



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Rich Funke

## Funke, Ibero Launch New English as a Second Language Education Program

RICH FUNKE August 21, 2015

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Senator **Rich Funke** and **Hilda Rosario-Escher**, President & CEO of the IBERO American Action League (IBERO), today celebrated the launch of a new free and open to the public English as a Second Language (ESL) education program. Supported by an appropriation delivered by **Funke** in the 2015-16 New York State Budget, the program will help non-English speakers gain the communications skills needed to excel in school, the workplace, and life. **Funke** and **Rosario-Escher** also issued a call for residents to contact IBERO if they are interested in participating in the new program.

*“I’ve seen first-hand how the written and spoken word can touch people, be a force for good, and even change the course of history. Yet those who aren’t able to connect through language often find a world that is closed-off to future opportunities,”* said **Funke**. *“I’m proud this program will give our neighbors the English skills they need to achieve bigger and better things, including better jobs, stronger families, and a more successful community.”*

IBERO programming is developed to help clients achieve complete self-sufficiency through hands-on learning and practices. Despite an identified service gap, the organization had not been able to offer its own ESL classes due to a

lack of corresponding funding. Approximately 70% of IBERO's 10,000 annual clients are Latinos, and 80% of those clients and community residents have demonstrated a need for ESL classes. Understanding the importance, **Funke** advocated for and was able to secure \$34,000 in the 2015-16 State Budget to allow IBERO to launch a full-scale ESL program for the first time.

IBERO will soon hire a Program Coordinator to develop curriculum and offer direct instruction. One hour classes will be held at IBERO's Early Childhood Center at 777 Clifford Avenue and IBERO'S Main office at 817 East Main Street in Rochester once per day Monday through Friday. A class schedule will be set once the first round of students complete the application process. Each class will focus on grammar, spelling, pronunciation, inflection, sentence structure and conversation. Students will practice written and verbal communications skills, prepare presentations, and participate in real-world scenarios, such as making requests for information, applying for jobs, and conducting mock interviews. The classes will be free and open to the public, with no restrictions based on age or previous education.

*"The individuals and families we serve are hard working people who want to work and make a better life for themselves and their families, but many of them can't afford to pay for English classes," said **Rosario-Escher**. "Because of this funding, we will now be able to fill a much needed gap that will no doubt help strengthen our entire community."*

Without adequate English language skills, many local Latinos are not able to seek employment, pursue a higher education, or voice their concerns related to issues such as housing, medical care or crime. While the Department of Labor reported a total unemployment rate of 5.4% in the City of Rochester as of December 2014, a 2013 Fiscal Policy Institute Report revealed an unemployment rate of 12% among Latinos living in Rochester.

IBERO is the only dual-language and Latino human services agency in Rochester. Those interested in the new ESL Program should contact IBERO at [585-256-8900](tel:585-256-8900). Interpreting and translation services are available.

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