NY-AFFIRMs is concerned about the school system’s capacity to serve immigrants and Multilingual Learners/English Language Learners (MLLs/ELLs) after the COVID-19 outbreak and through prolonged school closures. We recognize that responding to this crisis in a state with over 700 diverse school districts is an unprecedented challenge. An equitable response is even more difficult with the state budget freezing Foundation Aid for the next school year and possibly defunding our school system while districts are struggling to shift to remote learning and address families’ complex physical, economic, and social-emotional needs. NY-AFFIRMs has outlined strategic steps to institute more equitable approaches that ensure immigrant families, Multilingual Learners/English Language Learners (MLLs/ELLs), and all students receive the services they need and deserve.

We call on NYS elected leaders and the State Education Department to immediately take these urgent actions:

1. Support districts in prioritizing and strengthening school-family engagement with a particular focus on multi-pronged approaches and innovative solutions to connect with MLLs/ELLs, immigrant families, and hard-to-reach families.
2. Require districts to track and make public the available data on MLLs/ELLs that have not been engaging with school.
3. Formally address policies on grade promotion, aging out, and provisional MLL/ELL designations that are supportive of students.
4. Encourage districts to provide training on distance learning and social-emotional support to teachers of MLL/ELL students.

1) Support districts in prioritizing and strengthening school-family engagement with a particular focus on multi-pronged approaches and innovative solutions to connect with families of MLLs/ELLs and hard to reach families. Schools’ direct connections with youth and families are essential to relay information to families, address individual challenges families are facing, and help families stay engaged in school.

- Leverage Regional Bilingual Education Resource Networks (RBE-RNs)/Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), MLL/ELL networks and expert practitioners to share best practices that prioritize strong school and family relationships and to design plans to connect with MLLs/ELLs who are not engaging in remote learning activities.
- Employ RBE-RNs/BOCES to facilitate partnerships between school districts, local and ethnic media channels (TV and radio), and local immigrant, refugee and other neighborhood organizations to share information in families’ home languages.
- Encourage school districts to partner with local CBOs, religious institutions, PTAs, and other social resources to inform and do outreach for families who are otherwise unreachable.
- Partner with RBE-RNs, BOCES, and CBOs to increase language access capacity, from organizing volunteers to creating innovative solutions such as state-wide hotlines with accessible translation and interpretation resources.
- Encourage districts to disseminate information and curricular materials through already established in-person services, including homeless shelters, meal pick up sites and/or delivery services.
- Seek funders and partnerships with technology companies to expedite access to devices and high-speed WiFi or broadband for MLL/ELL students and remind school districts that information about devices and technological supports should be accessible without technology and in families’ home languages.
2) Require districts to track and make publicly available data on MLLs/ELLs that have not been engaging with school. MLL/ELLs may have greater challenges with remote learning due to limited or inadequate devices, poor internet access and lack of family members’ ability to support with online learning. MLLs/ELLs with disabilities are especially vulnerable.

- **Districts should design plans to leverage school-based staff, such as parent coordinators, social workers, counselors and/or teachers to track attempted student engagement and lack of engagement.** Mechanisms should be devised at the district level so as not to create an undue burden on pedagogical staff.

- **Require that districts produce disaggregated attendance data for MLLs/ELLs,** as this information is crucial to identify the extent of this year's gaps and to advocate for restitution of services next year for MLLs/ELLs.

- **Encourage districts to collaborate with community-based organizations to relay information on essential resources to families** including access to healthcare, rent, and utility relief in families' home languages.

- **Track engagement and publicly report the number of received meals, devices, and additional services.**

3) Formally address policies on grade promotion, aging out, and provisional MLL/ELL designations that are supportive of students. Due to gaps in information, lack of access to technology, family crises, and other reasons, many immigrant youth have been left behind by remote learning. Many MLL/ELL students fear they will not be promoted and seniors are desperately worried they will not be able to graduate. MLLs/ELLs already have the highest dropout rate of any subgroup, and without further support for seniors, more MLLs/ELLs will potentially drop out.

- **Formally extend public school-age eligibility by one year to allow students who have not yet graduated to remain until the end of the school year in which they turn 22.** This would help guarantee that seniors that did not have equitable access to remote learning will be able to complete requirements for their high school degree.

- **Issue guidance for school districts recommending holding students harmless who did not have a consistent opportunity to access online instruction.** Require that all students be promoted—with the supports necessary to be successful—to the next grade level and that school districts provide enrichment opportunities (integrated into their classes, afterschool and summer programs) for students to **opt in 2020-2021.** Guidance should include grading policies that take into account the real situation of students and academic approaches that build on and value the real learning in MLL/ELL’s lived experience of the crisis.

- **Give schools guidance on providing provisional MLL/ELL services to students who would have otherwise been eligible to take the New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners (NYSITELL).**

4) Encourage districts to offer training and additional support for teachers of MLL/ELL students. Teachers of MLL/ELL students need support to transition high-quality pedagogical practices onto remote learning platforms.

- **Design ways to disseminate training and best practices.** Training should be incorporated into regular staff meetings teachers would already be attending.

- **Continue to collect and share any resources RBE-RNs and other practitioners have developed and found to be successful in remote instruction of MLLs/ELLs in NY including support for social and emotional learning.** RBE-RNs and expert MLL/ELL networks are providing weekly newsletters and tools, best practices, and PD opportunities. All state-level resources should be archived in easily accessible formats on the Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages website.

- **Provide school districts with curated professional learning opportunities for educators to adopt trauma-informed practices when engaging with students and families during COVID-19.**
In addition to the above recommendations, we also call on New York State elected leaders and the State Education Department to take additional steps to prepare for possible future waves of COVID 19 and/or other pandemics that require additional school closures. As the situation evolves, we will continue to provide recommendations to address challenges and opportunities based on input from our members.

Decreased investment threatens to exacerbate the urgent, surging needs of schools serving our multilingual communities. Already underfunded before this crisis, school districts around the state will be forced to make cuts while trying to address the enormous costs of remote learning and the added basic and mental health needs of students and families currently experiencing trauma due to the health crisis related to deaths in the family, loss of income, food insecurity, and loss of essential utilities. The Federal CARES Act was used to supplant New York State (NYS) funding for schools instead of supplementing high needs districts’ budgets. Therefore, NYS must ensure that any additional federal funding “supplements, and does not supplant” services and supports for MLLs/ELLs, immigrant families, and their educators.

We are grateful for our educators and school staff who have risked their safety to teach our youth, support families, and feed the hungry. Yet our educators, families, and students need more resources, support, and guidance from our legislators and NYSED to weather this crisis. This unimaginable moment has underscored profound inequities within and among NYS school districts and has exacerbated them, particularly for low-income multilingual families. Therefore, we hope to partner with state leaders and NYSED to transform our school systems, with a particular focus on equity, transparency, and justice.

NY-AFFIRMs is a statewide coalition of diverse educators and community-based organizations focused on the needs of Multilingual Learners/English Language Learners (MLLs/ELLs) and their families. MLLs/ELLs are students who speak a language other than English at home and qualify to receive supports to learn English at school. NY-AFFIRMs urges New York State legislators and educational leaders to prioritize significant investments to leverage MLLs'/ELLs' full potential.

Signatures:

Advocates for Children of New York (AFC)
Alliance for Quality Education (AQE)
American Baptist Churches USA
Brentwood Union Free School District
Brooklyn Defender Services
Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY
Center for the Integration and Advancement of New Americans, Inc. (CIANA)
Central American Refugee Center (CARECEN-NY)
Central Islip Union Free School District
CENTRO CORAZON DE MARIA
Chinese Progressive Association
Chinese-American Planning Council (CPC)
Circulo de la Hispanidad
Citywide Council for District 75
Committee for Hispanic Children & Families (CHCF)
CUNY Faculty for Bilingual Education
CUNY Rising Alliance
DEJUS CENTER INC
Family & Children's Association (FCA)
Flanbwayan Haitian Literacy Project
Good Shepherd Services
Graham Windham
Hempstead Hispanic Civic Association
Hempstead Union Free School District
Hispanic Heritage Council of Western New York, Inc.
Hunts Point Alliance For Children
Italian American Committee on Education (IACE)
Italian General Consulate of New York
Jackson Heights People for Public Schools
Journey's End Refugee Services
Language & Literacy Resource Center
Latina Moms of Long Island / Latina Moms Connect
Latino Leadership Council of Patchogue
Literacy Partners
Long Beach Latino Civic Association
Long Island Immigrant Student Advocates, Inc.
Long Island Latino Teacher Association (LILTA)
Long Island Together
Mary's Place Refugee Outreach
Metropolitan Russian American Parents Association
Mixteca Organization Inc.
National Association of Puerto Rican and Hispanic Social Workers
New York Civil Liberties Union
New York Immigration Coalition
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI)
New York State Association for Bilingual Education
Next100
North Fork Spanish Apostolate
NYS TESOL
Refugees Helping Refugees
Robin Wilt for Congress
Sisters of St. Joseph, Office of Justice, Peace, Integrity of Creation
Suffolk County Hispanic Advisory Board
Teatro Yerbabruja Art Center of Central Islip
Teens Take Charge
The Brotherhood/Sister Sol
The Child Center of NY
The Collaborative for Inclusive Education
The Opportunity Network
UnLocal
Wyandanch Union Free School District
Zone 126