EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Education for Multilingual Learners (MLLs) in New York State is in a state of crisis. For decades, New York 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 staggeringly 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 New York State assessments.\(^1\) In that same year, the MLL four-year dropout rate of 30% was actually higher than the MLL four-year graduation rate of 27%.\(^2\) And while the six-year dropout and graduation rates improve to 36% and 48% respectively,\(^3\) they fall depressingly short of the six-year 10% dropout and 85% graduation rate of the total student population. These numbers confirm the reality that New York is one of our nation’s worst performing states when it comes to the educational achievement of MLLs. The MLL educational gap is startling and requires immediate action.

The population of MLLs across New York State has grown nearly 20% 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, New York State 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%. Inequities in access and opportunity to special academic and socio-emotional supports have also led to disparate and troubling outcomes for MLL students. If we are to significantly improve the educational attainment of MLLs, this situation much change.

We have long said that crisis can equal opportunity, especially as new voices in our state are calling for a progressive reimagining of our schools and education. Towards that most worthy of goals, the Latino Educational Advocacy Coalition (LEAD) lays out in this report its top six action priorities to close the MLL educational gap in New York State. These recommendations are rooted in an understanding that significantly improving the educational success of MLLs will require a collective effort, reliable funding and high quality monitoring.

1. FUND A TARGETED INITIATIVE TO INCREASE GRADUATION RATES FOR MLLS

In order to increase the graduation rates of multilingual learners, New York State (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.

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\(^1\) 2016-2017 New York State Report Card
\(^3\) 2016-2017 New York State Report Card Database
\(^4\) New York State Report Card, 2008-2017
2. INCREASE THE NUMBER OF CERTIFIED BILINGUAL TEACHERS
NYS has a shortage of certified ESOL and bilingual teachers across the state. In order to ensure that multilingual learners are receiving a quality education by a certified ESOL or BE teacher, NYS must invest significant resources in developing those teachers. For this to happen, NYS needs to increase opportunities and incentives for teachers to obtain ESOL or BE certification, especially in regions of greatest need. And to ensure effective teaching and learning, NYS must provide ongoing professional development trainings and opportunities for current ESOL and bilingual teachers.

3. INCREASE INVESTMENT IN ACADEMIC SUPPORTS AND PARENT ENGAGEMENT FOR MLLS, ESPECIALLY IN PRE-K THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL
NYS must provide funding to support the expansion of integrated classrooms and provide guidance and oversight in rolling out and sustaining integrated classrooms from pre-K through high school. At the same time, NYS needs to invest in the professional development of bilingual early childhood staff via training institutes and other opportunities that also put them on a pathway to career ladders and certification, so that they have the skills and knowledge to better support MLLs. As students progress in the school system, NYS should allocate new funding to districts via grants for extended school-based learning including afterschool and summer academies; and fund programming for MLLs performing below grade level, and provide new targeted supports for Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE). NYS must also do a better job of increasing parent 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
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, fear of anti-immigrant policies, and worries about not being accepted or fitting in, can impede or negatively impact their learning. In order to better support our multilingual leaners, NYS must address their socio-emotional needs. As such, NYS must invest in providing resources and building capacity to provide mental health services to MLLs. 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 in schools with larger MLL populations.

5. FORM A NEW YORK STATE COMMISSION TO ADVANCE THE ACHIEVEMENT OF MLLS
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, and demonstrating a full commitment to multilingualism as an asset.

6. EARMARK A MINIMUM OF $85 MILLION ANNUALLY FOR MLLS OVER A THREE-YEAR PHASE-IN OF THE TOTAL $4.1 BILLION OWED IN FOUNDATION AID
NYS must restore owed Foundation Aid to school districts across the state over the next three years. $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 document will inform the priorities and decision of the state’s political and education leadership in the months and years 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 to achieving that essential goal.

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.