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“In a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity – it is a prerequisite.”

President Barack H. Obama

In thinking about what the President’s statement means to you, how will your education help you leave a positive and lasting impact on your community?

Imagine struggling to connect words and their meanings together in order to understand a bill. Imagine failing to understand financial paperwork and feeling the shame of asking your children to explain them to you. Imagine a child struggling with homework because her parents aren’t familiar with the language. This is the reality for many working Americans, who are being left behind in today’s global economy due to a lack of education. President Obama was accurate in saying that education isn’t an option anymore; it is a must.

In my school, I am surrounded by many students, who like me, are first generation immigrants. Our parents have little or no education. Most of us have fathers who are construction workers, laborers, and small business owners. Our mothers struggle in the backrooms of department stores, pinning sale tags to pieces of clothes. This is a picture of my parents life, but I want to paint a different, a more successful life of my future.

To reach that goal, I am currently involved in the Asian American Student Advocacy Project (ASAP) run by the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF), which helps students like me learn and develop advocacy for a specific issue. This year, my fellow program members and I are currently working towards developing a policy recommendation to improve ESL/ELL curriculum. We were prompted to advocate this issue because, according to a letter from the New York

Immigration Coalition to the New York State Legislature, 50.5 percent of ESL/ELL students dropout of high school due to an inadequate curriculum and lack of funds. (1) This means 50.5 percent of today's ESL/ELL youth are left behind while the global economy moves forward.

I, along with CACF and my ASAP group, want to lower this number. By participating in the program, I am already taking the first step by educating myself on the problems that my community faces. My next step will be to go to Binghamton University and take a variety of classes in sociology and policy work. After graduation, I want to return to New York City and put my education to good use by working with non profit organizations in order to improve life for many immigrant families in New York City.

Why do this? Well, I don't want another child to translate a bill for her parent. I don't want another student to struggle in writing compositions in elementary school because of language barriers. Instead, I want to give future students the chance to choose education as a must, 'a prerequisite', so they won't be left behind in the future global economy. After all, our parents who have little or no education are struggling to earn an income barely above the poverty line. But we want to achieve better by adamantly pursuing our education, despite the language barriers.

Thus, to me, the quote above means that my education and dedication are the paints and brushes that I need in order to paint my future and, hopefully, paint the futures of many other students in my community. Therefore, President Obama is right; education is not a choice, but a must.

Works Cited

(1) "State Legislature Letter in Support of Fair CFE Funding for ELLs". New York Immigration Coalition. April 16, 2010
<<http://www.thenyic.org/templates/documentFinder.asp?did=641>>.