Muslim parents say it is also important to supply foods as per the Muslim culture.

Gonzales Fuentes, a spokeswoman for the Department of Education, said that the city just can’t prepare foods based on individual communities’ needs.

“The principal may give permission to those students, who are sick or obliged to obey the religious rules and regulations, to bring their own food to school,” Gonzales Fuentes said.

Minhaj Uddin Babar, former organizing secretary of the Bangladesh Society in New York, said he remains worried about the type of food his sons Roshad and Rainad, who are in third grade and pre-kindergarten respectively, are eating at PS 164 in Brooklyn. He has contacted the school and been told that the right foods are being served. Babar remains concerned.

“We give them breakfast every morning

before they go to school, so they don't have to take breakfast with them," Babar said. "Though this reduces certain tensions, we remain anxious about lunch."

Officials at several schools said that they never provide pork or any food made out of pork. About 180,000 students are supplied with breakfast and lunch at school, free of cost. Some students pay for their lunch.

Many Muslim students, particularly the younger ones in elementary school, have no way of knowing how the food is prepared, parents say.

Helal Uddin Mahmud, whose daughter Tanisha Mahmud is a third-grader at P.S 216, said he has contacted the school to request that Tanisha receive food prepared as per Muslim rule. "I don't know how sincerely my request is being considered," Mahmud said.

Wasiur Rahman, a guidance counselor at the John Brown High School in Queens, said that Muslim community leaders have to raise their voices to demand that Halal food be served. This may require them to start a letter writing campaign or to petition President Barack Obama, Governor David Peterson and City Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

Local council members representing communities with large Muslim populations may also help. While some communities have already approached their representatives about providing Halal foods in the schools, the movement has not yet gained momentum.

Until it does, parents remain anxious.

CHINESE

LOST IN LETTERS: SCHOOL REPORT CARDS CONFUSE CHINESE PARENTS

BY RONG XIAOQING, SING TAO

MAY 1, 2009

When New York City Schools Chancellor Joel Klein released the high school progress reports last November, he had a clear message for parents. “I’m confident that the changes we made to this year’s progress reports will make them an even more useful tool for parents and other stakeholders – especially for families of eighth graders who are deciding where to apply to high school,” Klein said at that time.

But his expectation has not been completely fulfilled, at least in the Chinese community where parents pay little attention to the school’s letter grade because of its weak stance on students’ academic performance.

The Department of Education (DOE) launched the progress reports in late 2007 to measure the schools’ performance and to hold the principals more accountable. The system mimics the students’ report card, giving each school a letter grade from A to F, based on the school’s environment, the students’ performances on standardized tests, and the comparison of the students’ performances in the current year with those that preceded it.

The three parts are scored separately through complex measurements and contribute to an overall score. But as its name indicates, the report weighs itself mainly on the progress category, which counted for more than 50 percent of the final score, with the other two categories sharing the remaining half.

The system hasn’t lacked controversy during

its two-year history. That each year some highly reputable schools receive an F, while schools that are considered to be “failing” by the state’s standard receive an A, has prompted principals and parents to question the fairness of the measurement system.

In the Chinese community, it is the report’s emphasis on progress rather than pure performance that turns parents away.

When she helped her daughter fill out the application form for high schools recently, Lillian Zen, a 45-year-old administrative manager, had a clear mind. Her first tier was made of the specialized high schools, such as Stuyvesant High School, The Bronx High School of Science and Brooklyn Technical High School. The second tier consisted of Townsend Harris High School and Benjamin Cardozo High School in Queens.

“I don’t have to look at the letter grade to know these are good schools. It’s the long standing reputation that works,” Zen said. “If you helped a couple of kids move from level one in the tests to level two, and you got an A because of that, well, you’ve done a good job, but I still don’t want to send my child to you. I want her to be with level four students and get into an Ivy League college when she graduates.”

Sufen Lau, a homemaker and mother of two, feels lost more or less for the same reason. She moved to Sheepshead Bay in Brooklyn six years ago and followed the instructions of the pamphlet that was circulated around the Chinese

community, which ranked public schools by their average scores on the state tests. Her daughter, Sofia, was of school age by then and P.S. 222, which was in her neighborhood, had received a high rank.

Now, 10-year-old Sophia is going into middle school, but Lau can no longer find the school rankings. “The ranking is very important. It tells you which schools get higher scores on the tests, and that’s where you want your child to be,” she said. She checked the DOE website and found the progress reports but was not impressed. “The letter grade doesn’t mean much to me. I’d be more appreciative if it directly told me the average score the school got on the recent tests,” she said.

Since the letter grade system was implemented, DOE officials have been talking to educators and parents, making some changes according to their recommendations.

For example, the second progress reports, released at the end of last year, not only showed the overall letter grade for each school, but also the grade for each of the three categories, providing principals and parents with more information about a school’s strengths and weaknesses. Also, a school that manages to keep its students’ performance above a certain high mark received extra credit points, indicating how much room was left in order to make progress.

Meanwhile, even more emphasis has been placed on the progress category that previously comprised 55 percent of the overall score and now makes up 60 percent. The percentage of the pure performance category shrank from 30 percent to 25 percent.

“Our view is that the school’s job is to help all students make academic progress,” said Andy Jacob, a spokesperson for the DOE. “Just looking at the level where students enter a school doesn’t really tell you anything about how well a school is educating the kids. But if you look at the progress the students make from one year to the next, that’s a really good indication of whether a school is really helping kids learn.”

That many Chinese parents have a different cultural background may explain their divergent views. “Chinese parents always follow the test scores,” said Teresa Hsu, executive director of

Asian American Communications, an education advocacy organization in Chinatown.

Ms. Hsu said that this tradition might result from the parents’ own experiences living in China where college admission basically depended on one single test. “You can make progress over the years, but if you are still below the level of the minimum score necessary for college by the time you take that test, the progress means nothing.”

Hsu said that real estate agencies and Chinese newspapers used to rank the schools based on their test scores, and the rank was like a bible for parents. But, after the progress report was launched, the ranking activities were toned down.

To be sure, not everyone in the community is against the progress reports. All the schools in Chinatown received As and Bs last year and the principals seemed to be happy about it.

“The schools in Chinatown all have many English Language Learner (ELL) students. They started at a low level but we have worked very hard to move them up. Nobody credited us before, and now we got a better grade for it,” said Lily Woo, principal of P.S. 130, which for the past two years received an A.

Pauline Chu, president of the Chinese-American Parents’ Association, also gives the grading system a thumbs-up, although not totally because of its emphasis on progress.

“To grade a school by the progress is part of the DOE’s adoption of the management of the corporate world. For corporations, growth is the most important barometer for achievements. I don’t think schools should be run that way,” Ms. Chu said. “But I don’t think schools should be ranked only by one test scores either. Parents should look at the scores over several years, the environment of the school, the quality of the teachers and many other aspects. The progress reports at least provide some additional information besides just the scores.”

LOCAL

PUSH TO CLOSE SCHOOLS ON MUSLIM HOLY DAYS GAINS MOMENTUM

BY JAMES FERGUSON, MOUNT HOPE MONITOR

JULY 2, 2009

In January 2006, a New York State Regents exam fell on Eid-ul-Adha, a holy day in the Muslim calendar. For Abdul Muhaimin Ladan, then a teacher in Queens, it was a kick in the teeth: his students, many of whom were Muslim, had to choose between taking a mandatory test and being with their families.

“We thought it wasn’t right,” recalls Ladan, who now splits his time between running his own business and working as an assistant Iman at Mt. Hope Masjid, a mosque on Mount Hope Place near Jerome Avenue.

Ladan’s frustration was shared by many Muslim parents, says Zahida Pirani, an organizer with the New York Civic Participation Project (NYCPP).

Afterward, the NYCPP, Mt. Hope Masjid, and 50 other organizations from across the city formed the Coalition for Muslim School Holidays. That September, the group’s advocacy work helped successfully maneuver a bill through the New York State Senate that prevents future

tests from being scheduled on religious dates.

The bill’s passing, Pirani says, was “a step in the right direction, but it wasn’t enough.”

Since then, the Coalition has been trying –

without success – to get the city’s Department of Education to close schools on Eid-ul-Adha, a day of celebration marking the end of the pilgrimage to Mecca, and Eid-ul-Fitr, which commemorates the end of Ramadan. Supporters say doing so would be no different than closing schools on Christmas Day, Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah.

“We shouldn’t be forced to choose between education and our religion,” Ladan said.

Advocates went even further. In a 2006 report, *Acceptance, not Exclusion: A Case for Muslim Holidays in New York City Public Schools*, NYCPP officials

and others said that the DOE’s unwillingness “to recognize Muslim holidays alongside the Jewish and Christian holidays denies Muslim students their rights to freedom of religion and access to an equitable education.”

Bourema Niambele, president of the New



York Council of Malians, agrees. He remembers a conversation with his then seven-year-old niece back in 2007. She asked him why she had to go to school on Eid, an Arabic word for festival, when her school closed on holidays her non-Muslim classmates observed.

“It broke my heart,” Niambele said, whose organization also joined the coalition. “Like in any community, it’s very important to celebrate it [the Eids] with the family.”

Marge Feinberg, a DOE spokeswoman, said there are no plans to add the Eids to the school calendar. She said the department already makes “accommodations to any students who want to take time off” for religious reasons.

Feinberg added that changing the school calendar is something the State can do, but not the city.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg is also reluctant to recognize the Eids.

“The truth of the matter is we need more children in school,” Bloomberg told reporters last year. “When you have a city as diverse as we do, with virtually every religion known to man practiced, if we closed school for every single day, there wouldn’t be any school.”

In 2009, Eid-ul-Fitr is expected to fall on Sept. 20, and Eid-ul-Adha on Nov. 27. The dates are subject to change because the Islamic Calendar is a lunar calendar, based on phases of the moon, which are difficult to calculate. Those who oppose adding the two holidays to the school calendar say this unpredictability makes planning difficult.

The Coalition for Muslim School Holidays counters by pointing out that 600,000 Muslims live in the five boroughs. According to a 2004 Columbia University study, one in every eight public school students (or 12 percent) is Muslim. That equates to 132,000 Muslim children in the system.

In the Bronx, the Muslim population has been growing steadily, with immigrants from Mali, Ghana, Gambia, and other West African countries settling in neighborhoods just west of the Harlem River, including Highbridge and Morris Heights.

When Ladan, 42, moved to the Bronx from Ghana nine years ago, there were seven mosques in the borough. Today, there are 28. On any given

Friday, he said, up to 400 people attend Mt. Hope Masjid, a converted four-story row house, for Friday prayers, called Jumu’ah.

Typically, Ladan says, children join in the Eid festivities – and miss school in the process. While their absence is marked as “excused” (provided their parents send the school a letter beforehand), missing a full day of classes puts students at risk of falling behind.

In the tri-state area, a number of cities with sizeable Muslim populations have already incorporated the two holidays into their school calendars. Irvington, Atlantic City, Trenton, and Paterson are among them.

Farther out, public schools now close on both days in Dearborn (MI), the city with the largest concentration of Arab Americans in the country.

Muslim groups in Baltimore have tried – unsuccessfully, so far – to convince the school board there to do the same, according to Laila Al-Qatami, of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, a Washington DC-based organization.

In New York, too, there’s been stiff resistance: bills seeking to modify the calendar have stumbled in the State Senate and State Assembly. But advocates are hopeful that a City Council bill (Resolution 1281), introduced in 2008 by Councilman Robert Jackson (D-Manhattan), a Muslim, will have a different outcome.

The bill, currently in the Education Committee, has 29 co-sponsors out of a possible 51. From the Bronx’s delegation, only Councilman Oliver Koppell has yet to sign on. The Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition, a group that’s been working closely with Mt. Hope Masjid and the NYCPP, has been reaching out to Council members on the fence, in hopes of gaining their support.

A hearing was held in the fall, and providing the bill makes it out of committee, a full Council vote is expected this spring or summer. Even if the Council votes in favor, however, the bill won’t become law as it is a resolution, rather than an introduction. (Mayoral control of schools has curtailed much of the Council’s law-making power when it comes to education.)

Still, a resounding “yes” vote would “make a

point” and could prompt the State Legislative to act, says Joe McNearney, Jackson’s legislative and budget director.

“We need to show that New York City recognizes diversity and promotes tolerance,” insists Pirani. “Other cities and districts have done it, why are they making such a fuss in New York City?”

Adding the Eids “would be such a great learning tool,” she continued.

Said Naimbele: “Having these days would push [non-Muslims] to understand what it means to be a Muslim.”

CHINESE

SKIRTS: HOW SHORT IS SHORT?

BY RONG XIAOQING, SING TAO

SEPTEMBER 9, 2009

Chinese parents frown at the DOE's loosened dress code.

One man's fashion can be another man's offense. This is more so for immigrant parents and their children, thanks to the combination of generational gaps and different cultural backgrounds.

Sulan Liu knows it. Liu's daughter, Cynthia, immigrated with the family 10 years ago when she was five years old. "Back then, she'd wear whatever I bought her. I dressed her like a little Chinese doll," said Liu. But when her cute doll quickly grew into a teenage girl, Liu started to worry about Cynthia's dress.

"In the past year, she started to wear these very tight shirts and sometimes the shirt is too short so it exposes her belly button. Sometimes it's her skirt that's too short. When I ask her to not dress that way, she says I am too old-fashioned," said Liu.

Liu did notice that some of Cynthia's friends dress the same way; however, since Liu grew up and was educated in China, the concerned mother questioned why the school doesn't interfere. "In China, the schools have a very strict dress code. You'd get punished, sometimes even suspended from class, for dressing inappropriately or wearing make up. But it seems in New York, the schools don't care," said Liu.

Liu's concern is shared by many Chinese immigrant parents who were educated in China and believe that fancy clothes, makeup and dating

can distract a student from her studies. And the last thing they want to see is their children's Ivy League road detoured by the overloaded adolescent self-conscience. Many of these parents think it is the school's responsibility to regulate students' dress code, but they soon found things are different in New York.

In some ways, today's New York is an unlikely place for tolerance towards inappropriate dress. It is after all a city where a series of stiff dress codes are set by investment bankers, socialites and celebrities, and one mismatching accessory is likely to be a damaging faux pas. It is also a city that has been gaining a reputation as a "nanny state" for its habit of setting rules from dancing to smoking bans to noise restrictions and curbs on trans-fats in food.

But unlike school districts in neighboring New Jersey and Connecticut, where the campus dress codes are often pages long with prohibitions on everything, from flip flops to sunglasses, and specifics of how tight is too tight and how short is too short, and how much underwear showing is too much, New York City public schools is almost a free zone for any fashion-minded youngster.

"The only thing we have [regarding students' dress] is not to wear gang colors. That's all," said DOE spokeswoman Margie Feinberg. When pressed for reasons, Feinberg said, "That is also the parents' responsibility."

The city hasn't always been as indifferent. There were efforts to mandate uniforms in public

schools in the late 1990s but the policy didn't last long amid a lack of wholehearted support from some parents, a reluctance by principals to enforce it and, of course, opposition from the kids themselves. Students got more freedom after the city settled a lawsuit filed by a 15-year-old lesbian student who was suspended for wearing a T-shirt that read "Barbie is a Lesbian," in 2004. They now have the right to wear "political or other types of buttons, badges or armbands," according to the DOE's discipline code.

It doesn't mean the public schools don't make their own rules. But random conversations with youngsters shopping at chain stores like American Eagle and Forever 21 indicate that these school-level rules often don't have much clout. James Singh, a third year student from the High School of Telecommunication Arts and Technology said that the only restriction he knows is not to wear a hat. But other than that, "it doesn't really matter what you wear," said Singh, a hip-hop fan who was clad in baggy pants with his underwear exposed. "I wear them [the baggy pants] almost everyday. I never get in trouble at school."

Angela Chin, a second year student at Newtown High School in Queens, said her school has no problem with guys' baggy pants either, but girls don't have as much freedom. "We are not allowed to expose bra straps or wear tank tops, which I think is ridiculous," she said. "We should have the right to wear whatever we want."

Many students enjoy the almost total absence of a dress code in school. "Adults always think that we know nothing, but we know who we are and what we should wear. If they had to write the dress code for us, it would make us look like kids from decades ago," said Jean Lu, a student at M.S. 131, in Chinatown. When asked about the idea of wearing an uniform, Lu seemed perplexed. "What are you talking about?" she asked.

For some parents, the lack of regulation and enforcement from the DOE has put them in a powerless situation to persuade their children to wear what the parents deem as appropriate.

"Kids should be focusing on their studies, not on their clothes. But we have some parents complaining that their children spend an hour every morning picking out what they are going to

wear to school. And some of the styles they like, like the baggy pants or jeans with holes, are just ugly. But when you ask them to change, they'd say everyone in the school dresses that way," said Pauline Chu, president of the Chinese-American Parents' Association and a supporter of uniforms for students. "New York is liberal and sometimes too liberal."

TURKISH

AS ETHNICALLY DIVERSE AS THEIR STUDENTS, DOE'S INTERNATIONAL TEACHERS ALSO GRAPPLE WITH CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

BY MEHMET DEMIRCI, ZAMAN AMERIKA

OCTOBER 1, 2010

Luminita Soare, who has 21 years of teaching experience, states that she was not used to students asking so many challenging questions of teachers during class when she worked back in Romania, from where she emigrated 11 years ago. Here in the United States, by contrast, she found students are taught to ask questions and express their opinions freely, so classroom management is more challenging. As a teacher, you must be well prepared to give an informative answer on the spot, she comments, and adds that good humor always helps, especially when you work with teenagers.



This is a common challenge among international teachers in New York City. Seven out of 10 students in the city's public schools are immigrants and of its 87,000 educators, almost 70

percent are immigrants – the Board of Education identifies teachers from different countries as international teachers. Teachers from almost all ethnic groups work in the city's public education system. They are happy about the diverse backgrounds of their students but many complain about the expansive students' rights.

Zeki Sekban, an immigrant teacher who has been working as a math teacher for a decade, says that you can see a lot of differences between the system here and the one in Turkey. "The idea of being respectful to the teacher is not the same as in Turkey; here, what they respect is your knowledge and not your authority. The standards of the public schools here are great; you can find that only in private schools in Turkey," he asserts.

Sekban claims that the biggest hardships and challenges for American and immigrant teachers alike are the seemingly limitless freedom that students have. "If a student cannot add up 2 plus 2 but he is well aware of his rights and is very vocal and adamant about them, it may put the teacher in a very hard situation," comments Sekban. "When I first started teaching in New York City, I gave my students a quiz and then I read their grades out loud in class. A student, who had a very low grade, objected and left the class. After a few minutes, the school principal came to the classroom to speak to me, and told me that I could not announce grades publicly, that I have to

do it privately with each student.”

In 2001, just 10 days before 9/11, Soare moved from Colorado to New York looking for the chance to work with students from different countries. “I worked for two years in Colorado and had 13 years of experience before I came to America, but the high school in New York City was totally different from any other place I had worked in before. I was teaching a student group that I had no idea about – 90 percent of them were Haitian. One day, a student came to me and said, ‘Don’t you see you are white? How can you teach us?’ I was shocked because I had never been differentiated in my life because of my skin color. I had lived and worked in a homogeneous society in Romania oblivious of racial issues. I told him to give me a semester and I would prove to him that we all have the same heart. At the end of that semester, he wrote me a note which said that I was right.”

Similar to immigrant parents, one of the first challenges Soare faced in her early years here was not related to her teaching skills but rather to being a foreigner in New York City. For instance, she would feel pressured when a joke would be made regarding a TV show that she had never watched in her life. “I always trusted my English, but sometimes I felt that I did have an accent which could be recognized. I needed to be as close to a native as possible being an ESL teacher. Despite all, everything became more and more comfortable with time passing and quite soon, I felt at home in New York City,” she declared.

Soare sees that there are several challenges for a teacher here, such as the observation sessions by DOE officials (who many times arrive unannounced), or not having as much time as she would want to prepare for classes. However, Soare loves working as a teacher in New York City. “In spite of the challenges that any teacher faces, working in New York City offers a fantastic opportunity to immerse oneself in the culture and society of the city. The diversity of New York is a means to continuous learning and understanding of life and people. I would have never worked with people from so many cultures and language backgrounds if I had not lived here. Being a teacher in public education is not only a job but

also a path to self-discovery and personal growth,” she says.

Sekban indicates that families also encounter the same adjustment problems and cites the situation for a parent from Honduras, who came to him with a discipline issue. The parent explained that back in his country, parents slap their kids, from time to time, in order to put them in line. Because you don’t see such practices here either in school or at home, the father despaired, his kids have become so spoiled that they don’t listen to the parents and or study for school.


Ann Forte, from Media Relations at the Department of Education, says that “the DOE doesn’t especially seek for international teachers, but it is happy to have teachers with international teaching experience; there are no reports of problems regarding their teaching or accents.”

The DOE offers many opportunities to immigrant teachers to help with their adjustment to New York City and to enhance their knowledge about public education, such as new teachers’ orientation sessions, when immigrant teachers also come together to discuss and share their concerns about the system and to help each other.

But like anyone who wishes to teach in the public school system, an immigrant teacher must pass the mandatory New York State exams and have a valid teaching license, as well as a Master’s degree in their subject. Throughout the school year, all teachers must attend professional development sessions in order to maintain their license.

SUCCESS STORIES

Despite all the struggles and challenges faced by ethnic and local communities in New York City's education system, positive stories happen and no publications can appreciate them as much as those that represent the communities and areas they happen in.

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POLISH

ENGLISH INSTRUCTION: POLISH PARENTS HELP THEIR CHILDREN OUTPERFORM OTHER STUDENTS

BY ALEKSANDRA SLABISZ, NOWY DZIENNIK

JUNE 17, 2009

Malwina Wloch came to the United States in 2003 and entered the eleventh grade with little knowledge of English as a 21-year-old. Despite her late entry into the school system, she scored 1200 on the SATs and ranked fourth in her graduating class of 740 at Newtown High School in Queens. Wloch is now at CUNY's Sophie Davis School of Biomedical Education, and she aspires to be a medical doctor.

"I worked really hard for it," said Wloch, who was considered an English Language Learner (ELL) when she was in the New York City public school system. "I knew I had to catch up, so I just sat there and studied. In the last grade, my schoolmates were out having fun; I hardly had any social life," she says, explaining how she would devote every spare hour to learning English, preparing for the SATs and applying for scholarships.

Wloch, like other Polish students, seems to be bucking the low-graduation trend of the city's English Language Learners. Last year, only 23.5 percent of ELLs graduated, compared with 55.8 percent of all other students, according to statistics from the Department of Education (DOE).

Chung-Wha Hong, executive director of the New York Immigration Coalition, called the ELL graduation rate "absolutely deplorable."

However, Polish children, seem to be doing fairly well. The DOE statistics do not provide the graduation rate for each ethnic group, but

the experiences of students like Wloch suggests Polish students may not be falling into the group of underperforming ELLs. Their apparent success has much to do with having educated parents who choose schools that offer appropriate programs, and who insist on their children being enrolled in English-only classes as well as in activities outside of school that develop non-academic talents, such as dance and piano.

Students from countries where education is highly regarded tend to finish the ESL program considerably quickly and to move out of the ELL category altogether, according to DOE statistics and some educators and parents. According to the DOE, former ELL students often outperform the students who are proficient in English. More than 70 percent of them graduate, compared to 63.5 percent of those who are English proficient. Former ELLs also seem to perform better on the statewide English Language Arts (ELA), math and Regents exams.

"We have smart kids from Poland, the Ukraine and France who are doing great," said Alicja Winnicki, principal of P.S. 34, in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. "We have kids here from the Dominican Republic who excelled in their studies after two years," she said.

Out of the 490 students who attend P.S. 34, 271 are from Polish-speaking families. The rest come from Chinese, Korean, French, Ukrainian and other ethnicities.

Winnicki admits that children from Poland

tend to do very well in math. One of her fifth-graders, Bartek P., reached English proficiency within one year of coming to the United States, and continues to perform above average in math. Another, Wojtek G., is almost out of the ESL program and also shows outstanding progress in math. And according to Winnicki, one new ELL student from China seems to be a math genius.

These students may be doing so well, compared to other ELL and English proficient students, because they come from countries where they received regular, basic education in their own language, thus preparing them to build on a foreign language. The underperforming ELL students may be from countries where they did not have a chance to attend school, or, where their education was frequently interrupted.

“Coming from a country where they had little exposure to formal schooling, the child faces a multiple challenge: to master the language, build learning foundations and catch up with others. The child will also struggle if he or she was taken out of school when the parents decided to move,” Winnicki said.

It is rare to find cases among Polish families where a child’s education was interrupted, and Polish children without any schooling is even rarer, Winnicki said.

Polish parents also have high hopes and ambitions for their kids because, in many cases, they too have achieved high levels of formal training in Poland.

“Many of the younger wave of immigrants have graduated from college, but even those who do not have degrees want their kids to achieve at least as much as they did, if not more,” said Krystyna Piotrowska-Breger, a psychologist in the Polish community and author of the book *America: A Dream Disturbed – The Unhinging of Today’s Polish Immigration*, which looks at the sociological and psychological aspects of immigration. “Most children born into Polish families participate in the various programs available at school, and most of the parents are very responsible.”

Kamila, 11, came to the United States after completing the third grade in Poland, and was not fluent in English when she arrived. In less

than six months, she had a good understanding of her school subjects and was communicating well in English. She finished elementary school with mostly As and is now a top sixth-grade student at the junior high school, P.S. 77, said her mother Renata.

Kamila’s parents both have Master’s degrees. They assisted their daughter with homework until she felt comfortable enough in English, and they do all they can to make sure she gets the most out of her American education.

Kamila’s classmate, Wiktoria Osuchowska, grew up in a similar environment. Her mother, a law school graduate, and her father, an engineer, make sure Wiktoria excels at school and develops all her talents. Wiktoria spends eight hours in dance school each week in addition to taking piano lessons, and learning Polish at the Saturday school.

“She is very busy, but she derives lots of satisfaction from what she does,” said Wiktoria’s mother, Bogna Osuchowska.

The choice of school and its approach to teaching also play a part in a child’s academic success. Many Polish parents choose English-only instruction over other language instruction programs, which has a significant impact on progress, Winnicki said. At P.S. 34, ESL is taught in context, not in isolation from the school’s curriculum, and that, according to the principal, accelerates the students’ learning of English and their immersion in the American school system.

“Two years ago, we focused on working out a program that best helps English learners,” Winnicki said. “Now we have ESL teachers who constantly upgrade their skills and work in tandem with other subject teachers.”

Last year, P.S. 34 got Extra Credit, additional points granted to a school, for closing the achievement gap in teaching ELLs. The ESL students at P.S. 34 do much better in the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) and reach the English proficiency level much faster than students in other city schools.

Being an immigrant also motivates the students. Wloch, the CUNY biomedical major, was well aware that she had a lot of catching up to

do when she arrived.

“I knew I was behind, especially in English, and I worked hard to do better” she said. “I saw the same drive in other immigrant students, especially Asians. They are even more diligent than my Polish friends.”

As the first generation of immigrants, parents often say they must forgo some of their dreams to make sure the children have all it takes for them to succeed. America is, after all, the land of opportunity to which they flew with hope for a better future. That obliges them to make sure the kids do not lose their chance and work doubly hard.

“We are marking the ground so that they have it easier in the future,” said Dobrosława Dyniszkiewicz, mother of Ania, an 11-year-old at Ballet Tech in Manhattan. “Our kids have great potential and need education to make use of it.”

TURKISH

AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS: A BOOST FOR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

BY MEHMET DEMIRCI, ZAMAN AMERIKA

MAY 18, 2010

The corridors at Information Technology High School (ITHS), which overlooks the magnificent skyscrapers of Manhattan, are busy as usual. Students are excited about the upcoming spring break, and teachers are busy with the last updates for the next semester. On the third floor of the school, however, there is another kind of excitement: students in an after-school study program have organized a show in which they will exhibit projects they made in the program.

The noise from ITHS, which houses 981 students in the quiet neighborhood of Long Island City, doesn't bother the neighbors. The student population is diverse: 55 percent of students are Hispanic, 15 percent are white, 15 percent African American and the rest are Asian. Students enter the building by swiping their electronic cards and walk down the main corridor where the numerous awards they have won are displayed. As we enter the corridor, we see a skateboard among the awards that catches us by surprise. A student approaches and speaks about how students made the skateboards, and the story is as beautiful as the skateboard itself.

The state-run schools, some of which may be closed because of budget deficit issues, currently are carrying out an unusual program – the After School Program. The program, which is assigned according to the capacity of the schools and student demand, could be described as student clubs for those readers who attended high school in Turkey. As nominal as it may be in Turkey,

after-school education carries great importance in the U.S. public education system. Many students who are successful in these programs end up joining the university of their choice.

ITHS Principal Dr. Nancy E. Casella, who has administered the school for the last two years, says that she couldn't attend an after-school education program in her neighborhood for security reasons. Zeki Sekban, a math teacher at ITHS, confirms Dr. Casella's words: "Many students in New York City can only enter their schools after being screened by x-ray machines. This is not the case at our school," and adds that ITHS is a good example in this regard. According to Dr. Casella, the school has a wide range of after-school education programs. "We have both academically and socially oriented after-school programs. For the academic programs, student needs are taken into consideration. Student grades are evaluated and needs are determined based on this evaluation. With the social programs, student demand is taken into account," she says.

One of the most important aspects of after-school education programs is that students who choose similar activities can form a group and pursue their common interests. For instance, if 15 students are interested in photography and request a photography class, the school will help them within its capacity and resources. After-school education takes place after normal school hours. At ITHS, normal classes end at 2 o'clock in

the afternoon. Academic and social after-school programs start at 3 pm and end at 5 pm. Classes in after-school programs run for a maximum of 45 minutes.

In comparison with normal school classes, students are more comfortable and relaxed in after-school programs and are not subjected to any testing. Students who are behind in their academic studies or are missing some credits can attend after-school programs and fulfill their requirements without taking exams. For example, a student who was not successful in math class can attend an after-school program and do his/her homework and this is sufficient to complete the credits.

According to Dr. Casella, after-school education satisfies both students and their parents. "Through after-school programs, teachers and students get to know each other better. Students volunteer to join after-school social programs because these classes are not as crowded," she explained.

After-school programs are also a good place for discovering hidden talents in some students, indicated the school principal. David Jimenez, whom she introduces as a music genius, is among those pupils. Zeki Sekban, a math teacher at the school, agrees, and related that David Jimenez, was a troublesome student before attending after-school activities. "He has gone through a great deal of good changes," noted Sekban. David now is an eager participant in class and is an essential member of the school band playing the drums.

David, who says he is very inspired by his music classes, started playing music in the eighth grade.

"I believed I could achieve something with music but there was no opportunity for me to get a formal musical education. When I started high school, our principal didn't care very much about music. After our school got a new principal, everything changed for me. Thanks to the after-school programs, I developed a better relationship with my music teacher. This encouraged me. Now, my teachers are like part of my family," David stated.

David, who is now a senior, wants to start writing his own music. He surprised Dr. Casella

when he said he wants to become a music teacher; she envisioned he would develop into a prominent musician.

Zeki Sekban, one of the newest teachers at ITHS, and worked at after-school programs in his previous job, found them to be extremely beneficial for students. "If after-school programs are implemented successfully, they are of great benefit to students. Students gain self-confidence and enjoy coming to school and doing fun things. Pupils are more comfortable without the pressure of the classroom atmosphere," noted Sekban.

Each after-school program class has a maximum of 20 students and runs for six weeks. In the younger grades, the focus is on social activities, but in high school, the programs become more academically oriented. Many high schools that have low graduation rates try to solve this problem by providing an opportunity for their students to complete their credits in after-school programs, which represent an unprecedented opportunity for students who are having difficulty graduating. State laws require at least a 55 percent graduation rate from every school annually. Schools that don't achieve this graduation rate become subject to investigation by state authorities. Last year, 60 ITHS students graduated after completing their credits in after-school programs. For Sekban, the success in graduating the students is indication of how useful the after-school programs are. "Fifteen students took math class in after-school programs. By the end of the program, at least five students were fully knowledgeable in math," he asserts.

Gizem Ekici, one of the very few Turkish students at ITHS, has been in the United States only five months and the language remains her biggest problem. Her father, Raif Ekici, has lived here for a very long time and is a strong believer in after-school programs.

"Gizem is new here. In addition to her language difficulties, she is still learning how to adapt to the school system. But she is a determined kid. So far, she has only taken math classes in the after-school program, but I believe that social programs are also going to be very helpful for her. I am an athlete and I hope she can

focus on a sport through this program.”

Jill Becker, who also teaches at an after-school program, says she skateboards with her students. Because skateboarding requires at least five students to work together, Ms. Becker says that this teaches pupils how to work as a group.

“Last year, we exhibited skateboards that were made by our students at an art gallery. While we were preparing for this exhibit, we taught our students how to interact with people in a social environment. Thanks to the after-school program, the students had an opportunity to exhibit their products outside the school to a broader audience. Parents were extremely happy with this,” she says.

NYC public high schools have a budget of approximately \$7 million each, which includes the expenses for the after-school programs. There are 65 teachers employed at ITHS who are paid approximately \$40 per hour. While any teacher in the school can teach in an after-school program, we are told that there is a special need for social studies teachers.

KOREAN

DOE'S PUSH BEYOND BILINGUAL STUDENTS

BY JINHWA JO, KOREA DAILY

JUNE 11, 2010

Juliana Parecki, a 6-year-old Jewish-Hispanic girl, speaks Korean in the morning at school and English in the afternoon. And she speaks Spanish at home. She's a kindergartener at PS 32, the only school that offers a Korean-English dual language program in New York City.

The majority of Juliana's classmates are Koreans, and her two non-Korean classmates speak English at home. But Juliana took a different path. She's becoming trilingual out of bilingual program before the age of 10.

More and more students take advantage of dual language programs to learn foreign languages at early age.

Bibiana Parecki, Juliana's mother, planned to have her children speak several languages when she married a Jew. But it wasn't long before she realized he was too busy to teach Hebrew to their daughter. So she turned to the only Korean-English dual program in her neighborhood. She said, "Juliana is excellent at Korean. Now she's becoming trilingual." This summer, the family will visit Colombia with lots of Korean books. The mother is determined to hone her daughter's Korean.



Santos Matine, a dual-language program specialist at the New York City Department of Education, has been seeing this trend. She helped a Chinese student enroll in a Spanish dual language program. Why? "Because his parents' business deals with lots of Hispanics, and they want their son to be ready to help," she said.

District 3, which includes the Upper West Side, is booming with kids who speak more than two languages. It's no longer surprising to see a Japanese child speaking Spanish or a Jewish child speaking Yiddish and Chinese. This district has more than 10 schools offering various dual language programs from Spanish, Chinese, to French, and the trend is only growing.

In New York City, there are 89 schools that offer dual language programs, which represent about 5 percent of all elementary, junior high, and high schools. The biggest single dual language program is Spanish, being offered at 79 of the 89 schools. There are six schools with Chinese dual-language programs.

Dual language programs teach students 50 percent in English and 50 percent in another language, usually one English-only day followed by a foreign language-only day.

Some schools, based on their students' diversity, have more than two dual language programs. And with the flood of recent immigrants, these programs are ready to expand. The DOE gives up to \$20,000 a year to any school that wants to start a dual language program.

Kum Ju Shin, who teaches at PS 32, praises Juliana's Korean. "If I don't see her, but only hear what she's speaking, I can't even distinguish if she is Korean or not," she said. Juliana was chosen as an MC at the school's Lunar New Year celebration earlier this year. She spoke Korean during the entire program without any accent. She even has a Korean name, Joohee Park, similar to Juliana Parecki.

Of course, not everyone is as talented in languages as Juliana, Shin admitted. "I can't generalize that learning another language at an early age works for everyone like it did for her, but I truly believe it works better for her because she already mastered English and Spanish before she stepped into learning Korean."

Bibiana plans future foreign-language learning around this theory. "I will make sure she speaks, reads and writes in Korean perfectly first, then maybe by high school, I can introduce Latin, which is similar to Spanish," she said.

This September, New American Academy opens with an ambitious curriculum – a mandatory trilingual program. Everyone has to learn Spanish, French and English by the time they graduate. Shimon Waronker, the principal, is a Jew who speaks perfect Spanish.

In this scenario, a Pakistani student enrolled at this school would be able to speak four languages by graduation: Urdu, English, Spanish and French.

Speaking four languages at the age of 12?

Dream big. In this diverse city with booming dual language programs, Shin is sure that she will see "seven- or eight-language speakers soon."

LOCAL

SMART TECHNOLOGY CHANGES HOW TEACHERS TEACH AND STUDENTS LEARN

BY DANIEL P. BADER, MANHATTAN TIMES

JUNE 22, 2010

Deepak Kapoor, a teacher with a dozen years under his belt, had never used a SMART Board before he started teaching at Gregorio Luperon High School for Math and Science. Now he can't teach without it.

He's not alone.

"Initially, five years ago, you'd have found teachers who said 'I'm fine, [chalkboards have] always worked for me,'" said Celine Azoulay-Lewin, the technology innovation manager for the Department of Education.

Since 2005, the white, touch-sensitive plastic boards have been taking the place of traditional chalkboards in New York City schools.

Students can play educational games on them, using their hands to move objects on the board; teachers can include hyperlinks in their lessons and have students tap them to open a page onto the Internet. This is not your dad's chalkboard.

Teachers like the SMART Boards, and believe they lead students to pay more attention to lessons. The boards cost anywhere between \$1,200 to \$10,000, depending on the size and accessories – many times the cost of chalk boards, which

cost less than \$600 apiece. Studies of the new boards have found that students pay attention longer when being taught on the new boards, but whether grades actually improve is up for debate.

An 18-week study by Early Childhood Special Education Teacher Jennifer Clark, and University of Nebraska-Omaha's Dr. Philip Nordness, found that elementary students spent 81 percent of their

time paying attention to a lesson on a SMART Board versus 53 percent without one. However, the researchers found only modest gains in students' grades during the study.

An Ohio teacher's study of her third graders' standardized tests, posted on the SMART company's webpage, paints a different picture. Students who had annual paper and pencil exercises to increase

their math scores saw little results, but after a year of instruction on a SMART Board, she saw significant improvement. After a year of math using the new board, all of the students passed, two students scored as "advanced" while three were rated as "accelerated."

In New York City, the boards were first bought for individual schools with funds from City Council members. To make the technology more available to every school, Azoulay-Lewin



has 21 active Title IID grants, money specifically allocated by the state to help low-income students become technologically literate.

The boards are more interactive and more entertaining and perhaps belong in a world where students e-mail their homework to a teacher instead of handing in sheets of paper, or create book reports in Microsoft PowerPoint instead of three-ring binders.

“Science, it needs a lot of activities and a lot of fun or you lose them,” Kapoor, a physics and Advance Placement calculus teacher said. “[SMART Boards are] very convenient, and students, because it’s more interactive, they like it better than the traditional chalk-and-talk method.”

In a recent interview, Schools Chancellor Joel Klein said teachers of the future would bear little resemblance in methods or tools to teachers of today because of technology.

Gregorio Luperon History teacher Saulio Tuero said the technology has already re-invented his job.

Before, if a teacher wanted to show a movie, they’d have to sign out a television and VCR or DVD player, and wheel the equipment on a cart to their classroom.

Not anymore. As part of his lessons, Tuero projected the World War I movie *Paths of Glory* from a DVD onto the SMART Board. “I’m able to stop it, turn it down, write on the board and turn it back on,” Tuero said. Soon, he said, he expects to be able to order it right from the online and mail order video store Netflix.

It makes it easier to teach, and to learn, he said.

“It’s so much cleaner, so much easier. It’s cleaner in terms of delivery of instruction – there are fewer obstacles.”

Principal Juan Villar said the technology in his school is helping his students, many of whom are immigrants, become computer literate.

“Some of them have not seen a computer before,” he said.

RADIO PIECES

Introduced as a new component to the 2010 fellowship, training in radio broadcasting gave Fellows the opportunity to cross-platform their investigative reporting skills beyond print media to new radio formats and podcasting. This training opens the door to other means of disseminating information, and for most of the Fellows, it is an introduction to the use of digital media in aiding to enrich the migration of their publications' online presence.

Click on the title of the radio piece to listen.

01 Fighting Obama's wars: recruiting youth in Brooklyn

by Jaisal Noor, May 31, 2010, Free Speech Radio News

After the military fell behind in its enlistment goals in 2005, it began increasing its efforts in schools in low-income neighborhoods. Recruitment numbers rebounded. To examine why youth are joining the military today, two reporters head to one of the most heavily recruited counties in the nation: Kings County, also known as Brooklyn.



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- **Lost in space – Immigrants in NYC public school system don't get the help they need**, By Yana Krasilnikova, *Novoye Russkoye Slovo*, 01.31.09
- **A tough choice: Russian parents find difficulty choosing the right schools for their children**, By Yana Krasilnikova, *Novoye Russkoye Slovo*, 05.24.09 **(99)**
- **Russian immigrant parents: Aliens in NYC public schools**, By Yana Krasilnikova, *Novoye Russkoye Slovo*, 06.26.09
- **Immigrant children find their way in a multicultural world**, By Ari Kagan, *Vecherniy New York*, 10.09
- **Russian-speaking parents want their gifted children not left behind programs**, By Yana Krasilnikova, *Novoye Russkoye Slovo, Vecherniy New York*, 09.25.09

TURKISH *Zaman Amerika*

- **After-school programs: A boost for high school graduation**, By Mehmet Demirci, *Zaman Amerika*, 05.18.10 **(156)**
- **As ethnically diverse as their students, DOE's international teachers also grapple with cultural adjustment**, By Mehmet Demirci, *Zaman Amerika*, 10.01.10 **(150)**
- **The challenge of being new**, By Mehmet Demirci, *Zaman Amerika*, 10.08.10 **(72)**
- **Radio piece accompaniment to "As ethnically diverse as their students, DOE's international teachers also grapple with cultural adjustment"**, By Mehmet Demirci, *Zaman Amerika*, (date not yet available) **(163)**

NEW YORK 2010 MEDIA ALLIANCE

New York Community Media Alliance (NYCMA) is a member-driver organization that promotes and advocates for the ethnic and community media in New York and the metropolitan area. NYCMA is a project of the Fund for the City of New York. NYCMA was founded in March 2007 to help strengthen the immigrant and community press in New York City, recognizing the critical role it plays in helping to organize, advocate for, and encourage civic engagement in the communities it serves. This media sector, comprised of close to 350 weeklies and 26 foreign-language dailies, reaches a readership of well over 3.5 million, of which 1.8 million have little or no English-language skills, according to the Mayor's Office on Immigrant Affairs. Well over a third of these publications are distributed nationally, thereby extending the impact of its reporting beyond the confines of their neighborhood, city and state. With foundation support, NYCMA has developed a sophisticated cluster of programs to encourage informed civic participation in communities that are not well served by the mainstream media: low-income and working-class communities, communities of color, and immigrant communities where English is not the primary language. As well, the programs work to project news and analyses from these communities beyond the confines of ethnicity and the boundaries of their neighborhoods.

NYCMA serves as an incubator of media models that integrate immigrant communities and communities of color to mainstream society.

FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM STAFF

JUANA PONCE DE LEÓN, New York Community Media Alliance, Executive Director

A former IPA Ethnic Journalist Fellow, Juana has also been the editor-in-chief of *Siete Cuentos Editorial*, the Spanish-language imprint at Seven Stories Press. She is the Executive Director of *Esta en tus manos*, a nonprofit Spanish-language editorial organization, and has served on New York State Council on the Arts (2000-2003). In addition, she is the former editor of *LS*, the literary supplement for New Mass Media newspapers. She has edited several literary collections, including *Our Word is Our Weapon — Selected Writings of Subcomandante Marcos*, and *Dream With No Name — Contemporary Cuban Fiction*. She also co-edited an anthology of community testimonies entitled *In Search of Common Unity*.

LAUREN STOLER, Fellowship Coordinator, 2008-2009

JEHANGIR KHATTAK, New York Community Media Alliance, Communication Manager

Jehangir Khattak began his journalism career in 1986 in Pakistan working for a variety of English daily newspapers before becoming news editor of *The Frontier Post*. During the 1990s, he covered the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the subsequent civil war, the rise of the Taliban and upheavals in Pakistan. He remained President of the largest press club in northwestern Pakistan, and worked for international organizations like Reporters Sans Frontiers. He immigrated to the US in 1999 and worked for different Pakistani community Urdu and English language publications. He writes a weekly Urdu column and regularly appears in radio and television programs as analyst.

GARRY PIERRE-PIERRE, Editorial Manager

Garry Pierre-Pierre is the editor and publisher of *Haitian Times*, which he founded in 1999. The English language weekly serves New York's 500,000-strong Haitian community. Pierre-Pierre has 20 years of experience as a journalist, including six years as a staff writer at *The New York Times*. While there, he shared a Pulitzer Prize for coverage of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. He also worked as a reporter at *The Sun-Sentinel* in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Pierre-Pierre is also a co-anchor for CUNY TV's "Independent Sources," which focuses on issues confronted by NYC's immigrant communities.

DEEPA FERNANDES, People's Production House, Executive Director

Deepa Fernandes is an award-winning journalist, who is the host of *Wakeup Call*, the morning news show at WBAI 99.5 FM. Since 2003, Deepa has anchored most of the major national broadcasts for the Pacifica Network, including election year events, Supreme Court nomination hearings and major congressional investigations. Deepa is the author of *Targeted, Homeland Security and the Business of Immigration*, where she writes about immigration policy and history, published by Seven Stories Press in December 2006. Deepa is also a Puffin Writing Fellow at the Nation Institute. Her writings have appeared in the *Village Voice*, *The Nation* magazine and *Mother Jones* magazine, among many others. She has an MA from Columbia University.

ABDULAI BAH, People's Production House, CNPI Program Associate

Abdulai is a member of *Nah We Yone* (it belongs to us), a non-profit organization that provides assistance to immigrants from Africa and elsewhere. Abdulai has reported both on the condition of Hurricane Katrina Survivors in New Orleans as well as Katrina evacuees living in New York.