

**The Exodus of Bilingual
Administrators from the
Rochester City School District**
An Examination of Factors That
Influence Departure

March, 2022



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Prepared for:

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Summary

Ibero American Action League (IAAL) engaged CGR to study the reasons why Bilingual administrators have left the Rochester City School District (RCSD) and examine how these departures impact students and families. CGR conducted 60-minute virtual or phone interviews with 10 Latino administrators identified by IAAL to study why they left RCSD.

Study findings indicate that Latino, bilingual administrators work for the Rochester City School District with a common desire to meet the needs of English Language Learners and their families. Many shared similar educational experiences as the families they served and some administrators grew up in the same neighborhoods as their students. However, barriers confronted within RCSD took a toll on administrators and ultimately led to their departure. Many confronted challenges when applying for RCSD administrative opportunities and felt locked out of opportunities as a result of favoritism. Some administrators felt undermined and unable to implement their new ideas or best practices in bilingual education. Others indicated that they experienced backlash when they challenged RCSD practices. Concerns about fair compensation and equitable workload were also reported by bilingual administrators. These experiences led many to feel disheartened and ineffective. The ten participants of this study all left RCSD to find administrative positions that they felt better aligned with their values and increased their ability to impact student success.

The departure of Latino, bilingual administrators creates a void for RCSD students and families given the relationships nurtured over time. Families and students have lost advocates and role models. As Latino, bilingual administrators leave the district, there is the potential that more families will seek alternative educational settings including Eugenio Maria de Hostos Charter School.

Recommendations

To address these departures of Latino, bilingual administrators, RCSD should consider implementing the following recommendations.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

- Implement diversity, equity and inclusion strategies to address the racism experienced in RCSD. Bring in consultants from the Urban League's Interrupt Racism initiative to support internal development.
- Adopt an equity lens to identify the haves and have nots in the RCSD by conducting an equity audit to examine whether disparities exist in hiring, retention, and compensation of administrators by race/ethnicity. The audit would also include a review of hiring policies to identify inequitable practices

that advantage some groups over others. These inequitable practices would be eliminated or replaced with new strategies.

Hiring & Compensation

- RCSD should implement practices that require a common location for job postings and transparent hiring procedures.
- If one does not exist, a RCSD recruitment policy should be created to ensure that a diverse pool of candidates is represented at all stages of the hiring process.
- Latino and bilingual community members should help select the director of bilingual education and administrators at the school buildings especially sites with bilingual programs (e.g. Monroe High School).
- Ensure additional compensation for bilingual administrators and staff in recognition of their double workload. This may require changes in union contracts.
- Ensure that all finalized compensation offers regarding new positions or promotions are comparable to salaries provided to other staff.

Appreciation

- Develop a culture of appreciation by celebrating employee contributions. These celebrations may highlight bilingual and Latino staff contributions by describing the specific roles they play inside and outside of schools. Given the strong relationships between bilingual staff and families, families can help select staff to recognize. Social media can be used to as the platform for these acknowledgements.

Leadership Development

- Create a succession plan to ensure that bilingual and Latino administrators employed by RCSD are being developed as candidates for positions in the Superintendent's cabinet.
- Create a leadership development program (or strengthen if one exists) to ensure quality mentoring opportunities for emerging and mid-level bilingual and Latino administrators.
- Cultivate a bilingual administrator affinity group as a mechanism of peer support.
- Identify an administrative talent pipeline of early career Latino and bilingual educators to target for professional opportunities that lead to administrative jobs at all levels of RCSD's leadership structure.
- Sponsor a delegation of Latino administrators to attend the New York State Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents annual conference.

Bilingual Education

- Central office staff, including school chiefs, should be provided professional development about the different bilingual programs implemented by RCSD. All RCSD administrators should demonstrate working knowledge of this information as part of their professional responsibilities.

Partnerships

- Continue partnership with Ibero American Action League to maintain connections with the bilingual and Latino communities. Ibero can also serve as an advisory group to ensure that report recommendations are implemented.

These ideas should be aligned with other RCSD strategic efforts to ensure that bilingual administrators committed to the needs of RCSD students and families remain in the district.

Acknowledgements

CGR gives thanks to Angelica Perez-Delgado and Miguel Melendez of Ibero American Action League and Anthony Plonczynski-Figueroa of La Cumbre for your project support.

Staff Team

Donna Harris, Ph.D. conducted interviews and is the author of this report. Erika Rosenberg and Alice Carle reviewed the report and provided valuable feedback.

Table of Contents

Summary	i
Recommendations	i
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion	i
Hiring & Compensation	ii
Appreciation	ii
Leadership Development	ii
Bilingual Education	iii
Partnerships	iii
Introduction	1
Methods	1
Findings	2
Participant Backgrounds	2
RCSD Leadership Experiences	2
Aspirations	2
RCSD Administrative Roles	2
Access to Administrative Positions	3
Positive Responses	3
Negative Responses	3
Departure Reasons	4
Departure Implications	4
New Administrative Opportunities	5
Recommendations	6
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion	6
Hiring & Compensation	6
Appreciation	6
Leadership Development	7
Bilingual Education	7
Partnerships	7
Conclusion	7

Introduction

Ibero American Action League (IAAL) engaged CGR to study the reasons why Bilingual administrators have left the Rochester City School District (RCSD) and examine how these departures impact students and families. As of October 2021, RCSD's enrollment was 23,907. A third of the student population was Hispanic, 53% African American/Black, 9% White, 3% Asian and 3% other. Specialized programs available for English Language Learners include Spanish/English Bilingual Education; Bilingual Dual Language Programs – One Way & Two Way; Transitional Bilingual Programs; English as a New Language (ENL) for English Language Learners (ELL) and Newcomers Programs: Rochester International Academy.¹

RCSD employs over 5,100 staff. The median number of years of teaching experience is almost 14 years. Data from 2016 indicate that 25% of instructional staff were teachers of color (806 of 3209).² Education Trust's analysis of 2015-2016 data found that while the share of Latino and Black students was 86%, the shares of assistant principals and principals of color were 48% and 57% respectively.³ Research suggests that the presence of Black and Latino staff helps to create connections among staff, students and families. The lack of bilingual staff, who are able to evaluate and provide services to English Language Learners in RCSD, was identified in the 2018 Distinguished Educator's Report as a problem.⁴ The challenges found locally reflect national, state and regional struggles that have implications for how well RCSD can serve a population with a significant share of Latino and Spanish speakers.

Methods

CGR conducted 60-minute virtual or phone interviews with 10 Latino administrators identified by IAAL to discuss their reasons for leaving RCSD. Interview protocols were developed in collaboration with IAAL and questions were sent to participants prior to our meetings. Detailed written notes were taken and video recordings of discussions were available to provide clarity regarding notes as needed. Interview notes for each participant were systematically analyzed for core topics. The results that follow provide a synthesis of main themes discussed by Latino administrators including RCSD leadership experiences, departure reasons, new administrative opportunities and recommendations.

¹<https://www.rcsdk12.org/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=75454&dataid=79394&FileName=District%20Profile%202022%202.10.22.pdf>

² <https://www.rochestercitynewspaper.com/rochester/the-case-for-more-black-teachers-in-rochester-and-everywhere/Content?oid=2886802>

³ Education Trust (2017). See Our Truth. Washington, DC.

<https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/4110263/See-Our-Truth-DIGITAL-v-2-Reduced.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/main/rochester-de-report-11-14-18.pdf>

Findings

Participant Backgrounds

The majority of participants were female (70%) and all indicated they were bilingual Spanish speakers. Half reported that they were RCSD graduates. Four of the interviewees were recruited by RCSD straight out of their teacher preparation programs. Eight of ten respondents had spent the majority of their careers in RCSD before their departure. Participants held a variety of roles at the district and school levels that directly served RCSD's bilingual students and families as teachers, instructional leaders and central office leaders. Most expressed strong connections within the Latino community and leveraged these relationships as they worked to educate bilingual and Latino students in the district.

RCSD Leadership Experiences

Aspirations

When asked about professional goals, interview participants stated that they aspired to serve in a variety of RCSD administrative roles at programmatic, school and district levels. For some, their aspirations to become an administrator evolved over time. Others saw themselves as either advocates or change agents and believed that becoming an administrator would allow them to expand their impact on students especially English Language Learners and Latino families. Several indicated that they were encouraged by RCSD leaders to obtain certification and pursue leadership roles. Even though money was not primary reason why interviewees pursued leadership positions, these roles paid higher salaries compared to teaching positions.

RCSD Administrative Roles

Before exiting RCSD, most respondents were school or district level administrators or worked in positions (e.g. school-based coordinator) that would lead to administrative roles, such as an assistant principal or principal. The majority of interviewees directly supported RCSD's bilingual students, families and programs. Only a few had jobs not directly connected to bilingual education, but these respondents articulated commitments to serving bilingual families and students as they performed their assigned responsibilities.

Access to Administrative Positions

The pathway to RCSD administrative opportunities for bilingual and Latino administrators was not straightforward. A few indicated that they were able to obtain an administrative position because women of color leaders advocated on their behalf but this was not a common occurrence. Most interviewees described confronting barriers to administrative positions, despite possessing necessary school and district certifications, though all were eventually able to obtain administrative positions. Interviewee experiences suggest a lack of transparency in RCSD's hiring process. Several reported applying for multiple administrative positions, having strong interviews and being highly ranked by selection teams but that they were ultimately not hired for positions. In some cases, a candidate external to RCSD was chosen. Some wondered whether decisionmakers had something against interviewees. Several believed that African American candidates had an advantage in hiring. One person suggested that African American applicants are able to access RCSD jobs and become the preferred candidates because of social networks created through their affiliations with historically Black fraternities and sororities. This person characterized this practice as nepotism and cronyism.

Although some anticipated that being Latino and bilingual would make them an attractive candidate, they felt that this was not the case even in RCSD schools with bilingual students. Since RCSD faces an insufficient supply of certified bilingual staff, interviewees said principals may have seen a significant downside to promoting them into administrative roles.

Positive Responses

Interviewees described a number of positive experiences, including a sense of camaraderie with Latino administrators at school and program levels (e.g. bilingual department). These relationships allowed the community to share knowledge, celebrate together and create a familial atmosphere. Others reported that they had positive relationships with colleagues and some were embraced by RCSD peers because their bilingualism helped monolingual staff connect with bilingual parents. The opportunity to work with bilingual families was fulfilling for many interviewees. One study participant identified with families since they also confronted the same experiences on arrival to the U.S. as a non-English speaking immigrant.

Negative Responses

Interviewees agreed that Latino, bilingual administrators were not valued. And the skills that they brought to the table were ignored. They were not highly visible in RCSD as a racial/ethnic group and did not see gains even during the tenure of a Latino superintendent. Some study participants reported that their ideas were ignored, qualifications were questioned and that they faced backlash when challenging the system. One Latino administrator reported experiencing microaggressions, identified

tensions between the Black and Brown communities and witnessed interethnic tensions among Latinos. Some suggested that RCSD did not foster trust within the system.

Several study participants indicated that a number of RCSD administrators (e.g. school chiefs) lack an understanding about bilingualism and the different types of bilingual education programs offered by the district. Some described functioning as a bilingual communicator as double the effort of a monolingual communicator. The work they do is intensive and not equivalent to English speakers. RCSD's union contract contributes to this inequity since it does not provide a pay differential for bilingual administrators.

Departure Reasons

None of the study participants wanted to leave RCSD, yet they made the difficult decision to do so. All of the interviewees left RCSD because they felt devalued, frustrated, disheartened, overworked and disrespected. Their departure was not immediate and came when each person felt they no longer had an impact on the education of children. Some believed the negative conditions of RCSD compromised their wellbeing and values. Lack of growth opportunities, micromanagement and the inability to influence change also contributed to departures. A bilingual educator decided to leave the district after a supervisor promoted instructional practices that the educator believed were not in the best interest of students. Administrative positions offered to some study participants did not match their aspirations. In lieu of a desired administrative opportunity at a higher rank, one study participant was offered an undesirable position that required giving up tenure with a salary that was not comparable to what other administrators received. Several interviewees felt systematically excluded from desired administrative opportunities after several unsuccessful applications and sought opportunities elsewhere.

Departure Implications

Study participants stated that the departure of Latino, bilingual administrators reinforced the belief that RCSD did not value or see them as an asset. One person believed that bilingual administrators are expendable despite the important role they play with non-English speaking students and families. All interviewees indicated that their exit would have negative consequences for students and families including the loss the role models. Latino and bilingual families will lose credible advocates and this may diminish their connection to RCSD. As bilingual, Latino administrators leave, trust between the district and families may also decrease. Some suggest that the erosion of trust and lack of Latino and bilingual staff has resulted in bilingual families leaving RCSD for charters schools especially Eugenio Maria de Hostos Charter School.

New Administrative Opportunities

Interviewees report that they more easily obtained the types of administrative positions they once sought in RCSD by looking in other school districts. Five of the interviewees landed positions outside of Monroe County. Seven study participants indicate that their new positions reflect a vertical move, one was a lateral move, one was demotion and one job had elements of a vertical and lateral move. Four of the study participants held district level cabinet positions and five were in administrative roles implementing bilingual programs. One interviewee served as a national consultant. For most interviewees, the new roles allowed them to fulfill their purpose and align with their personal values. For example, several indicated that they were able to implement ideas that were ignored by RCSD. These roles provided growth opportunities and increased responsibilities for all. Some were charged with developing new initiatives regarding diversity, equity and inclusion. Others had roles that did not solely rely on their bilingual status and drew on their leadership skills. Several school district leaders were able to hire a diverse cabinet that mirrored the communities they serve. A few interviewees hired former RCSD bilingual administrators to join their team. Many acknowledged that their RCSD experiences prepared them to take on these new roles.

Although some joined smaller districts with fewer bilingual resources compared to RCSD, study participants reported the freedom to build bilingual programs that aligned with best practices. Smaller districts also allowed for closer working relationships between district staff and principals. Interviews with former RCSD bilingual, Latino administrators suggest that their new opportunities offered them a platform to cultivate success for students and foster authentic relationships with families. These new organizations were more life affirming to study participants and provided a professional boost.

It is unclear whether RCSD could have done anything to keep interviewees in RCSD at the time of their departure. Some suggested that recognizing the contributions of Latino administrators was important and utilizing their assets was essential. Many would have stayed if RCSD showed them appreciation. One interviewee was disappointed that human resources did not conduct an exit interview or acknowledge their years of service. Others would have stayed if they were offered an administrative role (e.g. cabinet level position) that matched their aspirations with fair compensation. A bilingual administrator wanted a fair workload that recognized how their responsibilities were more intensive compared to monolingual colleagues in the same role.

Despite their experiences prior to RCSD departure, some left open the possibility of returning to RCSD in the future. Although frustrated by RCSD as an organization, the study participants were deeply connected and committed to RCSD bilingual students and Latino families.

Recommendations

Interviews provide several suggestions to address the challenges confronted by bilingual, Latino administrators.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

- Implement diversity, equity and inclusion strategies to address the racism experienced in RCSD. Bring in consultants from the Urban League's Interrupt Racism initiative to support internal development.
- Adopt an equity lens to identify the haves and have nots in the RCSD by conducting an equity audit to examine whether disparities exist in hiring, retention, and compensation of administrators by race/ethnicity. The audit would also include a review of hiring policies to identify inequitable practices that advantage some groups over others. These inequitable practices would be eliminated or replaced with new strategies.

Hiring & Compensation

- RCSD should implement practices that require a common location for job postings and transparent hiring procedures.
- If one does not exist, a RCSD recruitment policy should be created to ensure that a diverse pool of candidates is represented at all stages of the hiring process.
- Latino and bilingual community members should help select the director of bilingual education and administrators at the school buildings especially sites with bilingual programs (e.g. Monroe High School).
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Appreciation

- Develop a culture of appreciation by celebrating employee contributions. These celebrations may highlight bilingual and Latino staff contributions by describing the specific roles they play inside and outside of schools. Given the strong relationships between bilingual staff and families, families can help select staff to recognize. Social media can be used to as the platform for these acknowledgements.

Leadership Development

- Create a succession plan to ensure that bilingual and Latino administrators employed by RCSD are being developed as candidates for positions in the Superintendent's cabinet.
- Create a leadership development program (or strengthen if one exists) to ensure quality mentoring opportunities for emerging and mid-level bilingual and Latino administrators.
- Cultivate a bilingual administrator affinity group as a mechanism of peer support.
- Identify an administrative talent pipeline of early career Latino and bilingual educators to target for professional opportunities that lead to administrative jobs at all levels of RCSD's leadership structure.
- Sponsor a delegation of Latino administrators to attend the New York State Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents annual conference.

Bilingual Education

- Central office staff, including school chiefs, should be provided professional development about the different bilingual programs implemented by RCSD. All RCSD administrators should demonstrate working knowledge of this information as part of their professional responsibilities.

Partnerships

- Continue partnership with Ibero American Action League to maintain connections with the bilingual and Latino communities. Ibero can also serve as an advisory group to ensure that report recommendations are implemented.

Interviews also suggest that RCSD should draw on recommendations proposed in extant reports produced by RCSD consultants and local researchers.

Conclusion

Study findings indicate that Latino, bilingual administrators work for the Rochester City School District with a common desire to meet the needs of English Language Learners and their families. Many shared similar educational experiences as the families they served and some administrators grew up in the same neighborhoods as their students. However, barriers confronted within RCSD took a toll on administrators and ultimately led to their departure. Many confronted challenges when applying for RCSD administrative opportunities and felt locked out of opportunities as a result of favoritism. Some administrators felt undermined and unable to implement their new ideas or best practices in bilingual education. Others indicated that they experienced backlash when they challenged RCSD practices. Concerns about fair compensation

and equitable workload were also reported by bilingual administrators. These experiences led many to feel disheartened and ineffective. The ten participants of this study all left RCSD to find administrative positions that they felt better aligned with their values and increased their ability to impact student success.

The departure of Latino, bilingual administrators creates a void for RCSD students and families given the relationships nurtured over time. Families and students have lost advocates and role models. As Latino, bilingual administrators leave the district, there is the potential that more families will seek alternative educational settings including Eugenio Maria de Hostos Charter School.

In order to address the departures of Latino, bilingual administrators, RCSD has to examine its culture and practices to remedy structural inequities that are embedded in hiring, promotion, compensation and retention practices. RCSD should develop an asset-based approach to recognizing and acknowledging the talent of bilingual educators.

The district must also create a pipeline of Latino and bilingual administrators who will be eventually promoted to a RCSD cabinet-level position. RCSD has to find a way to create the conditions that former administrators encounter in their new school districts and roles. The recommendations outlined in this report including developing a culture of appreciation and creating a transparent hiring process will help remedy several of the challenges encountered. These ideas should be aligned with other RCSD strategic efforts to ensure that bilingual administrators who are committed to the needs of RCSD students and families are retained in the district.