



THE COALITION FOR ASIAN AMERICAN CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Breakfast with New York City Public Schools Chancellor Joel Klein and Asian Pacific American Leaders

On April 16, 2008, the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF) convened a breakfast with New York City Public Schools Chancellor Joel Klein and Asian Pacific American led and serving community based organizations (CBOs). At the office of South Asian Youth Action (SAYA!) in Elmhurst, Queens, 20 CBO representatives met with the Chancellor, four high-ranking Department of Education officials, and one representative from the Mayor's Office to discuss issues facing Asian Pacific American students in New York City public schools.

ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN COMMUNITY

Approximately one million Asian Pacific Americans now reside within the five boroughs of New York City. At over 12% of the total New York City population, Asian Pacific American students represent 13% of students in New York City Public Schools. The Asian Pacific American community, far from monolithic, is comprised of a multitude of ethnic groups, religious affiliations, and socioeconomic statuses.

- 4 of the top 8 primary languages (other than English) spoken among families in public schools are Asian languages (Bengali, Chinese, Korean, and Urdu).
- Approximately 20% of Asian Pacific American students are English Language Learners (ELLs).

Asian Pacific American students generally have high rates of achievement on standardized tests. In 2007, for students in grades three through eight, 72% of Asian Pacific American students scored "proficient" or better on New York State English Language Arts exams, while 88% scored "proficient" or better on New York State Mathematics exams. These test scores increased from 63.7% and 69.5%, respectively, in 2003. These percentages were higher than proficiency rates for the general student population of New York City.

At the same time, the significant needs and challenges of the diverse Asian Pacific American student population of New York City are hidden by these test scores. For example, approximately 78% of Asian Pacific Americans in New York City are foreign born, and 28% live in linguistically isolated households, meaning that no one over the age of 14 in a family speaks English fluently. Additionally, the following figures speak to the need for increased attention to addressing the needs of the Asian Pacific American student population of New York City:

- 25% of Asian Pacific American children live in poverty.
- 1 out of 4 Asian Pacific American students do not graduate high school on time or at all.
- 1 out of 5 ELL students in New York City speak an Asian language.
- 3 out of 4 ELLs fail to graduate in four years, the lowest of any group.



Chancellor Joel Klein and CACF Executive Director Wayne Ho

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Chancellor Klein opened the breakfast stating that under the current structure of the New York City Department of Education (DOE), many reforms have been instituted to improve public schools. Chancellor Klein stressed that overall the reorganization under Mayor Michael Bloomberg and reforms made in the past few years have produced tangible progress for New York City students. In comparison with other major urban areas and other parts of the state, New York City has exceeded or kept

pace in major indicators of achievement. Chancellor Klein stated that there are a number of reforms directly affecting the experiences of Asian Pacific American children and families in school, including overall increases in education funding, translation and interpretation guidelines, creation of Parent Coordinators at every school, improved teacher quality, and high school choice.

Education Funding

Chancellor Klein explained that under Mayor Bloomberg, education funding has increased dramatically, especially over the past few years. In 2005, the State and City committed to increasing funding for public education in New York City by almost \$7 billion over the next four years. In addition to budget increases, funding has also been reallocated to serve the neediest students, such as students in poverty and English Language Learners (ELLs). Over \$350 million has also been redirected from central administration to direct services for schools and classrooms. Chancellor Klein also explained that ELLs have seen an increase in their education funding in the last couple of years. For example, public schools with a large population of ELLs can apply for a grant to expand and enhance their ELL programs based on a \$7 million allocation by the City Council this year.



Wendy Cheung, CACF Youth and Parent Program Coordinator, and Carlos Rodriguez, DOE

Language Access

Chancellor Klein discussed how the DOE has helped thousands of limited English proficient Asian Pacific American families since the implementation of the Chancellor's Regulation on translation and interpretation a couple years ago. He explained that the DOE has mandated the translation of documents and the provision of interpretation services for limited English proficient parents interacting with the public school system. The central Translation and Interpretation Unit as well as individual school allocations for translation are still being phased in, but the DOE has made large strides in giving more Asian Pacific American parents an opportunity to meaningfully participate in their child's education.

Parent Engagement

Chancellor Klein explained that the DOE recognizes how partnerships between schools, parents, and communities translate into overall educational success for students. To address the needs of parents, the DOE has created the position of Parent Coordinator in every school to facilitate parent involvement. They are supported by District Family Advocates and the Office of Family Engagement, whose sole responsibility is to help families. Citywide surveys have also been administered to give parents a venue to provide feedback on their child's school.



DOE and CBO representatives discuss educational disparities among the Asian Pacific American student population

Teacher Quality

Chancellor Klein discussed how teachers are at the core of student achievement. Statistics have shown that students who spend a year under a significantly weaker teacher suffer learning losses that may take years to undo. The DOE has ensured that all teachers are certified within the public school system. The DOE also has increased starting salaries by 43% and has ended the practice of forced transfers. In addition, it has created the Lead Teacher program to mentor and attract good teachers to underperforming schools. Another recent initiative offers housing subsidies for teachers who teach in high-needs schools.

High School Choice

Chancellor Klein explained that more than 300 new schools have been created since 2002. The DOE has been committed to expanding the range of choices for students in New York City, and students can now apply to attend any high school across the five boroughs. Many new small schools provide supportive environments, smaller class sizes, and learning communities focused on specific areas of study.

ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN COMMUNITY CONCERNS

After Chancellor Klein's remarks, Asian Pacific American led and serving CBOs asked questions and provided recommendations to the Chancellor and his staff. The discussion focused on three main issues identified by the community leaders: 1) harassment in schools, 2) English Language Learner services and programs, and 3) disaggregated data.



Amardeep Singh and Neha Singh, The Sikh Coalition

Harassment in Schools

CBO representatives asserted that consistent measures were needed in order to fully address the problem of bias-based harassment in schools and that they were supportive of a Chancellor's Regulation to codify the policy and procedures on this issue. Because each school has its own character, identifying schools with supportive environments and those with needs is important to tackle harassment on a local level. In order to accomplish this, CBO representatives emphasized the need to track harassment incidents to gauge the extent of this problem, both locally and system-wide. CBO representatives also suggested the use of alternative methods, such as implementing Asian Pacific American and ethnic studies classes and using peer-to-peer conflict resolution, to promote increased understanding.

Chancellor Klein emphasized that the city's diversity is an asset. He acknowledged that bias-based harassment is still an issue in schools and that letting differences divide our schools and communities would be a great tragedy. The DOE's current Respect for All campaign includes training for teachers and requires schools to identify a point person responsible for receiving and addressing reports of harassment.

To further the DOE's work on this issue, Chancellor Klein announced the creation of an internal committee to identify other options for systematically reducing harassment in schools and changing school cultures. The addition of a Chancellor's Regulation addressing bias-based harassment is one of the options on the table. The Chancellor also emphasized that any action

taken by the DOE must be implemented with real gains toward tackling this pervasive and debilitating problem in the City's public schools.

English Language Learner Services and Programs

CBO representatives provided feedback on ELL programs based on their observations and on comments from students they serve. In general, CBO representatives emphasized that more attention must be given to ELL students in schools and that some ELL programs sometimes struggle to provide even basic instruction. They also explained that school choice for ELL students has been limited because of informational barriers to applying and being admitted to small schools as well as difficulties ensuring that ELLs receive appropriate services in new small schools. The CBO representatives provided recommendations to support ELL students, such as providing assistance to teachers who want to become fully certified to teach in Asian languages and providing credit recovery for immigrant students who had relevant content knowledge in their home countries. They emphasized that their recommendations are supported by research showing that ELL students learn better with native language support than in English-only classes. In addition, because of the great linguistic diversity of the Asian Pacific American community, more bilingual programs in different Asian languages would also benefit Asian Pacific American ELL students.



Executive Director of the Office of English Language Learners Maria Santos and Chancellor Joel Klein

The Chancellor highlighted the work of the Office of English Language Learners (OELL), headed by Maria Santos, who was also present at the breakfast. OELL has focused on accountability of student performance and improvement of services. OELL has hired Compliance and Performance Specialists to conduct site visits in order to both monitor and provide technical assistance to individual schools. They have emphasized new small schools, visiting each new school at least twice during the school year. OELL has also expanded professional development opportunities for ELL

teachers, added native language libraries in Asian languages to some schools, and began piloting programs targeted at Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFEs) and long-term ELLs who have been in ELL programs for more than 6 years. The DOE is also trying to understand how communities in New York City are changing in order to respond effectively to rapidly shifting demographics. Ms. Santos also asserted that the DOE is committed to expanding dual language options, having opened programs in 18 schools.

The Chancellor also added that in 2007 more English Language Learners are meeting performance standards on State English Language Arts and Math tests compared to 2002, with dramatically fewer low scores.

Disaggregated Data

CBO representatives explained that current DOE data may not accurately capture a large portion of the diverse Asian Pacific American community. The various ethnic, linguistic, and geographically distinct communities face different challenges that are hidden by the overarching "Asian" category used by the DOE. "Home Language" and "Country of Origin" categories are useful but may leave out significant populations within the Asian Pacific American community, such as Indo-Caribbeans.

Chancellor Klein expressed his commitment to utilizing data to improve teaching and learning in schools. The ARIS data system that the DOE is developing can help schools to identify strengths and weaknesses and to tailor instruction in an appropriate manner. For data about the Asian Pacific American community, the Chancellor said that the DOE would sort its data on home language, place of birth, and race and would share it with the CBOs. The Chancellor also mentioned that the costs for collecting and evaluating data can be very high but that accurate and useful data is a powerful tool. The Chancellor suggested the CBOs to follow-up with Jim Liebman, Chief Accountability Officer, to discuss further issues regarding data.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Chancellor Klein, DOE staff, and Asian Pacific American CBOs came out of the breakfast with a commitment to collaborate and continue dialogue to address the needs of Asian Pacific American students. Recommendations discussed during the breakfast include:

Harassment in Schools*

- Institute a Chancellor's Regulation defining and codifying policy and procedures regarding incidents of bias-based harassment.
- Track and compile system-wide statistics on bias-based harassment incidents. Release statistics to the public at the end of each year, and identify schools that are in need of improvement in this area.
- Develop mandatory staff trainings for all administrators, teachers, and school safety officers

on awareness of bias-based harassment, prevention tactics, and strategies to deal with specific incidents.

English Language Learner Services and Programs

- Conduct targeted outreach for bilingual teachers who speak Asian languages.
- Identify and facilitate the creation of bilingual Asian language ELL programs in all eligible schools.
- Develop brochures and information on high school choice for parents who are immigrants and/or parents who have ELL students. Include descriptions of the timeline and application process as well as detailed information on programs for ELLs in each school.

Disaggregated Data

- Track students by Asian ethnicity, not only race. Review models for collecting this data, including the U.S. Census and other school districts (e.g., San Francisco Unified School District).
- Work with other city agencies, including the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs and the Administration for Children's Services, to share information on demographic shifts in order to plan for potential areas of increased need.



Carlos Rodriguez, DOE; Zeyen Wu, CACF; Brian Ellner, DOE; Wayne Ho, CACF; Maria Santos, DOE; Annetta Seecharran, SAYA!; Pauline Yu, Mayor's Office; and Ryan Brack, DOE (l-r)

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*Since the breakfast, DOE has begun working with several advocates to address harassment in schools, and several recommendations are in progress.