

March 11, 2019

Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor, New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins
Majority Leader, New York State Senate
Legislative Office Building
188 State Street, Room 907
Albany, NY 11247

Honorable Carl Heastie
Speaker, New York State Assembly
Legislative Office Building
188 State Street, Room 932
Albany, NY 11248

Dear Governor Cuomo, Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, and Speaker Heastie,

On behalf of the Latino Educational Advocacy Directors (LEAD) Coalition, a collective of thirty organizations committed to increasing educational equity and closing the achievement gap for Latino students across the state, we write to urge you to include \$110 million in the final budget for multilingual learners (MLLs) across the state.

Education for Multilingual Learners (MLLs) in New York State (NYS) is in a state of crisis. For decades, NYS has failed to dedicate the appropriate level of focus and funding necessary to support the academic needs of this growing student population. And it shows. From graduation and dropout rates to scores on state assessments, multilingual learners lag sluggishly behind their non-MLL peers in NYS.

Here are the heartbreaking and unacceptable facts: In 2017, only 13% of MLLs were proficient in math and 5% in English in NYS assessments.¹ In that same year, the MLL four-year dropout rate of 30% was actually higher than MLL four-year graduation rate of 27%.² And although the six-year dropout and graduation rates, 36% and 48% respectively,³ is better, they are far from the six-year 10% dropout and 85% graduation rate of the total student population. These numbers confirm the reality that NYS is one of our nation's worst performing states when it comes to the educational achievement of MLLs. The educational gap is startling and requires immediate action. New York State can and must do better by its MLL population.

¹ 2016-2017 New York State Report Card

² New York State Education Department, June Graduation Rates for 2013 Cohort

³ 2016-2017 New York State Report Card Database

The New York State Board of Regents, under the leadership of Chancellor Betty Rosa, has focused on this crisis and the New York State Education Department has created diverse plans to support our MLLs. However, the governor and state legislature need to provide the funding for these supports. We strongly urge you to include funding for MLLs in their final budget. With these investments, New York State can turn the table and ensure that multilingual learners across the state receive a quality education that sets them on the pathway to postsecondary success.

The population of MLLs across New York State has grown 19% over the last ten years.⁴ Yet, the supply of certified Bilingual Education (BE) and English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers has not grown accordingly. In fact, since 1990 NYS is only one of two states that has had a consistent yearly shortage of certified bilingual teachers. And, in some regions across the state, the percentage of uncertified teachers teaching bilingual students is over 20%. That is unacceptable. Teaching is at the heart of learning, and students suffer when schools improvise and allow uncertified teachers to teach our MLLs. The continuing failure of our education system to prepare multilingual learners for postsecondary success is a tragedy and threatens the future prosperity of New York State as a whole.

In order to increase MLL outcomes, we strongly urge you to invest in the following:

1. Fund a Targeted Initiative to Increase Graduation Rates for MLLs- \$3 million

NYS must address the fact that the multilingual dropout rate is higher than the graduation rate. In order to increase the graduation rates of multilingual learners, NYS must increase its investment in the academic supports provided to high school multilingual learners as well as provide them opportunities for out-of-school time opportunities for credit recovery. In addition, NYS needs to provide alternatives to traditional assessments and ensure that assessments are provided in all of the top nine most popular languages.

2. Increase the Number of Certified English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and Bilingual Education (BE) Teachers in General and Special Education Settings and Provide More Professional Development Opportunities for current ESOL or BE Teachers- \$7 million

NYS has a teacher shortage of certified ESOL and bilingual teachers across the state. In order to ensure that multilingual learners are receiving a quality education, NYS must increase opportunities for teachers to obtain certification, especially in regions of greatest need. To demonstrate a commitment to bilingual education, NYS should provide incentives for teachers to become certified. And to ensure effective teaching and learning, NYS necessitates the investment of the professional growth and development of ESOL or bilingual teachers via increased professional development.

3. Increase Investment in Academic Supports and Parent Engagement for MLLs, especially in Pre-K through High School- \$9.8 million

For many students, Pre-K is the first year of their formal education. And the reality is that a large percentage of these students do not speak English at home. In order to adequately facilitate their academic growth, NYS must provide funding to support the expansion of integrated classrooms and provide guidance and oversight in rolling out and sustaining these classrooms in Pre-K. At the same time, NYS needs to invest in the professional development of bilingual early childhood staff that put them on a pathway to careers in education. Lastly, NYS must also do a better job of increasing parent

⁴ New York State Report Card, 2008-2017

information and outreach in home languages and must invest in providing additional supports to districts to develop more robust materials and transparent outreach processes to better inform parents in home language.

4. Increase Socio-Emotional Supports Provided to MLLs- \$5 million

For many recent newcomers, adjusting to life in a new country can be difficult, and for multilingual learners that are immigrants or come from mixed-status families, worry and fear may dominate their thoughts, potentially impeding their learning. In order to better support our multilingual learners, NYS must address their socio-emotional needs. As such NYS should pilot a school-based mental health initiative in schools with high MLL populations and increase professional development opportunities for counselors and social workers working with MLLs and their families. At the same time, NYS needs to increase the number of bilingual social workers and counselors with large MLL populations.

5. Form a New York State Commission to Advance the Achievement of MLLs- \$200,000

A group of experts and practitioners should be convened by NYS to thoughtfully provide guidance and feedback on how to increase the achievement of MLLs. The group would develop a best practices report, working backwards from a statement of full equity and high expectations, demonstrating a full commitment to multilingualism as an asset.

6. Earmark a Minimum of \$85 million of the Foundation Aid Owed to MLLs

NYS must restore owed Foundation Aid to school districts across the state over the next three year, and \$85 million per year, approximately 9% of the annual amount allocated, should be earmarked for multilingual learners in order to ensure that their needs are being met.

It is our hope that this letter will inform the priorities and decision of the state's political and education leadership in the months ahead. Closing the MLL achievement gap is within our reach if we have a common vision, a common path, and a long-term focused commitment. We know that the investments we make to improve MLL achievement will positively touch every aspect of our community and help build a stronger New York State.

Sincerely,

About the LEAD Coalition

The Latino Educational Advocacy Directors (LEAD) coalition consists of leading educational advocacy organizations committed to improving Latino academic outcomes and opportunities in New York State. Created by the Hispanic Federation, the coalition works to highlight and address the educational needs of Latino students in the following ways: identifying and supporting effective practice; public policy advocacy and research; and the advancement of a shared educational agenda.

Advocates for Children of New York
Alliance for Quality Education
Adelante of Suffolk County
Amber Charter School
Avenues for Justice
ASPIRA of NY
Casita Maria Center for Arts and Education
Catholic Charities Community Services
Coalition for Hispanic Family Services
Committee for Hispanic Children and Families
Community Assoc. of Progressive Dominicans
El Centro del Inmigrante
El Puente
ExpandED Schools
Hispanic Federation
Ibero-American Action League
Internationals Network for Public Schools
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
Latino U College Access
LSA Family Health Service
Masa-Mex Ed
National "I Have a Dream" Foundation
NYC Coalition for Educational Justice
New York State Association for Bilingual Education (NYSABE)
Operation Exodus
Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow
The Opportunity Network
Parent-Child Home Program
Project Hospitality
Zone 126