

Donald B. Childs, Ph.D.

January 13, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

It is my pleasure to write this supplemental letter of recommendation for Dr. Orlando Ramos. Dr. Ramos is a true transformational leader who has a laser-like focus on student achievement for every student. In his brief tenure in the School District of Beloit, Wisconsin, Dr. Ramos recruited an enthusiastic group of high school teachers to create a “think tank” that addresses issues of academic performance that have failed for several years to meet state expectations. In two brief school terms, the literacy initiative he introduced resulted in 18% and 14% reductions in student failure rates. A “coda” to that success came in November, 2019, when the State of Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction released state-wide testing results showing that Beloit Memorial High School improved from a school “Meeting Few Expectations” to a school that “Meets Expectations.” This is a direct result of Dr. Ramos’ initiatives and the collaborative instructional staff efforts he introduced.

Unfortunately, circumstances within the high school and the district resulted in Dr. Ramos resigning as of February 1, 2019. I believe this unfortunate turn of events requires some context to understand. Following are facts that played into Dr. Ramos’ departure from the district.

- The School District of Beloit has had five high school principals in four years and eight superintendents in five years.
- In the spring of 2018, the board of education conducted a superintendent search that collapsed and failed.
- Shortly after the failed superintendent search, the board hired Dr. Ramos as high school principal.
- Within weeks of Dr. Ramos’ hiring, three of the seven board members resigned in an internal dispute (which had nothing to do with the hiring of Dr. Ramos).
- The remaining board members then hired me as interim superintendent. After 31 years in the Chicago suburbs and ten years as a superintendent in one Wisconsin school district, I have made a “retirement career” of interim superintendencies, serving districts experiencing transitional dysfunction in seven Wisconsin districts, varying from one semester to four years in duration. Beloit’s dysfunction centers around years of extensive micro-management by its boards and a genuine desire to get better academic and behavioral results without changing governance and instructional practices.
- By the start of the 2018-19 school year, over 380 students had left the district under the state’s school choice program

- The tech director has left; the communications director has left; the HR director was bought out; the business manager was pushed out; both assistant superintendents were pushed out; both curriculum directors left; the staff development/data director has left; two principals have left, and one asked to be re-assigned. Six among that group are minorities. That's over half of the administrative staff.

It naturally took Dr. Ramos some time to understand the resistance to change, and in the meantime, he was seriously undermined by two inexperienced assistant principals, one of whose parent is a long-term employee of the district, and the other of whose spouse is a school board member. Their support came from long-tenured teachers opposed to change and who had personal connections to school board members.

The School District of Beloit was not a district in which a turn-around principal could thrive, and Dr. Ramos is a victim of that reality, despite the fact that he implemented successful initiatives and enjoyed wide and deep support from the business community and municipal officials who are anxious to have the community's public schools reflect the aspirations of the broader community.

Beloit has lost Orlando Ramos; but the district fortunate enough to retain his services will be well-served, indeed, and I am happy to give him my highest recommendation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Donald B. Childs". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Donald" being the most prominent.

Donald B. Childs, Ph.D.  
Former Interim Superintendent  
School District of Beloit, Wisconsin