

Longtime Forum Board Member Becomes First Latina In Illinois History to Serve as State Superintendent

CHICAGO – The Latino Policy Forum congratulates Dr. Carmen Ayala, one of its longtime board members, who today became the first woman and first Latina in history to be sworn in as Superintendent of the Illinois School Board of Education (ISBE).

Carmen has been a trailblazer her entire career, Forum Executive Director Sylvia Puente said. In 2012, when she took over as Superintendent of Berwyn North School District 98, in a mostly Latino Chicago suburb, she steadily turned around schools that were among the lower performing ones in the region. During her almost five years on the Forum’s Executive Board, she has been a champion for the organization in its efforts to achieve equitable school funding reform and increase resources for English learners.

“While we’re proud of this historic first, we don’t lose sight of the incredible academic gains Carmen helped all students achieve in her schools,” Puente said. “The future of achieving equity in Illinois schools is in good hands. Carmen has gone above and beyond in engaging communities in statewide policy discussions.”

In 2017, Carmen participated in the Forum’s year-end [VIDEO](#) and talked about the organization leading the effort to get an additional \$38 million for English Learners in Illinois.

The **State Superintendent** is an executive position in state government that works with ISBE to provide leadership, advocacy, resources and assistance so that all students are prepared for a postsecondary education.

Carmen is the second Forum board member chosen by Governor JB Pritzker for a major role in his administration. Last month, Forum co-founder and former board chair, Sol Flores, was appointed to the position of Deputy Governor.

The Forum also congratulates its former Education Director, Dr. Cristina Pacione-Zayas, now Director of Policy at the Erikson Institute, who was recently appointed by Gov. Pritzker to serve on the state board of education. Cristina’s work over the past decade has led to advancements in education policy and community initiatives that have helped Latino families and children of immigrants. Recently, Cristina penned a [BLOG](#) for the Forum regarding her work helping bring relief to Puerto Rico after the devastation of Hurricane Maria.