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THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS  
OF THE  
PUERTO RICAN CHILD  
IN  
NEW YORK CITY

WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON DISTRICT 7, SOUTH BRONX

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LAS NECESIDADES EDUCACIONALES

DEL  
NIÑO PUERTORRIQUEÑO  
EN NUEVA YORK

CON ENFASIS ESPECIAL EN EL DISTRITO # 7, SUP DEL BRONX

Prepared for Presentation  
to the New York State  
Board of Regents  
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by  
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HOW WELL ARE OUR PUERTO RICAN CHILDREN DOING IN SCHOOL?

- \*\* The first measure of a good school must be:  
Are the children learning to read?
- \*\* New York State is one of the few states in the country where every child - in public, parochial and private schools is given the same test. Thus we can compare our children to children in the rest of the city, and in the rest of the state.
- \*\* In October 1969, 74% of the children in New York State scored above minimum competency in reading.
- \*\* But only 52% of the children in New York City reached this standard.
- \*\* AND ONLY 27% OF THE CHILDREN IN DISTRICT 7 READ ABOVE MINIMUM COMPETENCY! Thus, District 7, with the most Puerto Rican students in the city, also had the lowest reading scores in the city...and the state!
- \*\* Only half of the children who complete junior high school in District 7 read well enough to qualify for a diploma.
- \*\* 57% of the Puerto Rican students drop out in their first two years of high school -- compared to 29% for mainland whites.
- \*\* Although 25% of the public school students in the city schools are Puerto Rican, only 3% (or 1600) of the students who received Academic Diplomas from our city high schools in June 69 were Puerto Rican!

THE MOST SERIOUS PROBLEM IS OUR SCHOOLS DON'T HAVE PUERTO RICAN STAFF

\*\* The Puerto Rican Forum issued a recent study showing that out of 55,000 teachers in New York City, only 350 were Puerto Rican!

\*\* The figures for District 7 -- with a student population which is 65% Puerto Rican -- are even more scandalous.

There are 22 schools and 1 Bilingual School in our district.

Thus, there are 19,000 Puerto Rican students in the other 22 schools where...

Of 91 principals and assistant principals, only 3 are Puerto Rican!

Of 1580 teachers, only 55 are Puerto Rican or Cuban!

Of 32 guidance counselors, only one is Puerto Rican!

\*\* This pattern contrasts sharply with the staff ratio in Black communities. For although there are far too few Black supervisors and teachers throughout the system, at least in Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant the percentage of Black staff is larger than the average for the total city.

### WHAT HAPPENS TO OUR CHILDREN WHEN THEY GO TO THESE SCHOOLS?

Statistics cannot tell the story. When there is such a shocking lack of Spanish-speaking staff in a district like ours, the cost to the pupil and his family is immeasurable!

- \*\* We can tell you statistically that 15% of our children speak no English at all. But can you visualize what happens to these 3000 children individually? Most of them waste their hours away sitting in front of an English-speaking teacher.
- \*\* The child does not respond. The teacher thinks something is wrong with the child's brain. He is tested - in English. He is labelled retarded. He is left to stagnate. Is it surprising that he suddenly "runs wild" through the halls or throws rocks at the school window?
- \*\* Parents come to ask questions. But the only professional in the entire school who speaks Spanish is the bilingual teacher. She is so busy translating for the principal, translating for the secretaries, translating for the teachers, -- that she can barely find time for the parents.
- \*\* Guidance Counselors who don't understand us discourage our children. They often misguide them.
- \*\* Teachers tell their students to listen and learn. They teach about Paul Bunyan, but they don't listen or understand when the children giggle about Juan Bobo. They make the class memorize the history of Plymouth, Massachusetts or Jamestown, Virginia. But when the children chatter about Caparra or Lares, the teachers call for silence.
- \*\* And our community turns frustrated and bitter. The Black English-speaking children are held back when the Spanish children don't understand what is going on. But out of anger, the children often turn on each other.
- \*\* A hundred times each day opportunities for cultural understanding and appreciation, opportunities for learning in two languages are ignored. Although the Blacks and the Puerto Ricans are living side by side in our community, we never get a chance to learn what we have in common. We are set at each other's throats by a school system which is cheating us both.

## WHAT SOLUTIONS DO WE PROPOSE?

### MORE BILINGUAL EDUCATION

- \*\* We want to see bilingual classes in every grade in every school in our district.
- \*\* The schools in District 7 must be restructured so that Spanish speaking pupils will be taught English for part of the day, and all other subjects in their native language until they become proficient in English.
- \*\* After the children have learned English, they should, if they wish, continue learning in both languages.
- \*\* The English speaking children should also have the opportunity to learn Spanish.

### MORE PUERTO RICAN AND HISPANIC STAFF

- \*\* There must be a massive increase of bilingual personnel in our school system. Starting this September, in District 7, we would like to see every single vacancy filled by a Black or Bilingual person, with maximum emphasis on the Puerto Rican. This calls for an aggressive staff recruitment campaign.
- \*\* The state must exempt districts such as ours from all the traditional licensing requirements. Experienced teachers from Puerto Rico, Cuba and other Latin countries should be actively and enthusiastically sought after. They should be hired as provisional teachers immediately, and allowed to demonstrate their ability through on-the-job performance.
- \*\* If a candidate is experienced and speaks Spanish fluently, but is weak in English, she should be placed as a teacher working with Spanish speaking children, while she studies and increases her proficiency in English. The school day should be reorganized to make full use of these talents, with the children studying English under another teacher.

### INCREASE TEACHER TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUERTO RICANS.

- \*\* An intense program is needed to help Puerto Rican high school graduates, Puerto Rican college students, and Puerto Rican para-professionals become teachers. Too many are now being dumped into unrealistic courses which do not help them but do frighten them. They need financial and personal support, and released time so they can become teachers as quickly as possible.
- \*\* An internship program is needed to prepare Puerto Ricans to assume supervisory positions in our district. Current opportunities are too limited and remove talented people from our community.

MORE BILINGUAL CURRICULUM AND TESTING MATERIAL

- \*\* Although everyone talks about the many books and new curriculum materials available for the Puerto Rican child, we do not see them in most of our schools.
- \*\* New screening tests are needed for the Spanish youngster. He should be tested in his own language by people who can understand him culturally and linguistically.

PERFORMANCE STANDARDS MUST BE HIGH -- FOR THE STAFF AND THE STUDENTS

- \*\* We believe that the parents, the staff, and the Community School Board must set performance standards for the staff. We think that poor children can learn just as well as middle class children. Unless we can hold our staff - Puerto Rican staff and other staff - accountable for results, no new programs will help our children.
- \*\* The Puerto Rican child must be tested annually, just as the English speaking child is tested. Yearly reports must be required giving academic progress in reading and math for the Spanish speaking child and for all the other children. Our children should not be excluded from tests because they can't speak English. Test them in Spanish!
- \*\* The state must hold the schools accountable, too. When you test all the children, and find that some schools have three-fourths of the children three and four years behind in reading, the state should take over those schools. It is unconscionable that those teachers should continue to draw salaries for such terrible results.
- \*\* We are opposed to the policy of annually promoting everyone whether or not they learn.
- \*\* We are equally opposed to the policy of keeping teachers on staff whether or not they teach.

IN CONCLUSION:

We don't want to have a

"Grito de Nueva York"

But if we have to, we will.