

## **Commission on the Status of Latino Students in Richmond Public Schools**

### ***A Proposal to Richmond School Board from the Richmond Region League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)***

**August 1, 2022**

Greetings Dr. Harris-Muhammed and Mr. Kamras,

We are writing to you in your capacities as School Board Chair and Superintendent of Schools to follow-up on our representative's public comment at the School Board meeting of July 18 with respect to establishing a community-wide Commission on the Status of Latino Students in Richmond Public Schools (RPS). We believe such a Commission is needed to comprehensively assess current issues related to the academic and non-academic success of Latino students (including English learners) and to identify policy, programmatic, and administrative steps aimed at significantly improving academic and non-academic outcomes for RPS' Latino students.

Below is a proposal detailing the proposed charge, timeline, membership, and work plan of the Commission. We believe our proposal is consistent with the *Dreams4RPS* Strategic Plan and the system's general commitment to equity for all students. We would welcome the opportunity for dialogue and discussion concerning any aspect of this proposal. We also urge you to move quickly to formally establish this Commission prior to the start of the 2022-23 academic year and to name the Commission members by no later than September 30, 2022 so the Commission can begin its important work.

#### **Preamble and Statement of Purpose**

- Whereas graduation rates for Latino students are the lowest for any racial/ethnic group in RPS; Latino students in RPS reported on-time graduation rates of 40%, 33%, and 57% for the classes of 2019, 2020, and 2021, compared to 71%, 72% and 79% for all RPS students those same three years;
- Whereas Latino students are the fastest-growing segment of RPS enrollment, increasing from under 600 in 2003-04 to over 1,500 in 2010-11 to over 5,000 in 2020-21;
- Whereas, despite this rapid growth, RPS has never focused sustained system-wide priority attention on specific issues impacting the well-being and achievement of Latino students;
- Whereas equitable, culturally competent, and fully inclusive treatment of Latino students as well as English learners, including respect for all rights of students and families, is both a legal and moral imperative;
- Whereas Richmond Public Schools in its Strategic Plan makes a top-level commitment to equity and declares that "Our very destiny as a city rests upon us ensuring that our schools become engines of opportunity for ALL of our children, regardless of background";
- And whereas strengthening specifically the safety, experience, and performance of Latino students will positively impact the experience and performance of *all* RPS students regardless of race or ethnicity;

The Richmond School Board, at the urging of community representatives, moves to create the Commission on the Status of Latino Students in Richmond Public Schools as a partnership between RPS and the community, for the purpose of identifying, highlighting, and developing an action plan to mitigate and overcome the numerous issues and obstacles now impeding the success of Latino students in RPS. The initial term of the Commission is to run from October 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023, with the possibility of one six-month extension if needed to allow the Commission to complete its work in a thorough way.

### **Commission Charge**

This commission is charged with:

1. Providing a comprehensive assessment of patterns of academic achievement for Latinos, including English learners, and review of factors impacting those outcomes
2. Assessing existing programming designed to meet the needs of Latino students and English learners
3. Consideration of the varied backgrounds of students, especially particular challenges faced by English learners, and assessment of RPS' ability to address varied needs
4. Gathering Latino community perspectives on strengths and weaknesses of existing programs and initiatives
5. Gathering input from best practices from comparable cities and districts on these same issues
6. Developing a multi-year plan to improve the well-being and academic outcomes of Latino RPS students, including new or expanded programmatic initiatives, reform or overhaul of existing programs, any other policy or administrative changes recommended to improve these outcomes
7. Designing an advisory council or other permanent mechanism for holding RPS publicly accountable for progress on these issues
8. Communicating these recommendations in Spanish and English via public presentations, written documents, and (as judged appropriate) other media

### **Timeline**

- Adoption of Commission by School Board, no later than August 29, 2022
- Appointment of Commission, no later than September 30, 2022. The initial term of the Commission is from October 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023, with the possibility of one extension
- Interim Report #1, including urgent recommendation for funding in FY 2024 RPS budget, no later than December 15, 2022
- Two or more community meetings with presentation of draft recommendations, April and May 2023
- Final Report, including comprehensive recommendations for adoption as policy prior to 2023-24 school year and establishment of permanent Advisory Council, June 2023
- Follow-up report #1 from Advisory Council, December 2023, including budgetary recommendations for FY 2025 RPS budget

- The Commission may request one six-month extension (to December 31, 2023) in completing its work as deemed necessary. Any such extension request should be submitted for approval to the School Board no later than June 1, 2023. The Commission may also seek a shorter extension (e.g. two months) if this is judged appropriate by its co-chairs.

## **Membership**

- 4-6 Community members including parents of RPS Latino students and English learners
- 2-3 RPS high school students representing Latino community
- Representatives of community organizations (e.g.. LULAC, Sacred Heart)
- Staff representation from City of Richmond Office of Immigrant and Refugee Engagement
- Staff representation from RPS Culture, Climate and Student Services
- Staff designee of Superintendent (Commission Director with primary responsibility for organizing the schedule and logistics of the commission)
- 2 School Board members, at least 1 representing Southside districts (1 to serve as co-chair)
- 1-2 Academic experts
- Representation from an organization with expertise in civil rights and/or educational law

Process for selecting members: One School Board representative and one person (not a student) representing the Latino community will be appointed as co-chairs upon adoption of the Commission. Those co-chairs will work with the Superintendent’s designee to identify, recruit, and recommend potential members. The co-chairs will seek applications from the general public for at least *one* student slot and *one* community member slot, and may elect to fill other seats via an application process. The co-chairs will present a final slate of proposed members, along with relevant information about each nominee, to the School Board for final approval. Every effort should be made both to assure significant Latino representation reflecting the full diversity of the Latino and English learner communities in RPS, and to assure broader diversity of perspective and experience with respect to race, gender, age, neighborhood and other factors.

## **Work Process**

To fulfill its charge, the Commission will coordinate and undertake these activities, and others as may be deemed appropriate and effective to completing its work.

1. Commitment to a full Commission meeting at least once a month over the duration of the commission
2. Establishment of initial ground rules for engagement to assure a respectful, inclusive, and productive environment in all Commission activities
3. Formation of subcommittees to undertake additional work and research between full Commission meetings
4. Review of all current publicly available data pertinent to Latino students in RPS
5. Overview of currently existing initiatives pertinent to Latino students in RPS
6. Interviews/reviews of data pertaining to these programs and initiatives
7. Interviews/structured conversations with student, parents, community members
  - a. e.g. focus group interviews
8. Public forums

- a. e.g. town halls
- 9. Review of initiatives from other cities
- 10. Development of written reports and associated public presentations

The work of the Commission will require a small budget; administrative support from RPS (for scheduling meetings, etc.); translation and interpretation services.

Richmond Public Schools administration is expected to cooperate with all aspects of the Commission's work including administrative support and timely production of data and responses to questions. All materials produced by the Commission are to be made available in Spanish and English. Full Commission meetings will be public meetings open to the general public and made available through the RPS YouTube channel, with live translation services. The Commission will provide an update to the School Board monthly over the life of the commission.

Respectfully,

Richmond Region LULAC Council Education Committee:

Vilma Seymour, Council President

Cory Adkins, English learner educator, 8th District resident

Jenny Aghomo, RPS parent, 6th District resident

Dr. Rachel Gomez, VCU School of Education

Dr. Thad Williamson, University of Richmond, 5th District resident

cc: Members of Richmond School Board; Ms. Hudasco