

[\(Original Daily News Article\)](#)

By *JOANNE WASSERMAN AND BRIAN KATES* □

Ask 13-year-old Amarnath Kuppannan and his 10-year-old sister, Aarthi, what they want to be when they grow up and they respond in unison: "A doctor."

Both youngsters, the New York-born children of Indian immigrants, spent their summer at the Elite Academy on 39th Ave. in Flushing.

Not for them were lazy, hazy days of canoeing, campfires and s'mores.

Starting at 8:30 a.m. and some days finishing as late as 2:30 p.m., the youngsters were drilled and quizzed four days a week in higher mathematics and the complexities of English grammar and composition.

In addition to sending them to the classes, Amarnath says, his parents buy math and English textbooks "and they let us study them."

Their father, Kuppannan Gounder, paid \$2,400 to send both kids to the private academy to prepare them for the tough entrance exam of the city's highly selective Stuyvesant High School.

Gounder, born in a rural Indian village where "my father was too poor to educate me," is one of about 350 parents - most of them immigrants - who sent their children this summer to Elite. The

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school is one of dozens of Korean-style hagwons, or test-prep schools, that city kids use to cram for the SAT and entrance exams of specialized schools like Stuyvesant, Hunter College High and the Bronx High School of Science.

"It is a sacrifice," says Gounder, a teaching aide. "I am not a good earner, and sometimes I have to borrow to pay [tuition], but these are our children and they are our hope."

Indeed, kids like Amarnath and Aarthi are the hope of the city.

A dramatic 62.4% of New Yorkers younger than 18 are foreign-born - the so-called 1.5 generation who come here as children and are reared and educated here.

"These immigrants and their children are the future," said Prof. John Mollenkopf, director of City University's Center for Urban Research. "How well they do is critical."

It seems that the future is in good hands.

"Foreign-born students outperform native-born students on traditional measures of academic achievement," according to a 2003 study by New York University's Taub Urban Research Center. "Immigrants have higher reading and math scores ... despite their higher poverty rates, limited English skills and newness to the U.S. schooling system."

Other studies show that recent immigrants who start in city middle schools graduate from high school on time at a higher rate than native-born kids and are less likely to drop out.

They also are more likely to go to college - 67.3% of City University students are 1.5ers or second-generation Americans - and to complete a four-year degree.

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The reason is basic: Immigrant kids have "greater aspirations," the NYU study determined.

That makes them less willing than their parents to work in the traditional jobs of their ethnic groups, such as in garment factories and restaurants for Chinese, in greengrocers' for Koreans and as home-care attendants for West Indians.

As Hunter College sociology Prof. Philip Kasinitz put it: "Second-generation immigrants tend to leave their parents' [employment] niches and join the mainstream economy. They resemble other New Yorkers their age more than their parents."

More than 75% of second-generation New York Koreans, for example, found jobs in the mainstream economy, compared with 40% of their immigrant fathers, according to a study by Dae Young Kim, a University of Maryland sociology professor. About half go into white-collar professions.

And, unlike previous generations of immigrants, "these young people do not seem to feel any particular need to give up their cultures or identities to become successful and accepted," according to a study published this month by the Russell Sage Foundation, a social sciences think tank.

"Our generation is more like Americans, but we are still Russians," said 1.5er Eric Piker, 38, who came to the U.S. from Belarus in 1979, when he was 14. "We have the values of both."

Piker, who spoke no English when he arrived in New York, attended Brooklyn public schools and a local yeshiva, then went to Baruch College and, taking classes on the Internet, earned a master's in business administration.

About a year and a half ago, he opened Eric's Health Food Shoppe on Brooklyn's Brighton Beach Ave. "I wanted to create a Manhattan-style store," he said. "My customers are 90% Russian, but they are well-educated and sophisticated."

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For 1.5ers and second-generation immigrants, ethnic differences bend, blend and broaden.

College students with roots in Korea, China and the Philippines unite as Asians, often mystifying their parents, who can't imagine what they have in common. Despite cultural differences, the city's diverse Latino population rallies around a unified banner.

West Indian teenagers adapt black American slang, and African-Americans dance to reggae and imitate Jamaican patois. The National nightclub in Brighton Beach features "Ramerican" music, Russian tunes with an American pop beat.

As they struggle to live between two worlds, many young immigrants find common ground in popular urban culture.

London-born Rekha Malhotra (aka DJ Rekha), who was 5 when she immigrated to Queens with her parents and older sister in 1975, illustrates the crossover.

Her popular Basement Bhangra dance parties at S.O.B.'s nightclub in SoHo meld traditional Punjabi dance rhythms with reggae and hip hop, attracting not only East Asians but also African-American, Latino and Anglo twentysomethings eager for the latest beat.

As a child, Malhotra spoke Punjabi with her parents. "They socialized only with Indians - specifically, Indians from west Delhi - and I had a time when I felt unconnected to America," she recalled.

In high school, "I started getting into Indian soundtracks," and, while studying for a bachelor's degree in urban studies at Queens College, she worked as a deejay, souping up her mixes with bhangra, then a pretty radical move.

Now, in a telling case of reverse assimilation, elements of Indian music are finding their way into the mainstream instead of the other way around. Last year, Jay-Z added a rap to Panjabi MC's

bhangra hit "Mundian to Bach Ke," remaking it as "Beware of the Boys."

"Is this appropriation? Is it culture without context?" Malhotra asks. "Maybe. But in the end, this opens people up to new things, new ideas."

That is the role of the children of New York's immigrants, the product of their parents' hard work, sacrifice and risk. You have only to sit in a CUNY classroom, listen to the city's vibrant street slang or peruse the eclectic menu of a trendy restaurant to see how completely they are transforming the city. jwasserman@edit.nydailynews.com

Second-generation Americans or immigrants who arrived as children are shaping the city's destiny. They make up:

36.5% of the state's population

31% of the state's school-age children

62.4% of New York City kids younger than 18

29% of New York City residents ages 18-32

67.3% of City University students

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, CUNY Center for Urban Research

Future Leaders Shine in School: Immigrant kids score better, have higher graduation rates and 'greater as

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