



ADVANCE THE EMPOWERMENT OF SOUTH ASIAN YOUTH.

Approximately one quarter of the South Asian population in the United States is under the age of 18.ⁱ **South Asian youth often face unique issues in the United States** that are often overlooked by members in the community and by policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels.

Many South Asian youth, particularly those who come from low-income families or are recent immigrants, are in need of academic preparation, employment training, leadership development, and safe spaces within schools. In addition, **limited English proficient (LEP) South Asian students struggle to academically succeed** without appropriate bilingual assistance, and, following 9/11, many South Asian students have experienced bias and discrimination in the classroom. **For undocumented youth, additional obstacles arise** in terms of attaining affordable higher education and interacting with immigration enforcement officials who enter schools to apprehend students lacking immigration status. Programs and policies that address these issues must be developed in consultation with students, parents, schools, and community organizations in order to meet the growing needs of young South Asians.

Primary and Secondary Education

Challenges Facing Limited English Proficient South Asian Students Many South Asian students are unable to obtain a meaningful education due to inadequate resources for limited English proficient (LEP) students. In New Jersey, for example, South Asian students are now among the top ten ethnic groups with the highest LEP enrollment rates statewide.ⁱⁱ Studies have shown that the lack of bilingual education instruction at schools can lead to a number of consequences for LEP students including poor academic performance; incorrect placement in special education classes; inability to form friendships with peers; lack of preparation for higher education; and lack of requisite skills to obtain employment.ⁱⁱⁱ

In addition, many LEP students find themselves falling behind their classmates without appropriate instruction and trained teachers. Yet, across the country, teacher shortages are most severe in subjects beneficial to LEP students, including bilingual, English as a Second Language, and foreign language courses.^{iv}

Cultural Barriers Between South Asian Parents and Schools Compounding the difficulties that students face in the classroom is the breakdown of communication between teachers and parents of South Asian students. Many immigrants coming to the United States were educated in school systems that are markedly different from what their children experience.^v School administrators and teachers in the United States often believe it is the parents' responsibility to be engaged in their children's education but fail to acknowledge and learn about the cultural differences that exist.^{vi} Due to such barriers, parents often refrain from becoming involved in their children's educational experiences. In addition, due to linguistic and cultural differences, immigrant parents are often not informed of important school issues, including parent-teacher conferences, examinations, and disciplinary procedures. In order to ensure that all South Asian students and parents are engaged, it would help significantly to have South Asian teachers and other school staff to whom they can relate.

Discrimination and Law Enforcement in the Classroom For many South Asian youth, classrooms are often not the safe spaces that they should be. This is due to harassment motivated by a student's race or religion, the presence of law enforcement at schools, and immigration enforcement authorities targeting immigrant students.

South Asian children often encounter bias-based bullying in the classroom and mistreatment by school teachers and administrators because of their ethnicity, national origin, or religion. In fact, a recent report revealed that over 75% of Sikh male students surveyed in New York City were teased or harassed on the basis of their Sikh identity.^{vii} Discrimination in the classroom also affects Muslim students; in 2006, over 170 civil rights complaints were reported involving Muslims in schools across the country.^{viii} Students of other faiths have also experienced bullying and harassment for various reasons, including religious practices around vegetarianism or worship of multiple deities.^{ix}

In addition to harassment perpetrated by classmates, teachers, and administrators, the increased presence of police and immigration authorities in schools following 9/11 has threatened the safety of many South Asian youth.^x Law enforcement presence often includes armed police patrolling school hallways, metal detectors at school, regular frisks and searches of students, and even enforcement of school disciplinary policies.^{xi} Often students find that police presence, instead of promoting school safety, can actually diminish it.

Particularly threatening to undocumented students is collaboration that has occurred among local law enforcement, immigration authorities, and school administrators since 9/11. Various policies, including the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB), the *PATRIOT Act*, and the *National Defense Authorization Act of 2002*, have enabled personal information about individuals, including students, to be shared among governmental agencies. Although all students, including those who are undocumented, have the right to a high school education, schools frequently ask students about their immigration status upon registration, when applying for lunch

programs, and when counseling them for higher education options.^{xii}

Another roadblock in creating safe zones for South Asian students have been inflexible “zero tolerance” disciplinary policies that mandate maximum

punishments for students who commit certain infractions.^{xiii} Such policies rely upon harsh punitive measures and even criminal charges when addressing often minor disciplinary problems.^{xiv} Zero tolerance disciplinary codes have also been shown to disproportionately affect students of color and the most vulnerable within student populations.

Higher Education

Pursuing Higher Education for Low-Income Students Poverty within the South Asian community prevents many students from being able to obtain a college education. In fact, the majority of

Bangladeshis in the United States live at 200% of the poverty line and more than one-fifth of Pakistani and Bangladeshi children live in poverty.^{xv} Although only 13% of Indians are at 125% of the poverty level, this constitutes more than 200,000 individuals.^{xvi} While various federal government programs are currently in place to promote the higher education of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, including Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) and TRIO (which combines various education programs including Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services), greater efforts must be made to promote the recruitment and retention of low-income South Asian students through these programs.

Higher Education for Undocumented Students Often, through no fault of their own, undocumented students live in the United States without immigration status after immigrating with their parents or other family members. These students are frequently prevented from pursuing their academic dreams due to state policies banning undocumented students from public colleges and universities or forcing them to pay out-of-state tuition. Policies must be enacted at the state and federal levels to ensure that these youth can obtain an affordable college education and also be able to legalize their status.

DID YOU KNOW?

A survey of South Asian students attending public schools in New York study found that 51% of respondents reported having seen and/or experienced harassment by school or police authorities. Among those who experienced or witnessed such harassment, 85% believed it was based on actual or perceived race, ethnicity, religion, or immigration status. *Education Not Deportation: Impact of New York City School Safety Policies on South Asian Immigrant Youth, Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM) (2006).*

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Ensure access to education that is cognizant of the needs of LEP students.

- Federal and state education agencies should increase funding for bilingual education programs that assist LEP South Asian students.
- State and local education agencies should obtain bilingual education materials in South Asian languages that can be incorporated into classroom curricula.
- State and local education agencies should provide technical assistance and trainings on cultural, linguistic, and immigration experiences in conjunction with local South Asian community-based organizations to teachers and school districts with LEP South Asian student populations.
- Schools, in consultation with South Asian community-based organizations, leaders and advocates, should recruit and train teachers who speak South Asian languages.
- Schools should train all teachers to understand the needs of South Asian LEP students and to work in multicultural environments.
- Federal and state education agencies should ensure that mandated standardized exams used to ascertain school performance accommodate the needs of LEP students, regardless of how long they are in the United States.
- State education agencies should develop accountability mechanisms to ensure that funding for English as a second language and bilingual education programs are used for such programs.
- Schools should promote peer tutoring programs among South Asian students that involve activities that foster language learning skills.
- State education agencies should conduct assessments through state education agencies to understand the needs of LEP South Asian students.
- Federal and state education agencies, as well as the U.S. Census Bureau, should expand data collection efforts on LEP students.

Ensure communication between schools and South Asian parents who are LEP and/or recent immigrants.

- State and local education agencies should develop programs encouraging South Asian parents, particularly those who are LEP or recent immigrants, to be involved in their children's education.
- Schools in areas with significant South Asian populations should provide translated notices about school activities, such as parent-teacher conferences, in South Asian languages.

- Schools should recruit South Asian teachers and education staff to facilitate communication between parents and educators.
- State and local education agencies should utilize community organizations and ethnic media to reach out to South Asian parents about important school-related information.

Ensure that classrooms are safe spaces free from discrimination and harassment.

- State and local education and civil rights agencies should institute educational training programs, and technical assistance to school districts on harassment and bias-based bullying.
- Federal, state, and local education and civil rights agencies should outreach to South Asian community members on anti-discrimination and bias-based bullying.
- State education agencies should develop educational curricula that promote cultural understanding in the classroom and incorporate the cultural and historical experiences of South Asian communities and faiths.
- Federal and state education and civil rights agencies should provide Know Your Rights resources in South Asian languages for students and parents about their rights when they confront bias and discrimination in the classroom.
- Schools should recruit South Asian case managers to provide counseling support for victims of bias and discrimination in the classroom.

Ensure that classrooms are safe spaces free from police presence and immigration enforcement.

- State legislatures as well state and local education agencies should establish "immigrant safe zones" where teachers, administrators, and other school staff are prohibited from inquiring about students' immigration status on school grounds.
- Law enforcement agencies should train police officers in public schools on South Asian cultures and faiths.
- Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) as well as schools should ensure that immigration enforcement will not seek out students who may be undocumented in the classroom setting.
- Schools, law enforcement, and ICE should put safeguards in place to ensure that personal information about students is not shared.
- Schools should involve students, parents, teachers, and South Asian community-based organizations in the development and evaluation of classroom safety programs.
- Federal, state, and local education and civil rights agencies should provide *Know your*

Rights resources in South Asian languages for students harassed by law enforcement or immigration authorities.

Ensure access and resources to higher education.

- Congress should enact legislation, such as the *DREAM Act*, that allows students lacking immigration status to legalize their status.
- Congress and state legislatures should enact legislation allowing students lacking immigration status to be eligible for higher education at public colleges and universities at in-state tuition rates.
- State legislatures and universities should promote scholarships and tuition assistance for low-income South Asian students.
- Congress should support the designation of higher educational institutions that serve minority students, including South Asians, to receive federal and state funding.

ⁱ U.S. Census 2000, Summary Files 1 through 4. See also *Demographic Characteristics of South Asians in the United States: Emphasis on Poverty, Gender, Language Ability, and Immigration Status*, South Asian Americans Leading Together (2007).

ⁱⁱ State of New Jersey Department of Education, Bureau of Bilingual/ESL Education. *2006-2007 Languages with Highest LEP Statewide Enrollment* (2007).

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Provision of an Equal Education Opportunity for Limited-English Proficient Students*, U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (2000).

^{iv} *Teachers Supply and Demand in the U.S.*, American Association for Employment in Education (1998).

^v *Id.*

^{vi} *Id.*

^{vii} *Hatred in the Hallways: A Preliminary Report on Bias Against Sikh Students in New York City's Public Schools.*, The Sikh Coalition (2007)

^{viii} *The Status of Muslim Civil Rights in the United States*, Council on American-Islamic Relations (2007).

^{ix} "School Badgering: Kid's Play or Serious Stuff?," *Hinduism Today* (January/February 2001).

^x *Education Not Deportation: Impact of New York City School Safety Policies on South Asian Immigrant Youth*, Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM) (2006).

^{xi} *Id.*

^{xii} *Id.*

^{xiii} *School to Prison Pipeline Factsheet*, New York Civil Liberties Union (2007).

^{xiv} *Id.*

^{xv} See *supra* note i.

^{xvi} *Id.*