

January 11, 2014

To: Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission (Connecticut) Officials

Issue: Concerning Latino Civil Rights Violations in Windham Public Schools of Willimantic, Connecticut

Hello. I am a concerned resident of Willimantic, Connecticut. I'm concerned because Latino civil rights are being violated in Windham Public Schools in my town of Willimantic/Windham. Windham Public Schools are 70 percent Latino (mostly Puerto Ricans and Mexicans). The district has a significant number of ELL students. There are three specific cases of civil rights violations. I'm hoping that the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission will be able to do something about these injustices.

Many of these problems stem from the fact that the town's board of education and superintendent have not been in charge of the Windham Public Schools since August 2011. Governor Malloy of Connecticut appointed Special Master Steve Adamowski to run the schools in August 2011. Since that time, he has made unilateral decisions and policies for the school system.

Elimination of a Strong Bilingual Education Program

The bilingual education program at Windham High School used to have content area classes of math, science, and social studies taught in Spanish to help students with low English language levels learn the content areas while they were learning English in their language acquisition classes of the bilingual program. Once the Special Master took over, those Spanish language content classes in the bilingual program were eliminated. Now students who know little English are thrown into content area classes that are taught in English. The "non-bilingual teachers" have been given training in ELL teaching techniques, however, this is not enough to help the kids who have low English levels to succeed in a math or social studies class that's fully taught in English. Sure, some of these content classes are team taught with a bilingual teacher but this isn't adequately working. The way the bilingual program was before the Special Master took over was working. There's a large number of ELL students who are failing classes or barely passing because they're not receiving the proper support to gain an education and learn English. This is the 3rd school year where this is happening!

Elimination of the Latin American History course

A Latin American History course started at Windham High School in 2006. My daughter took that class and she enjoyed it and learned a lot. The course focused on the histories of Puerto Rico, Mexico, and South America, and also examined the Latino experience in the United States. The course has been eliminated in a high school that has a 70 percent Latino student body! The Latin American History course wasn't offered in the 2012-2013 school year, however, it was listed in a document for Windham High School's Arts and Humanities Academy (Windham High School has been split into the Arts and Humanities Academy and the STEM Academy) as a course that would be offered. It was clearly identified in the Arts and Humanities Academy's document that Latin American History was to be part of the academy's curriculum. Albert Harris, the Headmaster or Principal of the Arts and Humanities Academy, removed Latin American History from the curriculum. Instead, American Studies and Connecticut History were put in place of Latin American History. Students in that academy are already required to take three trimesters of U.S. History for graduation. Why would a Latin American History course be removed so that more American History courses could be added to the curriculum instead? It seems like a form of institutional racism when a white administration removes a Latin American History course from being an option for a student body that is 70 percent Latino. It definitely shows a lack of respect for Latino history and culture on the part of the white administrators.

Unfair Non-Renewal of Superintendent Ana Ortiz's Contract (Windham's first Latina Superintendent)

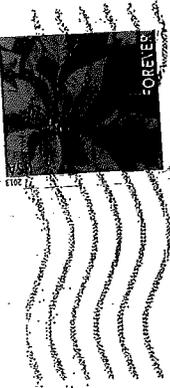
In October 2013, the Board of Education voted for non-renewal of Superintendent Ana Ortiz's contract. She will have to leave her post by October 2014. She is Windham Public Schools' first superintendent of Hispanic heritage. The Board of Education based its decision on an evaluation rubric that focused on the low CAPT and CMT scores of Windham's students. The thing is that Superintendent Ortiz who started in the summer of 2010 as interim superintendent has not been in charge of the school district since August 2011. Special Master Steve Adamowski has been the one in charge of coming up with decisions and policies, not Superintendent Ortiz. All she did was implement the decisions and policies of the Special Master. She should not be blamed for what the Special Master has done. Windham's first Latina superintendent is being unfairly scapegoated in this situation. For the new superintendent selection process, the Special Master will be providing the names of final candidates to the Board of Education to choose from. It seems likely that the Special Master will choose people who have connections to him. This whole situation is unjust. Superintendent Ortiz shouldn't be losing her job because she has not been really in charge of the school district since August 2011. She carried out the Special Master's orders and look what it got her!

Hopefully, the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs of Commission of Connecticut can do something to help deal with these three Latino civil rights problems in Windham Public Schools. Thank you for taking the time to consider these issues.

Concerned Residents of
Willimantic, Connecticut

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