



# THE CRISTO REY NETWORK: Serving Sustainable Success

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**One of the nation's most powerful urban education success stories** of the past decade, the Cristo Rey Network serves exclusively economically disadvantaged students with its Catholic mission to prepare them all to enter and graduate from college.

Many expect that the Network's newest school, in California's Silicon Valley, utilizing an innovative blended learning model, will define a powerful new direction for the Network's future. "It appears to me that the future of education has got to take technology in stride," observes the school's board co-chairman John A. Sobrato, noting how the model reduces overhead costs while strengthening individualized instruction with real-time feedback to teachers.

This year, the network's 28 schools serve 9,000 students around the country, 96 percent of whom are people of color.

Each student's family contributes \$1,000 for tuition, on average. Employers for the school's corporate work study program provide most of the balance needed to cover costs.

Work study programs are required of all students, and relationships with employers are central to the Cristo Rey model.

All 1,400 of Cristo Rey's 2014 graduates nationwide were accepted to college, and 90 percent enrolled.

Cristo Rey's 2008 graduating class enrolled in college at three times the rate of peers of similar economic backgrounds and completed college at nearly four times that rate.

Details follow.

### **CRISTO REY AT A GLANCE**

- **Explicitly Catholic in mission, founded by Jesuit priest John P. Foley, S.J. and his team in Chicago in 1996**
- **28 schools nationwide, serving 9,000 students**
- **96 percent of students are people of color; all are economically disadvantaged**
- **Students pay average annual tuition of \$1,000. With 40–60 percent of operating costs covered by the schools' work study programs, philanthropic support covers the balance.**
- **More than 2,000 employers projected to invest more than \$44 million in student workers this year**
- **Cutting edge blended-learning model piloting at San Jose school this year showing early success in student achievement gains**



## INTRODUCTION

**John A. Sobrato co-chairs the Cristo Rey Network's newest school board in San Jose.** The Silicon Valley businessman and philanthropist brought together the founders group that raised capital for the start-up school and has driven its innovative use of blended-learning.

Sobrato has invested in more than a smart brand; Cristo Rey carries clout as an expanding, transformative, private model on the education landscape — addressing the needs of low-income youth with astounding results. The Network emulates opportunity in education — turning traditional schools' vocational, administrative, community and culture on its head.

The Sobrato Organization is one of California's most successful family-owned real-estate development companies. Nationwide, business leaders recognize the value of Cristo Rey. More than 2,000 employers are investing more than \$44 million in Cristo Rey Network students this year.

Students enter the network underprivileged and underachieving<sup>1</sup> (on average, two years behind their peers academically) and they emerge graduates of a private, college-preparatory high school with a one-hundred percent college acceptance rate and paid professional experience, overturning statistics linking race and income to low achievement.

Cristo Rey schools blend a unique approach to education with measurable outcomes and innovation. A strong base in social justice defines the Jesuit-founded Catholic school system. A holistic approach to educating individuals, careful selection of students and employees and a cost-effective work study program has allowed the network to build an impressive record of accomplishment with only one school closing its doors in nearly 20 years.

<sup>1</sup> Sweas, Megan, *Putting Education to Work: How Cristo Rey High Schools are Transforming Education*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc. 2014), Kindle edition, location 221.



While many Catholic schools are closing their doors to financially-behest competitors, (from 2003–2014, 23.2 percent were reportedly closed or consolidated and student numbers declined by 22.7 percent)<sup>2</sup> the Cristo Rey Network is expanding.

“We are a Catholic high school network that is thriving, the only one serving exclusively low-income youth that is growing,” said Cristo Rey Director of Advancement Brenda Morris. Demographically, only four percent of students are white and average family income is \$34,000.<sup>3</sup> Statistically, they surpass all expectations, achieving well beyond their peers academically and carrying the numbers beyond graduation.

**“WE’VE MADE AN INVESTMENT IN BLENDED LEARNING, AND THE HOPE IS THAT WE CAN FIGURE IT OUT AND OFFER IT TO THE REST OF THE SCHOOLS.”**

BJ Cassin,  
Cassin Educational Initiative Foundation

Every one of the 1,400 Network graduates was accepted into college in 2014, and according to National Student Clearinghouse, 90 percent of Cristo Rey graduates have enrolled in college.<sup>4</sup>

Cristo Rey’s 2008 graduating class enrolled in college at three times the rate of peers of similar economic backgrounds and completed college at nearly four times that rate.<sup>5,6</sup>

According to a federal Education Department publication on vocational education in the U.S., “Only a minority of students complete a coherent

sequence of courses preparing them for employment in a specific occupational field... Indeed, the sequence of courses defining an occupational program varies among high schools and school districts across the country.”<sup>7</sup>

Increasing economic activity, neighborhood stability and growth, employment, city tax base, and community development are each important hallmarks of the community impact of Cristo Rey schools.<sup>8</sup>

Measurable outcomes illustrate impressive annual growth and achievement as well.

Every year, students at Cristo Rey Network schools take the ACT four-year College and Career Readiness System; the EXPLORE assessment as freshman, the PLAN assessment in their sophomore year and the ACT in their junior and senior years.

2 “United States Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools 2013–2014: The Annual Statistical Report on Schools, Enrollment, and Staffing,” National Catholic Education Association, accessed Sept. 15, 2014, <http://www.ncea.org/data-information/catholic-school-data>.

3 “2013 Snapshot Report: Student Profile,” Cristo Rey Network Annual Data Report 2013, p.5.

4 “Impact,” Cristo Rey Network, accessed Sept. 15, 2014, <http://www.cristoreynetwork.org/page.cfm?p=354>.

5 Includes 2 year and 4 year institutions. Martha J. Bailey and Susan M. Dynarski, “Inequality in Post Secondary Attainment,” 2011. In Greg Duncan and Richard Murnane, eds., *Whither Opportunity: Rising Inequality, Schools, and Children’s Life Chances*, pp. 117–132. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

6 Bailey and Dynarski, 2011. Also, “Affluent Students Have an Advantage and the Gap Is Widening,” *The New York Times*, Dec. 21, 2012. Accessed May 7, 2014.

7 U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, “Vocational Education in the United States: The Early 1990s,” accessed Sept. 15, 2014, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs/web/95024-2.asp>.

8 “Impact,” Cristo Rey Network, accessed Sept. 15, 2014, <http://www.cristoreynetwork.org/page.cfm?p=354>.

Composite data for the class of 2013 illustrates an average ACT gain of 3.15 points from freshman to senior year. Cristo Rey's class of 2013 showed a mean composite ACT score of 18.4, increasing 5 percent compared to 2010 seniors, and outperforming many high achieving charter school students, according to school data.

"Data also validates that our unique combination of classroom learning and workplace learning prepares low-income youth for success in college and in life," notes Morris.

## CORE MODEL: HOLISTIC AND REALISTIC

**The first Cristo Rey school developed in response to the needs of underprivileged Hispanic-Americans in the Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago.**<sup>9</sup> The Jesuit order of Catholicism, recognized as a highly educated and active religious force in poverty-stricken communities, found that only 14.3 percent of Catholic-school students nationally were Hispanic.<sup>10</sup>

Catholic schools' mounting tuition costs over the years, rising from a lower number of religious men and women working in schools free of charge, meant they were less accessible to a large percentage of Catholic churchgoers.

Chicago native, John P. Foley, S.J. and his team, opened the first Cristo Rey school in response to an expressed need for Catholic education in Pilsen in 1996.

Today, the Cristo Rey Network holds fast to that cause: more than half of students in the Network are Hispanic, a third are African American and overall, 96 percent are minorities.<sup>11</sup>

Cristo Rey San Jose Jesuit high school's Principal Joe Albers was initially drawn to the Network for that reason.

"I developed a commitment to work with under-served Latino communities through my Jesuit education at Bellarmine and Santa Clara," Albers said. "That led me to work in public and charter schools which served a higher population of low income students."

Outcome gaps between races have closed some since the 1970s,<sup>12</sup> but truly serving the disadvantaged goes beyond ethnicity. Today, the achievement gap between the wealthiest and poorest students is worse than it was 30 years ago,<sup>13</sup> and school districts are a mirror image of this trend: one study found that 96 percent of students in wealthy districts graduated as opposed to only 64 percent of their counterparts in high-poverty school districts.<sup>14</sup>

"Economically disadvantaged" students, according to Network standards, are defined as those coming from families that earn less than 75 percent of the national median income.

9 Sweas, *Putting Education to Work*, location 249.

10 "United States Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools 2013-2014: The Annual Statistical Report on Schools, Enrollment, and Staffing," National Catholic Education Association, accessed September 15, 2014, <http://www.ncea.org/data-information/catholic-school-data>.

11 "2013 Snapshot Report: Student Profile," Cristo Rey Network Annual Data Report 2013, p.5.

12 Sweas, location 264 citing John H. Tyler and Magnus Lofstrom, "Finishing High School: Alternative Pathways and Dropout Recovery," *The Future of Children* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2009): p.82.

13 Sweas, location 264 citing Sean F. Reardon, "No Rich Child Left Behind," *The New York Times*, April 27, 2013, <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/04/27/no-rich-child-left-behind/>.

14 Sweas, location 264 citing Robert Balfanz, "Can the American High School Become an Avenue of Advancement for All?" *The Future of Children* 19, no.1 (Spring 2009): p.22.

Although the Network's Mission Effectiveness Standards, developed at the start of the Network's expansion, have undergone adaptations, the first standard has never changed.

A faith-based culture at schools is intrinsic to the model, no matter what evolution the academic track takes.

## MISSION EFFECTIVENESS STANDARDS

### As a member of the Cristo Rey Network, a school:

1. Is explicitly Catholic in mission and enjoys Church approval.
2. Serves only economically disadvantaged students. The school is open to students of various faiths and cultures.
3. Is family centered and plays an active role in the local community.
4. Shall prepare all of its students to enter and graduate from college.
5. Requires participation by all students in the work study program. All students must be fourteen years old by September 1.
6. Integrates the learning present in its work program, classroom, and extracurricular experiences for the fullest benefit of its student workers.
7. Has an effective administrative and board structure as well as complied with all applicable state and federal laws.
8. Is financially sound and at full enrollment is primarily dependent on revenue from the work study program to meet operating expenses. In addition, the school maintains a comprehensive advancement program to ensure financial stability.
9. Supports its graduates' efforts to obtain a college degree.
10. Is an active participant in the collaboration, support, and development of the Cristo Rey Network.

According to research conducted for *Catholic Schools and the Common Good*, by Anthony Bryk, Valerie Lee, and Peter Holland, and summarized by *Putting Education to Work* author Megan Sweas, the effectiveness of Catholic secondary education is based upon, "the belief, intrinsic to the Catholic faith, in the equal human dignity of every person. All deserve and are capable of receiving a classical education that advances their spiritual understanding."<sup>15</sup>

"It's the whole school climate...the Catholic school climate," Morris said. "Theology and [the question of] purpose brings this whole new dimension which isn't explored in a public school."

As noted in Network standards, the school is "open to students of various faiths and cultures," but religion classes, a social justice focus woven into schools' cultures and community involvement and support provide a cohesive backdrop for the Network's holistic approach.

<sup>15</sup> Sweas, location 350 citing Bryk, Lee, and Holland, *Catholic Schools and the Common Good*, p.31.

### DEFINING 'DISADVANTAGED'

Cristo Rey Network standards adhere to a simple definition of “economically disadvantaged.” These students, according to Cristo Rey Network standards, are defined as those coming from families that earn less than 75 percent of national annual median income (\$51,371 in 2012 according to the U.S. Census Bureau).

In comparison, eligibility for the federal Food and Nutrition Service is the broadly-accepted surrogate for determining economically disadvantaged rates in public education systems. For the 2014-15 school year, a family of four with an annual income of \$31,005 would be eligible for free meals and milk, and an income of \$44,123 for reduced-price meals.

### How it Works

A day in the life of a Cristo Rey student often begins earlier than those attending their neighborhood public schools. Allotting time for the work study program has meant lengthening the traditional school day and year at most Cristo Rey Network schools, making up for missed classroom time.

Bridget Moreira, who attends school at Don Bosco Cristo Rey high school in Takoma Park, Maryland, leaves her house around 5 a.m. to catch the first of two city buses to arrive before the first bell. Like many of her peers, she is typically on campus until long after the end of the school day, utilizing the computer lab and accessing tutoring support and her peer community. Moreira has no internet at home so she relies on the school's computer lab to complete her assignments.

Cristo Rey schools acknowledge the hardships their students face and accommodate beyond traditional school hours.

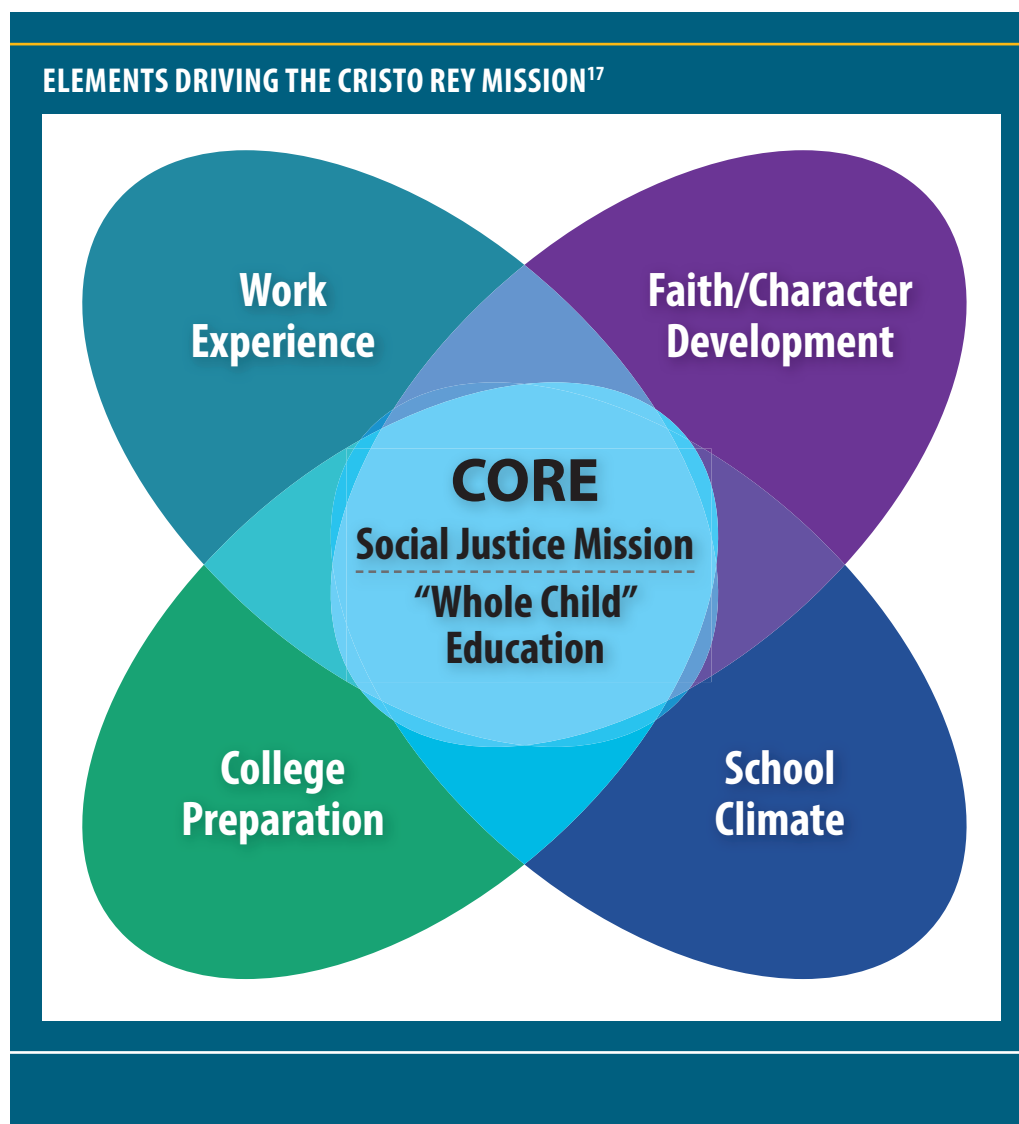
“Free tutoring programs are not required for Cristo Rey schools, however all Cristo Rey schools offer a range of academic intervention structures: structured tutorials, scheduled study hall, summer bridge programs to close the gap of underachievement, and “double dosing” — extra courses in English and math,” Morris said. “The exact support structures and length of the school day are determined at the local level.”

According to Don Bosco President, Fr. Steve Shafran, students average writing 9–10 college essays, supported by an in-house after school program.

The core model, therefore, is holistic and realistic; anchored in a social justice mission to adapt per community and individualize learning to students, yet anchored in a strong, classical, college-preparatory curriculum.

In 2012, the Search Institute published an exploratory study about Cristo Rey Network students. The study compared two Network schools in Harlem and Minneapolis; schools that could provide both current student and alumnus perspective.

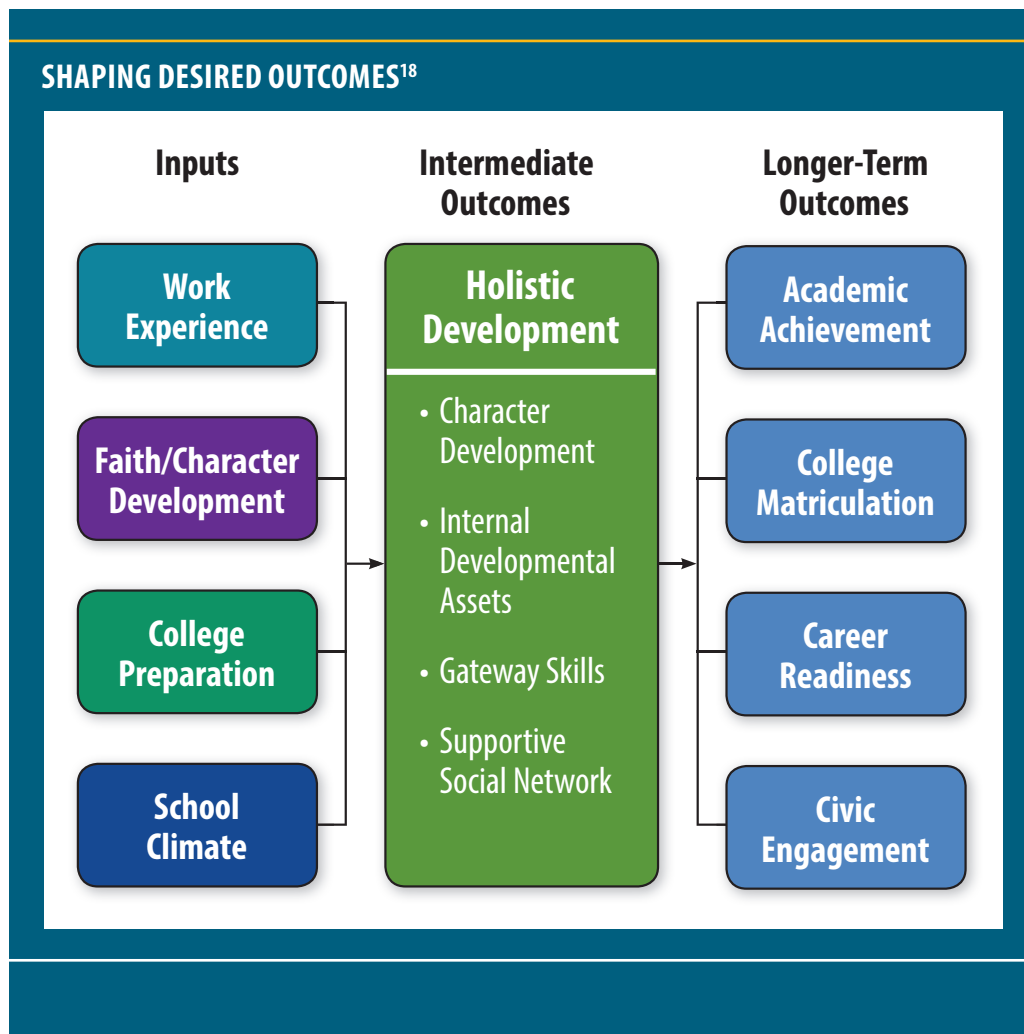
Through interviews, focus groups and the utilization of grounded-theory analysis software, the institute determined that Cristo Rey's success story is founded in four specific components: Work Experience, Faith and Character Development, College Preparation and School Climate.<sup>16</sup>



<sup>16</sup> Terri Sullivan, "Share the Learning: Cristo Rey/Search Institute Exploratory Study," Jan. 12, 2012. Presentation. Microsoft PowerPoint file, slide 24.

<sup>17</sup> Sullivan, slide 26.





Based on the research findings, experiences accumulated through these four factors lead Cristo Rey students to ultimate, long-term outcomes: Academic Achievement, College Matriculation, Career Readiness and Civic Engagement.

Researchers found that the work study program produced a sense of pride in students as their job placement paid for a large part of their tuition in school. The Network's summer "bridge" program and ongoing training provided support on how to "navigate work culture."<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Sullivan, slide 24.

<sup>19</sup> Sullivan, slide 12.

This is something Cristo Rey schools do uncommonly well. While summer preparatory bridge programs are required, repeated mentorship and guidance follows students through their high school years and onward. Once they have graduated, Cristo Rey Network students are offered admittance into a tracking system, called Naviance. A college and career-readiness platform, Naviance assists schools in tracking and supporting students to reach postsecondary goals<sup>20</sup>

The Cristo Rey Network subscribes to the Naviance District Edition for high schools, a tool that supports college counseling programs.

“At the school-level [Naviance] provides a standardized tool to manage college and career readiness criteria and collect student level data related to post-secondary enrollment,” said Andy Laureano, Cristo Rey’s Associate Director of College Initiatives. “School practitioners are able to collect information from students and engage online via Naviance. Resources such as the Family Connection tool component allow for students and parents to login and access assignments, resources, and information related to post-secondary goals.”

The Network also subscribes to Naviance eDocs, an electronic transcript and document sharing tool. This allows prompt delivery of student application forms such as transcripts or recommendation letters to colleges and universities, as per student request.

“At the Cristo Rey Network we are able to monitor usage, track application processes, and conduct feedback surveys in efforts to better understand and support our Cristo Rey high school students and staff,” Laureano said.

The exploratory nature of religion classes and its impact as a reflective topic in schools was a major point of discussion by students. This is a notable point, as religious expression in public schools is such a topic of debate and often removes faith discussion from classrooms.

Researcher Terri Sullivan found that religious education had a broad application and response from students in the schools. She presented her findings to schools in a Webinar on January 12, 2012.

“Some appreciated the opportunity to learn about many faiths, in ways that built bridges in the school community. Others talked about it as a class...where they studied, compared and contrasted a variety of different ideologies. Others talked about religion class as a place where they explored social justice issues...as helping them think about roles they can and want to play in their communities. Some greatly appreciated the chance to connect with their faith in school...a chance to think about who they want to be as a member of society.”<sup>21</sup>

The Minneapolis-based Search Institute bases its research framework on “developmental assets,” or areas that are required for successful development; the more of these youth exhibit, the higher chance of success in life and work and lower chance of engaging in risky behaviors. Students in the study repeatedly referred to three specific skill sets within the developmental assets realm: commitment to learning (achievement, motivation, bonding to school, school engagement), social competencies (planning and decision-making skills, cultural competence) and positive identity (self-esteem, sense of purpose, positive view of personal future).<sup>22</sup>

“I will be the first to graduate high school in my family,” Moreira said. She discusses her future college career as a surety, her concern lies not with college acceptance, but which major to choose.

20 Naviance (2014), “Connecting Learning and Life,” accessed Oct. 6, 2014, <http://www.naviance.com/college-and-career-readiness-platform>.

21 Sullivan, slide 15.

22 Sullivan, slide 29.



### Administration Supporting Educators

Cristo Rey's vibrant and impactful school culture would be difficult to implement within the confines of a more traditional, hierarchical administration.

According to Sweas, "The effectiveness of a Cristo Rey school is rooted in collaboration and high expectations for the adult community. Strong school leadership is required to implement a rigorous college-prep education and work study program within the context of a supportive Catholic school environment."<sup>23</sup>

The Network's administrative model lets a principal focus on education and internal school relationships, while the president is responsible for fundraising and coordinating job sponsors alongside the corporate work study director. The corporate work study director is also a required role at schools, but from there, duties can be allocated as best fits each individual school.

Finding educators who will commit to extended hours and a disadvantaged student body can be a challenge, especially when pay is often less than what public-school teachers earn; the selection process involves Network leaders on down.

The first school had limited resources and relied upon common preparatory space for teachers. Common planning times aided in the development of a student-centered curriculum and team-teaching.<sup>24</sup>

"One of the strengths of the Cristo Rey movement is that each school has to adhere to intense standards but they are in fact independent schools," observed philanthropist BJ Cassin, whose Cassin Educational Initiative Foundation has been instrumental to the Network's growth. This leadership enabled the Network to replicate 17 schools over a six-year period.

Although Cristo Rey schools are held to Network requirements and standards, the Network is fairly decentralized. This allows for autonomy and individualization from school to school to better adapt to community needs.

<sup>23</sup> Sweas, *Putting Education to Work*, location 467.

<sup>24</sup> Sweas, *Putting Education to Work*, location 660.

## CORPORATE WORK STUDY PROGRAM

**On average, families contribute \$1,000 annually for student tuition at**

**Cristo Rey schools.**<sup>25</sup> For a proven, achievement increasing college-preparatory, private education program, this amount is far below prevalent market rates. According to the most recent data collected by the Council for American Private Education (CAPE), on average, students enrolled at private high schools pay an annual tuition of \$13,300; with Catholic high schools costing an average of \$9,790 annually and non-sectarian \$25,180.<sup>26</sup>

Nationally, only 13 percent of wealthy families (as determined by those within the highest income bracket of earning over \$75,000 annually) enroll their children solely in private schools, as reported by CAPE. In fact, the majority of private school seats are filled by lower and middle class students.<sup>27</sup>

The reasons seem evident: according to data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES),<sup>28</sup> private school students are twice as likely to receive a bachelor's degree as public school students; in turn, private school students are more likely to land higher-paying jobs within more successful professions. In an NCES longitudinal study from 2002–2012, 31.1 percent of public school students had attained a bachelor's degree or higher by 2012, compared to 61.9 percent of Catholic schools and 57.1 percent of other private schools.

**“THE REALITY OF BEING A 14-YEAR-OLD GOING OFF TO A PROFESSIONAL JOB IN A FEW MONTHS HELPED STUDENTS FOCUS. STUDENTS’ CONFIDENCE SEEMED TO GROW EVERY DAY.”**

Joe Albers,  
San Jose Principal

Cristo Rey's model is not only sustainable, it is cost-effective and financially innovative, funneling students into successful post-high school paths. This is largely due to the school's corporate work study program, providing students with professional, entry-level positions at partnering businesses; creating a culture of high expectations and high-stakes.

In her book, Sweas may have described this model best: “Work study directors run a separate nonprofit placement service within the context of a high school. It is essentially a temporary employment

agency. As in any business, the director's role is to sell a product and keep customers satisfied, but in this unique situation the work study program's clients are corporate sponsors and its products are the student workers.”<sup>29</sup>

This year, students are projected to earn \$44 million working with 2,000 employers, according to Morris — funds which then go to support Cristo Rey schools, along with tuition and fundraising support.

25 Cristo Rey Network Expansion Plan, April 2012, published by the Cristo Rey Network.

26 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), “Private School Data File,” 1999-2000, 2003-04, 2007-08, and 2011-12, (Table was prepared in June 2013), accessed Sept. 15, 2014 from [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13\\_205.50.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13_205.50.asp).

27 U.S. Census Bureau, School Enrollment, (Last Revised: Sept. 3, 2013), accessed Sept. 15, 2014, <http://www.census.gov/hhes/school/data/cps/2012/tables.html>.

28 Council for American Private Education. “Private School Students More Likely to Attain College Degrees.” CAPE Outlook, 392 (Feb. 2014), p.1. CAPE Publications.

29 Sweas, *Putting Education to Work*, location 898.

No typical vocational education program, corporate work study at Cristo Rey is integral to its model and funding mechanism. Rick Murray, a real estate attorney and developer, was brought on board by the Jesuit founders to develop the program before the opening of the first school in 1995. Murray initially planned revenue from the work study program to cover the entire operating cost of the school.

During the 2012–13 school year, the average cost per student in the Network was \$13,000. Today, the work study program funds about 40–60 percent of operating costs, while fundraising and tuition fulfill remaining financial needs.<sup>30</sup>

The work study program is so integral to the Network, that the only school that has ever closed, St. Peter Claver High School in Omaha, Nebraska, encountered financial difficulties due to a combination of underenrollment and not enough work study jobs, Morris said.

Here's how it works: companies contract with the school to fill entry-level positions; students are paired into groups of four, rotating days at the company and splitting the fifth day of the week. Required summer training preps them for entering and succeeding in a corporate atmosphere. If students fail to fulfill duties adequately they can be fired from their job.

When this occurs, the student is then required to participate in a disciplined retraining program, 3–6 weeks in duration, in which counselors, family and school staff work cohesively together to ensure the student succeeds in identified area(s) for improvement.

In what Network leaders describe as an extremely rare occurrence, if fired twice, students are asked to leave the school.

Cristo Rey schools integrate hard and soft data to appropriately place students and maintain strong relationships with work study sponsors; information collected from students and companies before, during and after the placement process is considered alongside personality traits to pave a successful corporate experience.

"Matching students to companies is more of an art than a science," said Irene Hickey, school growth coordinator. "Some schools take student input, but often only for juniors and seniors once they begin thinking about potential careers. The more important factors, however, are company needs, supervisor management style, student personality, and student capabilities."

Network administrators work to place and support students for success.

"To create solid matches, Corporate Work Study staff make several touch points with supervisors to understand needs and personality," Hickey said. "Similarly, staff closely monitor the performance of freshmen during summer training."

Summer training, required for all incoming freshmen and transfer students, focuses on professionalism and success in a workplace environment.

"The Corporate Work Study Training really helped raise the stakes for students," Albers said. "The reality of being a 14-year-old going off to a professional job in a few months helped students focus. Students' confidence seemed to grow every day as they learned how to shake hands, make presentations, and use Excel and Word."

The network collects annual data with partnering businesses rating their experience with student workers.

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30 Sweas, *Putting Education to Work*, location 120.





Companies are so invested in the model that 88 percent of corporate sponsors remain with the program annually. In last year's Corporate Partner Performance Evaluation, sponsors found 93 percent of Cristo Rey students to meet or exceed expectations at work.

According to the Network's last Professional Skills Assessment, Cristo Rey students met or exceeded expectations in all ten characteristics and behaviors that contribute to professional success: adaptability, communication, enthusiasm, initiative, judgment, professionalism, reliability, teamwork and collaboration, willingness to learn and work efficiency.

Character skills are reinforced in the workplace and the classroom.

"Oftentimes, the CEO or someone high in the company has a strong belief in Catholic education or helping students from low-income communities, which bolsters their support for the program," Sweas said. "More specifically, you could say that their beliefs lead them to hiring a team of students. The work with the student is left to supervisors...schools must work with and support the supervisors in order to ensure their satisfaction with the program and individual students' work."

The Search Institute found the ongoing commitment of employers to their student employees impressive.

"Work study placements provide a source of mentors and supporters beyond the school building," said researcher Terri Sullivan in her presentation on the qualitative study. "I heard lots of stories about work study supervisors who...work hard to help them learn how to be successful in a work environment, how to navigate the system. They pay attention to students' interests and talents, and do their best to find tasks that help students build on them."

Sullivan found that supervisors often came to school events and supported students outside of the workplace.

"In some places, students have lunch with senior leaders in the organizations where they work," Sullivan said. "They find themselves being less intimidated, more able to interact with people at all levels of these organizations. They're expected to function as adults. They do real work that adults would do if they weren't there. They participate in work celebrations and social functions, they eat in the cafeteria. And they learn what it takes to succeed in this environment."<sup>31</sup>

"Securing jobs is a top priority," Morris said. "On average, 62 percent of Cristo Rey school board members are from the business sector."

"These kids have resiliency and attitude, which could be great gifts when channeled correctly and serve them well now and when they move into college, throughout life and the business world," Don Bosco President Fr. Steve Shafran said. "They are empowered because we respect them; we aren't educating to them, never one directional, but they are being educated with us. The work study is truly transforming, as it breaks down the walls of traditional school and moves education into the community too."

### Modernization and Innovation

In 2003, the Cristo Rey Network incorporated as a school development organization with a dual purpose: "create independent, sustainable schools that adhere to the Cristo Rey mission," and "protect the Cristo Rey brand by ensuring that member schools agreed upon Network standards."<sup>32</sup> Instituting a Network-wide college-preparatory curriculum came fast upon the heels of a modernized model, when new leadership at a Network-assumed school, North Cambridge Catholic (now Cristo Rey Boston) in 2007, found that students still were not quite up to par academically.<sup>33</sup>

The North Cambridge Catholic Principal, Father Jose Medina, created several new practices that have been adopted nearly across the board in Network schools today, to include, an online grading system, e-mail for teachers and students to facilitate communication, common assessments and consistent grading.<sup>34</sup>

"Back in 2009 we realized that our college-going data was good but it wasn't great," national Director of Advancement Morris said. "We took a step back and developed a rigorous, four year college-ready curriculum that has been implemented in nearly all of our schools; a lot of our work has been developing and refining our curriculum and really building principal and teacher effectiveness. We recently held our seventh summer institute — where all the principals and teachers come to Chicago for hands on professional development."

Internal planning documents detail processes in place to set up replication schools for success. They include: a true governing board responsible for the strategic direction and financial success of the school. The Network will play an active role in the appointment of a school's president, principal and work study director, and has the right to reject candidates. Other growth requirements include: full inclusion of the Education Enrichment Initiative, incorporating the Network curriculum, assessments, ACT programs and teacher effectiveness programs; \$2.5 million in capital raised prior to launch; required use of

31 Sullivan, slide 12.

32 Bridgespan Group, "Expanding the Supply of High Quality Public Schools," 2005, slide 6.

33 Sweas, *Putting Education to Work*, location 430.

34 Sweas, *Putting Education to Work*, location 430.

the Cristo Rey brand name and mission statement; and a common technology platform including a student information system, common auditor, financial reporting system, chart of accounts and development system.<sup>35</sup>

## BLENDING LEARNING AT CRISTO REY

**Ever adapting, the Network is set to tackle an increasingly recognized style of learning in its newest schools:** blended or virtual learning. Notes BJ Cassin, who

also serves as the Co-Chair of the board of directors for the new San Jose school, “I’m always looking to see where there is leverage to make an investment to reap multiples. We’re a long way from saying this is a model everyone should use but we’ve made an investment in blended learning and the hope is we can figure it out and offer it to the rest of the schools.”

The newest Network school is using blended learning to increase efficiency and allow for the model to thrive on a lesser number of in-classroom hours while improving achievement at an incredible rate.

Cristo Rey San Jose Jesuit high school opened its doors in August 2014 as a blended-learning

**“INDIVIDUALIZED  
INSTRUCTION WITH  
REAL-TIME FEEDBACK  
TO THE TEACHER.”**

John A. Sobrato,  
San Jose Jesuit Board Co-Chair

model school, integrating technology and real-time data to support personalized learning for students.

“We’re hoping to prove that blended learning is more efficient; we are trying to shift the focus from adding time to increasing learning efficiency through personalization,” Albers said.

“It appears to me that the future of education has got to take technology in stride,” San Jose Jesuit’s Board Co-Chair Sobrato observed. “I think we have an opportunity in the charter or private school environment to deploy technology. You can get [across] concepts with fewer teachers if you’re using technology as part of the curriculum. Larger class sizes can work utilizing technology and thereby reduce overhead costs and at the same time provide individualized instruction with real-time feedback to the teacher.”

The school’s mandatory Summer Bridge program concluded August 1. Over the course of five weeks, 134 students completed more than four hours of math a day, as well as Corporate Work Study Training.

Course completion data found that 72 out of 78 students placed in Elementary or Pre-Algebra passed into Algebra I; 65 students passed the first semester of Algebra I; an additional 14 students completed the full year of Algebra I and three students completed Geometry.

Math classes relied on a blended learning concept using a program called Aleks.

“Our math team did a fantastic job implementing the concept we have been developing all year,” Albers said. “Aleks proved to be very efficient in addressing students’ skill gaps and ensuring course mastery.”

“In terms of our initial expectations, the performance of our Pre-Algebra students far exceeded our expectations,” Albers said. “We will start the school year with only six students in Algebra support. We found out that students moved through Algebra I on Aleks at a

35 “2013 Snapshot Report: Student Profile,” Cristo Rey Network Annual Data Report 2013, p.6.



slower pace than anticipated. Students who did complete Algebra I showed incredible mastery as they averaged 92.5 percentile on an outside end of course assessment. This high level of mastery spring boarded three of them to finish Geometry in less than three weeks.”

San Jose Jesuit does not rely solely on Aleks data to promote students to the next level. A computer-adaptive assessment, NWEA MAP, tested students for initial placement following completion of the summer program.

“Students, on average, grew a grade level and a half on those assessments,” Albers said.

“Students averaged a 7.4 grade level equivalency on the first day and 8.9 on the last day. We had 50 students grow two or more grade levels.”

“You shouldn’t teach math in any other way,” Albers said. “We know that traditional math instruction does not work for most learners, period. As an educational community, let’s try something completely different and commit to it.”

Cristo Rey’s leaders took a very deliberate approach to designing the new blended learning model.

“We did an unusual thing and hired a blended learning director first, and that individual had the task, before the school opened, to go find out what everyone was doing, review software, etc. and then pair that with the Cristo Rey curriculum to see if we could adapt it to a blended learning model,” described co-chair Cassin. Typically, the Network identifies a principal and work study director and makes them their first hires.





The school's Blended Learning Director, Francisco Castillo-Fierro, spent a year researching and collaborating with Albers to discuss and craft an initial model.

"The problem with a lot of teachers in our system is they don't adapt as well to technology as some of the younger teachers do," Sobrato said. "Many older teachers nearing retirement age do not want to go through the career development process to adapt the new technologies in their classrooms. Young teachers who were brought up in the digital age can fully grasp technology's education potential."

Ensuring adequate internet infrastructure for the school building was critical. Castillo-Fierro observed, "Our school is wired with Cisco APs and network, and we made sure to pilot our blended learning program over the summer to make sure everything was working."

San Jose Jesuit offers six classes. Math, English and Spanish are, what Albers describes as "student-paced," where the instruction continuously adapts based on each individual student's mastery level. Science, social studies and religion are teacher-paced. "Those are good, technology-based courses where there may be some elements of blended learning but the teacher is setting the units of study and student mastery."



"We are keeping elements of traditional instruction, because for certain subjects I believe that has a stronger benefit, and other subjects we're really trying to be cutting edge on individualization," Albers said.

Research, program design and school implementation were a year-long process, Albers said.

While Aleks itself is not a "tech-engaging program," according to Albers due to its traditional and minimalistic interface, it was extremely attractive to the team due to its reliance on teacher instruction.

"Students were engaged in Aleks because they were finally learning at their level and they started to take off," Albers said.

English and reading intervention programs are still being piloted, with the goal of committing to one a few months into the current school year.

Every student is assigned a Google Chromebook tablet device that they carry with them during the school day. Principal Albers and Castillo-Fierro are setting up a Chromebook rental program for students who have wireless internet at home but no sufficient device to complete schoolwork.

For those who have no internet access at home, students are welcome to stay at school until 6 p.m. to utilize school resources.

"Not all of the work is done on the computer, but a great deal is," Castillo-Fierro said. "We have various programs we use for Math, English, and Foreign Language and we supplement our Science, Social Studies and Religion classes with [computer-based] programs as well."

As mentioned in the model summary, individualization of learning is an overarching goal, but not always realistic; blended learning programs are making individualization a strong reality in start-ups and may pave the way for a new technology-based Network model.

"As Cristo Rey replicates, blended learning is going to pick up a lot of steam with the new schools," Albers said. "I think with the existing schools, it will happen, but more slowly."

In the meantime, the Network is looking to hire a national technology leader at their main office.

"The main lesson is that when a financial model is no longer working, *i.e.*, no longer able to cover costs and sustain the school, it's time for a new approach," said Joe McTighe, executive director for CAPE. "Outside-the-box thinking can provide schools with a new lease on life. The good news is that education today is filled with possibilities for reform; technology, blended learning, new funding streams and governance structures. It takes an entrepreneurial spirit and vision, but Cristo Rey demonstrates that sustainable reform is doable."

Sustainable and serving, the Network continues to commit to founder Foley's mission, transforming urban America one student at a time.





## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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