



*Mexican - American students are not able to turn to their parents for support when they struggle with school. When the most obvious place to turn for help is the school, the public education system is failing Mexican-American students and is leaving many of them behind.*

**A REPORT ON THE REALITY OF MEXICAN-AMERICAN  
STUDENTS IN NEW YORK CITY'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

# **Nowhere to Turn: The Reality of Mexican-American Students in New York City's Public Schools**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Between 1990 and 2000, the Mexican population in New York City quadrupled, skyrocketing from the 17<sup>th</sup> largest immigrant group in the city to the 5<sup>th</sup> largest. With no indication that this growth will slow, it is almost certain that the 2010 census will show a similar increase. Although the population of Mexican immigrants has increased precipitously, they still have the least schooling, the lowest per-capita income, and the lowest rate of English proficiency among the city's immigrant groups. In 2007, Latino students had the lowest high school graduation rates in the city.

Based on the abject disparity between the performance of Mexican-American students and those of other immigrant communities, it is our finding that the public education system is clearly failing this population, the most rapidly growing group among the city's Latinos. The surveys and focus groups we conducted with Mexican-American parents and students pointed to three main areas of concern: parents' limited access to teachers and information due to language, cultural, and educational barriers; students' lack of access to information and school programs, in addition to a lack of advocacy from educators on behalf of Mexican-American students; and a failure of the public education system to properly acknowledge the cultural identity of Mexican students and the unique and complicated pressures it exacts on their education.

Our first set of recommendations are that the Chancellor's office should hold a language access audit, especially for schools where there are high numbers of parents with limited English skills, to ensure that schools are complying with Regulation A-663. Additionally, the Chancellor must compel schools that are underperforming to adhere to A-663 policies. A-663 must be expanded to ensure that translation services are available to parents during parent-teacher meetings and for notes and other communications from teachers concerning individual students.

Our second set of recommendations centers around improving the guidance counseling system, including mandated certification through a program that emphasizes advocacy competencies through a social justice framework, highlighting the unique needs of new immigrant students. In addition, we would also like to see the City enforce a responsible student-counselor ratio that ensures guidance counselors are not overwhelmed and have adequate time to focus on—and advocate for—the individual needs of students.

## **I. METHODOLOGY**

The research from this report includes four components: a data and literature review of the growth and poverty indicators for the Mexican community in New York City; the results of a survey of Mexican mothers of children in public schools; a focus group among Mexican-American public school students; and key informant interviews.

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## **Data and Literature Review**

The research team conducted a review of relevant data, scholarly articles, and research studies on New York City's Mexican community and the structural challenges Mexican-American students face in the public education system. The most comprehensive set of data and information on the city's Mexican population was found in the New York City Department of City Planning's report "The Newest New Yorkers 2000". This report was based on statistical data gathered by the 2000 US Census and other City specific surveys.

## **Focus Groups**

La Unión conducted a focus group of ten Mexican-American students attending public schools in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. Discussions in this group focused on the structural barriers faced by Mexican-American youth in the city's public education system.

## **Survey**

The research team designed and completed a survey of 80 Mexican immigrant mothers with children in New York City public schools. The survey included questions about their access to staff in public schools and language barriers faced by immigrant parents.

## **Key Informant Interviews**

In addition to the focus groups and survey, La Unión conducted in-depth key informant interviews with several residents of Sunset Park, advocates, and academics.

## **A Note on Terminology**

In this report, participants in our own research and those from our community are referred to as "Mexican", "Mexican-American", or "Mexican immigrant" based on self-identification. The word "Latino" is used interchangeably with the above-mentioned self-identifiers because institutional demographic information and studies conflate ethnicities based on their shared language: Spanish.

## **II. CONTEXT**

### **Background**

La Unión is an organization of people of the global south working to advance the social, economic, and cultural rights of the communities where we now live and the communities we left behind. The 600 members of La Unión are predominantly from the Mixteca region of Mexico and across Latin America. La Unión is based in the neighborhood of Sunset Park, Brooklyn, one of New York City's largest Mexican immigrant neighborhoods.

The issue of barriers faced by Mexican-American youth in the city's public schools first came to light when La Unión's members began to talk about the discrimination suffered by their

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children at the hands of guidance counselors in public high schools. The experiences ranged from the utter absence of support from guidance counselors for struggling students, to actively encouraging Mexican-American students to drop out, discouraging them from going to college, and suggesting that because they are of Mexican descent they would never be able to go on to—or succeed at—higher education.

### **Community Growth**

Between 1990 and 2000, the Mexican population in New York City quadrupled, skyrocketing from the 17<sup>th</sup> largest immigrant group in the city to the 5<sup>th</sup> largest<sup>1</sup>. By 2007, with a population estimated at 290,000, people of Mexican origin have become the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest Latino group in New York City, after Puerto Ricans and Dominicans<sup>2</sup>. With no indication that this growth will slow, it is almost certain that the 2010 census will show a similar increase. Another sign of continued growth is the birthrate among Mexican immigrants, which is reported to be the highest of any immigrant group in the City<sup>3</sup>. In addition, conventional wisdom posits that data collected on the Mexican population by any census or survey is necessarily under-representative due to the fact that Mexican immigrants are less likely to participate in a census or survey because many are undocumented.

### **Poverty**

While Mexicans in New York become ever more numerous, their income rates are among the lowest for immigrant groups in the city. Mexican immigrant males earn an average of \$21,284 while Mexican immigrant women earn an average of just \$16,737 annually<sup>4</sup>. In fact, Mexican women are the lowest paid workers in the city's economy. The Mexican home held the highest average number of workers per household (1.8), but the fifth lowest mean earnings. The only groups making median earnings less than Mexicans had an average number of workers per household at around 1.0<sup>5</sup>. The average income for Mexicans in the city is not showing great signs of improvement, and even more alarming is that studies show there is little or no improvement in subsequent generation earnings: only a fifth of the second-generation boys and a third of the second-generation girls are upwardly mobile in terms of occupation and education<sup>6</sup>. These second-generation children—who are US citizens—are finding it hard to even get the jobs that their parents hold, because exploitative

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<sup>1</sup> New York City Department of City Planning, "The Newest New Yorkers: Immigrant New York in the New Millennium Briefing Booklet" (New York City, 2004) 8.

<sup>2</sup> Center for Latin American, Caribbean, and Latino Studies: The Latino Population of New York City 2007 (<http://web.gc.cuny.edu/lastudies/latinodataprojectreports/The%20Latino%20Population%20of%20New%20York%20City%202007.pdf>) Accessed November 10, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Lobo, Immigration to New York and Its Impacts, New York City Department of City Planning (New York City, 2008) 3, 12.

<sup>4</sup> Newest New Yorkers.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Courtney Smith, *Mexican New York: Transnational Lives of New Immigrants* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 36-37.

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employers wish to hire non-US citizens<sup>7</sup>. Despite the US-born generation being proficient in English and accustomed to American culture, many of them are finding it hard to get jobs outside of low paying restaurant, factory, and construction jobs that offer few, if any, opportunities for advancement.

### **Education**

Despite the fact that Latinos are the largest minority group in the New York City Public Schools, the education system is leaving Mexican-American and other Latino students behind. Currently, there are no institutional solutions aimed at increasing support for Mexican-American and Latino students. The lack of attention paid to the unique needs of Latino students has resulted in their graduation rates remaining among the lowest compared to other ethnic minority groups in the city. The achievement gap between Latinos and other student groups is alarming. In 2007, 68.8 percent of white and Asian students graduated within four years, compared with 47.2 percent of African-American students and 43.0 percent of Latino students<sup>8</sup>.

Similar trends are also true for Latinos nationwide. While emerging as the country's largest ethnic minority group, significant disparities remain between Latino students and their non-Latino peers. Principals, teachers, and guidance counselors in public schools lack knowledge, sensitivity, and respect for the socio-cultural and linguistic background of Latino students, making it nearly impossible to address these discouraging circumstances.<sup>9</sup> According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics:

*Educational, vocational, and school counselors* provide individuals and groups with career and educational counseling. School counselors assist students of all levels, from elementary school to postsecondary education. They advocate for students and work with other individuals and organizations to promote the academic, career, personal, and social development of children and youth. School counselors help students evaluate their abilities, interests, talents, and personalities to develop realistic academic and career goals. Counselors use interviews, counseling sessions, interest and aptitude assessment tests, and other methods to evaluate and advise students. They also operate career information centers and career education programs. Often, counselors work with students who have academic and social development problems or other special needs.<sup>10</sup>

Mexican-American students are especially in need of these services as Mexican immigrants in New York have the least schooling, the lowest per-capita income and the lowest rate of English proficiency of the city's immigrant groups. However, instead of receiving appropriate access, advocacy, and support services from their guidance counselors, many of the Mexican-American students participating in our focus discussion reported feeling

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Jennifer Medina "Most in City Now Graduate in Four Years." (*New York Times* August 12, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Margaret Gibson, Patricia Gandara, and Jill Koyama, *School Connections*, (Teachers College Press, Columbia University; New York 2004).

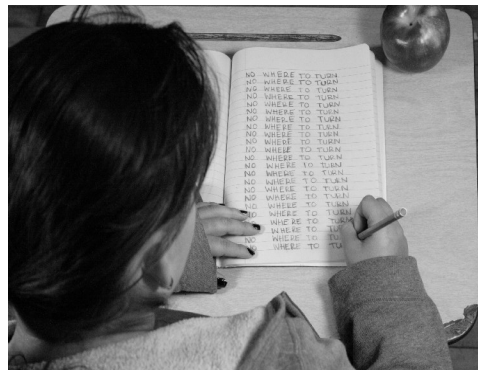
<sup>10</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics: "Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2008-09 Edition"  
(<http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos067.htm>) Accessed November 10, 2008.

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abandoned. “I am completely on my own,” said one participant who attends a middle school in Brooklyn. Sentiments such as these help contribute to the fact that nearly half of Mexicans in the city, aged 16 to 19, are neither in school, nor high school graduates<sup>11</sup>. At least 95 percent of Mexican boys between 13 and 14 in New York City are in school, but by age 18, that number drops to only 26 percent. Statistics for female students trend similarly, falling from 96 percent school enrollment at age 14 to 31 percent by age 18<sup>12</sup>.

***“Many Mexican-American students are only offered information about the CUNY system and are left out of conversations about private colleges because the assumption of educators is that they won’t succeed or are unlikely to be accepted for admission to competitive schools.”***



Mexican-American students also often fall victim to misinformation and incorrect assumptions based on the national debate around the politics and policies of immigration, especially those that focus around documentation status and its roll in accessing higher education. For instance, in our focus groups we learned that many Mexican-American students are only offered information about New York City schools, such as the CUNY system, and are left out of conversations about private colleges and universities or out-of-state public universities because the assumption of educators is that they won’t succeed or are unlikely to be accepted for admission to competitive schools.

In most communities, this would be considered a crisis worthy of immediate attention, however New York City’s Mexican-origin population — conservatively estimated at about 350,000, including children born in the US — is so dispersed, and so wary that making demands will lead to reprisals and deportations, there is no political capital focused on this issue.<sup>13</sup>

### **A New Generation with Nowhere to Turn**

Mexican-American students in New York City public schools have nowhere to turn. Caught in a perfect storm of institutional and public policy, cultural misunderstanding, and language barriers, they find themselves in a situation where the traditional sources of information, advocacy, and access that pave the way to a quality high school experience and the path to higher education are not available to them, as neither their home life nor their school life

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<sup>11</sup> Nina Bernstein, “A Mexican Baby Boom in New York Shows the Strength of a New Immigrant Group.” (*New York Times*, June 4, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

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provides sufficient resources. On the one hand, Mexican parents are faced with language, educational, and cultural barriers that prevent them from helping their children get the best out of the education system. On the other, students of Mexican origin are met by a system that, besides being generally overburdened, is reinforcing—sometimes in overtly racist ways—the message that the city's public education system is uninterested in their basic education, and that higher education is not available to the.

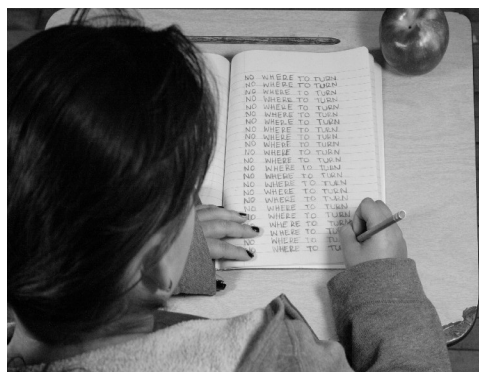
### IV. FINDINGS

The surveys and focus groups we conducted with Mexican-American parents and students pointed to three main areas of concern: parents' limited access to teachers and information due to language, cultural, and educational barriers; students' lack of access to information and school programs, in addition to a lack of advocacy from educators on behalf of Mexican-American students; and a failure of the public education system to properly acknowledge the cultural identity of Mexican students and the unique and complicated pressures it exacts on their education.

Like many middle and high school students, all 10 focus group participants shared experiences in struggling with grades and having trouble with specific subjects in school. However, unlike most, these students also shared a common thread: their parents lack the English comprehension and basic education to help with homework. One student explained, "My parents helped back in elementary school with the multiplication tables but then they stopped because they never went to high school and because the Mexican system is very different to the way they teach us here."

In spite of these added difficulties, over 80% of mothers surveyed for this report said their children were very enthusiastic about their education, and all students in the focus group aspire toward college. However, when students were asked if they knew what a B.A. was, none of them could answer the question. Nor did any of the students know if there are requirements to graduate from high school, what those requirements are, whether there is a test required to apply to college, or when they needed to start planning for college. This lack of knowledge is particularly alarming since three out of the ten students were already in high school and the rest were in middle school.

***"It is totally up to me to explain when I'm failing in school because, although my parents care, they cannot understand on their own how I'm doing since there is a language barrier."***



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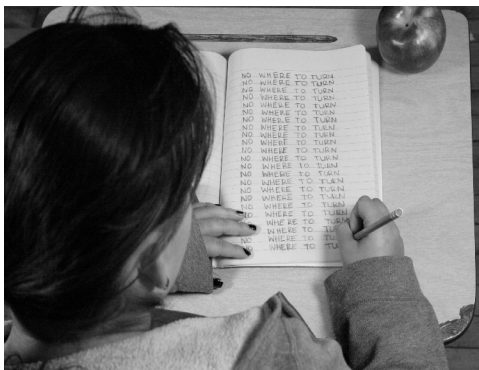
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Nine out of the ten students participating in the focus group were US born American citizens and all of their parents were born in Mexico. When asked if their parents had a college degree the students just laughed. While all participants reported their parents having attended school in Mexico, none of their parents was a college graduate. Most parents had dropped out of school by middle school or earlier. All students reported that their Spanish speaking parents faced prohibitive language barriers when dealing with their schools.

“It is totally up to me to explain when I’m failing in school because, although my parents care, they cannot understand on their own how I’m doing since there is a language barrier,” a student explained. In our survey, nearly four out of ten Spanish speaking parents reported issues in getting access to teachers and half of the parents reported that interpreters were not always available. Students explained that usually their teachers are neither Latinos nor have any Spanish language skills. Focus group results also showed that when translation is available, it is usually because bilingual children are themselves interpreting for their parents.

“One time I remember my brother was having problems in school so I had to translate what my brother’s teacher was saying to my parents. I don’t think it was right for a twelve year old, like me, to be put in the spot like that,” another student shared. Yet another student spoke of teachers resorting to Spanish-speaking support staff to translate for parents: “My science teacher wanted to speak to my parents. I wasn’t doing well in that class. The only person the school could find to translate was the lunch lady.”

We conducted several in-depth interviews that focused on parents’ educational background as it relates to accessing school resources. Rosa Herrera and Elizabeth Mendoza’s interviews shed light on feelings many Mexican immigrant parents have of being left in the dark about the education of their children. Parents also experience frustration and sometimes shame at lacking the necessary tools to help their children because they themselves have had to drop out of school – some before finishing the 6<sup>th</sup> grade—a fate many emigrated from Mexico to help their children escape.



***“When teachers reply to Rosa’s notes they always write in English, which Rosa doesn’t understand.”***

Rosa Herrera, a Mexican native, is the mother of three children. Rosa was able to attend school until the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, but had to drop out to work and help her family. She currently

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faces the difficulty of not being able to assist her children with their schoolwork because she does not have the tools necessary to do so. Adding to Rosa's crisis, her two older children have special education needs, including speech therapy, and the oldest son suffers from a learning disability. Because Rosa does not have an extended educational background, it is often difficult to help her children with their homework – especially in subjects they have particular trouble with. Rosa revealed that even when she attempts to help her children do math homework, for example, she is not certain as to whether the answers are correct because not all assignments are checked by teachers. Sometimes, if a difficult assignment arises, Rosa tries to communicate her lack of understanding to the teachers by writing a note in her child's notebooks. Unfortunately, when teachers reply to Rosa's notes they always write in English, which Rosa doesn't understand. Many times, Rosa has received her son's failing report cards with a note attached highlighting the areas he is having difficulty, but again, the notes are in English, leaving Rosa unable to address the problems in her son's education. In the interview, Rosa discussed another example of language barriers that seem to be common with the parents we surveyed. When attending parent-teacher conferences, she noticed that because she does not speak English, she was left to wait until an interpreter could be found, or was made to find someone to interpret on her own, while English speaking parents who arrived after her were allowed immediate access to teachers.

Elizabeth Mendoza is also from Mexico and a mother of two. Her older child, Adriana is in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Although Elizabeth was able to attend school until the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, now that Adriana is taking several Advanced Placement courses, the questions she has about her homework are too advanced for Elizabeth to help with. Elizabeth revealed that when she attempted to inquire at school about other resources she could use to get help for her daughter, the school failed to provide her with information about available academic guidance programs. Eventually, Elizabeth had to resort to the Dial-A-Teacher<sup>14</sup> service, which Adriana can call and get help for her homework. Elizabeth also mentioned an incident that occurred when Adriana was younger. Adriana was learning how to multiply double digits, and naturally turned to Elizabeth when she was having trouble. According to Elizabeth, she taught her daughter how to multiply the way she had learned as a child, in Mexico. The next time Adriana had a math test, she returned home beside herself because her teacher had accused Adriana of cheating. When Elizabeth confronted the teacher, Elizabeth was told that even though Adriana had done the work correctly, because she used a different method for solving the problem she had cheated because she had not used the process taught to the other students. This was a clear example of the frustration Mexican immigrant parents face at the hands of a system that refuses to address the cultural differences that create unique barriers for Mexican-American students.

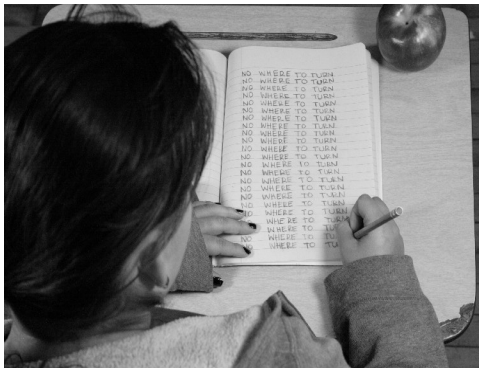
The barriers and frustration faced by parents' lack of access are compounded for students. Besides being unable to turn to their parents, Mexican-American students are often ignored, and sometimes effectively shunned, by the system itself; frozen out of information, advocacy, and opportunities, and finding themselves isolated with nowhere to turn.

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<sup>14</sup> Dial-A-Teacher is a service offered through the UFT and the Department of Education. It provides live homework help from "veteran" UFT teachers. See <http://www.uft.org/member/education/dat/> for more information.

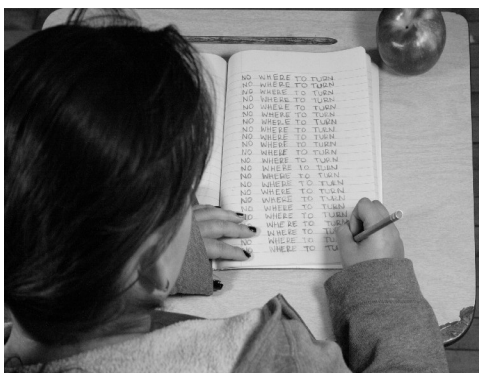
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***“My high school guidance counselor told me to drop out, that I wasn’t going to succeed.”***

The main mechanism for providing advocacy and support to students, within the public education system, is guidance counselors. However in general, the experience of Mexican-American youth who participated in our study has been overwhelmingly negative when it comes to their interactions with the guidance counseling system. Students reported experiences that include counselors who are completely disengaged and effectively withholding information, to counselors actively encouraging kids to drop out from school and discouraging them from going even considering college. A focus group participant reported: “My high school guidance counselor told me to drop out, that I wasn’t going to succeed.” Another student mentioned: “My guidance counselor said it was too bad I was doing well in school because since immigrants don’t pay taxes, their children can’t go to college.”



***“There is no respect for our culture. When one teacher saw my rosary she took it away. She said it was gang paraphernalia. She didn’t understand what my mother’s rosary meant to me.”***

It should also be noted, that none of the students who participated in our focus groups self-identified as American or Mexican-American, rather they labeled themselves as Mexican. This supports the theory that “Latino/a Americans who have experienced discrimination are less likely to self-identify as ‘Americans,’ and more likely to self-identify with pan-ethnic or hyphenated American labels... this is because experiences of discrimination teach some Latinos and Latinas that other citizens of the United States do not view them as

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'unhyphenated Americans.'"<sup>15</sup> When asked if they felt that their principals, teachers, and counselors understood their experience as Mexican-Americans with intensely transnational lives, all said that none of their educators understood their culture, language, and experience as first generation immigrants. "My teachers don't really understand who we are, to them we are all brown people that speak Spanish – Puerto Rican, Dominican, Mexican – are all the same to them," one student said. Another student shared, "There is no respect for our culture. As a Mexican I was raised very Catholic and my mother gave me rosary beads she had brought from Mexico. When one teacher saw my rosary she took it away. She said it was gang paraphernalia. She didn't understand what my mother's rosary meant to me."

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<sup>15</sup> Tanya Golash-Boza, "Dropping the Hyphen? Becoming Latino(a)-American through Racialized Assimilation." *Social Forces*, Vol. 85, No. 1 (Sep. 1, 2006), pp. 27

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### **V. RECOMMENDATIONS**

In the qualitative research conducted, we found that public schools are failing to address the needs of Mexican-American students in two main ways. First, schools fail to direct attention toward language and educational barriers faced by Mexican parents, making it impossible for them to be partners in their children's education. Secondly, schools fail to provide adequate support and guidance to Mexican-American students, especially in terms of the significant and cultural differences of Mexican-American students, and the unique social pressures and barriers they face as America's leading immigrant group, the majority of whom continue to struggle with the transnational nature of their and their family's lives.

#### **Language Access**

On February 27, 2006, Mayor Michael Bloomberg, City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, and Department Of Education Chancellor Joel I. Klein announced a new Regulation (Chancellor's Regulation A-663) with the purpose of providing translation and interpretation services to the hundreds of thousands of parents who have limited English skills. The Regulation, intended to break down language barriers and enable Limited-English Proficient (LEP) parents to participate in their children's education, was the result of a coalition campaign led by immigrant parents, community groups, and City Council members. The Regulation became effective on September 5, 2006.

It is overwhelmingly clear that immigrant parents continue to face significant language barriers when trying to access their children's schools. Marcia Del Rios from Advocates for Children spoke about a report her organization is currently preparing on the issue of language access:

“While the overwhelming majority of immigrant parents we spoke to said they would like to be more involved in their children's schools, they told us that they face many challenges that limit their ability to communicate with schools and participate in school activities. These include the lack of consistent interpretation and translation services, discrimination based on national origin and language, distrust of school staff, and fear of retaliation should they speak out against school policies or decisions. While some parents felt welcomed in their schools and had opportunities to get involved, most parents expressed frustration about their inability to get help and information from schools when they needed it and were disheartened by their experiences in the schools.”

Our first recommendation is that the Chancellor's office should hold a language access audit, especially for schools where there are high numbers of parents with limited English skills, to ensure that schools are complying with Regulation A-663. Additionally, public schools should not only be compelled to meet the provisions outlined in A-663, such as the requirement that “schools and offices must post in a conspicuous location at or near the primary entrance...a sign in each of the covered languages...indicating the availability of interpretation services”<sup>16</sup> and provide translation services during business hours. These

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<sup>16</sup> New York City Department of Education “Regulation of the Chancellor A-663” (Issued November 2, 2007) section VII, paragraph B.

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measures should be expanded to require translation for parent-teacher meetings and for homework assignments and notes from teachers – especially those concerning individual students—in order to give immigrant parents the opportunity to be partners in the education of their children.

### **Reemphasizing the Advocacy Role of Guidance Counselors**

Our second recommendation is to improve the quality of guidance counselors working with Mexican-American and other struggling students, by both reemphasizing the advocacy roll that guidance counselors play, as well as focusing on the ratio of guidance counselors to students and the basic requirements for guidance counselors in the New York City public education system. Frank Gaytan, who is currently conducting a similar study of Mexican-American youth in New York City public schools, suggests that having culturally sensitive, caring and respectful teachers or mentors can have a great impact on the success of Mexican-American students.

We recommend a reemphasis on the role of guidance counselors as advocates within a social justice framework. In her 2007 book *School Counseling to Close the Achievement Gap: A Social Justice Framework for Success*, Cheryl Holcomb-McCoy reinforces the need to emphasize the advocacy roll of guidance counselors by recounting our own experience. “I learned that it is often the ethnic minority students who receive covert and sometime overt messages from educators that they are not valued and “smart enough” to succeed...If any group of educators can make a difference in the lives of students, it’s guidance counselors.”<sup>17</sup> Holcomb-McCoy proposes that because of their basic training, guidance counselors don’t necessarily need reeducation, but rather expanded exposure to and training in social justice principles, existing inequalities, and the reality that their students live in.<sup>18</sup>

On that note, we feel the need to address the lack of uniform training and basic requirements necessary to be a guidance counselor in New York City public schools. Currently, New York does not have overarching or mandatory requirements for education, training, or certification of guidance counselors. We recommend that mechanisms be put in place to require guidance counselors, and especially those working in majority-minority schools, meet the basic requirements for regular teachers, as well as additional certification through a training program that adheres to the Advocacy Competencies that were unanimously endorsed by the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) in 2007<sup>19</sup>. The Competencies include Student Empowerment, Student Advocacy, Community Collaboration, Systems Advocacy, Public Information, and Social/Political Advocacy.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Cheryl Holcomb-McCoy: *School Counseling to Close the Achievement Gap: A Social Justice Framework for Success* (Corwin Press, 2007) 3.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Association for Counselor Education and Supervision website: <http://www.acesonline.net/features/asp?feature-id+726468253>. Accessed November 11, 2008.

<sup>20</sup> The full and detailed framework can be accessed on the ACES website: <http://acesonline.net>.

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In addition to improving the quality and focus of guidance counselors, we would also like to see a commitment from schools to reduce the student-to-counselor ratio. As with the minimum requirements to be a guidance counselor, New York also does not currently mandate the ratio of students to guidance counselors. The American School Counselor Association recommends a student-counselor ratio of 250:1<sup>21</sup>, while most New York City public schools will have only one guidance counselor assigned to entire school, most of which have more than 1,000 students. Thirty states, and the District of Columbia, currently mandate guidance counselors in K-12 schools, 17 of those have prescribed student-counselor ratios, and 15 provide 100 percent funding for guidance counselor programs through tax levy funds.<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, New York no longer mandates any provisions for guidance counselors in K-12 schools.<sup>23</sup>

### **VI. CONCLUSION**

The reality of Mexican-American students in New York City public schools is a lonely one, caught between a broken system that is leaving them behind and families whose desire to see their children succeed is undermined by a lack of access, basic education, and understanding. By addressing basic issues in parents' access to information and students' ability to access caring, culturally competent advocacy and information from their schools, we can ensure that every public school student has somewhere to turn for success.

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<sup>21</sup> American School Counselor Association website:

<http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?contentid=460>. Accessed November 11, 2008

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.