

Cambridge Youth Organizations: Where do Latino
Youth fit in?

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Preface:

The Tufts University anthropology class, Urban Borderlands, and the Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School students from the Ahora program collaboratively worked together to compose a comprehensive oral history on Latinos in the Cambridge community. This project increases awareness for Cambridge Latinos as well as the greater community of the important contributions Latinos have made in Cambridge. My chosen theme for the project is youth organizations for Latino youth. Youth organizations are particularly interesting to because I never had a club or youth organization specifically created for Latinos at my high school. I think that a positive recognition of the Latinos within a school is imperative for students in order to develop a confident cultural identity.

Working with Andrea, a junior from Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School (CRLS), I focused on Concilio Hispano's Ahora Program, and the Cambridge Youth Programs (CYP) focusing on the Moore Youth Center and the Frisoli Youth Center. I chose these two organizations because I wanted to compare the structure of a youth program designed specifically for Latinos (Ahora) to youth programs catering to a diverse community (CYP) to see whether Latino youth can receive the same quality of culturally sensitive programming from both. Since I could not interview youth under the age of 18, I mostly interviewed youth program directors and facilitators; however, I was able to formally interview one Latino student, Cesar Garcia, who has participated in both the Ahora program as well as in the CYP Area IV Youth Center. Otherwise, all interviews with the youth were very informal chats when I visited the Ahora office after school.

Introduction to Cambridge Youth Organizations:

Various youth programs in the Cambridge community are designed to provide Cambridge youth with academic, emotional, and mental support during their crucial stage of adolescent development. This is particularly true for high school age students. Students from ages 14 to 18 stand at the cross roads, fast approaching the next pivotal stage of their lives. Whether entering college or seeking a career, youth have to balance these decisions while still struggling with the issues and pressures of being a teen. Therefore, youth organizations around the community serve as supporters, mentors, and advisors for the students. Many youth facilities and programs are fairly new in the community like the Frisoli Youth Center and the Moore Youth Center. While others, like the Ahora program, have been in existence for many years constantly changing their program design and staff to meet the needs and demands of the youth. This creates a unique situation for the students because they have the ability to influence the design of these various youth programs since they are supposed to accommodate the needs and wants of the youth. Yet, the major difference between the Ahora program and the Cambridge Youth Programs (Frisoli and Moore Youth Centers), is that the Ahora program is designed to specifically cater to Latino youth, while the CYP youth centers are designed to accommodate to an ethnically diverse group of teens.

With the recent census, reporting that Latinos are now the largest minority population living in the United States, it is imperative for service organizations to accommodate the Latino community with assistance in addressing their needs. More importantly, youth organizations should support Latino youth with sensitivity to the

cultural and racial components of their identities. Without having positive reinforcement of their cultural background, youth will struggle to develop a strong sense of self-confidence and identity.

In Cambridge particularly, there is a prominent Latino population. This is especially evident in the high school where students of color as a whole outnumber white students. With significant numbers of students of color attending the high school, the administration should embrace an organization like the Ahora program that specifically serves the Latino youth in providing wonderful opportunities for community involvement and mentoring while emphasizing the positive role the students have in being Latinos in Cambridge.

In contrast, the city-funded youth programs like Frisoli and Moore Youth Centers are heavily influenced by the expertise of their staff in the types of youth enrichment programming that they offer. Without Latino staff, programs celebrating the Latino culture or addressing Latino issues will not be sufficiently implemented.

Latino Youth at Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School:

Currently, the Latino population at CRLS is 15% of the total population. According to Patricia Sanchez, an Ahora staff member, there are roughly a total of 289 Latinos attending the high school out of about 2000 students. Although they are not the largest minority population attending the school, they have a significant presence on campus since 63% of the total student population is students of color and steadily growing. There is not Latino faculty or administrators besides the two staff members, Patricia Sanchez and Ruby Reyes, at the Ahora office. Therefore, when students have a

concern that pertains to their cultural background, they have no faculty members to turn to, nor do they expect the majority white faculty to be able to understand their problems. One Ahora student I spoke to commented that Patricia and Ruby are the only adults on this campus she feels comfortable talking to because they do not have stereotypes against Latino youth. “How can I get help from my teacher when they already assume that I’m dumb just because I’m a Latina?” Therefore, she relies on Patricia and Ruby to help her with homework and finding a tutor.

Without a supportive faculty and administration, Latinos cannot access the assistance or advice from their teachers when having academic trouble. IF they do not access this support, students lose the desire to go to class, are likely to fail the course, or even worse, drop out of high school. For the Latino youth particularly, certain problems arise from year to year at Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School. In the last High School Student Data Report (HHS DR), written by the Office of Development and Assessment, the report surveyed school attendance, academics, and post-secondary schooling over the last three years.¹ Highlighted below are just a few examples of the issues Latino youth face in the high school mentioned in the High School Data Report:

Attendance: *Demographically...Hispanic and African American students were more likely to be absent than other groups (ii).*

Suspensions: *African American and Hispanic students are more likely to be suspended than other racial/ethnic groups (ii).* (242 students had out of school suspension with Hispanic students at 13.8% of this total, while 56 students had in-school suspension with Hispanic students at 4.5% of this total.)

¹ http://www.cps.ci.cambridge.ma.us/admin/ODA/2002data/High_School_Report_02.pdf

Failures: *African American, Hispanic, and Other Black students were more likely to fail courses (ii).* (Hispanic students make up 37% of students failing one or more courses.)

Dropouts: *In 2001/2002. Hispanic students were once again more likely to drop out of school (iii).* (2.1% of Hispanic students dropped out in 200/2001.)

Honors: *59% of all CRLS students received some honors (1st, 2nd, or regular) for at least one marking period during the academic year. (47% of Latino students received honors for at least one marking period.)*

Graduation Plans: *Hispanic students continue to lag behind other racial/ethnic groups in college plans (iii).* (see chart)

These problems are systematic. They are not a cultural issue. Students do not fail classes, get suspended, or drop out of high school because they are Latino. Rather, the lack of support and encouragement from the teachers and staff attributes to their lack of self-esteem and confidence. If the Latino youth are not encouraged to push themselves to realize their full potential as students, they will not believe themselves capable of passing a class, getting good grades or even taking honors classes. Without the confidence in those three things, Latino youth will definitely not consider college an option for them after graduation from high school. Therefore, to remedy the issue, a systematic change must be implemented. Support and encouragement for Latino youth needs to be provided in some form if the teachers and staff are not doing a sufficient job. This is exactly where the Ahora program fits in.

History of the Ahora Program:

The Ahora program was originally designed to address the high dropout rate of Latino students at the Cambridge Ridge and Latin High School. The dropout rate was at 67% when Ahora was first designed in the 1980s (shortly after the two high schools were combined). Through the collaboration among community member Nelson Salazar, Superintendent Ed Saranson, and the leader of CRLS Arnold Clayton, the Ahora program was created as a “case management” program for Latino students struggling with attendance, failing classes, or having disciplinary issues. Now, the dropout rate is at 2.1% - a vast improvement. Yet, from the statistics above, it is apparent that these issues are still common with the Latino community and the Ahora office is essential in managing them.

Before Ahora was implemented at the high school, it was evident that the school staff was not aware of the issues causing the disciplinary problems that many Latino students were facing, nor did they have the adequate skills to address them. Patricia Sanchez, currently an advisor in the Ahora, explains that the administration simply labeled the Latino students as “out of control” (Interview with Patricia Sanchez, 2/28/03). However, since the administration was very concerned about the Latino students and their futures, the administration worked with the Latino non-profit organization, Concilio Hispano, to tackle the reasons Latino students struggled in the high school environment. It is a unique relationship between Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School and Concilio Hispano’s Ahora program because the educational institution has allowed an outside organization to address and aid in solving a school issue.

Relationship between Ahora and the CRLS administration:

For the past 15 years, the program has grown and developed to be a very successful organization offering Latino youth an outlet to access on their campus. The results have been extremely positive. Even though the program continues to grow and modify its programs to fit the demands and needs of its students, Ahora continues to struggle with the administration of the high school in developing a strong working relationship. Patricia Sanchez explains that each year, Ahora sends out information to the faculty and staff “introducing – reintroducing ourselves, and sort of like, ‘okay, this is our goal, help us do this.’ But we’ve had a very rough time trying to fit in at the school. I think that since the teachers have been there for such a long time, they see the Ahora the program as sort of like the place where the ‘bad’ kids hangout. And again, that has changed over the years – it’s not like that anymore” (Interview with Patricia Sanchez, 2/28/03). Antoinette Basualdo, the youth director at Concilio Hispano, recognizes the constant need to “encourage” the relationship between the staff of the high school and the staff of the Ahora program. She comments that the “fact that we’re actually still in the school says something about the school and their members within the school that still believe that this is still an important piece” (interview with Antoinette Basualdo, 3/7/03). However, the necessity to constantly work on this relationship reveals the tensions between the administration and the Ahora program. Some of the teachers still view the Ahora program as the case-management program it once was. With this negative perception of the program, teachers do not encourage Latino youth to participate in Ahora programs, nor do they reinforce a positive reputation of the office. Because of this, Latino

students are sometimes hesitant to visit the office because the fear being labeled as one of the “bad kids” that hangs out at Ahora after school.

This past year, the Ahora program relocated to another office, although it is closer to the cafeteria. It is substantially smaller in size than the old office, which is now the space for in-house suspension and detention. Currently, the Ahora office is less accommodating for the students who wish to hang out in the office during lunch and after school. What does this say about the significance the Ahora program to the high school administration if the Ahora office has been relocated so there can be more room for students in in-house suspension – is punishment more valuable than youth enrichment? Of the 56 students receiving in-school suspension Latino students share the highest percentage (tying with African Americans) at 4.5%. For the Ahora program, Patricia estimates that they have a core group of 30 to 35 students; however, an average of 100 to 150 students come in and out of the office throughout the year (interview with Patricia Sanchez, 2/28/03). Therefore, it would make more sense for the Ahora office to have a larger office to accommodate this number of students.

Could this mean that the Ahora program is in danger of eventually being kicked out of the high school and forced to relocate? Possibly. Cesar Garcia, a senior at Cambridge Rindge and Latin, has participated in the Ahora program since his sophomore year. Cesar does not believe the threat of the Ahora office closing down to be such a “hypothetical” situation. He has seen the Ahora program lose a core of its student from graduation, as well as the decreasing number of students coming to the Ahora office. It is not a matter of inadequate programs, or the staff because Patricia Sanchez and Ruby Reyes have significant relationships with the students as well as facilitate wonderful

programs. But, it is matter of their relationship with the school administration. If the administration does not fully support the program and see it for its value, then fewer students will be encouraged to participate in the programs if it continues to have the reputation of where the “bad kids” hang out.

Ahora Programs:

The Ahora staff offers a variety of programs for students that provide services including: academics, counseling, and preparation for their post-secondary plans. Some programs are fairly new, while others have been implemented for years. The programs are constantly modified to meet the demands and interests of the students. Listed below are the programs, their functions, as well as their importance to the students.

The Futuro Program: *Futuro*, meaning the future, prepares students for their post-secondary education. Patricia Sanchez, who has a vast knowledge on Latinas and their access to higher education because of her research while she was in college, directs this program. Students are advised during their junior year, the summer before their senior year, as well as their senior year on college applications and essay writing. Patricia explains her job:

I have a group of students, a core group of students, who come in every week, and we have group workshops that have to do with everything that comes with college, you know, from researching colleges, to applying, to editing essays, to college life, to substance abuse at college, decision making, goal planning, all that stuff. I do that both with the seniors and the juniors, so it's with different groups. And on top of that, I meet with them individually and help them with their college applications and essays and stuff like that. (Patricia Sanchez, 2/28/03)

One Ahora student remarked that preparing the essays and applications during the summer took a lot of pressure off her during the school year, instead of worrying about

both college applications and classes at the same time. Then once she received her acceptance letters, Patricia really helped her in weighing which aspects of each of the colleges would best suit her and her interests both academically and socially.

Patricia and Ruby also plan college campus visits with the students including U-Mass Boston, U-Mass Amherst, Boston College, etc. These college trips allow students to actually experience life on a college campus. Since the Ahora advisors have both attended college, they can also share their experiences and advise the students what they should look for in a school. Cesar Garcia remarked that he really appreciated their advice on the racial environment he will find at college. The Ahora program really opened his eyes to a lot of issues that he will face in college because of his race, and that gives him a more realistic perspective of what he should expect in attending certain schools. CRLS is a unique high school where students of color outnumber white students. Unfortunately, in higher education it is often the other way around. Therefore, Cesar has had many discussions on this subject with Patricia and Ruby and has received great advice on how to prepare him for the change.

Futuro also prepares students for situations and experiences they will have while attending college. The workshops on these subjects range from substance abuse on college campuses to applying for financial aide. (The Ahora program also holds financial aide workshops for parents as well at Concilio Hispano).

The Futuro program was implemented because Latino students were not encouraged to seek higher education by the faculty; therefore, Ahora not only encourages the youth to access higher education, but helps them through the entire application process. It is an unfortunate pattern for the counselors of the school, as one student

commented, for them underestimate their potential and only encourage Latino students to apply to 2-year colleges or technical schools instead of 4-year universities.

Most of the students participating in the Futuro program are first generation college students. Because of this, their parents will not have the knowledge or experience in applying to college and the students rely on themselves to understand the entire college admissions process. Since CRLS is large, students do not receive a significant amount of attention or sufficient advising from their school counselors. With Ahora, however, students have the opportunity to develop a valuable one on one relationship with Patricia and Ruby and receive important advice and mentoring on the college admissions process.

The Futuro program is there at every step of the college application process from researching colleges to actually choosing the college to attend. In the Ahora office, the list of universities Ahora students have applied to and have been accepted to is proudly displayed on the door – Patricia is particularly pleased with this list because it shows how successful her students have been in the college application process. In addition, Patricia and Ruby are very supportive of students who may not have been accepted into their first choice. As one student was talking about her disappointment in not making it into her top choice, Patricia comforted her saying, “You are a smart girl, no matter where you go you will be successful because you have good study skills. And you should be proud that you got into schools people would love to go to! You’ll end up where you’re meant to be.” And the next minute, Patricia and the student began to talk about all the exciting things she would experience in college.

Without the Futuro program, some students would not have realized that the option of attending college would be an option for them. For Antoinette Basualdo, she

feels her greatest sense of accomplishment when a student comments that “if it wasn’t for the Ahora program, I would have never considered that I could go to college” (interview with Antoinette Basualdo, 3/7/03). This idea, she comments, is something that not all Latino students feel is an option for them. Therefore, Ahora encourages Latino student to realize that college is an option for them, helps them through the entire application process, and finally prepares them for the types of issues they will encounter while attending a university.

Juntos: Juntos, meaning together, is a leadership program headed by Ruby Reyes. It focuses on community service projects, social justice, substance abuse prevention, as well as AIDS prevention. Unfortunately, Ruby Reyes is leaving the Ahora program for another job opportunity, but the program will still be implemented.

For some students, the Juntos program is the first Ahora program that they participate in. It is a wonderful way to not only connect with the Cambridge community and participate in informative workshops, but it is a wonderful setting to meet and get to know their fellow Ahora peers.

HOY: HOY, Health Opportunities for Youth, also means “today” in Spanish. This internship through the Cambridge Health Alliance, gives young students the chance to work in the hospitals and clinics to prepare them and develop their interests in the health field. The Ahora program has students working at the Windsor Clinic and at the Cambridge Health center. But students do not just go to the clinics and work, but the program also includes a debriefing with Patricia every other week on Fridays to talk

about what they're learning, what they interests them, or what they are enjoying about the internship. The program is fairly new, as Antoinette Basualdo explained, and when working collaboratively with another organization, there are bound to be changes. Since the program is also being accessed by other organizations besides Ahora, there are a limited number of students who can take advantage of it. But from what Antoinette explains, the original design of the program remains the same:

The goal when we started was that the youth could participate with these, participating in the internship for a couple years, start as juniors and then as seniors, and then the health alliance had made the commitment that if they student after participating in couple years was interested in pursuing a health oriented career, would...they would make the commitment to help with the tuition to go to school with the return that the students, after completing their education, would come back and work in return at the hospitals. (Interview with Antoinette Basualdo, 3/7/03)

This is an incredible opportunity for Ahora students to access because not only will they have an incredible experience working in clinics and hospitals while in high school, but also if they wish to continue working in the field of health as a career, they will be assisted in the cost of education to pursue this.

Tufts Oral History Project: Ahora students are connected with Tufts students participating in the Urban Borderlands class taught by Prof. Deborah Pacini-Hernandez at Tufts University. The intent of the class is to gather information on the history of Latinos in the city of Cambridge to be shared publicly for residents to learn and appreciate the presence of Latinos in their community. The collaboration allows Ahora students to attend interviews with the Tufts students as well as develop a relationship with them.

Tutoring and Advising: Students struggling in their classes have an opportunity to seek tutoring from a volunteer who comes in weekly. It is very accessible because the tutoring

is on campus at the hours convenient to the student, but appointments must be made with the volunteer to assure that the student can get help. Patricia and Ruby are also accessible for help – especially advising. If a student needs to apply for a job, Patricia and Ruby will help with their resume and application process. If a student is failing a class, Patricia and Ruby will talk to the teacher to see what exactly the student is struggling with and will set the student up with the tutor.

Noche Latina: Ahora students plan an end of the year dinner/performance to celebrate Latino culture at Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School. Family, friends, and community members are invited to eat dinner, provided by various restaurants from the community, as they watch the performances given by the youth. This year's performance included a fashion show of cultural dresses and evening wear to youth, poetry in both Spanish and English, a slide presentation, a singing performance, a guest speaker, and digital story presentations by the Urban Borderlands class. It is a wonderful opportunity for Latino students to express their cultural pride artistically. In addition, it is the youth's contribution back to the community to provide them with a night of food and entertainment.

Cambridge Youth Programs:

Recognizing the need for the youth of Cambridge to have facilities to hang out after school, the Department of Human Services Program for the City of Cambridge funded various youth programs and youth centers around the Cambridge community. The Cambridge Youth Program (CYP), has five locations for its youth centers including: the Gately Youth Center, West Cambridge Youth Center, Frisoli Youth Center, Area IV Youth Center, and the Moore Youth Center. The teen programs at each center are set up to have the same agenda each night so that students can expect the identical programming and recreational activities from each center. Each session begins at 6:30 and ends at 9:30 P.M. Check-in lasts from 6:30 to 7:00 as students sign in and pay their fee (if they haven't already done so). Membership for the entire year costs \$20, but the payments divided into weekly fees at \$2. Next, the youth have an hour-long workshop on various subjects designed by each individual center. Following the workshop, from 8:00 to 9:30 is designated for either recreational activities or time to finish homework until the center closes and the youth sign out. With the membership in the CYP programs, students can attend any youth center any night of the week. Youth even have the option of attending two centers in one night, but once the youth sign in, they are the responsibility of the youth centers. For example, if a youth were leaving the Frisoli youth center to attend the Moore Youth Center, the two youth centers will call each other once the youth leaves and once the youth arrives at the second youth center. This assures the parents that the centers know where their child is at all times.

CYP Programs:

Although youth centers have the freedom to design their own programs to fit the expertise of the staff as well as the demands of the youth, the programs will address particular issues that are important in adolescent development. For example, each center is equipped with a gym and fitness center. Health and fitness are subjects that are discussed at each center. The Moore Youth Center also provides a trainer to teach how to use the various weightlifting machines. In combination with the fitness aspect, youth are taught what healthy foods to eat as well. These subjects are popular for teens because as a part of their adolescent development, image becomes an insecurity at times. Therefore, the centers promote a positive body image by encouraging a healthy lifestyle that includes not only healthy eating, but physical fitness as well.

In addition to health, substance abuse prevention is an important program as well. Discussion groups often talk about the pressures of alcohol and drug use while going to high school. Staff members talk about the dangers of alcohol and drug use as well as ways to avoid the pressures from peers.

AIDS/HIV and STD prevention is also a subject the centers address. As Jeneen Mucci commented, many of the youth are becoming sexually aware as they enter high school. It is imperative that they learn the ways to be safe while sexually active (interview with Jeneen Mucci, 4/16/03). This subject is a common topic because the youth feel comfortable discussing this with their peers and the staff because their homes and the high school are not spaces open to discussions on this. Therefore, not only are the staff available for advice, they are also there to teach valuable lessons concerning the safe sex and abstinence.

In addition to the discussion groups, the youth centers also provide spaces for homework and opportunities for tutoring. The youth centers have computers accessible to the youth for homework or to just surf the Internet. In addition to the computer lab, program directors are also available for tutoring in various subjects. However, there is no specific tutoring program.

One of the most popular activities, especially at the Frisoli Youth Center, is the Boys group and Girls groups that allow youth to talk about gender related issues they face as teens. This encourages the youth to not only talk about experiences or issues that challenge them, but to also seek advice from their peers and the program facilitator. For the Frisoli Youth Center, the Girls Group is much more organized than the Boys Group because it is modeled after the “Go Girl’s” curriculum and the Studio 2B curriculum, which is a girl-empowerment program designed by Girl Scouts. The Boys Group is focused more on sports than discussion groups. However, they are both great ways for the youth to bond.

In addition to these activities, there are also organized programs for the youth to reach out to the community. First, Leaders in Action is a paid internship training youth in community outreach and programs. C.O.R.E. (Create Organize Respond Evaluate) is a forum for teens to raise question, ideas, or concerns regarding the youth center programs so that they can be modified to better fit the needs of its youth. Neighborhood Service Project is another community outreach program where youth involved in the various CYP programs are required to do some type of community service that is designed with the assistance of the youth center staff. This program is in collaboration with the Office of Workforce Development for a ten-week service-learning project specifically for 14 to 15

year olds. These listed programs are intended to not only connect youth with the community they live in, but to also development collaborative working skills, a strong work ethic, leadership skills, and a sense of community building.

CYP Facilities:

The facilities for each youth program are designed with a different layout, yet they are all impressive spaces that offer an incredible facility for students to use after school. I visited the Frisoli and Moore Youth Centers specifically, and was given a tour around the each facility.

At the Moore Youth Center, the single floor building is equipped with various rooms specific for activities to enrich the youth. The computer room, one of the smallest rooms there, is accessible for Internet use, games, or a place for students to type a paper for school. Some of these computers were donated, while others were purchased by grant money. The gymnasium, which is probably the most popular room of the center, is a full basketball court. There is a basketball league among the different youth centers as well. Adjacent to the basketball court is the game room with a pool table and ping-pong table. According to Jenni Nettick, the youth program director, the game room is the most unpopular room because youth are more likely to play basketball rather than pool or ping-pong. The lounge is equipped with a television and couches where youth watch videos or have discussion groups. The kitchen is the spot where every Friday night, youth and program directors cook dinner together.

The Frisoli Youth Center has a different layout that is more accommodating for larger groups. It is a two-story structure that is much more spacious. In addition, the

Frisoli Youth Center is only 5 years old, so the facilities are much more recent than the Moore Youth Center. The Frisoli Youth Center also hosts a hockey league run by the Cambridge police force where the youth have the chance to become acquainted with their local police officers as their team coaches or players while playing hockey.

Ethnic Diversity at the Youth Centers:

When visiting both youth centers, it is apparent that the majority of the youth attending them are African American. Jenni Nettick, the youth program director at the Moore Youth Center, attributes this to the location of their center. They are located in a community that is predominately African American; therefore, they have a majority African American youth that attend the center. The Frisoli Youth Center is located in a more diverse community according to Jeneen Mucci. Yet when I asked her the racial breakup of the youth attending the center was, she replied “we have African American, Asian, white...we have a lot of diversity” (Interview with Jeneen Mucci, 4/16/03). As their smallest ethnic population of the Frisoli Youth Center, Latinos are not as active as African American, Haitian, or Asian youth. This might not be the case at the three other youth centers (Gately Youth Center, West Cambridge Youth Center, Area IV Youth Center).

There are programs and activities that address cultural diversity – ranging from the cooking classes to the discussion groups. Since the staff members are the ones who design the various programs, they need to have the expertise to teach a course or run a program on a specific culture. At both the Frisoli Youth Center and the Moore Youth Center, there are no Latinos on staff; therefore, there are not programs specifically

designed to celebrate the Latino culture. Without Latinos on staff, it is less likely that the Latino cultures will be recognized and celebrated through specific programming. For African-American youth, they had an entire event among the five youth centers celebrating African American heritage. While it is imperative to hold events like this, it is important to be inclusive of all cultures when working with a diverse population. However, both youth centers advocated that their underlying motto is to embrace everyone's differences, but focusing on their similarities as high school students growing up in Cambridge.

The Cambridge Youth Program has built wonderful facilities to house programming accessible to all youth in Cambridge. The CYP youth centers are designed to cater to diverse populations of youth rather than one specific ethnic group. Yet, since African Americans are the primary attendees of these programs, cultural courses and programs often highlight African American culture. In addition to this, with no Latino staffing, programs for Latino youth are not designed. This may not be true in all the youth centers, but in the two that I visited, the lack of Latino staff has obviously contributed to the small Latino population attending the youth centers and the lack of programming celebrating the Latino culture. This opens up an opportunity for youth to not only demand programming, but to also encourage the hiring of Latino staff in the various youth centers.

Closing Remarks:

The Cambridge community recognizes the need to provide its youth with enrichment programs to be involved outside of school. This is apparent in the variety of youth organizations located within the community. However, the only program

specifically for Latino youth is the Ahora program housed at the CRLS. Not only does it have great programming preparing Latino youth for their post-secondary plans, but also a space where Latino youth find a culturally welcoming atmosphere on campus the CRLS campus. It is imperative that the administration of CRLS recognizes the significant contributions of the Ahora office and work collaboratively with them to improve the academic issues common among the Latino students.

The CYP youth centers are fortunate to have wonderful facilities to not only provide wonderful recreational programs, but educational programs as well. The combination of the two programs contributes to the well-rounded youth that attend. However, the lack of the Latino presence in the staff and youth does not provide the same cultural appreciation that youth will find at the Ahora office.

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