

Open Doors: Education Access for NYC's Older Newcomer Youth

(Webinar, October 17, 2024)

PANELISTS



Natasha Quiroga, Director of education policy and InsideSchools, The New School's Center for New York City Affairs



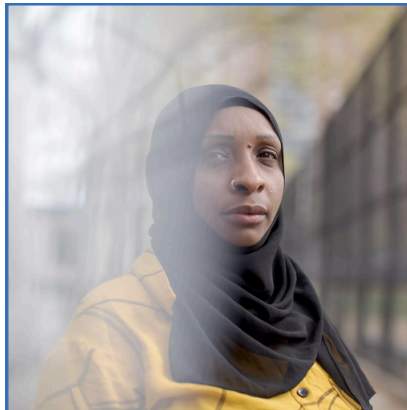
Shweta Ratra, Principal, Crotona International High School



Alona Cohen, Principal, Brooklyn Frontiers High School



Brenda Garcia, Interim Acting Chief, Office of Multilingual Learners, NYC Department of Education



Adama Bah, Founder, Afrikana



Nana Keita, Older Newcomer Student



Lara Evangelista, Executive Director, Internationals Network



Center for New York City Affairs

InsideSchools

INTERNATIONALS NETWORK
Transforming education for multilingual learners

MODERATOR

Natasha Quiroga

Director of Education Policy and InsideSchools, The New School's Center for New York City Affairs



Natasha Quiroga is Director of Education Policy and InsideSchools at the New School's Center for New York City Affairs. She brings almost 20 years of experience advocating for children, youth, and families to these roles. Most recently, she was Director of the Parental Readiness and Empowerment Program (PREP) and Senior Counsel in the Educational Opportunities Project at the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, where she developed and successfully expanded national initiatives fostering parental leadership in education. Over the course of more than 10 years' leadership at the Lawyers' Committee, she provided extensive and expert analysis for parents, educators, and legislators on issues impacting the education of students of color, immigrant children, multilingual learners, and students with disabilities. Natasha also served as the first full-time Executive Director of Escuela Bolivia (now Educación Para Nuestro Futuro) in Arlington, Virginia, and advised state and local education agencies on compliance with federal education laws at an education law firm.

Natasha received her J.D. from American University's Washington College of Law and her Master's in International Politics with a concentration in Children and Youth Development from American University's School of International Service. She received her B.B.A. in Marketing and B.A. in Plan II Liberal Arts at the University of Texas at Austin. She is a 2017 Presidential Leadership Scholar.

SPEAKER 1

Shweta Ratra

Principal, Crotona International High School



For the past eight years, Shweta Ratra has served as Principal of Crotona International High School in the Bronx, NY, part of the Internationals Network for Public Schools. Deeply committed to supporting newly arrived English Language Learner (ELL) students and their families, she has dedicated her leadership to helping them navigate the challenges of adjusting to a new culture and language. Shweta's own journey from India to the U.S. informs her understanding of the immigrant experience. After completing a Bachelor's degree in Biochemistry and an MBA in India, she held an executive role in international marketing before moving to Sweden and England, where she spent a year in each country. Her transition to education began through the NYC Department of Education's NYC Teaching Fellows and LEAP programs, where she found her passion for teaching and school leadership.

As a Principal, Shweta has participated in prestigious professional development opportunities, including the Gray Fellowship for Principal Excellence and the Cahn Fellowship for Distinguished Principals, which she embarked on this year. These experiences have equipped her with invaluable personal and professional skills, enhancing her capacity to lead transformative change in her school.

Under her leadership, Crotona International High School has seen significant improvements in student engagement, academic performance, and social-emotional development. Shweta's collaborative approach with faculty and staff has fostered a school culture grounded in high expectations, accountability, and unwavering support for every student's success.

SPEAKER 2

Iona Cohen

Principal, Brooklyn Frontiers High School



Alona Cohen started her career in education as a biology Teaching Fellow at South Brooklyn Community High School. There she worked in close collaboration with a small group of DOE educators and Good Shepherd Services staff to help establish the first partnership transfer school model for over-age, under-credited youth in New York City. Dr. Cohen went on to become the founding principal of Brooklyn Frontiers High School (BFHS), a new model partnership transfer school designed to serve both current high school students who need new opportunities as well as first time ninth graders who had been previously held over twice in middle and/or elementary schools. BFHS has recently moved towards creating a structured program for supporting over-age newcomer students. She holds a B.A. in Molecular and Cell Biology from U.C. Berkeley, M.S. in Secondary Biology Education from Pace University, M.S. in School District Leadership from Baruch College and Ph.D. in Biochemistry and Structural Biology from the Weill Medical College of Cornell University.

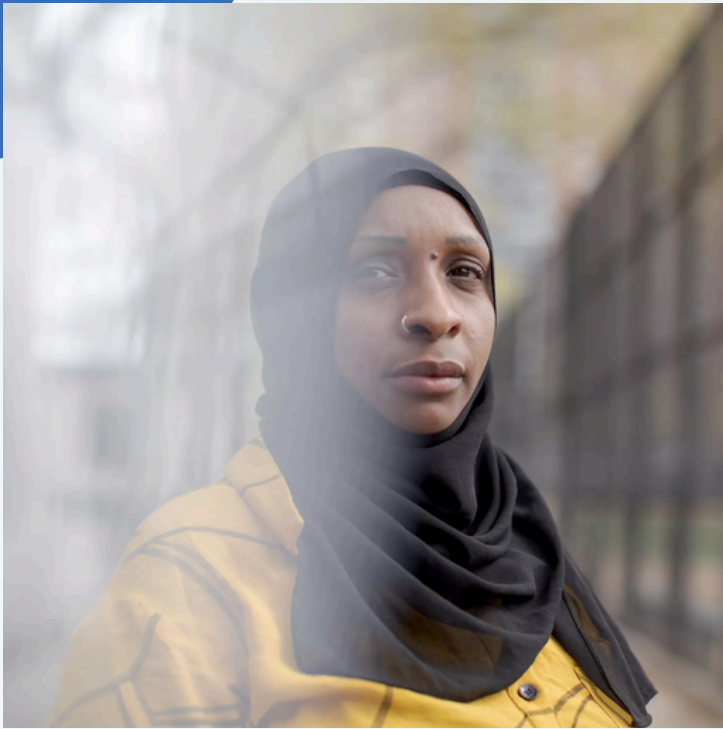


SPEAKER 3

Brenda Garcia

Interim Acting Chief, Office of
Multilingual Learners, NYC
Department of Education

Dr. Brenda A. Garcia is the Interim Acting Chief for the Office of Multilingual Learners within the Division of Inclusive and Accessible Learning (DIAL) in NYC Public Schools. Previously, she served as the Executive Director for School Support and Implementation overseeing English Language Learner (ELL) policy implementation, data, and district support. Brenda also served as the Executive Director for Bilingual and ESL Education at Newark Public Schools in New Jersey. Brenda joined the New York City Teaching Fellows program in 2004 and started her career teaching in the Bronx serving as a bilingual teacher. In 2010, she joined the Central Office of ELLs for the NYC DOE as a Senior ELL Compliance and Performance Specialist and later served as the Director of Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) Programs, where she led initiatives that involved opening new bilingual programs in schools with high ELL densities. Brenda holds a Doctor of Education and a Master of Education from Columbia University, a Master of Science in Elementary Education from Mercy College, and a Bachelor of Arts in Economics and International Relations from Boston University.



SPEAKER 4

Adama Bah

Founder, Afrikana

Adama Bah is the founder and executive director of Afrikana. In 1990, at the age of two, Adama Bah came to the United States and attended public school. By age sixteen, her whole world changed. The FBI raided her family's apartment and handcuffed her and her father. She was detained and told she was "illegal." Her father was deported. Adama was allowed to stay in the United States but forced to drop out of school to support her family. Now Adama tells her story because she is an advocate for individuals in the crosshairs of racial profiling, harassment, misinformation, and poverty due to lack of resources. Under the auspices of Afrikana, her non-profit organization, Adama guides individuals and families navigating the immigration and social benefits system to survive and thrive.



SPEAKER 5

Nana Keita

Student at ELLIS Preparatory
Academy

Nana Keita is a young woman from Mali. She is incredibly intelligent and mature. Two traits that have served her well in being successful at school and resilient in her personal life, especially when she had to move into a shelter. She has since aged out of the shelter and is now living with her grandmother in Brooklyn. She works to support herself and arrives on time to school everyday. She is the equivalent of a mom to so many of our young African girls and boys. She is a senior.

SPEAKER 6

Lara Evangelista

Executive Director of the Internationals Network for Public Schools



Lara Evangelista is the Executive Director of the Internationals Network for Public Schools, an educational nonprofit that partners with schools and districts to develop inclusive and equitable programs for their adolescent, newcomer, multilingual learners. As the child of immigrants and a first-generation college student, she feels passionately about this work. Prior to this role, Lara spent 28 years serving MLL students in New York City Public Schools. This included teaching and leading in three different International High Schools and being a founding team member of The Flushing International High School in 2004. Lara was appointed principal of Flushing International in September 2011 and worked throughout her 8-year tenure to develop a culturally responsive environment for the young people in the FIHS community. Most recently, she was the deputy superintendent for the Consortium, Internationals, and NYC Outward Bound Schools, a 48-school high school district in New York City. Lara holds degrees from Georgetown University, New School University, and is a doctoral student at Teachers College, Columbia University.