

At a Glance

Major
Sociology

Immediate Post-Grad Pursuits

- Graduate School
- Executive Director at the Consortium for Latino Health
- New York State Policy Director at Paraprofessional Health Care Institute
- Director of Business Development at the Delaware Valley Community Health

Continuing Education

- MA in Sociology from Bryn Mawr College
- MPA from the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University

Current Title

Assistant Director, Office of School Health Services

Employer

School District of Philadelphia

Contact Information

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The Guardian**Fostering children's healthcare with Louis Bonilla '90**

In public healthcare, it's easy to overlook the cracks beneath the surface. Poorly-kept records threaten health insurance coverage, problems with eyesight impair learning, and STDs common in high school students aren't tested for and treated. But what the system misses, Louis Bonilla catches.

Louis works for the School District of Philadelphia as the Assistant Director of the Office of School Health Services. He identifies needs and then mobilizes organizations to address the problems. Louis explains that the School District does not provide healthcare because the city is already rich in resources: "We can and should, instead, be connecting our kids to the providers of these health related resources."



For example, once a year the School District teams up with the University of Pennsylvania and Temple University Dental Schools to create "Give Kids a Smile" Day, providing underprivileged children with free dental care. Louis smiles now as he recounts the million steps that brought the project to life. The logistical and legal issues were numerous. In addition to getting signed consent from parents, he arranged transportation for 350 kids and liability insurance for Penn and Temple, all the while planning within the universities' schedules. "You always need more lead time than you think you do," he admits. He finds this especially true when working with and coordinating different groups.

Having dedicated his time to organizing such large-scale efforts, Louis has seen his fair share of bureaucracy. He knows that it can make or break the best of intentions. The road to success is rough, and it is Louis's job is to deal with the speed bumps that each project inevitably encounters. Successful navigation rests on his ability to understand and communicate with people from different professional and educational backgrounds. For example, parents encounter various barriers preventing them from getting healthcare for their children. Louis helps them by overcoming language barriers, gaining their trust and providing them with phone numbers to call for health insurance. He offers an example: "With immigrants, the parents may be here illegally but the kids were born here. So you need to somehow convince the parents that if they sign up for health insurance and give information about their kids, there is no way that they could be deported."

Louis has found that the opportunities in public health policy are as diverse as the people in the field. He has taken full advantage of this, previously serving as Director of Business Development with Delaware Valley Community Health, New York State Policy Director with the Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute, and Executive Director of the Consortium for Latino Health. The typical career path, he says, no longer exists. "In a city like Philadelphia, the professional class of decision makers and policy makers are small enough that it pays to get to know them early," he explains. "By working on a range of issues, you get to know people in different fields and those contacts are useful later on." He advises students to get a head start on establishing contacts, to cast a wide net and to cast it regularly. (While at college, he sent out an astonishing 50 emails every summer!)

Pausing to reflect on his own path, he advises: "Follow your passion. If you're honest in what you do, a lot of people will pick up on that and reward you with funds, a promotion, or support." This, ultimately, is what allows him to ensure that no one slips between the cracks.