

## **Closing gaps for ELLs**

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Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Chancellor Joe Klein have boasted about educational gains in New York City's public schools. But one of the glaring problems in our schools is the dropout crisis affecting students learning English.

The city's high school graduation rate for English Language Learners, ELLs, is a shockingly low 23.5 percent. This does not bode well for immigrant communities and a city that increasingly relies on these communities for productivity and growth.

There are 150,000 ELLs in city schools. Among them are largely teenage newcomers and long-term ELLs and also students who had little or no formal education in their native language.

The low graduation rates don't tell the entire story, according to the city's Department of Education. Former ELLs are graduating from high school at rates that exceed students who are native English speakers, according to the DOE. And the pass rate on English proficiency exams has increased.

Throughout the city, there are models of success. For example, at the Bronx International High School, the ELL dropout rate is under 5 percent.

But these success stories have to be the standard, not the exception. Improving outcomes for ELLs must be a top priority across districts, including at charter schools.

The New York Immigration Coalition has identified a number of issues with the delivery of quality support for ELLs. These include a shortage of certified ESL and bilingual teachers in New York State. With stimulus dollars and a president calling for far-reaching educational reform, Albany must address this gap.

The Coalition also makes recommendations for improving educational outcomes—among them, focusing on high-risk ELLs, accountability for immigrant parent engagement, and the recruitment of qualified staff to low-performing schools.

These and other strategies are clearly in order for a school system that wants to bill itself as a national example.