

City School District of Albany 2021-22 Legislative Priorities Support for English as a New Language Immigrant and Refugee Students

The City School District of Albany remains deeply committed to our English-language learners (ELLs) and their families. Over the past several years, our district has experienced a significant increase of immigrant and refugee families, and, in response to that growing need, we established a Department of ENL and Refugee Services as well as the Albany International Center. This optional, short-term program was designed to serve refugee and immigrant students in grades 6-12 in the early stages of learning English and also adjusting to a new culture and a new community.

The enrollment of ELLs comprises about 12% of our total student population. Our students represent more than 55 countries and speak 45 different languages. Even though federal restrictions have reduced the number of incoming refugees and immigrants to our city and country in recent years, our district has added approximately 150 new ELL students so far in the 2020-21 school year despite those restrictions and the current global pandemic. With a new administration taking leadership at the national level in January, we anticipate that the numbers of immigrant and refugee families moving into our city may return to the levels we experienced from 2012-17, when our ENL population more than tripled and made our school district one of the fastest-growing in New York.

The state continues to outline the expectation for districts to meet the needs of ELLs through mandated increased staffing levels and prescribed units of study through the implementation of CR Part 154. We applaud this philosophy. Unfortunately, the requirements of CR Part 154 are unfunded. This places a significant burden on high-needs districts like ours to provide programs and services for our ELL students without short-changing other students. Support specifically targeted to districts such as Albany with large and growing ELL student populations is a critical need, especially amid the ongoing COVID-19 fiscal crisis and with our federal immigration policies likely to change dramatically in the coming months.

In an effort to comply with the requirements and unfunded mandates of CR Part 154, our school district added 28 new teaching positions over the past five school years at a total cost of nearly \$2.2 million. These positions do not include our additional investments in a principal for the Albany International Center, an ENL home-school coordinator and an ENL social worker. The added staffing resulted in positive outcomes for our students, as evidenced by the following from our last full academic year of traditional in-person programming:

In 2018-19, Albany International Center achieved:

- Attendance rate for all grades – 93%

(more)

VISION STATEMENT

The City School District of Albany will be a district of excellence with caring relationships and engaging learning experiences that provide equitable opportunities for all students to reach their potential.

MISSION STATEMENT

We will work in partnership with our diverse community to engage every learner in a robust educational program designed to provide the knowledge and skills necessary for success.

- Algebra Regents pass rate – 90% of students passed in June/August
- Whitney Young Mobile Van – Two times per month, a 100% increase
- St. Peter’s Dental Van – 63% of students serviced
- Restorative Justice Initiative - 60 mediations/restorative circles
- Added Northern Rivers staff person with caseload capacity of 25
- Completed 66 home visits, representing 41% of students
- 67% of students with two data points increased their English proficiency by at least one level

However, the unprecedented health and economic crisis thrust upon our nation in March had a catastrophic impact on ENL programming. Specifically, faced with deep looming reductions in state aid due COVID-19 in our current school year, the district restructured the Albany International Center program, moving all students in the program in grades 7-12 to a virtual instructional model. Students in grade 6 had the option of in-person or virtual instruction at our district middle schools, with the robust ENL services we offer district-wide. But all AIC students lost the benefits of the more structured instructional and social-emotional support that the in-person program provides.

It is well-documented that the sudden shift to remote learning last spring exacerbated the digital divide among students in U.S. schools. The impact is even more pronounced for ELL students, and especially for Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE). Not only are these students expected to independently navigate a new and unfamiliar online learning environment, they are faced with linguistic and academic challenges that can be difficult to overcome without the consistent, targeted support of ENL educators and other professionals to meet their needs. The devastating impact of the recent budget cuts, paired with the potential influx of hundreds of new refugees and immigrants beginning in 2021, sets the stage for significant challenges to support this vulnerable student population in communities like Albany that serve as federal relocation cities for immigrants and refugees and welcome the vibrant diversity these families bring to our community.

For 2021-22, the district is proposing the re-establishment of the stand-alone in-person Albany International Center program, providing that the health and safety circumstances related to COVID-19 allow that instructional model. To restore that program, we would need to restore the positions eliminated at the start of this school year as we restructured due to the economic realities of the pandemic:

- Eight (8.0) ENL teachers
- Four (4.0) content teachers
- One (1.0) classroom teacher
- One (1.0) school nurse
- One (1.0) ENL Art teacher
- One-half (0.5) Physical Education teacher
- One (1.0) office manager
- One (1.0) teaching assistant
- One (1.0) principal

In our longer-term planning, we envision the Albany International Center growing to serve students in the Dual Language Program, a pre-K through grade 5 bilingual immersive program for native Spanish and English speakers. Also, we would like AIC to include newcomers in grades 3-5 as well as ELL students 18-21 that are about to age-out of public education without the time to complete high school graduation requirements. We also envision the center becoming a regional hub that would provide these same services to ELLs from surrounding school districts, consolidating resources and building on our experience and expertise in serving our city’s large, rapidly growing and diverse refugee and ELL student population.