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## Supreme Court Justice Urges Immigrant Parents to Help Children with School



Yasmeen Khan

Thousands of parents of English language learners attended the D.O.E.'s annual conference.

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By [Yasmeen Khan](#)

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor on Wednesday told thousands of parents of English language learners to always ask for help when needed and to learn alongside their children. “They cannot do it without your help,” she said at the [10th Annual ELL Parent Conference](#).

Sotomayor, who grew up in public housing in the Bronx, told the parents gathered that “if I can do it, you can do it,” and delved into childhood anecdotes of how she learned to become a good student, including asking a fifth-grade classmate for study tips.

To hear Sotomayor’s full keynote address, click play.



Her mother fostered a love of reading in her children, said Sotomayor, and subscribed to the magazine [Highlights](#) after seeing it at the doctor’s office. Sotomayor said she loved reading *Nancy Drew*, and would receive a new book from the series for birthdays, Christmas or as a reward for getting good grades.

“Read to your children,” said Sotomayor, “and when they start learning how to read, ask them to read to you,” even if it meant reading in a native language other than English. She encouraged parents who did not know how to read to start learning with their children.

The Supreme Court justice also relayed some basics: Every child should know how to use a computer. Ask librarians for help. Don’t let children turn in sloppy homework. “You don’t need to speak English or understand it,” she said, “to build a process of having discipline in your studies.”

Sotomayor’s keynote address was translated into nine languages for audience members. When she finished speaking she waded into the crowd, flanked by bodyguards, and took questions directly from audience members.

Melissa Miro, who works at [P.S. 49 Willis Avenue](#) in the Bronx as a pre-K family assistant, said she brought parents to the conference so that they could feel more connected to the city schools. She said that Sotomayor’s key message of asking for help was a good one for non-English speaking parents.

“It’s so difficult to get them involved and keep our parents and children involved when they don’t understand the language,” she said.

David Grady, a parent coordinator at [J.H.S. 383 Philippa Schuyler](#), said he brought six Spanish-speaking parents from his school to the conference. He attends the event each year and said he feels that it helps unite immigrant parents. He said he knew that many parents this year had questions about the Common Core learning standards.

“Some parents don’t understand the Common Core,” said Grady. “But here, they might feel a little more comfortable and they see other people have the same concerns as them and they feel much better.”

Angela Guillen, whose granddaughter, Nyla, attends fourth grade at [P.S. 19 Asher Levy](#) in Manhattan, said she wanted to understand how to help Nyla excel in her first year in public school. She previously attended Catholic school, Guillen said.

More than 4,000 parents registered for the conference, according to the D.O.E., where they attended workshops on topics including the Common Core, summer learning programs and support services for students with autism.

*Yasmeen Khan is a producer at WNYC. Follow her on Twitter @yasmeenkhan*

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