



Work & Study

The Cristo Rey model of schooling is a study in success

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H *by Karen Crandal*

OW DOES a fourteen-year-old come to the United States from Mexico, speaking no English, and graduate as his school's valedictorian four years later?

What can explain how a girl from a family of nine with little financial means was able not only to attend a private high school but to earn a scholarship that pays her tuition to Stanford and also the graduate school of her choice?

What could motivate a boy from a poor and sometimes dangerous neighborhood to cut off his beloved braids, try a new school, and get a job?

These success stories, and hundreds more like them, have become reality around the country since the first Cristo Rey high school opened in 1996 in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood. The school's unique model was so successful that 21 more Cristo Rey schools have opened, with two more set to welcome their first students this fall.

The lab work that Alejandra Ochoa, a student at Cristo Rey Jesuit High in Chicago, performs at Loyola University's medical center pays much of her tuition. www.cristorey.net

Baltimore's Cristo Rey Jesuit High is the work of the Jesuits of the Maryland Province. The nineteenth school in the Cristo Rey tradition, it will graduate its first class in 2011. www.cristoreybalt.org

Building a network

In 1996, Jesuits of the Chicago Province took on the task of making a Catholic college-prep education a possibility for the youth in a largely Hispanic neighborhood in the Windy City. They knew that many could not afford it, and, in many cases, couldn't imagine it in their wildest dreams.

So how could they provide this to students for whom the school's cost per student represented the majority of his or her family's income? Cristo Rey's mission to serve this demographic was an ambitious plan: it left a seemingly impossible gap between the school's costs and its possible income.

A consultant suggested that the school help make up the difference by having students work for their education. Groups of four students would share a job—a full-time, entry-level, position at some of the country's most high-powered institutions.

Each student would work one day a week, and employers would pay the

school about \$25,000, the same salary the business would pay for an entry-level employee, and that would cover 70 percent of the tuition. The cash would allow the schools to cover payroll and benefits for their employees. Families who had the means would pay a modest tuition; the rest would receive financial assistance.

Cristo Rey schools use a formula in which students must come from families whose income is under 75 percent of the median per-capita income of the city where the school is located. Prospective students are recruited from the ranks of those who qualify for free or reduced lunch programs or who attend local churches or community events.

Various groups in addition to the Jesuits, including other Catholic religious congregations and dioceses, have formed Cristo Rey schools around the country. This proliferation has been assisted greatly by the Cristo Rey Network, a national association founded in 2001 when leaders from groups in Port-

Cristo Rey Network Facts

- 22** schools in 19 cities
- 796** faculty/staff
- 5,003** students
- 1,004** work study jobs across the country
- 1,252** sponsoring companies
- \$26,750,000** earned by students
- \$35,581** average family income
- 55%** Hispanic/Latino students
- 34%** African-American students
- 54%** female students
- 46%** male students
- 99%** college acceptance rate

land, Oregon, Cleveland, Denver, and New York—hoping to replicate Chicago's Cristo Rey—gathered to learn more about the model school.

The school that works

All Cristo Rey schools have a longer-than-usual school day and year; summer school classes provide the necessary academic assistance to allow new students to catch up to the appropriate grade level. In many cases, freshmen arrive in the fall two grades behind the national standards after struggling to learn or stay motivated in public-school systems. College counseling addresses the unique needs of students who have a wide range of academic abilities.

All Cristo Rey students are required to participate in the work-study program, as it is a critical aspect of a Cristo Rey education not only financially but also formatively. In-school Corporate Internship Program staffers at the Cristo Rey schools handpick jobs for each student based on his or her strengths and interests, and students are driven to their jobs in school vehicles.

Alberto Gonzalez, Preston Prince, and Ismael Buenrostro attend Verbum Dei High School, a Cristo Rey-styled school in the Watts District of Los Angeles. It's a joint venture of the California Province of the Society of Jesus and the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. www.verbumdei.us



Cristo Rey Network Philanthropy

When venture capitalists B.J. and Bebe Cassin heard about Cristo Rey schools at a Mass at their parish in 2000, they decided to help the cause. After many conversations and dinners with the network and the building of a strong relationship, the Cassin family decided to make a significant leadership gift in 2003 through the Cassin Educational Initiative Foundation to help create twelve high schools across the country that would be modeled after the successful Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in Chicago. As the book *The Cristo Rey Story: More than a Dream* by G.R. Kearney states, "In the blink of an eye, Cristo Rey Jesuit High School became the Cristo Rey movement."

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation also made transformational gifts in 2003 and 2006 to expand the network. Melinda French Gates, a valedictorian from a Catholic high school in Texas, was especially moved by a visit to the founding school in Chicago. A 2007 *Time* magazine article reported that "after asking a table full of juniors in the lunch room if they had planned to go to college, the response was a polite and respectful version of Well, duh!"

"Cristo Rey is magical," she said. "What you see is that hope, that optimism."



Students at San Miguel High, Tucson's Cristo Rey school, pull their weight. The De La Salle Christian Brothers founded it in 2004, after opening De La Salle North Catholic High School in Portland, Oregon, another Cristo Rey school. www.sanmiguelhigh.org

From at-risk youth to seasoned office professional

Before students start freshman year, they attend a two-week summer training "boot camp" for four hours a day, which teaches them the basics of functioning in the corporate world. Students learn essentials such as how to dress for success, converse with adults, use appropriate body language, make a good impression, and look people in the eye.

Mike Jacobson is the Corporate Internship Program director at De La Salle North Catholic High in Portland, Oregon, which opened in 2001 as the first school to replicate the Chicago model. He says that new students have often picked up some "body language" from their neighborhoods that can give the impression of "an attitude." They get the opportunity to practice more-appropriate behavior with their peers during role-playing sessions.

Other valuable office skills the students acquire during summer sessions include note-taking, managing multiple priorities, operating copiers, taking phone messages, e-mailing, using fax machines, and learning "best practices" in customer service.

Overcoming adversity

This combination of work and study has spawned a number of real-life success stories, including that of Una Ilisnovic, an '09 graduate of Cleveland's Cristo Rey school, St. Martin de Porres High. She has been practicing for her life as an adult since she was a child. She and her family came to the United States when she was four. Una's mother is Bosnian and her father Croatian; the family moved to the States when the Bosnian war broke out. They came speaking no English, and there was just no money or time for her parents to take English classes; they were too busy working in factory jobs.

Una is the only one in her family who can speak English, so she was in the habit of going everywhere with her parents—from doctors' appointments to stops at the bank—to handle all the translation tasks.

Una's mom was thrilled at the prospect of her attending Cristo Rey and working in the corporate world. Her family members have a strong work ethic: one of her grandmothers was a nurse and the other a successful businesswoman.

"I want my parents to be proud and

know that their trip to America was worth it," she says. The journey did pay off: Una will attend Ohio's Miami University in the fall.

Discovering exceptional talent

One of the amazing outcomes of Cristo Rey schools occurs when students who have never been fully acknowledged for their unique gifts find a home base where they can truly shine. This was the case for Xavier Cole, in the class of '11 at Cristo Rey Jesuit High in Baltimore.

When Xavier finished eighth grade he thought to himself, "Well, that's it for me." Several people in his family never went to high school, let alone college. He didn't feel the need to continue schooling because although he was given the credentials to move on to ninth grade, he knew that he shouldn't have passed.

"I had a lot of trouble learning in middle school because there was no structure and I was never put to the test," says Xavier.

As is the case for many Cristo Rey applicants from public schools, Xavier only began thinking about attending Cristo Rey Jesuit right at the end of the school year. Xavier applied the day he



Students at St. Martin de Porres, Cleveland's Cristo Rey school, are on their way to the Mass of the Holy Spirit. This Cristo Rey school, "dedicated to transforming urban Cleveland one student at a time," opened in 2004. www.saintmartincleveland.org

graduated from eighth grade, a day his mother was able to take off from her job. This scenario is typical; many schools in the network report that a number of their interested students and parents are walk-ins.

Xavier was still sporting his graduation boutonniere when he and his mother presented themselves at the front door and were invited to come in

to talk about the school and learn about the application process.

Xavier's outgoing personality made a memorable impression, which helped tip the admission process in his favor. At Cristo Rey schools, a passing grade is a 70, as opposed to a 60 in the public school system, and this challenged Xavier. He had a hard first two years, but he felt that summer school, free of distractions from the regular school year, was the ticket to grasping science and algebra.

Xavier has developed in other ways as well. After two years at Cristo Rey, he has become known for his singing voice, songwriting skills, and a definite flair for public speaking. "I've finally seen the more optimistic side of school life and understand what I can do with an education," he says.

Estefany Hernandez, a soon-to-be junior at Arrupe Jesuit High in Denver, worked at a veterinary clinic on the one-day a week system common to Cristo Rey schools. "Every young person deserves an opportunity. This is our mission, this is our hope," says school president Fr. Steve Planning, SJ. www.arrupejesuit.com





Cristo Rey Network

Corporate Sponsors

The heart of the Cristo Rey model

The money students earn at their shared entry-level jobs covers more than half of each student's annual tuition costs. Corporate sponsors nationwide range from Fortune 500 companies to national and local non-profits, government offices, and some of the country's finest colleges and universities. They include:

Allstate
 American Red Cross
 Cleveland Cavaliers
 Deloitte and Touche, LLP
 Deutsche Bank
 General Mills
 Habitat for Humanity
 Johns Hopkins Medical System
 J.P. Morgan Chase
 KPMG LLP
 Los Angeles Times
 New York Supreme Court
 Nike
 PricewaterhouseCoopers
 Prudential Financial
 Texas Instruments
 U.S. Department of Education
 U.S. Soccer Federation
 United Way
 Xerox

Cristo Rey New York draws students from all five of New York's boroughs and then sends them to Fordham University, Canisius College, Swarthmore, and a host of other colleges and universities. www.cristoreyny.org

Language hurdles

Edgar Enriquez, an '08 graduate of Chicago's Cristo Rey Jesuit High, was born in the United States but had lived in Mexico since he was two months old. When he and his family moved back to the States, he was fourteen and spoke only the English he had learned in Mexico.

"I was a good student in Mexico—third in my class," says Edgar. His first days at Cristo Rey were different. "I didn't want to disappoint my parents, and I felt like throwing up every time I went to English class." Despite the challenges, he is the valedictorian mentioned in the first paragraph and has just finished his first year studying economics at Georgetown.

His family thought highly of the Jesuits and was impressed by the dual-language courses offered at Cristo Rey Jesuit. The school offers two classes in Spanish each year—either religion, global issues, or Latin American history and also Spanish.

Edgar says math and science came more easily because of the language similarities with numbers and scientific terms. According to his teachers, he

worked extremely hard, put in long hours, and had the support of his family and an older sibling who had all gone on to college.

In addition to graduating as the school's valedictorian, one of the highlights of his Cristo Rey career was his work-study stint with the U.S. Soccer Federation; he got to play soccer at lunch and received free products from sponsors. Edgar worked during a high-pressure time helping the Chicago team and their fans get ready to travel to Germany for the 2006 World Cup.

Ending the cycle of poverty

Some students have lived so long in poverty that a college education is simply not on their radar screen. Such was the case for Alma Flores '09 of Arrupe Jesuit High School in Denver. Alma stated in her address to a group of Arrupe donors, "When I was younger, I knew that college was an option, but I didn't know it was one of *my* options."

Having grown up in a tough neighborhood with a not-so-wealthy family, she talked of not knowing anything else beyond what she saw. She assured the attendees at the luncheon that "you are

making a difference in some kid's life."

In her corporate work experience, one of her supervisors at Catholic Health Initiatives took her shopping one day and bought her new clothes for work. Her boss told her something she would never forget—to never hold back when giving.

Alma received an "Outstanding" rating from her supervisor and great experience in the medical field; she was inspired to study nursing at Regis University beginning this fall.

The first in her family

Jasmine Wiggins is a 2009 graduate of Cristo Rey New York who grew up in the city's lower East Side. While she was born in New York, her family is from Puerto Rico. They discovered Cristo Rey after attending an open house for Catholic high schools. Jasmine was intrigued by the work component, the Spanish program, and how the principal and teachers knew the names of every student.

On top of being the first in her family to graduate from high school, Jasmine also earned the Silver Medal Award for

the second highest GPA in her class. Because education has been so incomplete in her family over the generations, they have all been counting on her to finally break the cycle and be the first one to receive a high school diploma. Her family is overjoyed that she graduated with honors and will be heading to Northwestern University to study biochemistry in the fall.

Jasmine's dream is to become a veterinarian, a dream that was shared by Pfizer Animal Health, her employer of three years. The school wanted her to work there so she could learn more about caring for animals. As a testament to the quality of her work, Pfizer hired her both last summer and this one.

Long hours


Taylor Hodges '08 often spent half the day at De La Salle North Catholic in Portland, Oregon. Her high school memories are filled with hard work, long hours, volleyball success, and student leadership. Because of the time invested, she calls De La Salle home.

Taylor worked at the law firm of Tonkon Torp, doing reception and clerical

work for nearly all of her high school years. That same employer has asked her to return this summer even though she just completed her freshman year at Stanford. Aware of her family's lack of resources to pay for education at such a prestigious school, Taylor spent months writing essays and completing applications and ultimately earned a Gates Millennium Scholarship from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The honor gives her access to any college of her choice, all the way through grad school. She is contemplating a major in feminist studies when she returns to Stanford in the fall.

Great expectations

These stories offer just a glimpse of the transformational work being done throughout the country at Cristo Rey schools, and the movement continues to grow at a rapid pace. As two new schools in Houston and San Francisco are preparing to open this fall, two more in Cincinnati and San Diego are in development and scheduled to open in 2010. The network has grown from 4 schools and about 750 students in 2002–2003 to 22 schools and more than 5,000 students in 2008–2009.

Rob Cummings, the director of advancement for the Cristo Rey Network, puts it this way: "Not only do Cristo Rey schools want to see their students 'get through' high school and go to college, but our goal is for them to have success in those endeavors." 



Fr. T.J. Martinez, SJ, has a dream coming to fruition: a Cristo Rey School in Houston, welcoming 100 students this fall. He and his team secured over \$2 million in grants and donations to renovate an old school near the city's Hobby Airport. www.cristoreyhouston.org



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