

THE CHANGING ROLE OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION IN URBAN AMERICA
AND ITS IMPACT ON THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of
The School of Continuing Studies
and of
The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts
in Liberal Studies

By

Mary Jane Reese, B.A.

Georgetown University
Washington, D.C.
April 18, 2011

Copyright © 2011 by Mary Jane Reese
All rights reserved

THE CHANGING ROLE OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION IN URBAN AMERICA
AND ITS IMPACT ON THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

Mary Jane Reese, B.A.

Mentor: Michael J. Collins, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

The Catholic Church has moved from understanding the importance of education in terms of teaching pagans about Christianity to educating the marginalized children of the inner cities in America with the same standards as the wealthiest neighborhoods place on their schools. Along the way, there has been tremendous growth, however, today the Church is faced with closing doors and merging schools due to the financial stresses involved in running parish schools with lay teachers rather than with the priests and nuns who taught at little or no extra cost to the parishes. Schools are now staffed with teachers who require higher salaries and benefits than their predecessors. Also, many families struggle to make ends meet and cannot afford to pay tuition costs so the Church has been forced to find other ways of financing the education of the children in its communities without increasing the parish debt.

This new wave of Catholic schools appearing in the poorest neighborhoods can be examples for public schools to follow. The graduation rates are much higher than at the

public schools, the test scores are much better, and many of the students are given opportunities to actively participate in financing their education, therefore gaining self-confidence to attain the American dream.

At the same time, public schools in these cities are struggling to keep their students in school, and to make sure the children are proficient in Reading and Math when they graduate. This paper investigates two networks of schools to show how they have adapted the typical curriculum in order to guarantee academic success for students. Changes such as longer school days, longer school years, internships for students, and parent participation as well as a constant infusion of professional development for teachers have created schools where every child is expected to graduate and to gain acceptance to college. These schools follow the students long after they leave their hallways and they continue to provide advice and counseling whenever their graduates may need the help.

The schools studied in this paper are incredible success stories, but the changes made to their curriculum would be very difficult for public schools to follow if government officials and unions do not make concessions and agree to put the best interest of the children first when it comes to educational decisions. Eventually, if the children receive the same quality education no matter where they live, our economy will benefit, therefore providing better opportunities for all graduates nationwide and we will be a stronger global competitor in the work force.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

COPYRIGHT.....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	iii
TABLES.....	vii
CHAPTER	
CHAPTER 1 THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION.....	1
CHAPTER 2 POVERTY AND TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS.....	15
CHAPTER 3 A LOOK AT EDUCATION TODAY.....	22
School Vouchers.....	22
No Child Left Behind (NCLB).....	25
Consequences of NCLB.....	26
Michelle Rhee Brings National Exposure To School Reform.....	31
CHAPTER 4 THE CATHOLIC TO CHARTER SHIFT IN WASHINGTON, D.C.....	33
Issues To Overcome in the Shift.....	35
Changes in the Schools.....	36
Enrollment After the Transition.....	37
CHAPTER 5 NATIVITYMIGUEL SCHOOLS.....	39
CHAPTER 6 WASHINGTON JESUIT ACADEMY (WJA).....	49
CHAPTER 7 THE CRISTO REY NETWORK.....	58
Gartland Takes to the Streets of Pilsen.....	62
Opposition From Other Schools.....	63
Concessions Made to the Archdiocese.....	67
Curriculum.....	68
The First Day of School.....	69
Venture Philanthropy.....	71
Bill and Melinda Gates Join the Reform Effort.....	72
CHAPTER 8 DON BOSCO CRISTO REY, TAKOMA PARK, MD.....	74
Importance of Sponsors and Donors.....	75
Dan Porterfield.....	77
CHAPTER 9 OTHER EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS.....	80

Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP).....	81
More Successful Programs Nationwide.....	82
Paying for Grades.....	84
CHAPTER 10 CONCLUSION: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?.....	87
Tenure.....	89
What Makes Cristo Rey and WJA Different?.....	95
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	99

TABLES

1.1	Hidden Rules Among Classes.....	20
1.2	Changes in Level of Proficiency for the Class of 2008	50
1.3	Is Cash The Answer?.....	85

CHAPTER 1

THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION

The American dream is often described as the desire to live a better life than your ancestors along with the ability to ensure your children will have opportunities to do the same. Education plays an integral role in attaining this aim, and America's education system has struggled to find the best way to ensure equal access and learning for all its students. Catholic schools have shifted their focus over the years in order to keep up with societal and ecclesiastical changes. The result is a growing number of Catholic schools being studied by other educators due to their successful implementation of non-traditional school programs. Catholic educators have gone beyond providing a religious learning environment for their students and are striving to create school atmospheres that provide opportunities for success in areas where the graduation rates and national test scores are well below average.

Catholic schools have been forced to make changes in their curriculum throughout their existence and will continue to do so in order to best help the children in their care. School is not only a place to learn the basics academic skills to succeed in life. It must also be a setting where every student is given an equal opportunity to excel in life by receiving a well-rounded education and not just be a place where they are taught how to take standardized tests. Everywhere you turn today, you will hear complaints from both sides of the education battle. Parents complain about failing schools, bad teachers, and unions that force the hand of the school systems, while administrators complain about a lack of proper funding, concerns about assessments, students who are unprepared

for school, violence and so much more. If there is one principle both sides can agree on, it is that the earlier you start to prepare students for life, the better off they will be in the classroom and eventually in the work force.

Historically, Catholic leaders have pushed for the education of their followers, but the reasoning behind the push has been transformed many times in order ensure Catholicism remains strong and its believers receive the skills necessary to carry on the religion from one generation to the next. This comes in many forms. It is not just the education in a physical Catholic atmosphere, but it also consists of sharing Catholic values of social justice in newly transformed charter schools that replaced failing parish schools in our cities.

Many of the original Catholic schools were created as mission schools in order for pagans to be taught about the religion rather than for Christians who needed further guidance. As far back as 372 A.D., there was a school set up by Protogenes to teach children to read the Gospels and Psalms in Edessa (present day Greece). Although he was known for his skill as a painter, he also wanted to make sure Christianity would continue to be read and understood. Even earlier, in 363 A.D., Saint Cassian established a school to teach children to read and write, secretly hoping they could then learn about Christianity with this knowledge. Eventually he was denounced because his enemies realized he was a Christian, and his punishment was that he got turned over to his pagan students. They took it upon themselves to murder him in his own classroom.¹ The battle

¹ Steve Kellmeyer, *Designed to Fail: Catholic Education in America* (Peoria: Bridegroom Press, 2005), 19.

over education between secular and religious societies is nothing new, and although there is agreement today that education is necessary for every child in America, there is still much debate between the public and private schools as to the best methods of educating these children.

The leaders of the Catholic Church have made changes regarding whom their religious leaders should teach and what are the goals of this education. During the 1st century, many schools were established, but most of them were for adults rather than for children. The idea was to train these adults as Christian philosophers in order to give them the knowledge to guide their responses to pagan protests of Christian doctrines.² Education had nothing to do with wanting children to learn more and have a better quality of life for themselves and their families as a whole like it is used today.

When it came to faith formation, most children during the first 5 centuries were educated at home. It was up to the parents to ensure their children could carry on the faith and share it with others. Steve Kellmeyer explains that if we look at the Gospels, we see that Jesus prays for children, but he does not teach them. It was believed that parents had the sole responsibility of teaching their children and therefore Jesus spent his time teaching the adults rather than teaching the youth in society.³ We still believe parents are primarily responsible for ensuring their children are educated, but now it is done away from home and with professional educators. Morality and spirituality start at

² Ibid., 17.

³ Ibid., 8.

home and can be combined with what is learned at school to form the most well-rounded and effective student.

Kellmeyer also discusses how at some point in the 9th-10th centuries, a distinction was formed between those who would be studying for a future in the religious culture and those who would need to be educated for secular society. Education at that time was conducted in monastic communities that were based in the countryside rather than in parishes that we see today in both urban and rural areas. These monastic schools taught seven subjects. They were broken down into the “trivium”; grammar, logic and rhetoric as well as the “quadrivium”; arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music.⁴ All of these subjects had theology intertwined with the coursework so each student was fully educated in the faith while also gaining literacy to help them be prosperous in life. This may have been the beginning of a Liberal Arts education.

It wasn't until the Third Lateran Council in 1179 that Catholic leaders discussed the problem of literacy in society. The council members wanted to help the poor and decided every Cathedral Church must have a master who could teach both the clerics of each church and also teach the poor scholars in order to help them overcome poverty. By the 1300's there were several different types of schools formed by the Churches. The problem that remained even though the schools existed was that books were extremely expensive. In order to make a single book, an entire herd would need to be slaughtered

⁴ Ibid., 20.

to make enough vellum for the book.⁵ How could literacy rates improve if there was no way to afford the books needed to teach the Church followers how to read? This was not the only problem. Too much time was needed to be educated, and the young men were expected to help at home in order to work and feed the family. Therefore, most of the schools still mainly educated the men who would eventually become priests. This phenomenon changed when Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press in the mid 1400's and books became more readily available as well as less expensive to purchase.

In 1524 Martin Luther proposed the idea of compulsory schools in order for everyone to learn to read and therefore have the ability to study the Bible.⁶ His idea was the impetus for the school systems we have today. Of course, the religious underpinning no longer pushes Americans to ensure each citizen receives a quality education, but we can give Luther credit for wanting everyone to be able to read and learn what was deemed important at that time in history.

In 1606 a group of Franciscans opened a school in what is now St. Augustine, FL in order to “teach children Christian doctrine, reading and writing.”⁷ When America was settled, the ideas and traditions of Catholic schools were already well established in Europe. Higher education was more prominent, but there were elementary schools as

⁵ Ibid, 22.

⁶ Ibid, 25.

⁷ National Catholic Education Association, “A Brief Overview of Catholic Schools in America,” NCEA. <http://ncea.org/about/HistoricalOverviewofCatholicSchoolsinAmerica.asp> (accessed July 10, 2010).

well. In the early 1600's it was often the pagan Native Americans that were targets for mission schools in order to bring religion and civilization into their lives.⁸

The industrial revolution in the early to mid 1800's brought with it great changes in educational needs. Men didn't have to be educated in order to work in factories. It was easier to put men in menial and monotonous positions in a factory if they weren't so well read. The men with educations could cause problems because they were more aware of the denigrating jobs they were working in, and they had a better understanding of their poor working conditions and monotonous work responsibilities. The less intelligent or less literate man would be more efficient in a factory, and therefore setting up a caste system by limiting education would help alleviate any possible dissatisfaction that the better educated worker might bring to the factory owners. Americans soon realized that although Britain had a good idea of how to create less disgruntled workers, it was Prussia's lead they should follow in creating such a malleable factory worker because Prussia's had combined what they learned from Britain and India into the best system.⁹

According to Kellmeyer, England had a class system in place when the industrial revolution occurred in the mid 1700's. Men were aware of their place in life and therefore understood that some were meant to work in factories and would do so without questioning their position in the workforce. During the 1790's, England began following the Hindu use of mass schooling in order to keep their caste system in place. One purpose of mass schooling in India was to teach students their place in life and to learn

⁸ Kellmeyer, *Designed to Fail*, 30.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

about conforming to the practices of their society. Prussia took this practice and used it as a source to help reconstruct their military program and then move on to create a three part compulsory school system. In Prussia, the Brahmins who were the top one-half of one percent of the student population were trained at the “academy”. Approximately seven percent of the students were trained at the “real” school where they received a watered-down education, but would still be able to obtain professional careers in the business world. The last school system was the “people’s” school and more than ninety percent of students were educated here. These students needed to learn enough to be able to read their daily job responsibilities. According to both English and Prussian leaders, “literacy breeds discontentment”.¹⁰

America used this Prussian model to create a more malleable work force and ensure it had employees willing to do the menial jobs that didn’t require much thought or knowledge. Although this was the idea behind schooling in America, some Catholic organizations were slowly using “educating” children for different purposes. In 1729, a group of Ursuline sisters opened the first orphanage in New Orleans to help take care of immigrant children. They not only fed and clothed these children; they also provided educational and spiritual guidance to ensure the continuance of the Catholic faith.¹¹ In 1782, the first parochial school was opened in the United States. St Mary’s school in Philadelphia began to educate its parishioners since many of the earlier Catholic schools

¹⁰ Ibid., 49-52.

¹¹Dorothy M. Brown and Elizabeth McKeown, *The Poor Belong to Us: Catholic Charities and American Welfare* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 87.

were only meant for upper class families so they could contest the Protestant influence that permeated their surroundings.¹² This was very true in Maryland as well. Bishop Carroll announced in 1792 that all Catholic parents should home school their children in their faith since the Prussian modeled public schools were not doing so and since these families could not afford to send their children to private Catholic schools even if there were any in the area.¹³

As discussed previously, many early Christian schools were set up to teach pagans about Christianity and save their souls. This may have been the impetus for the first Native American school system that was opened in Emmitsburg, MD. The Daughters of Charity, founded by Elizabeth Ann Seton in 1809, was created to run the school. It became the starting point of what is now the parochial school system.¹⁴

The dichotomy between what the factory owners wanted in education and what the Catholic Church wanted was growing and becoming more obvious. The average life span at the time was only about 42 years, and children were forced to grow up fast so they could help support their families. Children were doing what we would consider adult work prior to their teenage years. Their real world experiences were more important for many than what they would learn in school. There was no time for idle behavior. Compulsory schooling changed this. It gave children time to slow down since the classroom work was not as difficult as the time spent working on the family farm. It

¹²National Catholic Education Association, (accessed July 10, 2010).

¹³ Kellmeyer, *Designed to Fail*, 32.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

also separated children from their parents. This separation was a great way to ease the challenge of creating a softer man. Breaking up the family by taking children off the farm to be educated gave the teachers the chance to change work habits and soften the students. The students were taught by teachers who were not much older than they were; they no longer spent the day on the farm with adults who would teach them how to run a farm so they could support their families now and in the future.¹⁵

If we compare the average person in the early 1900's who was working in a factory or on a farm with someone from the early 1800's, we can see the negative effect of our compulsory school system. Pierre DuPont had said in 1812 that only 1 in approximately 4000 Americans did not read well. Although there wasn't mass schooling, the average person was self-educated and the literacy rate, according to Alexis de Tocqueville in 1840, was almost 100%. When these students did go to school, it was only for about 40 days a year, so it was not necessary to be formally educated in order to read and write.¹⁶ Catholic leaders were not as concerned as the factory owners were with softening the spirit of the children in order to form a better worker. They understood that many Americans could read, but they wanted to ensure that Catholics would read the Bible and continue to actively participate in their religious faith.

Catholics were appalled even more when the Children's Aid Society (CAS) was founded in 1853 in New York with the aim of "sending the children west".¹⁷ The belief

¹⁵ Ibid., 55-58.

¹⁶ Ibid., 46-47.

¹⁷ Brown, *The Poor Belong to Us*, 16.

was that since poverty was increasing and children were not being taught discipline as they would have on a farm, the next best thing was to separate the children from their parents both emotionally as well as physically and thereby eliminate the bond that could be reinforcing the poverty cycle.

Poverty created a need for charity and this became the driving force for Catholics to have a public voice about the ills of American culture during the last half of the 19th century. Catholics were going to take care of their own both in the schools as well as in the home.¹⁸ The first plenary council in Baltimore began encouraging every parish to open a school as early as 1852. By 1884, at the third plenary council, its delegates demanded each parish open a school.¹⁹ This demand was made after the Children's Act of 1875 had been created to ensure if the children were taken away from parents, they would be under the control of an institution that shared the same faith as the child's parents. The Catholic organizations believed in the strength and integrity of the family so the parental rights regarding religion for their children was important as was the desire to move the children back home again as soon as possible.²⁰

Promotion of the compulsory school system as well as financial responsibility of the schools was coming from the industrialists more than from the state governments by the early 1900's. The goals of the schools were becoming more evident and creating more tension with Catholics. Loyalty to family was not as important as loyalty to the

¹⁸ Ibid., 1.

¹⁹ NationalCatholic Education Association, (accessed July 10, 2010).

²⁰ Brown, *The Poor Belong to Us*, 24.

corporation so it was important for factory owners to sever religious and familial ties. Religion often gave people a sense of worth, and this would only interfere with creating good factory workers. Any sense of community was also seen as having a negative impact in the factory. Dependence should be on the boss and not on grades, union affiliation or religious groups. Pavlov's experiment with dogs in 1903 was also used to train students and factory workers to respond to the sound of a bell.²¹ Children were treated like animals in order to prepare them for the life of a factory worker.

New York had its own system of helping the poor and creating a better environment than the industrialists wanted for their employees and their families. The state decided to allow public support of the poor to come from private agencies during the late 1800's. This was greatly beneficial for Catholic organizations because they were large and were able to receive a majority of the funding to help the poor.²² For a time they used the money to build schools, but things changed around 1894 when the parochial schools could no longer get public aid since it was seen as a violation of separation of church and state. Archbishop Hughes made a decision to use private funding to ensure the building of the parochial schools, and by the end of the century there were more than 80,000 students in the New York parochial school system.²³ At the beginning of the 20th century, there were over 50,000 religious women working in the parochial schools and hospitals. By 1920 that number grew to 90,558 and included some

²¹ Kellmeyer, *Designed to Fail*, 64.

²² Brown, *The Poor Belong to Us*, 15.

²³ *Ibid.*, 31.

224 religious orders for women.²⁴ The largest population of Catholics in the country in 1918 was in New York where there were 1.4 million Catholics and, at that point, it was child-care that held together the programs in the churches.²⁵

Catholic schools changed again in the early 1900's when the Christian Brothers came up with an idea of the students making money and learning a trade while in school. The schools trained boys in industries such as shoe-making, cabinet-making, chair caning and printing. The income from these sources provided much needed revenue for the running of the schools.²⁶ The boys were given the opportunity to learn a vocation and also see the importance of their work in the sustainability of the school itself. They knew if they worked hard and made a good product, in return the school would make enough money to continue their training and help other boys as well.

Learning a trade not only gave these children an opportunity to support themselves in the future, it also kept them out of trouble. The parochial schools did a great job keeping the children where they belonged, in the schools. Maine and Wyoming were the only 2 states in 1919 that didn't have juvenile courts and what was obvious in some of these court systems was that the parochial school children were absent from them. A probation officer from Brooklyn, NY said he saw very few children from the parochial schools in his office, and Rev. C.J. Quille of Chicago said that out of the 90,000 children who attended the parochial schools in Chicago, only 1 girl was brought in for

²⁴ Ibid., 87.

²⁵ Ibid., 53.

²⁶ Ibid., 21.

charges of immorality.²⁷ Catholic charities were trying to focus energy on these youth. They wanted to keep them from being sent away from their families so they didn't just teach the children: they acted as caseworkers trying to keep the students in line. The number of children enrolled in Chicago parish schools was as high as the number of students enrolled in all of the Detroit area public schools.²⁸

The younger children were also provided with a safe environment while parents struggled to make ends meet. Immigrants were converging on cities such as Boston, NY and Baltimore. Jewish and Catholic orphanages were created as well as Catholic day nurseries that cared for the functional needs of the children while instilling a knowledge of their faith. For parents it was a way of keeping the children in the neighborhoods even if they needed help from an outside "institution" to provide for their children. There was no need to send the children out west as the industrialists had wanted.²⁹

Historically the church has 3 missions in the world; to govern, to sanctify and to teach.³⁰ The two types of schools were either mission schools to teach the unbaptized in the Christian faith or the Catholic schools to teach Catholic children in the community so they would not in America at least, be forced to follow the Protestant beliefs being taught in the public school system.³¹ The problem the schools created for the parishes in later

²⁷ Ibid., 130.

²⁸ Ibid., 128-9.

²⁹ Ibid., 126.

³⁰ Kellmeyer, *Designed to Fail*, 17.

³¹ Ibid., 148.

years is that they are very expensive to run and have been seen as a black hole for many parishes. The Catholic Church has been forced to find other ways to keep the schools running and provide the faith-based school systems they expect their followers to use for their children.

As Bishop Aloisius Muench of Fargo stated during a religious conference in 1935, the Catholic Church has an important role in educating their followers no matter what the financial situation may be. “The poor belong to us,.... We will not let them be taken from us”.³² This obligation he felt for educating the poor and keeping them in the Catholic faith is still alive today. Catholic schools are sprouting up in many underserved areas of cities throughout the U.S.. These schools are not only faced with economic challenges but are also responsible for creating a learning environment that is safe and nurturing for students who often come from communities where education has not been a top priority and teachers are not adequately prepared to deal with societal differences between them and their students.

³² Brown, *The Poor Belong to Us*, 193.

CHAPTER 2

POVERTY AND TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS

Teachers have the ability to make a lifelong impression on a student and although most people could name at least one great teacher they had, the majority of their teachers would be considered unremarkable. The teacher in an underprivileged urban area often has a much more difficult task in becoming the person who made a difference in a child's life. The best teachers in urban areas not only understand the curriculum they are teaching, they also understand the culture of their students which means they have an understanding of the culture of poverty. A simple thing such as learning the differences between how we speak to each other in different cultural situations as well as what are the cultural rules and norms of the students will benefit every teacher and provide an opportunity for a stronger bond between the student and the school faculty.

Payne provides a list of different types of "language" and how we use them in our daily life. The first is called "frozen" because the language always stays the same. An example would be prayers or vows. Go into a local church and you will hear everyone reciting a prayer in sync with one another. The second type would be called "formal" and this is what is used in both work and school environments. Teachers or employees will speak in clear and coherent sentences as well as stay away from slang. The third type is "consultative". This is used in work and school as well, but it is much more conversational such as teachers discussing a class with each other or co-workers discussing a meeting. There is still formality, but this register gives room for a little more casual relations to show through. The fourth register is "casual" and is generally used

between friends. Joking and body language play a role. This form also allows for shortened or incomplete sentences but still making sure the point of the conversation has gotten across. The final register would be “intimate” and generally used between lovers or in situations of sexual harrassment.¹

Many adults may have an understanding of these different types of language and where they are appropriate, but not all students understand the time and place where these different languages can and should be used appropriately. Some inner city children don’t even know that formal language exists and would certainly not know how to use it in a classroom situation. Often there are teachers or administrators who work in urban schools that don’t take the time to appreciate the lack of awareness regarding these differences. Students who seem disrespectful can frustrate teachers, but in reality, the students simply don’t realize their language use makes an impression on people they encounter throughout the day. Add this to a student who is already struggling to understand the work he is supposed to be doing, and the relationship between student and teacher can become strained. Another very important reason for students to understand formal language is that most standardized tests are written in a formal language. SAT and ACT tests that are used to compare students trying to enter college are even harder for these students to master when they are unsure of the terminology on the exams.² This argument has been used for a long time regarding the exams. It is less often examined in

¹ Ruby K. Payne, *A Framework For Understanding Poverty* (Highlands: aha!process, 2005), 27.

² Ibid., 28.

the classroom setting as a source of struggle for both students and teachers, but it should not be overlooked since it can be a relatively easy issue to fix.

Teachers in urban schools need to have an understanding of the cultural differences as well, since they may not be outwardly apparent to them when dealing with their students. Every teacher has a minimum of a college education and can explain the difference between the poor, the middle class and the wealthy in society. Usually the description given when asked to explain the 3 classes has to do with how much money a person makes or on the other hand, what they go without in life. Most Americans don't recognize the hidden rules of each class that have to do with everything from money, time, education, love, humor and more. Payne provides 15 such descriptions and explains how each class views their understanding of them.³

Payne states that the lower class sees education in an abstract form rather than as a realistic goal to achieve. It is not crucial for them and therefore the emphases in their life is not put on going to school and maintaining good grades so they can graduate from high school and then attend college. They also view time differently than members of the middle or upper class. To them, time is relevant in the present tense. Decisions are made based on what is currently happening and in a mode of survival. It is difficult for them to look far into the future. If this is the case, how can a student in middle or high school be expected to worry about their academic future when they don't consider the future

³ Ibid., 42-43.

outside of the classroom?⁴ Destiny and fate are more of a reality for the lower class than hard work in order to move up the social ladder. Teachers can have conferences with students and parents about behavior or academic issues, but if the student believes more in destiny than in his own effort to produce results, it will be very difficult for the teacher to effectively change the student's attitude in the classroom.³³⁵

Payne also describes the driving force behind each class. The middle class tends to be pushed by their desire to have a good job and become achievers. They are striving to find the American dream. The poor in our society are driven by relationships, entertainment and survival. All three of these forces directly relate to their behavior in school and can affect how much energy or effort they believe needs to be put into their education. Relationships have the biggest impact in the classroom. They see people as a possession because they don't have much more to call their own. If a teacher can break through the barriers and become a trusted person, he will become one of the driving forces in the student's life. In order to do this, each teacher needs to understand all of these differences to have the best chances of bonding with the student and knowing how to relate on both a personal and professional level.

Understanding the "language" of each class, as Payne discusses, can help a teacher communicate with the students and help them explain to each student when and where certain forms of communication are more appropriate. According to Payne, the poor use a casual register while the middle class uses language as a form of survival and

⁴ Ibid., 43.

⁵ Ibid., 23.

upward mobility. The wealthy class believes language is used for negotiation and tends to use a formal register. These differences may not seem important, but if a new teacher does not understand that the children in inner cities tend to use a casual register, he may become frustrated with his students and not understand that the tone or language used is not derogatory, but normal to their every day experiences.

Many inner city schools have a hard time keeping good teachers in their classrooms. The work environment is not as pleasant as in a middle class suburb and the obstacles to overcome are everywhere. Teachers do not learn about these subtle but important differences in language and cultural behavior while getting a degree in education, but having a better understanding of why someone believes or acts in a certain way can build confidence in a new teacher. According to the National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislation (NHCSL), a government agency on education reform, it is important to “ensure teachers and principals are knowledgeable about and respectful of the culture, history and language of communities.”⁶ Reviewing and appreciating these differences does not take long, and in the end it would help both the teachers and the students better understand each other.

⁶ Weis, Suzanne, “Research Sheds new Light on the Hispanic-White Achievement Gap,” *The Progress of Education Reform* 6, no. 3 (August 2004): 3.

Table 1.1 Hidden Rules Among Classes

	POVERTY	MIDDLE CLASS	WEALTH
Possessions	People	Things	One-of-a-kind objects, legacies, pedigrees
Money	To be used, spent	To be managed	To be conserved, invested
Personality	Is for entertainment. Sense of humor is highly valued	Is for acquisition and stability. Achievement is highly valued	Is for connections. Financial, political, social connections are highly valued
Social Emphasis	Social inclusion of people he/she likes	Emphasis is on self-governance and self-sufficiency	Emphasis is on social exclusion
Food	Key question: did you have enough? Quantity important	Key question: did you like it? Quality important	Key question: was it presented well? Presentation important
Clothing	Clothing valued for individual style and expression of personality	Clothing valued for its quality and acceptance into norm of middle class. Label important	Clothing valued for its artistic sense and expression. Designer important
Time	Present most important. Decisions made for moment based on feelings or survival	Future most important. Decisions made against future ramifications	Traditions and history most important. Decisions made partially on basis of tradition and decorum
Education	Valued and revered as abstract but not as reality	Crucial for climbing success ladder and making money	Necessary tradition for making and maintaining connections
Destiny	Believes in fate. Cannot do much to mitigate chance	Believes in choice. Can change future with good choices now	Noblesse oblige (nobility obliges)
Language	Casual register	Language is about survival	Formal register. Language is about negotiation
Family structure	Tends to be matriarchal	Tends to be patriarchal	Depends on who has money
World view	Sees world in terms of local setting	Sees world in terms of national setting	Sees world in terms of international view
Love	Love and acceptance conditional, based upon whether individual is liked	Love and acceptance conditional and based largely upon achievement	Love and acceptance conditional and related to social standing and connections
Driving forces	Survival, relationships, entertainment	Work, achievement	Financial, political, social connections
Humor	About people and sex	About situation	About social faux pas

Source: Data from Ruby K. Payne, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty Highlands: aha! Process*, 2005: 43.

Providence St. Mel School in Chicago, Illinois, believes using some slang in the classroom can be beneficial to the students. The teachers understand that for many of the students, slang is a method of survival for them on the streets. They can't speak to

their neighborhood friends in the same manner as they would speak to teachers at St. Mel's, but the children also know they can not use the street language in a more formal setting such as at a job or at school.⁷ If they want to rise above some of the problems they face in the streets, they must know how to code-switch between the language of the street and business language.

Teachers at Providence St. Mel also have to learn to do some code switching. One of the teachers explained that she has to be more disciplined and “military” in her classroom structure, but she is able to become more casual with her students outside the classroom setting. A more disciplined classroom makes it easier to stay on task and take advantage of every moment spent teaching.³⁴⁸ The ability for a student to learn how to code-switch means he will be able to adjust on his own to the situation and know how to communicate better. “Self-reliance begins in having the confidence to work with others.”⁹ Confidence for these students means understanding that it is okay to relax around the neighborhood, but slang isn't the language of the business world or the classroom.

⁷ Samuel Casey Carter, *On Purpose: How Great School Cultures Form Strong Character* (Thousand Oaks: Corwin, 2011), 146.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁹ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 3

A LOOK AT EDUCATION TODAY

Washington, DC, is a typical American city trying to come up with a solution to fix its ailing schools. In 2007-08 there were 253 public schools with an enrollment of 78,422 students. The student teacher ratio was at 12.4, which is better than the national average of 15.5. These numbers never seem credible because we hear so many complaints about overcrowded classrooms and a teacher's inability to control and teach so many students. This problem of discrepancies in statistics will be discussed later in the paper. There were 14,990 middle school students (6th-8th grade) and 20,242 high school students in the DC public school system. Almost half (49%) of the students are eligible for free or reduced price lunches.¹

School Vouchers

During the 1990's school choice advocates expressed frustration with the path education in America was taking.

Public education was incapable of ever reforming itself, because the institution was "owned" by vested interests, including teachers' unions and myriad associations of principals, school boards, superintendent, administrators, and professionals-not to mention education schools, book publishers, testing services, and many other beneficiaries of the institutional status quo.³⁵²

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 2002 in the *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* case from Cleveland, Ohio regarding lottery voucher programs that gave preference to low-

¹ National Center for Education Statistics, "State Education Data Profiles," NCES, <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/stateprofiles/> (accessed June 5, 2010).

² Diane Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 188.

income families who could choose between private and public schools. The ruling stated there was no violation of the establishment clause since there was indeed free choice between religious and secular schools.³ This further opened the door to voucher programs across the country.

In 2003, the Republican led Congress established a voucher program in Washington, D.C. to give public school students the opportunity to attend a private school by giving them a voucher that would allocate a portion of their tuition to be paid by the District of Columbia. About 2/3 of the students who chose this option entered Catholic schools in the district.⁴ At the same time, the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program was introduced. If a student were attending a school that fell into the category of “schools in need of improvement” (SINI) by national standards, he would be eligible to receive up to \$7500 towards a private or religious school in Washington, DC.⁵

According to Diane Ravitch’s research, the students as a group who came from secondary schools in the SINI category did not make improvements in their test scores in the first 1 or 2 years compared to students who were not in SINI schools, but still took advantage of the voucher program.⁶ Ravitch also looks at 2 separate authors of DC voucher program studies released in 2009 where both authors came to the same conclusion. They stated that the gains in achievement for the voucher program students

³ Ibid., 120.

⁴ Ibid., 121.

⁵ Ibid., 130.

⁶ Ibid.

were so small that they were “not statistically different from zero”.⁷ This could be one reason why in 2009, Congress voted to phase out the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program. The 1700 students who were already receiving the benefits would still be eligible until they graduated from high school, but no new vouchers would be granted.⁸

Although these statistics show there was little improvement made, what they do not show is if the students feel better about their school environment and have a stronger desire to stay in school and continue on to college. Many statistics only studied students for a short period of time and unfortunately administrators will look at these short-term implications and decide to change their strategies. Changes do not come overnight. Plenty of students who came from schools that were performing below the satisfactory standards did make improvements in their test scores. Maybe the students from the SINI schools were so far behind that they needed more time to make improvements and find the best way to learn. These students may have been in underperforming schools all of their life and are struggling to keep up with the academic rigor of a more difficult school environment. Other factors must be examined in order to fully understand the findings of the study.

Caroline Hixby of Stanford University did a study on the Scaresdale- Harlem Achievement Gap in New York City. Her conclusion states that students who attended

⁷ Ibid., 129.

⁸ Ann Weaver, “Opportunity Scholarship Students Urge Congress to Reauthorize Program,” *The Catholic Standard* (accessed March 1, 2011), <http://www.catholicstandard.com/main.asp?SectionID=2&SubsectionID=21&ArticleID=441>.

charter schools from grades K-8 (9 consecutive years) closed most of the gap on standardized test scores between those in SINI schools and the more successful schools.⁹ Diane Ravitch also concludes that if the charter school was in operation for more than 9 years, the children attending the school showed the greatest gains.¹⁰ Again this shows that decisions about success or failure of a school to improve test scores for their students must not be made after 1 or 2 years.

Improvements aren't always recognized right away and programs need time to work out the kinks in order to ensure they are on the right track. New schools need time to reflect and make changes. Flexibility given to administrators is often cited as a motivating force for successful schools. When schools and their teachers are forced to stick with strict guidelines, the teachers can't make adjustments in the classroom in order to change teaching strategies. Teachers don't go into the classroom hoping to fail their students. The failure often comes from a lack of flexibility in academic programs and schools as a whole.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

At the same time, the national goals must be held to the same standards in each state and as we will see later, the failure to do this often leads to discrepancies in test results. The only way to ensure every school is on equal footing is to expect the same standards at each school. One school can't have a passing grade of 65 while another has a passing score set at 60 or even lower. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was created to

⁹ Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, 142.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 139.

give a set of national standards and goals, but unfortunately many states have adjusted the pass/fail levels in order to improve their standings as a whole. NCLB expects by 2014 to have 100% proficiency in all public schools. The argument has been made that it is more of a declaration of belief that at some point total proficiency can be maintained because if you look at the statistics from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), we are far from that goal.¹¹ The 2007 data on reading revealed for 4th graders 33% of the students were below basic levels, 34% were at basic levels, 25% were proficient and 8% were doing advanced reading. The results for 8th graders were similar with 28% reading at grade level and 3% reading at an advanced level.¹²

Consequences of NCLB

Some critics believe teachers have lost their vision to do anything more than making improvements on reading and math scores. Test prep becomes more important than actual education. In New York City, some argued that for the last month before the standardized tests, many teachers stopped teaching science and social studies so they could spend more time on the math and reading goals.¹³ The teachers involved knew they would be judged on the student outcomes. Ravitch believes “if a get-tough policy saps educators of their initiative, their craft, and their enthusiasm, than it’s hard to believe that the results are worth having.”³⁶¹⁴ Teachers and parents alike have echoed this belief.

¹¹ Ibid., 103.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 108.

¹⁴ Ibid., 67.

Good education doesn't come from strategies in testing children or placing either shame or blame on teachers and then closing bad schools. When a school spends most of its day doing test preparation, students lose out on everything else that makes them a well-rounded individual who can think on his own.

NCLB looks at Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) when they grade each school. Graduation rates should also be a factor in AYP. Slowly, more states are using these rates to determine the success of its schools. The "Graduation Counts Compact" is determined by the number of students who graduate within 4 years with at least a standard diploma and divides that number of students who entered 9th grade for the first time 4 years ago, plus transfers into system minus the number of students who transfer out of the system.¹⁵ How can we have reliable data if each state makes its own guidelines and can manipulate test scores? Chicago test scores went from 55% of 8th graders meeting the Reading standards in 2004 to 76% meeting them in 2008. The Math scores went from 33% to 70% in the same time frame. This is not because the students improved, but because of new tests and procedural changes that lowered the cut scores for being considered proficient.¹⁶ Until we have national standards for every student, these results don't give us an accurate view of our educational assessment.

A study on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) showed that when looking at Hispanic high school graduates nationwide, their skills in reading and

¹⁵ Jennifer Duonay, "Research Sheds Light on the Students Most at Risk of Dropping Out-and how to Keep Students on the 'Graduation Track,'" *The Progress of Education Reform 2007* 8, no. 1 (July 2007):2-7.

¹⁶ Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, 158.

writing were considered equal to a 13-year old white student. The math scores in 2000 showed that only 10% of the Hispanic students were advanced or proficient and 60% of those in the study had scores that were “below basic.”¹⁷ The research did not provide what percentage of these students had attended schools in urban areas or whether they attended schools considered to be successfully preparing their students for the future. A Nation At Risk, released in 1983 by the National Committee on Excellence in Education, stated that approximately 13% of 17 year olds were considered to be functionally illiterate and results showed the rate for minority youth could have been as high as 40%.¹⁸ This number is astounding when you consider that most of the 40% of minorities involved in the study had attended school for at least 10 years and had failed to become proficient in reading on a national level.

The statistics for public education in Washington, DC do not show great results either. According to information published by Don Bosco Cristo Rey High School in Takoma Park, MD, more than 40% of students don’t graduate from high school. Where do these students end up? Three out of four state prison inmates are high school dropouts. Approximately 69% of jail inmates and 59% of federal prison inmates dropped out of high school.¹⁹ Combine that with the fact that the government makes \$209,000 in

¹⁷ Charmaine Llagas, “Status and Trends in the Education of Hispanics,” U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics NCES 2003-008 (April 2003).

¹⁸ U.S. Department of Education, “A Nation At Risk,” <http://www2ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/index.html> (accessed July 6, 2010).

¹⁹ Duonay, 5.

revenue and reduced government cost for every high school graduate in America.²⁰ If our schools had the ability to create a curriculum that would ensure our students would not only graduate, but also be proficient in Math, Reading, and Science, the savings could be even greater.

Approximately 33% of the children in Washington, DC live below the Federal Poverty Level, which was \$22,050 in 2009 for a family of four. In 2007, results of test scores showed 66% of the District's 8th grade students were below basic proficiency in math and 52% were below in reading.²¹ According to Time Magazine, in 2009 68% of eighth graders nationally scored below proficiency in reading and 68% had done so in math. The same study also showed that between 1971-2004 when considering national reading test scores, there had been no change in performance among 17-year-old students.²² Washington, DC may be doing slightly better than the national average in reading scores, but the results are still way below our foreign competitors.

The United States is not in great standing compared to twenty-nine other developed countries. We were ranked #21 in science literacy and #25 in math literacy (both from a 2006 survey). At the same time, we ranked #5 in spending per student in grades K-12 among these 30 developed countries.²³ In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education created a report called *A Nation At Risk*, which highlighted

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Don Bosco Cristo Rey Facts At a Glance school handout, 2010.

²² Amanda Ripley, "A Call to Action for Public Schools," *Time*, September 20, 2010, 35.

²³ Ibid., 35.

many problems in the education system in America. It reported, “the average graduate of our schools and colleges today is not as well-educated as the average graduate of 25 or 35 years ago, when a much smaller proportion of our population completed high school and college.”²⁴ This statement goes back to what was mentioned by Alexis de Tocqueville earlier regarding literacy rates in the mid 1800’s. How could we have had so many literate Americans when we had such little compulsory schooling?

Reading is learned. It does not come naturally. What *A Nation At Risk* does not explain is whether or not social promotion in our schools has created a higher number of graduates who would not have been allowed to pass to the next grade in earlier years. The policy of social promotion used throughout our nation never helped a student become literate or proficient in reading.

The New York City Department of Education ended its policy of social promotion in all grades in the early 2000’s. It also lowered the levels a student needed to reach in order to pass a test. Diane Ravitch believed that if a student did random guessing they could possibly pass the exam.²⁵ The policy of promoting students to the next grade level in order to keep them with social peers rather than holding them back until they are proficient enough to pass a test is another area where national standards should inhibit the school from allowing this to occur. Our students are not graduating from schools with the knowledge they need when compared to other developed countries across the globe, and these are just a few of the areas that should be examined on a national level.

²⁴ U.S. Department of Education, “A Nation At Risk,” (accessed July 6, 2010).

²⁵ Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, 159.

Michelle Rhee Brings National Exposure To School Reform

Washington, DC has been struggling with low test scores and has been in the spotlight for several years. Mayor Adrian Fenty named Michelle Rhee the new DC School Chancellor in June 2007, and the nation became more aware of the failing school system as she vowed publicly to make changes and improve these schools. According to Diane Ravitch, the District had 80,000 public school students in 1997 and only 45,000 in 2009. There were also 56 Charter schools educating another 28,000 students.²⁶ Charter schools were educating almost 1/3 of all students in the District in 2008.²⁷ These statistics show that many parents were unhappy with the public education their children were receiving and were willing to take the chance with a new Charter school in hopes of better classroom results for their children. Michelle Rhee started the New Teachers Project to recruit new teachers to the inner city.²⁸ She believed teachers are the most important factor in successful schools. Job protection for teachers would not help students. She asked teachers to forgo tenure and if they did, salaries could be as high as \$130,000 per year. If a teacher would not give up their tenure, they would not be eligible for these salary increases.

Meanwhile, Catholic schools in the District were struggling to stay afloat due to financial concerns. Many parish schools had been forced to close or consolidate to ease financial burdens on the churches. Washington, D.C. was not the only area with these

²⁶ Ibid, 132.

²⁷ Ibid, 125.

²⁸ Ibid, 171.

problems. Michael J. Petrilli of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute explained that “since the 1990’s, 1300 inner-city Catholic schools throughout the country have closed, displacing 300,000 kids.”²⁹

²⁹ Elise Viebeck. “Save D.C’s Catholic Schools.” Black Alliance for Educational Options. http://baeo.org/news?news_id=762 (accessed August 27, 2010).

CHAPTER 4

THE CATHOLIC TO CHARTER SHIFT IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

The opening of charter schools in Washington, DC, as well as fewer low-paid religious personnel available to teach in Catholic schools added to the financial burdens of parish schools. The Center City Consortium was formed due to these factors in 1997 by merging 8 struggling Catholic parish schools into one new group. The “new” schools were going to be independent of the Archdiocese system and the executive director, Mary Ann Stanton, vowed to have a “razor sharp focus on academic outcomes.” Stanton knew that these schools were already meeting academic standards prior to joining together and she was determined to maintain the academic integrity of them all.¹ The struggles facing this new consortium were going to be to overcome financial difficulties rather than needing to improve academically as so many other district area schools were racing to do.

Even though the schools were financially separated from the Archdiocese, the Consortium struggled to make ends meet. They were losing students to charter schools because they were free and so many of the families involved with the consortium couldn’t afford the educational costs. Almost 30% of the public schools in DC had become charter schools, so families had better choices than the public school system offered years ago. In 2005, the Consortium acknowledged the model they were upholding was not going to be sustainable.² Getting donations for school is more difficult

¹ Andy Smarick, *Catholic Schools Become Charter Schools: Lessons From the Washington Experience* (Washington: Seton Educational Partners, 2010), 5.

² *Ibid.*, 6.

when the contributors could see the schools still struggling to survive. This was true even though the education provided was outstanding and approximately 60% of the students lived at or below the poverty level. The D.C. School Choice Incentive Act of 2003 made it possible for 764 low-income students to enter the schools through the voucher program. Less than 1/3 of these students were Catholic.³Theodore Cardinal McCarrick, the Archbishop of Washington at the time felt strongly about educating these students, no matter what their religious background. It was social justice at work for McCarrick.⁴

There are a lot of poor people in our diocese. We have to help them whether they are Catholic or not Catholic...that's what it's all about, that's what the Church is about. That's what our life is about.

Although the desire to help everyone was heartfelt, the continuing financial stress of operating these schools was becoming more apparent. At the same time, Cardinal Wuerl had replaced McCarrick and was told in 2006 that the inner-city Catholic schools in his diocese had become unviable financially. The Archdiocese was supporting over 70 elementary schools and still earmarked more than 50% of the educational funds towards the Consortium, which was still operating under a deficit of more than \$1.5 million to educate a student body that was less than 30% Catholic.⁵

The answer to these financial problems came on November 5, 2007 when the Archdiocese created the “New Catholic Framework for Education in the Center City” and

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 7.

announced the break-up of the 12-school Consortium. A smaller consortium would be created and 4 of the original 12 schools would be joined together. One school was going to become a stand-alone parish school and the last 7 schools would be converted to public charter schools while still maintaining the physical presence on Church property.⁶ It was difficult for the Archdiocese to make these adjustments and convert these schools, but it was more important for them to ensure the children would receive a quality education. The Center City Public Charter Schools became the operator of these 7 schools in Washington and Mary Anne Stanton led them once again.⁷

Issues To Overcome in the Shift

Concerns were voiced from both sides of the education aisle. Parents who's children were previously educated in religious schools were being told the Catholic community was no longer in charge and DC taxpayers worried about having to. Eventually 97% of the original Consortium parents approved the switch from Catholic to charter schools.⁸

Timing became the next obstacle to overcome. The process of opening a new charter school usually took more than 2 years and these schools were trying to open within a few months. They still had to get the approval from the DC Public Charter School Board (PCSB), which they finally did on June 16, 2008.⁹ Since the schools had

⁶ Ibid., 9.

⁷ Ibid., 11.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 12-13.

always been well run and standards were set high for students, it was an easier decision for the board than for a school starting from scratch.

Funding was still a concern. The consortium was not going to receive any grant money from the federal Charter School Grant Program because it was not willing to hold an open lottery for acceptance to the school. They already had the students and weren't going to risk having some of their current students lose a space in the class because of the lottery. Instead, they became involved with a national organization that helps charter schools expand. The New Schools Venture Fund would provide a grant of \$250,000.¹⁰

Changes in the Schools

Although names and bosses may have changed, much stayed the same in these schools. Holy Name School had opened in 1925 and a majority of its students were African American as well as Catholic. During its final year as Holy Name, only 14% of the student body was Catholic. The first day of school at the newly named Trinidad school was filled with familiar faces. The principal and all of the full-time teachers were the same. Approximately 70% of the staff at all 7 schools remained the same.¹¹ This means for most students who were transitioning from Catholic to charter school, not much would change. The building was the same, the teachers were the same and many of their friends would still be there with them.

¹⁰ Ibid., 14.

¹¹ Ibid., 15.

What did change was the religious aspect of the schools. No longer could there be Morning Prayer. Instead there could be honor codes to follow. Character lessons could take the place of religious lesson. Salaries also changed. Teachers saw a 22% increase after converting to the charter school system.¹² The teachers also had to pass a Praxis exam rather than having to get a full teacher certification that was standard practice in most national public school systems. They were given opportunities for professional development across broad topics of character development over the first year. Many teachers stayed because they felt the values hadn't changed. Jesus was no longer "visible" in the classroom, but similar values of dignity and respect were everywhere.¹³

Enrollment After the Transition

Enrollment changed in these newly formed schools. Prior to the conversion 65% of students were eligible for free or reduced lunches. After the conversion, that number jumped to 75% of the school population. More special needs children were also enrolled in these schools and the percentage of lower-performing students also rose. Only about 35-40% of the total number of students came from the original Consortium due to the fact that enrollment as a whole went up 27% in the first year of operation. Realizing the lower-performing students were having a hard time catching up to their classroom peers, Stanton decided that in year 2 of the schools operation they would only admit new

¹² Javier C. Hernandez, "Secular Education, Catholic Views," *The New York Times*, March 9, 2009 <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/09/nyregion/09charter.html>? (accessed September 17, 2010).

¹³ Smarick, "Catholic Schools Become Charter Schools," 16.

students at the elementary grade levels.¹⁴ Parents in DC knew the Catholic administrators always had high expectations for their schools but many of the poor families could never afford the Catholic schools. The shift to charter schools opened the door for poor families to attend higher quality schools without the cost of a Catholic school.

¹⁴ Ibid.,17.

CHAPTER 5

NATIVITYMIGUEL SCHOOLS

Charter schools are not the only options in cities such as Washington, DC. The NativityMiguel school network has 64 middle schools throughout 27 states and looks for continued growth.¹ Each middle school affiliated with the network has to follow a set of 9 mission standards. If these guidelines are not strictly followed, a school will no longer be able to continue its association with the NativityMiguel network. The standards are as follows:²

- Faith Based
- Serves the Economically Poor and Marginalized
- A Holistic Education (academic, physical, social, moral etc)
- Partners with Family
- Extended Day and Year
- Commitment Beyond Graduation
- Effective Administrative Structure
- On-going Assessment and Inquiry
- Active Network Participant

According to the network, the average school size is approximately 71 students, and the class size is about 24 students. The students attend class for approximately 9.6 hours each day and school year lasts up to 11 months. Graduation rates for 2008 showed 79% of their alumni completed high school in 4 years and 67% of these graduates enrolled in college. These statistics are well above the national average for low-income families and

¹ NativityMiguel Network of Schools website.
<http://www.nativitymiguelnetwork.org/>(accessed September 24, 2010).

² Ibid.

therefore the schools are making a positive impact on the lives of many children suffering from poverty.

A study of 9 Nativity schools was published in the *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, released in 2008. However, in 2006, the Nativity Network of schools joined together with the San Miguel Network as the schools began to spread throughout the country and both had the same goals and aspirations for their students. The survey was done prior to the merger of the 2 networks.

The results show 4 prominent reasons for the success of these schools. The first is that each school has a devoted staff. The second is each school has an extended day, which offers opportunity for tutoring and general help with homework. The third explanation is the low student-teacher ratios at each school and the last reason for success is the overall support of peers.³ These may seem like common sense applications for schools to ensure a successful academic year, but unfortunately they are not easy to establish with the constant changes of expectations in our nations schools as well as the turnover of teachers in the urban ghettos of America.

The same report states that less than 50% of 8th graders living in urban areas graduate from high school within 5 years and many that do graduate received an education that did not do enough to prepare them for competition in the workplace with

³ L. Mickey Fenzel and Rosalind H. Monteith, "Successful Alternative Middle Schools for Urban Minority Children: A Study of Nativity Schools," *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk* 13 (2008):381.

their middle class counterparts.⁴ Students who aren't expected to be functionally literate, yet are allowed to graduate from high school will not be able to keep up with those who had a more demanding curriculum in school. If some students make it to college, they may not be adequately prepared for college level courses either. We also don't want to revert to how education was treated during the Industrial Revolution when businessmen were hoping to dumb down our citizens in order to fill factory positions with more malleable workers. We cannot afford to have our high school graduates go into the work force unprepared for the responsibilities and workload. If our youth are not able or willing to go to college, their high school education should at least ensure they are proficient in math and reading before they join the work force full time.

It is easy to find loads of research on how to run an effective middle school, but it is not as easy to implement the standards to ensure our students are both emotionally and academically on par with each other across the nation. The Alliance for Excellent Education acknowledged in 2003 that many of our urban schools have been forced to function with much less money than the middle and upper class suburban schools in their state.⁵ The teachers in these urban schools often do not get a chance to have as much training and professional development as their peers which can leave them frustrated as well as less prepared to effectively teach their students. Earlier we discussed how educators don't understand the hidden rules and languages of the lower class. Schools

⁴ Fenzel and Monteith, "Successful Alternative Middle Schools," 382.

⁵ Alliance for Excellent Education. *Alliance Calls For National Movement to Ensure Basic Educational Rights For All Children*. Washington, DC. May 5, 2003. http://www.all4ed.org/press_room/press_releases/05152003 (accessed August 12, 2010).

struggling to make ends meet do not have the financial resources to pay for teacher development seminars where they could gain a better understanding of these issues. Instead, these schools are just trying to do the best for the students with very limited resources.

The teachers who are faced with large class sizes due to budget issues have a much more difficult time giving the students the individual attention needed in order to ensure each child is understanding the lessons being taught before they are expected to pass a test. The larger class also makes it harder for students to bond with their teachers and as we saw earlier, many urban poor children put a lot of value in their relationships since they don't have much else worth value in their lives. An article published by the *Journal of Applied Psychology* discussed the role of self-perceptions among Hispanic and African American students is not as important as the knowledge that their teachers have set high expectations for the students and they believe in the ability of the student to rise to the challenge and do the work necessary to achieve academic success.⁶

The NativityMiguel schools not only give their students a sense of worth and responsibility, they don't forget about the graduates once they cross the stage and are handed their diplomas. These children and their families were given support when applying to high school and the goal of the network is to continue following each student as they apply and enter college, ensuring there is still a support system in place to guide

⁶ J.D. Finn, and D.A. Rock, "Academic Success Among Students At Risk for School Failure," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 82 (1997): 221-234.

them through what is often the first college experience in their household.⁷ The schools have a graduate support director (GSD) to fulfill this position and the children also have advisors to work with them in middle school.

During the time at the NativityMiguel schools, each student is a part of a small advisory group. They meet with the teacher/mentor of the group and have a chance to bond with this mentor as well as create stronger bonds with other students. As one student put it, “It’s just like a family here.”⁸ Students are more willing to share experiences with classmates when they feel connected than if they only sit near them in class. They are more open to hearing what a teacher has to say when they spend time outside the classroom together and see the teacher as more than just the person standing in front of the class and talking. The teacher becomes a person who can be trusted and can help with things other than class work or homework. These groups help build confidence in students, give them a desire to be a part of the school community, and hopefully in the future these children will return to give back to the school and their neighborhood as a way of showing gratitude for the guidance they received. Part of the job of the GSD is to persuade alumni to volunteer in the schools by tutoring current students. Some of the graduates have also come back to receive tutoring while attending high school or college.⁹

⁷ Fenzel and Monteith, “Successful Alternative Middle Schools,” 384.

⁸ Peter Meyer “Independent Networks, NativityMiguel & Cristo Rey,” The Fordham Institute, http://www.setonpartners.org/userfiles/file/catholic_schools_08.pdf (accessed September 12, 2010): 65.

⁹ Fenzel and Monteith, “Successful Alternative Middle Schools,” 395.

The teachers at NativityMiguel schools are a combination of very experienced teachers who work alongside interns or volunteers who are readily available to help with homework and tutoring. Not all of the network teachers are certified as opposed to most public school teachers who must hold a certification in the state they are working. The lowest number of certified teachers in one of their participating schools was 39% and the highest was only 58%.¹⁰ More important than certification is the student-teacher ratio which had a range of 4.4 to 7.2 students per teacher, which is lower than the national average of approximately 15 to 1. The schools do spend a lot of time and money on mentoring the newer teachers and on giving all teachers plenty of training opportunities to improve their methods of teaching and mentoring.

Another reason for academic success is related to the summer school program that is required at all network schools. The time allotted for the summer school can be anywhere from 2-to 6 weeks and usually is only for approximately 3 hours each day. This time is used either for enrichment purposes for the students or it is used as a time for remedial help in order to get the students on track in reading, math and also writing.¹¹ At Washington Jesuit Academy, which is in Washington, DC the student are not required to wear a uniform during the summer classes and although the students are there to work, it is a more relaxed atmosphere than during the school year.

Parental involvement during these middle school years is also a very important factor. Since NativityMiguel schools are very small, the family atmosphere can make it

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

easier for parents who would feel lost in a large public school to be a part of the community and work together with the teachers to ensure success for their children. The political and bureaucratic stresses at a larger school are less of an obstacle when there are less than 25 students in your child's classroom and there are teachers as well as outside volunteers available to help guide you through any issues that may inhibit your child from obtaining the end result of both high school and college graduation.

Sustainability of these schools is something to look at in order to decide if the model should be examined by other school systems. The NativityMiguel Network has posted on its website a document that explains their current financial status as well as their goals for future growth and sustainability. The annual budget counts very little on tuition since it only covers about 5% of the operating costs of the schools. The rest of the funding comes from donations from private donors, religious congregations, corporations and a small amount of government support.¹²

Finding donors year after year is never easy, but many of the supporters do so because they not only see the educational opportunities they are affording the students, they also understand the bigger picture and want to do more to promote equality of educational opportunities for the underprivileged and often forgotten children in our urban areas.¹³ It is social justice in the school systems that will enable these young

¹² Nativity Miguel Network of Schools, <http://www.nativitymiguel.org/> (Accessed June 6, 2010)

¹³ Ibid.

students to break the barriers of poverty and bring self-confidence to children who need it most.

There are 16 network schools that have been operational for 15 years of service and another 23 that have been open for 10 years. A large number of these 23 schools were started when the Cassin Educational Initiatives Foundation became involved and the Nativity Network evolved.¹⁴ The Cassin family has helped many schools and their name can be attributed to other successful school programs throughout the country. Although the schools have collectively raised over \$72 million in the 2008-09 school year, there were 2 schools that decided to close their doors. These schools were in Detroit and in Racine, WI. It was not an easy decision since the schools were academically doing well, but financially they were not able to meet budgetary needs and the future success for funding was not going to ease their debt issues so they made the choice to close gracefully and worked hard to support faculty and students during the transition.¹⁵

Not all of the other schools are operating in the black; 44% of them had a budget deficit ranging from \$39,000 to \$550,621. An equal percentage of schools were operating in the black with surplus of up to \$400,000.¹⁶ These number show that this model is not an absolute success story. Schools that have been open for many years are still struggling, but they are determined to find a way to succeed because they realize the

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

need for this type of school is great and it is worth their time, effort and energy to find the funds to continue to educate the less fortunate students.

Are these schools sustainable if there are so many operating with a deficit? The network believes they are because “If you are responding to needs with an innovative product and fresh perspective, chances are increased that a business will be around.”¹⁷ This may be true, but as mentioned earlier, one very important aspect of a successful school as well as a successful business would be strong leadership.

The leadership at the NativityMiguel schools must wholeheartedly believe in what they are doing because it is their responsibility to raise funds year after year to support the school and it’s faculty. These schools have a full time president who spends the majority of his time forming relationships and finding the money to run the schools while the principal is handling the day to day running of the school.¹⁸ The members of the Board of Directors for each school also must be fully committed to growth and development by taking ownership of every aspect of the school. They cannot afford to have a board member who is not willing to go the extra mile to ensure the stability of the school. Each school has a mission and as a board member, he must be willing to work tirelessly to bring it to fruition, or the program can fail. These schools are not run by a parish or a religious order, it is in the hands of the board of directors so their actions will be a factor in the success or failure of the school.¹⁹

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

The board members must have a strategy in place for their fundraising efforts. The relationships they build will potentially be making a lasting difference in the schools. Even though these are Christian schools, the students come from many different religious backgrounds and some children don't follow a religion at all. The Board stresses to possible donors the academic results and does not need to stress the faith-based instruction at all times. They can show the positive results by using test scores and acceptance rates to both colleges and high schools to prove the academic rigor is paying off for the students in each school. The schools are there to serve the poor, no matter what they believe or where they come from.²⁰ It is social justice at work and by using such terms when searching for donors, the board members may find supporters in places that a traditional Catholic school would not have asked for donations in the past.

²⁰ Ibid.

CHAPTER 6

WASHINGTON JESUIT ACADEMY (WJA)

The Washington Jesuit Academy (WJA) is one of the successful schools in the NativityMiguel Network. It opened its doors in Washington, DC, in 2002. The typical profile of a WJA student is worth noting in order to understand where the students are coming from and what obstacles they face outside the classroom every day.¹

- 82% African American; 12 % Latino
- 75% Non-Catholic
- 80% qualify for Federal meal subsidies
- \$28,000 average family income
- 75% raised in single parent families
- 21% have no contact with their father for more than 10 years
- 14% have a deceased parent
- 22% have an incarcerated parent
- 100% significantly improved their standardized test scores in at least one subject after attending the school

Many of these children are coming from poor performing schools in the area. They have not been meeting the standards set by the US government on their test scores prior to arriving at WJA, but by the time they leave, their academic success stories are astounding. Below is a table with statistics for the class of 2008 that will show the dramatic jump in their assessments.²

¹ William Whitaker, interview by author, Washington, DC, June 23, 2010.

² Ibid.

Table 1.2 Changes in Level of Proficiency for the Class of 2008

WJA Class of 2008	Reading	Language	Math	Total Test
Average grade level in 6 th grade	5.9	5.2	5.7	5.7
Average grade level in 8 th grade	11.2	10.8	9.4	9.7

Source: Data from Bill Whitaker, President of Washington Jesuit Academy, interview by author, June 23, 2010.

Within two years the students are between 1 and 3 years ahead in each subject at WJA after being well below where they should have been upon acceptance into the school. These results show what the school president, Bill Whitaker, meant when he explained their search for possible students, “While we may be looking for the potential cream of the crop,” our students otherwise “might have fallen through the cracks.”³ The school doesn’t take the best students’ from area schools; it takes those with potential for growth. WJA does not advertise to find new students as many private schools in the Washington area do each year. They work closely with advocates for these children, such as DC Police after school program workers or teachers in the DC public school system, as well as parents who know their children need something better than what they are getting in their current schools.⁴ Over 90% of the WJA students have come from DC public schools.

³ William Murray, “Nativity School Model Being Replicated” The Heartland Institute, http://www.heartland.org/schoolreform-news.org/Article/9384/Nativity_School_Model_Being_Replicated.html (accessed June 23, 2010).

⁴ William Whitaker, interview by author, Washington, DC, June 23, 2010.

“Everyone talks about education reform, we live it,” is how Rey Ramsey explains what he sees when he walks through the doors at WJA. The school is actively changing the boys’ lives for the better each day. The staff is always learning and working to bring better educational opportunities to each student. They don’t just ‘teach to the test,’ they find innovative ways to foster a love of learning and a desire to help others along the way. Ramsey tells these boys, “over time, you carry this place with you into a very tough environment you might come from. Brick by brick, moment by moment.”⁵ The first day the students walk through the doors, it is often because someone else tells them it will be a great place, and not because they want to be there. The school changes the perspective of its students through guidance, high expectations, respect and caring. The boys grow to love being a part of WJA.

Marquell Cooper, a graduate of WJA, had gone to 5 different schools before being enrolled in WJA. He had no idea what to expect and never had so much work to do. The 2-2 ½ hours of homework each night became part of his normal schedule. He began doing community service every Saturday from 8-4, because WJA instilled the value of helping others in him.⁶ The school staff has high expectations for their students, and Marquell is only one example of a student who became a better person through his time at WJA.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ WJA, “Opening Doors to the future,” <http://www.raffertyweiss.com/educational-video-production/index.html> (accessed March 5, 2011).

Courtney Clark, from the Clark Charitable Foundation, a sponsor of WJA, explains a little of the school's philosophy regarding its students. "You can go wide or you can go deep. We very much believe in going deep."⁷ Everyone involved at the school is striving to make each child a better human being. It is not just about better test scores; it goes deeper than that. Brian Ray, the Director of Finance, said to me that a few of their graduates have come back in the summer to tutor current students. The school opened in 2002 so its first graduates are still in college. Knowing that some are already willing to give back to their middle school is impressive. This is not something the average student is willing to do with their free time in the summer. WJA has made an everlasting impression on the boys that is often mentioned at school, the Jesuit philosophy of "a man for others" is more than just a statement. It has to become a way of life.

Another graduate of WJA who was interviewed on a video released by the school is Martese Holmes. According to his mother, he would probably be incarcerated or possibly even dead if someone from WJA hadn't found him and changed his life. Mr. Blue, one of Martese's teachers, said he had major behavioral problems at his previous school. He was put in the special education classes due to his violent outbursts as well as a lack of respect for authority. Mr. Blue says, "He didn't know these things were wrong." He had been on 7 different types of medication, and after getting settled into

⁷ Ibid.

WJA, he stopped taking them altogether. He hasn't received less than an A in his classes during his time here.⁸

When Martese was asked about the biggest impact the school had on him, he said, "they gave him love". This not only translated into respect and a desire to succeed in the classroom, it helped at home as well. His mother said when they walked into the school for the first time, she didn't have a relationship with her son, but during his time at WJA they reconnected and now they have a mutual respect and love for one another. Martese had teachers who were willing to be father figures to a boy who didn't have anyone else to fill that role. Teachers at this school give so much more than is expected at a typical high school. These teachers know they will make a difference in their students' lives and are willing to put in the extra time, energy and effort to help them succeed by opening doors that were previously closed to these boys.

Courtney Clark also explained that for students at this school, character education is just as vital as writing or reading is in the curriculum.⁹ Morals and values are honored everywhere on campus. The religious aspect is visible even though all of the teachers are not Catholic. Retreats are common in the curriculum, and the 8th grade students attend a weeklong retreat together each year. Ms. Ann Clark, the Director of the Counseling Services at the school explains:¹⁰

The Retreat Program at the Academy is all about reflection and personal growth. We teach our students how to disconnect from the chaos for their daily routines and take

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Bill Whitaker, "2009-2010 Annual Report," Washington Jesuit Academy.

time to reflect on their decisions, habits and behaviors, and their consequences. To use an Ignatian term, they work on becoming ‘contemplatives in action.’

It is easier to expect students to become solid citizens when caring teachers who have the flexibility to teach their classes in a way that gives these boys the best chance for improvement are mentoring them. To date, 3 out of the 4 original teachers from 2002 are still at WJA. The mission of the school is important for prospective teachers to understand. They must realize their potential to create growth in the boys and be willing to give over and above what is expected at most other schools. According to Bill Whitaker, the president of WJA, 7 out of 10 teachers are African American and, since 82% of the boys are African American, these teachers are a great example for them to follow. Many of the students don’t have great role models in their neighborhoods, so to have these men as teachers and mentors makes the connection even stronger.

Each student attends a summer program where the atmosphere in class is more casual. For the new students, it is a great opportunity to see what the longer school days will be like in September without having to wear a uniform. The shorter days and casual dress gives them a chance to catch up on their skills while not being in an environment that is as structured as the regular school year. Since the teachers are expected to be working in this summer program, the school completely closes for part of the summer to give everyone a much-needed break. In 2010, it was closed from 7/23-8/18. There is also an opportunity for teachers to take a sabbatical in order to get more time off in the summer. Last year there were 2 teachers who had the summer off from school through the program. The teachers are also paid well since they are expected to work such long

hours compared to their peers in other schools. Each week every teacher must work one day until 7:30pm.

Besides working late, there is also plenty of opportunity for professional development. Bill Whitaker says he hates to close the schools for it, but agrees that this is important for teachers and therefore it must be done to help the school and the boys as well. WJA is also involved with other area schools. His teachers will go to another school for 2-3 days and teachers from other schools, such as The Woods Academy, an independent co-ed school in the Washington suburbs, will spend a few days at WJA to share teaching strategies with each other.

Teachers aren't the only people supporting these students. Last year 58 volunteers came in from 5-7:30 pm for study hall. These volunteers eat dinner with the boys and then hold small study groups. There are usually about 8-10 volunteers each night. There is no study hall on Friday evenings, so the boys have one night "off".

Looking at the graduates from WJA, there is a sense that something good is happening inside these school walls. The first graduating class had 18 of 20 students attend college. The second graduating class had 18 students and 14 of them went on to college.

Perhaps this is why so many people are willing to sponsor a child or donate money to WJA. The Archdiocese of Washington does not financially support the school at all. This means the school has a little more flexibility than typical parish schools. Approximately 90% of the revenue at WJA comes from individual and group sponsors. Usually a group consists of no more than 7-8 individuals who get together to sponsor a

child. Last year over \$1.9 million was given by individuals to help educate the students at WJA. These numbers are extremely important when you realize there is no tuition cost for any students at WJA.

Fundraising is essential to the success and future growth of the school. Bill Whitaker said there is a possibility the school will open up a 5th grade class in the next few years and that isn't possible without more donors. The average family of 4 income for a student at WJA is \$28,000 so there is little chance of getting large donations from these families, but anyone who walks into the school or watches a video about the students can see right away how the school does become a part of your life and one can't help but want to root for the success of each and every student.

WJA also helps support its students by having a full time Graduate Support specialist on campus. This allows the school to keep up with its graduates as they attend high school and apply for colleges, and the counselor can even help in college if necessary. The connection WJA has made to schools such as Georgetown University allows the middle school students to see where they can one day attend college as well as having WJA gain access to students and alumni at Georgetown who want to help.

Recently Georgetown University held a "Hoyas Give Back" weekend where they set up opportunities for current students and alumni to volunteer in different areas throughout the U.S.. WJA was lucky enough to have over 50 volunteers come in on a Sunday morning and paint the walls of their school. At the same time they were able to share their story with 50 potential donors or even mentors for the students. As the volunteers look up on the walls of the dining hall, they see a banner from Georgetown

hanging up with banners from other high schools and universities that have accepted WJA graduates since 2002. Chances are some time in the near future, it will be WJA graduates coming back to help paint the walls as a way to say thanks for giving them the guidance needed to attend a school like Georgetown University.

CHAPTER 7

THE CRISTO REY NETWORK

The Cristo Rey network of schools began in Chicago, Illinois, but has now spread throughout the country in hopes of offering better educational opportunities for youth in urban America. The background of the network's history is important because it not only shows what went into starting a school in a depressed neighborhood, it explains the dedication necessary by all involved to make something from nothing and turn it into the future of education for urban America.

In the south side of Chicago, in the Pilsen and Little Village neighborhoods, poverty is everywhere. This part of the city has a long history of immigrants moving here in search of a better life. Scandinavian, Russian, Austrian, Hungarian as well as Polish immigrants have all populated the area, but now it is mostly Latinos who call these neighborhoods their own.¹ St. Ignatius College Prep is not far from this area. Fr. Bradley M. Schaeffer, SJ, was principal there in the 1980's until 1989. He remembers looking out the windows of the school towards Pilsen and thinking that the Jesuits should go there to educate the children because the two public high schools there were not adequately educating anyone. Over one hundred thousand people lived in these 2 neighborhoods and many were undocumented immigrants.² Schaeffer believed the Jesuits should be teaching these students because many of them were Catholic and they should be given the

¹ G. R. Kearney, *The Cristo Rey Story: More Than a Dream, How One School's Vision Is Changing the World* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 8.

² *Ibid.*, 9.

same educational opportunities as the Catholic children in the middle and upper class neighborhoods of Chicago.

His opportunity to do something arose in August of 1991, when he was named the thirteenth provincial of the Chicago Province. Within months he asked permission of the Cardinal of the Archdiocese of Chicago to take over care of a Latino parish there. He was offered two parishes in the Little Village and Pilsen Neighborhoods.³ He chose the St. Procopius parish, which was the poorest one in the area, but one that seemed to have many young families who could benefit from a good school system. “The poorest of the poor are the modern equivalent of Biblical lepers- people shunned and easily forgotten.”⁴ Fr. Schaeffer was not going to let these families be forgotten. He wanted to make a difference and he was ready to do what was necessary to do so. He named the house the Jesuits would take over at St. Procopius in honor of a Jesuit priest from Mexico in the early twentieth century. He ministered during a tumultuous anti-Catholic period in Mexico until he was caught and killed by a firing squad. Just before being shot, he yelled, “Viva Cristo Rey,” which means, “Long live Christ the King”.⁵ The house was called Cristo Rey and Fr. Schaeffer began his quest for a new school.

The archdiocese of Chicago hadn’t opened a new school in decades. In 1992, there were only fifty parish schools compared to over seventy-five in the early 1970’s. The decline was due to mergers as well as closures. Schaeffer decided his goal was to

³ Ibid., 13.

⁴ Ibid., 18.

⁵ Ibid., 21.

open a high school in the Pilsen area. He met with Dr. Elaine Schuster in 1992. She was the Superintendent of Schools for the Archdiocese of Chicago and was also a friend of Schaffer's. Although she could understand the need for such a school, she had doubts about how these families could afford tuition at the high school, and Schaeffer said he was working on creating a school that people could afford, but didn't know how it could be done yet. She told Schaeffer to do a feasibility study to make sure there was a need and also make sure the new school would not have too great an effect on other Catholic schools that pulled students from these neighborhoods.⁶

Fr. Jim Gartland, SJ, soon learned about the feasibility study from Schaeffer. He hadn't followed the typical path of a Jesuit during his years of training, and those different steps made him a perfect candidate to help. During the years of study to become a Jesuit, there is a period of 2-3 years called the "regency" which is when most Jesuits choose to do their ministry work in one of the many Jesuit high schools in America. Since Gartland had already spent time teaching in the United States, he asked for and was approved to go and teach in Peru.⁷

I wanted to be broken, by being forced out of my comfort zone, challenged to learn a new language, and challenged to learn lessons from the poor about trust and humility. I thought it would also make me more available as a Jesuit if I spent some time in 'the missions' and picked up a second language.

He was assigned as a full time teacher and counselor to Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in southern Peru. He went back to Berkley, California, to finish his last three years of

⁶ Ibid., 24.

⁷ Ibid., 29.

theology to become a Jesuit priest. After two years, he asked permission to spend his summer back in Peru as a teacher and was again granted permission. He began teaching at a Fe y Alegria School, which was part of an educational movement started by another Jesuit who wanted to teach children who lived in the slums of Caracas, Venezuela. By the time Gartland became a teacher at one of these schools, there were over 500 in Latin America.⁸ The experiences with the students at Fe y Alegria would prove to be similar to the experiences many of the future students at the Cristo Rey schools. He said, “they can’t plan; they live day to day. Their faith is one of the only constants. They have so little, and yet they have this faith.”⁹ When he spoke to his provincial in 1992, who happened to be Schaeffer, about his plan to spend more time in Latin America, Schaeffer told him he had another plan for him to think about, and it pertained to doing the feasibility study in Pilsen.

Gartland was ordained on June 5, 1993 and, in late August of the same year, he returned to Chicago to begin his work on the feasibility study after Schaeffer convinced him his place was not in Latin America, but in Chicago. Not everyone agreed time should be spent on studying the viability of a new school when there were already fewer Jesuits available to help with the current ministries in Chicago. At the same time, however, many Jesuits felt “the greatest need” was not being addressed in the local Jesuit schools. Instead of teaching the poor, these schools had many third and fourth-generation

⁸ Ibid., 31.

⁹ Ibid., 32.

students who were children of very successful businessmen rather than the poor whom the Jesuits had originally planned to educate.¹⁰

Gartland Takes to the Streets of Pilsen

Gartland began his feasibility study by walking the streets of the Pilsen neighborhood and asking questions. To do so, he put himself in an uncomfortable position because he had to talk with gang members who were most often the people hanging around in the streets. It was important for him to figure out what went wrong and why these kids were in gangs, and the best way to do that would mean facing his fears of getting beat up by the gangs and talking with the gang members. He realized when he spoke to these boys that, for the most part, their relationships with the other gang members was the most important thing in their lives. As discussed earlier, when poor children don't have much else to call their own, they rely heavily on their relationships to get them through life. Gartland realized that no matter what gang the kids belonged to; they all seemed to lack a "sense of future."¹¹ Gartland knew this would be an important factor to consider in creating a new school environment.

The parents of these children were excited to hear there could be a new school in the area. They had already been asking the Chicago Public School Board to open another school in the Pilsen/ Little Village area due to overcrowding. As Gartland recalls, "many parents expressed a desire for a school of their own, a school they could understand and

¹⁰ Ibid, 43.

¹¹ Ibid, 46.

one that understood them.”¹² This sense of belonging and being understood goes back to the class differences discussed in a previous chapter. It wasn’t just the classroom education that mattered; it was more than that for these families. They wanted to feel a connection to something and know there were others who were concerned about the future of the children.

Opposition From Other Schools

This doesn’t mean the idea was without opposition. Many area Catholic middle and high school administrators were against the opening of another Catholic school. They were struggling to survive and didn’t want to compete against a new school with a fresh perspective and funding that could make their schools look less appealing. They couldn’t afford to lose students and, as they heard about the ideas behind the new school, the administrators feared they would indeed lose students.¹³ This is a problem echoed throughout the country. Schools are competing for enrollment, and in tough times, it means closing the doors or merging schools if you can’t keep up the enrollment and make ends meet. Rather than making sure the best interest of the children is the highest priority, administrators push to keep their doors open, even if they are failing to educate the students properly.

Having learned a lot by talking to students, parents and administrators of local schools as well as finding out more about the Nativity school network, Gartland put his

¹² Ibid., 47.

¹³ Ibid., 48.

study together and presented the following information to Schaeffer in 3 parts: statistical data, stories to match the names of residents, and recommendations for the school.¹⁴

- Two out of five Hispanic children in the area are poor.
- The Hispanic men have a higher rate of participation in the labor force than non-Hispanics at 78.2% compared to 73.9, yet they are still poor.
- Only 50 percent of the Hispanic adults graduated from high school.
- Ten percent of the Hispanic adults have a high school degree and for Mexican Americans, it goes down to 6.2 percent.
- In the Pilsen/Little Village neighborhoods, only 27 percent of Latinos have graduated from high school.
- In two local public schools, the drops out rates in 1991 were 55 percent and 73.1 percent.
- Almost half of Chicago public school teachers (46 percent) send their own children to private schools.

Gartland explained what he learned by talking with inmates in the county prison as well. Most of the men wanted to be successful, but had no idea what to do or how to reach these goals. These families couldn't afford to send their children to private schools, and the public schools were inadequate at best. When Gartland explained this to Schaeffer, he said a new school would help, but funding would be an issue that needed to be considered since most of these families couldn't afford to pay full tuition. Gartland had eleven ideas for what would make this new school unique and would make it work. There are three that need mentioning. The first is that the new school would have to work with other parish schools already in existence rather than try to replace them or take students from them. Being out front about this would make it easier to get the other parishes to agree to opening another school if they knew their student body wasn't going to shrink dramatically.

¹⁴ Ibid., 52-53.

The second is the importance of parental involvement. He believed adult education and development would be vital to the success of the students in school as well as in the neighborhood. Spirituality should also be encouraged for both parents and students. Lastly, he felt the school should be located in the Pilsen/ Little Village neighborhood and enrollment should only be offered to children from those areas.

Schaeffer loved what he read and moved to the next step of deciding how to fund the school.¹⁵ He called on a colleague and friend, Fr. Ted Munz, SJ, who had an MBA and plenty of experience in social research. He also called on Fr. John Foley, SJ, in 1995, shortly after he had returned from Peru, to help with completing the task of opening this new school. Schaeffer knew that with the experience of teaching the poor in Peru and doing so in Spanish, Foley had a lot to offer. They researched the Nativity models a bit more, but knew the biggest issue would be tuition. Most of the Nativity schools are much smaller since they are middle schools, and therefore their budgets are smaller as well. They can cut corners by having students and parents help keep the school clean rather than hiring a janitorial staff.¹⁶ But this would be too difficult in a larger high school setting. Remember, the staff of WJA brought in volunteers from Georgetown University to help paint the walls of their schools rather than pay their staff for it or contract the job out to another company. There had to be better ways to make ends meet, and the men involved were asked to help create a program that would solve the financial problems.

¹⁵ Ibid., 56-58.

¹⁶ Ibid., 68.

Rick Murray, a real estate developer who had also done work on debt-conversion strategies in Africa and South America, was called in to a meeting with three of the Jesuits involved in the project. Murray realized very quickly that these men really did want to make a difference and had a good understanding of the people they were trying to help, but he also saw they had no idea how to finance such a project and all they did seem to have was a mission statement. As he asked questions to get a better idea of who the students were, he realized although these students were mostly Mexican immigrants, they didn't quite feel Mexican and yet since they didn't look American, they weren't accepted that way either. They didn't fit in their surroundings. He decided to help and agreed to brainstorm some innovative ways to finance the school.¹⁷

It was Murray who concluded that the school needed to have revenue in order to be sustainable. He remembered the internships he had done during high school and how the experience had such a positive effect on his life. He learned more in the office than he did in school. Munz had said earlier that it was important for the students to understand their self-worth, and that's what Murray learned from his internships. The internships would help foster long-term relationships between the students and their employers. Payne believes this is a great way to ensure the students who may not have good role models have resources on the outside world to help them through the emotional aspects of growing up and becoming mature adults.¹⁸ He believed five students could

¹⁷ Ibid., 75-78

¹⁸ Payne, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, 66.

hold down one full-time job, and in exchange for their work, the school would be earning money from the sponsor which would pay for tuition.¹⁹

Although it was originally hoped to be a tuition-free school, the calculations made more sense to have the parents pay \$1,500 per year in tuition since the students would bring in approximately \$3,325 through the internships. The hope was that by having parents pay a little, they would be more involved in their child's education.²⁰ Another way they hoped to get parents involved was through the College Plan. Each student who finished college would be eligible for ten thousand dollars from the school. Financially, a family living in poverty could do a lot with an extra ten thousand dollars and the possibilities for help from their child who would be a recent college graduate. Looking at it from the side of the school, they were hoping to have alumni who were more willing to give back to the school that helped them get to college and pay them for their graduation. Maybe the students would even be willing to let Cristo Rey keep the money if they were already financially stable.²¹

Concessions Made to the Archdiocese

Cristo Rey did have to make some concessions to the Archdiocese of Chicago in order to open the school. They weren't going to enroll freshmen for the first year, they wouldn't accept transfers from other Catholic schools and their entrance exam could not be on the same day as exams for the other Catholic schools in the area. The hope,

¹⁹ Kearney, *The Cristo Rey Story*, 81-84.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 107-108.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 109-110.

Schaeffer told the Archdiocese, was “that this will be a national model for urban Jesuit education.”²²

Curriculum

If Cristo Rey wanted to be a model for education, curriculum needed to be addressed. Judy Murphy, the first principal at the school, had plenty of ideas. She didn’t think a traditional curriculum was best for these students. She knew these children would need to be inspired and understand the importance of learning in order to succeed. Class size as well as a dual-language program would be integral as well. If these students could master two languages, college courses would come easier to them. The longer school days she envisioned would offer more time for the students to master the curriculum. Cristo Rey would make these children know that they belonged there, and they were important to the adults involved in the school.²³

One of the first year teachers at Cristo Rey, Mike Heidkamp, who had also spent time teaching in Peru, said when comparing his students to the middle and upper class societies, “it isn’t that we’re all different. Certain differences are privileged.”²⁴ The students at Cristo Rey had never felt accepted outside their neighborhood. They were not seen as American, but as Mexican or Latino. The color of their skin or the accents when they spoke made them foreigners in their own country. The teachers at Cristo Rey would need to teach these students how to integrate into the larger society and assure them that

²² Ibid, 118-119.

²³ Ibid, 126-128.

²⁴ Ibid, 144.

they were just as good as everyone else. If they could find a common culture between their students and the youth outside the Pilsen/Little Village neighborhoods, the students would feel better about themselves.

The First Day of School

The school opened with an official visit from First Lady Hillary Clinton on August 26, 1996.²⁵ Now the new students would have to be ready for their classroom experience as well as their jobs in the Corporate Internship Program (CIP). They would be following in the footsteps of the Christian Brothers from the early 1900's who had first begun to teach their students a trade and have them work to help pay for their education. These ninety-seven new students needed to learn how to behave in the work place. They had to learn simple things such as how to introduce themselves and shake hands when they went to work. Their cultural norms and languages were not what was expected at their internships, and they needed to learn how to behave and what to expect. Luckily, when the phone started ringing at Cristo Rey the first morning the students were working as interns, the voices on the other end of the line were calling not to complain, but to say thank you for allowing us to have your interns in our office.²⁶

There were plenty of obstacles to cross during the first few years at Cristo Rey. One student had gotten caught stealing from his boss. If any student missed a day of work, he would be fined one hundred dollars.²⁷ This created issues with teachers who

²⁵ Ibid., 151.

²⁶ Ibid., 160,

²⁷ Ibid., 170.

felt a bad message was being sent to the students because they were not fined for missing school, just work. Wasn't school just as important at this point in their academic careers? Some students also lost their jobs because they couldn't handle the work. Luckily for Cristo Rey, when they contacted the sponsors about returning the money since the students wouldn't be working there any longer, not one company would accept the reimbursement. These employers could see the differences being made in the children's lives at Cristo Rey, and they weren't going to be the cause for someone falling through the cracks.

Curriculum challenges continued as well. Financial concerns caused some supporters to question increasing the size of the school, but educators were concerned about class sizes being too large and teachers not having the time to connect with all of their students. An education reform study showed in 2007 that schools with the least amount of dropouts tended to have less than 600 students, and many of the schools with lower dropout rates were independent or Catholic.²⁸ The block scheduling at the school allowed students to spend more time learning one subject and teachers to integrate their lessons more effectively, but it cost 23% more per teacher.²⁹

Cristo Rey also had an Active Learners program. Two teachers worked together for a semester and instead of just lecturing, the students would have much more participation in the class. They would be given a problem or question in a project that

²⁸ Dounay, "Research Sheds Light on the Students Most at Risk of Dropping Out-and how to Keep Students on the 'Graduation Track, 70.

²⁹ Kearney, *The Cristo Rey Story*, 182.

would hopefully teach them to use critical thinking in order to solve the problem. Rather than testing to see what they learned, their capstone project one year was to take a crime scene and do an investigation, and then perform a mock trial with the information learned.³⁰ It wasn't until some of the students left Cristo Rey and returned to local public schools that the administrators realized this program wasn't benefitting the students. Those who left were required to redo their freshman year because the public schools wouldn't accept credit for Active Learning.³¹ If these otherwise failing high schools weren't acknowledging the learning involved in these classes, how would this prepare students for college life?

Venture Philanthropy

The biggest positive change came for Cristo Rey when venture philanthropists saw what good was coming out of the school and decided to help. Cristo Rey was a success story, and the school was getting phone calls from other school systems throughout the country asking how they managed the school and could they share their insight with someone looking to do the same elsewhere. One of its first benefactors, B.J. Cassin, a successful businessman and venture philanthropist. He had watched the deterioration of Catholic schools in America's inner cities and wanted to know how he could help, but he wanted to do more than donate money for scholarships. Fr. Foley was glad to help him figure out how to make a difference. Rather than asking for financial assistance for his school, he decided Cassin's money would be best spent trying to figure

³⁰ Ibid, 205-207.

³¹ Ibid, 241.

out how to help these other people looking to start another Cristo Rey school in inner cities throughout the country.³² Only one day after B.J. Cassin spent time with Fr. Foley and witnessed the Cristo Rey School for himself, he called Fr. Foley to tell him that he and his wife would be starting a foundation with 2 million dollars in order to help Cristo Rey, San Miguel and Nativity networks replicate their schools around the country.³³ That one phone call changed the lives of many inner city children all over America.

Bill and Melinda Gates Join the Reform Effort

May 21, 2003 was a big news day for Cristo Rey schools that were slowly opening in other cities. The newspapers were announcing to the world that the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation was giving a \$9.9 million grant to the Cristo Rey movement. They had already invested in other alternative high schools in hopes of seeing a national increase in graduation rates. This was another step in that process, but they wanted to see what measures were being taken to ensure the financial stability of the Cristo Rey schools since they had struggled to make ends meet during the first several years. The Gates Foundation required the creation of standards by the network to ensure the stability and growth of the schools. As a result, the combined pledge between the Cassin and Gates foundations was \$18.9 million.³⁴ One very important aspect of the standards that the Gates foundation wanted to see was that the Cristo Rey Network schools “would serve

³² Ibid, 265-266.

³³ Ibid, 270.

³⁴ Ibid, 341-343.

the economically disadvantaged.”³⁵ Bill Gates was concerned with boosting the graduation rates in urban areas and he believes the earlier you can get a child on the right education path the better. The problem the Gates foundation saw with the American school system was that it was in essence obsolete. The schools don’t teach the same thing to every student. Some high school students are learning Algebra II while others are learning to balance a checkbook. The schools of the future according to the Gates foundation should be able to prepare all students for college.³⁶ This is what Bill and Melinda Gates as well as B.J. Cassin saw when they walked into the Nativity schools as well as the Cristo Rey network schools.

³⁵ Ibid, 344.

³⁶ Ravitch, *The Death And Life of the Great American School System*, 203-206.

CHAPTER 8

DON BOSCO CRISTO REY, TAKOMA PARK, MD

Don Bosco Cristo Rey High School opened its doors in August, 2007 to one hundred twenty seven freshmen. These students came from all over the Washington, D.C., area, and when they went through the admissions process, it was equally important to know they could follow directions in an office as well as do the work required in a classroom. These students would be working to pay for their tuition, and the risk of losing money from Corporate Work Study sponsors if they failed at work was a good reason to make sure the prospective student was willing and able to take their internship seriously. Most of them qualify for free and reduced price lunches at school. More than half of them come from the District of Columbia, but in total, there are students from 42 zip codes in the metropolitan D.C. area.

The tuition costs for the 2010-2011 school year is \$13,500 per student. Each student will earn \$6,800 through the Corporate Work Study Program (CWSP). The Archdiocese of Washington will give \$4,200 in additional aid through grants and scholarships. That means each family is charged \$2,500 per child in tuition. Unfortunately, most cannot afford the tuition and, almost ninety percent of the students get further financial aid from the school in order to attend.¹ This is another reason why the ability to maintain the internship is vital to the success of the school and therefore a concern for acceptance. According to staff at the school, many of the students are more

¹ Christopher Maloney, interview by author, Bethesda, MD, April 12, 2010.

successful at first in their jobs than they are in the classroom. The confidence they gain at work eventually is seen in class and their academic achievements improve once this occurs.

High schools like Cristo Rey will probably not be known for their success in sports. The work-study program jobs interfere with the ability to attend regular practices and maintain good grades. The school's aim is to prepare the students for college and beyond, so athletics must take a back seat to academics and work.

Importance of Sponsors and Donors

Finding sponsors is an ongoing process. Don Bosco Cristo Rey has been privileged to have supporters volunteering together to find individual donors, corporate sponsors and groups who will offer their time, energy and money to the school. Msgr. John Enzler, the pastor at the Shrine Of The Most Blessed Sacrament in Washington, D.C., is one of those individuals who believes in what the school is doing and spends countless hours helping to give the students the best educational experience possible. He has been involved with many organizations trying to find new ways to help needy families afford the Catholic education they want for their children. His work at the Shepherd Foundation, which raises scholarship money for financially strapped students in the Archdiocese, is well known in the Catholic circle.

His willingness to work every week with a handful of other Don Bosco supporters has made it possible for more students to attend the school each year. They spend time looking for new donors as well as looking for corporate sponsors. According to Fr. John, the school was down almost 10 internship jobs in the past two years and when we spoke

at the end of the 2009 school year, they were looking to fill three open slots for the following academic year.

The school website lists twenty-one corporate work-study sponsors for the 2010-2011 school year. One sponsor helping both the local Don Bosco Cristo Rey School and also helping on the national level is Georgetown University. Not only has the University employed Cristo Rey students in the work-study program, but thanks to both the President of Georgetown, John J. DiGioia, and Senior Vice President for Strategic Development, Daniel Porterfield, the school has taken on a very active role in helping the Cristo Rey graduates prepare and attend schools such as Georgetown University.

Dr. Porterfield provided a compilation of ways Georgetown is helping to strengthen its relationship to the schools. His breakdown gives an insight into how Georgetown hopes to make a difference for the Cristo Rey communities all over the country.

Support for the Network of Schools:

- Spring of 2010- 10 students from Cristo Rey Network schools were accepted to Georgetown.
- 21 Cristo Rey graduates were enrolled for the 2010-2011 academic year at Georgetown.
- May 2010- Georgetown graduated its first 2 Cristo Rey alumni.

Support for the Don Bosco Cristo Rey School in Washington, D.C.:

- 2010-2011- Georgetown employed 16 students, which is a \$120,000 business relationship with the school.
- 2010 Georgetown University graduate Karina Ramirez (CR of Chicago '06) developed a tutoring program that helps Cristo Rey students receive tutoring by current Georgetown undergraduates.

- Spring 2009- Georgetown University Baker Scholars hosted 30 of Don Bosco's top students for SAT prep, lectures, and regular tutoring sessions all on Georgetown's campus.
- A Georgetown alumni and teacher at Don Bosco Cristo Rey brought the entire school to campus to learn more about college, visit classes, get a tour and have lunch.

Support for other Cristo Rey schools in the network:

- 2010 Georgetown graduates- Four of them started as two-year, full-time volunteers in the Boston, Chicago and New York schools.
- About 9 Georgetown alumni have served in the same two-year program listed above.

Dr. DiGioia sees “working for social justice and expanding access to high quality education as two pillars of Georgetown’s Catholic and Jesuit identity.”² As mentioned earlier, the Catholic Church sees education as a form of social justice. The Archdiocese of Washington made the choice to convert parish schools into charter schools in order to ensure its students could continue to receive the education they were getting at the parish schools. It is not about educating the Catholics in society: it is about helping children gain access to quality education they all deserve.

Dan Porterfield

Dr. Porterfield became intrigued with the Cristo Rey schools when he visited the original school in the Pilsen neighborhood after one of his own students took a job with Fr. Foley. Porterfield described what he saw.

I saw this one school as an element of some of the great narratives of our time—the migration drama, the power of education, the dignity of labor, the American Dream. I could feel that the school was powered by the Jesuits’ calling to help

² Daniel Porterfield, Ph.D., *Annual Meeting Cristo Rey Network*, (April 23, 2008).

souls and societies, which is part of the Church's conviction that every single person has equal value and dignity before God.

The American Dream is coming alive in the halls of these schools. According to Porterfield, when a student from a school like Cristo Rey enters a college like Georgetown or any other elite University, they are given amazing opportunities to succeed beyond their dreams. He believes "kids from minority communities disproportionately use an elite education as a mode of empowerment not just for themselves, but also for their communities."³ Many of them struggle in college because they miss home and they realize who they are on the inside is not always who they seem to be on the outside. This is especially true when they are living on campus at an elite school where most other students have no idea what obstacles they overcame to even graduate from high school. This is one reason Dr. Porterfield expressed at the 2009 spring conference for the Cristo Rey Network that college counseling has to be strengthened in each school in order to ensure the students are fully prepared for the college entrance process, whether dealing with SAT prep, college essays, making sure everything is mailed in on time, college visits as well as helping with the Free Application For Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form. Students at Cristo Rey schools should be getting the same information and guidance as students at the top college prep schools in the country.⁴

³ Ibid.

⁴ Daniel Porterfield, Ph.D., *Cristo Rey Network Spring Conference* (Cambridge, MA: March 20, 2009).

According to Porterfield, if we look at the 50 largest urban school districts in America, only seven percent of the students at these institutions will earn a college degree.⁵ Cristo Rey schools are in these school districts and their goal is to have 100 percent of the students earn a college degree. Their students are given high expectations from the first day they enter the school and have vast support systems in place to ensure they will succeed if they stay in school and work to meet the expectations of their peers, teachers, internship bosses, as well as the expectations of success they learn to place on themselves.

⁵ Ibid.

CHAPTER 9

OTHER EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS

Payne describes four support systems that, if placed in schools, will increase the likelihood of success for the students. Since many of the children in urban schools have obstacles such as immigrant or absent parents, help with homework can be hard to find. According to Payne, when a school has homework support, the student benefits from the after school help. Remember that both the Cristo Rey and NativityMiguel schools have mandatory after school tutoring and homework time. Payne also believes supplemental computer based reading programs in schools help by testing students on comprehension because many children have parents or guardians with poor literacy skills and may not be able to help with reading outside the class. A third type of support Payne emphasizes is used in both the NativityMiguel model schools as well as the Cristo Rey network. Both networks believe in teaching the children coping strategies in order to increase self-confidence. Advisors and graduate support personnel can spend time outside of the class helping the students learn the coping mechanisms that will help in all aspects of their lives.

Finally, parent training is also important to Payne. Some schools in Illinois sent videos home to parents with a class overview, expectations and a general introduction to the year ahead. The parents were told how they could get in touch with the teachers and the school.¹ Since entertainment, as we have seen, is very important to the poor, the state of Illinois believed most families would have VCR's, a video tape would thus be an

¹ Payne, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, 71-73.

easier way to get the parents to know what was happening at school since many of them work several jobs or have other obstacles in the way of their visiting the school for back to school night.

Another factor may also contribute to the success of the schools. During the early part of the 1980's, sociologist James Coleman discussed his finding that Catholic schools usually found more success than public schools in educating minority children. Ravitch explains that most Catholic schools cannot afford to have multiple tracks and so each child is expected to do the same work. Therefore, minority students are more likely to take advanced courses than their peers in a public school and the likelihood they will attend college and graduate school is therefore much higher than the public school students in the same neighborhoods.²

Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP)

David Levin and Michael Feinberg created the KIPP schools in 1994 after they had worked in the Teach For America program. Most of the schools are for middle school students, and they require some Saturday school, longer days of up to 9 ½ hours, as well as a 3-week summer school for their students.³

Michael Feinberg runs the KIPP School in Houston. His students have a mandatory 2 or more hours of homework each day. Most of the children attending the school qualify for free lunch and 90% are Hispanic. The goal is for every student to attend college and they push liberal arts courses to prepare the children. His students

² Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, 127.

³ *Ibid.*, 135.

spend on average 67% more time in class than their peers in public school. The teachers are free to teach courses as they wish, but they are accountable for the success of each student. The teachers also have toll free cell phone numbers so they may be reached by students or parents 24 hours a day. The faculty is known to visit the homes of their students and to help the families; the school also holds workshops on matters such as home ownership.⁴

The KIPP School in the Bronx, NY, is the highest performing school in its district, and is run by David Levin. The school shares the same building as P.S. 151, which happens to be the lowest performing school in the district. Levin believes music is very important, and every student must participate in orchestra. Levin believes it would be too hard to replicate his school on a national level because the pool of teachers who can work at this type of school is much too small.⁵

More Successful Programs Nationwide

Samuel Casey Carter puts The Frederick Douglas Academy in the same group of successful stories as he does the above-mentioned KIPP schools. The Frederick Douglas Academy is a 7th-12th-grade college preparatory school in New York. The classes run from 7:30 am until 8pm weekdays and from 9-4pm on Saturdays when students are taking AP classes or studying for the SAT. College visits are mandatory for the students

⁴ Samuel Casey Carter, *No Excuses: Lessons from 21 High-Performing High-Poverty Schools*. (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 2000). 93-95.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

as well as one year of music theory.⁶ This comes at a time when so many public schools are being forced to end their music and arts programs due to budget cuts, yet these schools find the arts so important that they are mandatory for each student.

The Cornerstone Schools Association is in Detroit. Its “Christ-centered” school is from Pre-k through 8th grade. It is also a liberal arts school with an 11-month school year as well as a supervised study hall. Foreign language courses begin in kindergarten. Ernestine Sanders, the head of the school, believes it is extremely important to get the children on track at a very young age and enforce high expectations from the very beginning. Although many students are poor, every family must pay something for tuition. They have “partners” who will sponsor a child by paying \$2000 per year and also agreeing to meet with their sponsored child four times during the school year.⁷ Again we see the importance of mentors providing support as well as children being given high expectations in school no matter how old or how smart they are.

Carter also discusses George Washington Elementary School in Chicago. Approximately 76 percent of students come from low-income households. This public school, run by Craig Ergang, spends money on the arts because Ergang thinks many students succeed because of taking classes in the arts. There is a “big correlation between musical proficiency and increased reading ability,” according to Ergang.⁸ His teachers also put in longer school days than expected at other public schools and therefore are

⁶ Ibid., 81-83.

⁷ Ibid., 63-66.

⁸ Ibid., 58-59.

available for students and parents when help is needed. According to Carter, a great way to ensure success in later school years is to ensure strict measures of accountability for parents when their children start school. When you have strong school leadership, it is easier to have a higher rate of parental participation in academic affairs since the parents will see from the first day their children enter school that education is to be taken seriously and their participation is paramount to the success of the children.⁹

Paying for Grades

Roland Fryer, Jr., an economic professor at Harvard University, created the largest financial incentive study for students, and it is also considered to be one of the most thorough studies ever done on an education policy to date because he had 17 people working on the study with a budget of \$6 million.¹⁰ He chose schools in Chicago, Dallas, Washington, D.C., and New York, and the schools paid for either good grades, how much reading was done, class attendance, or staying out of fights in school.¹¹

One hundred forty three schools were in the study and they were divided so approximately half would have to take 10 routine tests during the year and be paid for their performance while the other half was considered the control group and received no payments. Below is a table taken from *Time* magazine showing what each city tried and how the students reacted to the study.¹²

⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁰ Amanda Ripley, "Is Cash The Answer?" *Time*, April 19, 2010, 40-47.

¹¹ Ibid., 42.

¹² Ibid., 44-45.

Table 1.3 Is Cash The Answer?

	Dallas	Chicago	Washington	New York City
What students did for payment	Reading	Grades	5 metrics, including good behavior and attendance	Test scores
Grades of students	2 nd graders	9 th graders	6 th -8 th graders	4 th and 7 th graders
How much money paid	\$2 per book	\$50 for A's \$35 for B's \$20 for C's	Up to \$100 every 2 weeks	\$25 (4 th graders) to \$50 (7 th graders) per each test
Average money students earned	\$13.81	\$695.61	\$532.85	\$139.43 (4 th graders) \$231.55 (7 th graders)
Size of study	1,780 from 22 schools	4,396 from 20 schools	3,495 from 17 schools	8,320 from 63 schools
Results	Saw dramatic increase in reading scores when paying children to read	Slightly better grades, fewer cut classes, but no increase in standardized test scores	The rewarding of better behavior made some positive difference in reading skills	No measureable change in grades or learning for students

Source: Data adapted from Amanda Ripley, Is Cash The Answer? *Time*, April 19, 2010.

Some of the Washington, D.C., results showed the boys did better than the girls, and the students who gained the most tended to be those who were considered the hardest to reach normally. Those students who were considered behavioral problems in the class gained the most which was comparable to 5 extra months of school. Dallas showed dramatic differences in reading for the children who were paid to read, but these children were very young and therefore more eager to learn than older students who have already been let down by the school system. The students in New York, who were paid for their good test scores, struggled to find ways to make more money. When asked about ways

they could've improved test scores, not one of the children mentioned staying after school and getting extra help.¹³

KIPP has been paying students for success in their schools for the past 15 years. The students are paid with “money” to be used at the school store. The children get paid for attendance, attitude, participation and other similar controllable actions. The schools have found that paying students each week works better than waiting longer between payouts. Money isn't the only payment. Older students can earn the privilege of listening to their iPods during lunch. The hope is to motivate the students to see the intrinsic value of hard work and a good attitude.¹⁴

¹³ Ibid, 45-46.

¹⁴ Ibid, 46-47.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The U.S. Department of Education released a report in 2001 listing seven traits seen in high-performing schools nationwide. The characteristics are similar to those found in many of the schools discussed in the paper, but they unlike those in most urban public schools and there lies the first obstacle in education reform. How can schools be expected to improve if the administrators aren't even capable of implementing the small list of traits for success? The list includes the following:¹

1. Assessment and curriculum require high standards of student achievement.
2. Administrators and teachers must be accountable for meeting the goals listed by the schools.
3. Orderly and safe environments are necessary in order for students to concentrate on academics.
4. Maximum time is spent on class instruction.
5. Both administrators and teachers have high-quality professional development at their disposal and are committed to the school philosophy.
6. High level of parent and community involvement.
7. Each school has the flexibility necessary to create its own curriculum and to make both personnel and financial decisions.

The problem with the list is simple; most urban public school systems do lack the means necessary to fulfill any of the requirements listed. The schools discussed in the paper that were considered to be successfully preparing students for academic success in urban areas can and do follow the characteristics, but most of them are also not public schools being run by the local, state or national governments.

¹ Carla Thomas McClure, "Report offers data, insight direction: To improve schools, improve the systems that support them," *Transformation*, (Spring, 2001):7.

The documentary film, *Waiting for 'Superman,'* by Davis Guggenheim expresses what is wrong with our public schools and where changes need to be made in order to improve the outlook of our national education system.² The following information is all discussed in the documentary film. Many people believe poor neighborhoods breed failing schools, but Steve Barr, founder of the Green Dot Public Charter Schools in Los Angeles, CA, believes just the opposite. He feels it is because the schools fail the children that the neighborhoods cannot break the cycle of poverty and therefore the infrastructure is in a constant state of decline.

Washington, D.C. is one city discussed in the film. *The Washington Post* reporter, Jay Mathews aptly called the D.C. public schools academic sinkholes before Michelle Rhee took over. Unfortunately, cities all over the country have similar reputations. Although the U.S. Department of Education's list of successful school characteristics names individual school flexibility, this is also seen as a major problem with education reform today. Since states are allowed to set their own standards, there are more than fourteen thousand autonomous school boards in America. How can we expect all of them to agree to what is best for the students and what are the chances they will all agree on what is considered a passing score on standardized tests? The bureaucrats, not the local schools are the ones with the flexibility.

Guggenheim points out in the movie that if a student fails a test in Longmeadow, Massachusetts, he can drive one mile to Enfield, Connecticut, where the same test score

² Davis Guggenheim and Billy Kimball. "Waiting For 'Superman.'" DVD. Directed by Davis Guggenheim (Los Angeles, CA: Paramount Vantage, 2010).

would give him a passing grade. This is happening everywhere. Not only are their discrepancies in the scale for passing the standardized tests, some teachers are teaching to the test while others are not teaching at all. The difference between a good and bad teacher can make the difference of the equivalent of 1 year of academic learning for a student. Students with high performing teachers progress at a pace three times faster than a lower performing teacher. These teachers cost the same to the school, and it is sometimes next to impossible to get rid of bad teachers because of tenure.³

Tenure

The process of obtaining tenure is a grueling one for most college professors and they are not guaranteed to receive it. Public school teachers can automatically receive tenure and once they do, it is extremely difficult for them to lose their job, thanks to the strength of the teachers unions in America. Some supporters of tenure believe the teaching profession is self-selective because within the first 5 years of becoming a teacher, approximately 40-50% of teachers leave the profession on their own.⁴ The argument could be that the teachers who are still there after 5 years are the better teachers or the ones who really want to teach. But it could also be that many teachers stay just because they know how hard it is to be fired at this point and don't care what impact they have on their students because they have job security.

Jason Kamras won the National Teacher of the Year award in 2005 and is now running the teacher quality control program in Washington, D.C.. He has to follow the

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, 177.

Professional Evaluation Process for Teachers (PEPAP) if he wants to replace a bad teacher. There are 23 steps he must follow including conferences at the beginning of the year, weekly assistance to the teacher, 3 observations and then post observation conferences within 90 days of the class visits. This must be done by January or wait until the following year to try again. The pile of forms to be filled out is tall and if one date is missed, the teacher can file a grievance. It is difficult to change any of these requirements due to the power of the contracts with the teacher's unions. The National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) are the largest campaign contributors in the country. They have given over \$55 million over the last 20 years to both Republicans and Democrats who support their beliefs. The democrats on the national level received over 90% of the contributions, but at the state level the Republican Party is tied to the teacher's unions.

Instead of being able to fire the bad teachers, many districts end the school year with rituals like the "dance of the lemons," "pass the trash," or the "turkey trot." These are all different terms to explain the process of passing bad teachers off from one school to the next in hopes that the teacher a school gains is better than the bad teacher just traded.

The New York Public School system has a "rubber room" which is where tenured teachers are sent as they await disciplinary hearings for things such as sex abuse, incompetence or even excessive lateness. At the time the movie was made, there were 600 teachers who spent 7 hours a day in this "room" while receiving full pay and benefits. The average teacher sent to the rubber room was there for 3 years before their

case would be heard. The cost to the city of New York is over \$100 million each year for these teachers. This is money that could be spent on improving infrastructure, professional development for teachers, new materials for students, lengthening the school day or year, and so much more. Each year 1 of every 57 doctors will lose their medical license, 1 in 97 attorneys will lose their law license, and only 1 in 2500 teachers will lose their teaching credentials.

Carter believes it is just too hard on a nationwide scale to get rid of bad teachers.⁵ The statistics show he is right when we compare other professional careers to teaching. Ravitch, however, believes accountability of teachers is not the answer and therefore firing teachers whose students receive low test scores is not the response she wants to see. She thinks the goal should be to offer more support in improving schools rather than ruining the lives and careers of these teachers.⁶ According to Ravitch, there is also no known correlation between academic achievement and unionism. She believes it is more likely economics than the unions that create poor school systems.⁷ While this may be true that the poorest neighborhoods tend to have the worst schools, you cannot forget that at these schools there are often teachers who simply refuse to teach. Howard Fuller, the former Superintendent of Schools in Milwaukee, had students take hidden cameras into class in 1991. The videos showed kids playing craps in the back of class and teachers sitting at their desks reading the paper rather than instructing the students in any way

⁵ Carter, *No Excuses*, 22.

⁶ Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the American School System*, 165.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 175.

possible.⁸ If there is no accountability, why should the teachers try and teach when the conditions in the classroom are poor at best?

This is where Catholic schools have the upper hand. When a school has the ability to get rid of bad students, those who stay in class will probably have better test scores. Many charter schools and Catholic schools hold lotteries because the waiting lists for entry into the schools are so long. This is not the case in the urban public school districts. The majority of those children have no choice what school to attend. Their parents may know the school is a dropout factory, but it is the only school in the neighborhood, so they must take their chances and hope for the best.

We as a nation have to step back and decide what we mean by a “good education.” Do we want the highest test scores, do we expect or just hope our children will master basic skills in Math, Reading and Science? Does character or morality have a place in schools? These may seem like basic questions, but often critics of our school systems cannot even agree on what the foundation for a good education is in America. Some people want to do away with the arts in school while others believe the arts are extremely important in creating a well-rounded individual, or they believe music is the key to mathematical success and understanding.

Another issue is that each time a new public charter or private school is opened, the better children get siphoned away from the local public schools and therefore the test scores will be lower because the caliber of the students is not as high as the charter and private institutions. This may be true, but is it fair to expect families to keep their

⁸ Guggenheim, “Waiting for Superman.”

children in failing schools simply because they live in that neighborhood or should they have a choice as to where their children are educated?

Standards should be set at a national level and each school should be held up to those standards. There is no reason why a student who fails the standardized test in one state could go to another and, while receiving the same grade, have a passing score. The University of Michigan released a study in 2003 that stated almost 18% of the students in the study who dropped out of high school had not taken Math in the first 2 years of high school.⁹ National standards should be set to include how many years of each subject are needed in order to graduate. Ravitch show that when *A Nation At Risk* came out while Reagan was President in office, the list of the “Five new Basics” was created. Each high school student should have to take 4 years of English, 3 years of Math, 3 years of Science, 3 years of Social Studies, ½ year of computer science and those on a college prep track should also take 2 years of a foreign language.¹⁰ High school is there to educate the youth and give them the skills necessary to find a job and support themselves in the future. What are we teaching the students when we only expect the minimum from them? Why allow students to attend high school without expecting them to take academic courses in Reading, Math and Science but rather allow them to move on to the next year of their education without making sure they are proficient in these subjects?

The talk of education reform is endless. Nobody can agree on how to change our schools in order to best benefit the students. There need to be more accurate ways of

⁹ Dounay, 5.

¹⁰ Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the American School System*, 26.

tracking the success or failure of our children. Just as we are given social security numbers, why can't each student receive an educational ID number so they can be tracked no matter how many schools they attend or how many states they live in during their academic career? Enrollment information in many public schools is incomplete, and it is hard to collect data on a student who has moved through many schools to see what courses were taken and whether or not the student was successful. Payne suggests allowing students to stay with teachers for more than 2 years to try and ensure continuity in teaching methods and also giving teachers and students an opportunity to form closer bonds with each other.¹¹

The down side to this idea is if the students are forced to be with bad teachers for a few years they can be hurt even more by the system. It has already been mentioned that teachers are both the cause of low performance as well as the cure for it. Administrators must ensure they are hiring and keeping the most qualified teachers. This does not always mean they should hire only teachers with education degrees; they must invest time and money into teacher development programs to continually allow for professional growth. Many great teachers have come into the job as their second career. They bring with them a knowledge that is different from what a teacher in training learns, but at the same time it can be very beneficial in the classroom. Teacher credentials should not outweigh teacher effectiveness in schools.¹² No matter how they came to a career in

¹¹ Payne, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, 66-67.

¹² Carter, *No Excuses*, 20.

teaching, these individuals have to take responsibility, risks and initiative for their students as well as for themselves.¹³ They have to be willing to help each other maintain an academic setting that is filled with mutual respect, understanding and high expectations.

What Makes Cristo Rey and WJA Different?

When a school administrator has freedom and flexibility to change curriculum, fire poor performing teachers or to hire teachers who many not have a teaching degree, they have an advantage over the administrator who must follow the same path as other schools in their district, even if the school environment is completely different. The teachers at schools like Cristo Rey and WJA are there because they have bought into the idea of quality education for every student who walks through the doors of the school. They believe each child can and should be held to the highest expectations, and they are willing to go the extra mile to help each student successfully maneuver through their academic courses as well as their life outside the school grounds.

These schools can and do cap their enrollment to ensure there is enough money available for each child to receive the best education possible. The staff is constantly working with donors to bring in more funds and to help the teachers with professional development on a regular basis just as the student is always given the opportunity for educational growth. Teachers are often paid very well because the schools are aware of the impact a high quality teacher can make on a child. Nationally, the enrollment in Catholic schools has dipped over 50% in the last forty years due to school closings. Most

¹³ Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the American School System*, 39.

of the closures have occurred in the inner cities where parents struggle to find good schools for their children to attend. If this continues, the nearly 900,000 kids in these cities will be forced to go to failing public schools.¹⁴

Those numbers are daunting, because rapid growth of schools such as WJA or Cristo Rey is not feasible. Maybe we can expect to eventually see one of these schools in most of our inner cities across the country, but it will take time, money and plenty of effort on the part of venture philanthropists, corporations, and the countless individuals who make these schools the successful places they are today. If public schools want to compete with these schools, they will have to make dramatic changes in curriculum and expectations of every student and teacher involved. Successful schools do not shut their doors at 3 o'clock each afternoon. The school day and school year are much longer and the demands on all those involved are greater. Teachers are given some flexibility in the classroom, but at the same time they are held accountable for their actions and their teaching methods. Parents are also expected to play an active role in educating their child. This doesn't mean they have to be able to help do homework; it means they must make sure their child is ready and willing to do what it takes to learn the required material and cooperate with the school to ensure their children are working to their potential each day. This in itself is an almost insurmountable expectation for many low-income families who are struggling to survive in this economy and for so many public schools that lack the materials necessary to provide students with a safe and suitable place to learn. But it does not mean there is no hope for improvement.

¹⁴ Smarick, *Catholic Schools Become Charter Schools*, 1.

The question that must be asked of the 2 teachers unions mentioned earlier and of the government is whether or not they are putting the best interest of the children first. We cannot continue to keep allowing bad teachers to stay simply because they have been teachers for many years, but at the same time we must ensure these older teachers don't lose their jobs because the newer teachers will earn less and therefore free up money for the school. If we cannot afford to pay teachers competitive salaries, can we offer them assistance with housing in order to bring better teachers to the schools that need them most. Michelle Rhee tried in 2008 to alleviate the tenure and pay issues by offering the district teachers an opportunity to almost double their salary if they agreed to give up tenure and take the risk of losing their jobs if their students failed to meet the minimum standards on tests.¹⁵ Of course, the teachers union involved felt this was undermining education. As Michelle Rhee stated in *Waiting for Superman*, educating our children is a privilege and not a right for those who have held the job for more than a few years.

The Catholic Church has had to change its path many times when trying to educate its followers. During the early years, the Church wanted to spread the word of Christianity to as many people as possible. They also went on to educate the less fortunate while providing a safe place for children of immigrant parents. In the past several years, the Church has closed the doors of many parish schools due to financial concerns and has begun to convert their financially stressed schools into charter schools in order to gain financial help from the government and from other outside sources. After all, although the Church wants to teach their parishioners to follow Christ, they must also

¹⁵ Guggenheim, "Waiting for Superman."

understand that social justice is about helping the poor, no matter who they are or what they believe, because that is what Jesus did. Schools such as WJA and Don Bosco Cristo Rey are doing just that. They are asking for help from both sectarian and religious groups to ensure the best education for the students who wish to be educated at their schools. When our nation agrees that equality of education should be guaranteed to all individuals, we won't need to put as much hope on schools such as WJA or Don Bosco Cristo Rey to make the difference in our inner cities. Until then, these schools will continue to outscore our public schools on national tests, but they will only be helping a small number of children who are lucky enough to be enrolled.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alliance for Excellent Education. *Alliance Calls For National Movement to Ensure Basic Educational Rights For All Children*. Washington, DC. May 5, 2003. http://www.all4ed.org/press_room/press_releases/05152003 (accessed, August 12, 2010).
- Brown, Dorothy M., and Elizabeth McKeown. *The Poor Belong to Us: Catholic Charities and American Welfare*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Carter, Samuel Casey. *No Excuses: Lessons from 21 High-Performing High-Poverty Schools*. Washington: The Heritage Foundation, 2000.
- _____. *On Purpose: How Great School Cultures Form Strong Character*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin, 2011.
- Cristo Rey Network. *Transformed: Cristo Rey Network Annual Report 2010*. (Chicago: Cristo Rey Network, 2010).
- Dounay, Jennifer. "Research Sheds Light on the Students Most at Risk of Dropping Out-and how to Keep Students on the Graduation Track." *The Progress of Education Reform* 2007 8, no. 1 (July 2007): 5.
- Fenzel, L. Mickey, and Rosalind H. Monteith. "Successful Alternative Middle Schools For Urban Minority Children: A Study of Nativity Schools." *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk* 13 (2008): 381-401.
- Finn, J.D., and D.A. Rock. "Academic Success Among Students At Risk For School Failure." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 82 (1997): 221-234.
- Guggenheim, Davis, and Billy Kimball. *Waiting for Superman*. DVD Directed by Davis Guggenheim. Los Angeles, CA: Paramount Vantage, 2010.
- Hernandez, Javier C. "Secular Education, Catholic Views." *The New York Times*, March 9, 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/09/nyregion/09charter.html> (Accessed September 17, 2010).
- Kearney, G.R. *The Cristo Rey Story: More Than A Dream, How One School's Vision Is Changing The World*. Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008.
- Kellmeyer, Steve. *Designed to Fail: Catholic Education in America*. Peoria: Bridegroom Press, 2005.

- McClure, Carla Thomas. "Report offers data, insight direction: To improve schools, Improve the systems that support them." *Transformation* (Spring 2010): 7.
- Meyer, Peter. "Independent Networks, NativityMiguel and Cristo Rey." The Fordham Institute.
http://www.setonpartners.org/userfiles/file/catholic_schools_08.pdf (Accessed September 12, 2010): 56-70.
- Murray, William. "Nativity School Model Being Replicated." The Heartland Institute,
http://www.heartland.org/schoolreform-news.org/Article/9384/Nativity_School_Model_Being_Replicated.html
 (Accessed June 23, 2010).
- National Catholic Education Association. "A Brief Overview of Catholic Schools America." National Catholic Education Association.
<http://www.ncea.org/about/HistoricalOverviewOfCatholicSchoolsinAmerica.asp>
 (Accessed July 10, 2010).
- National Center for Education Statistics. "State Education Data Profiles." U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences.
<http://nces.ed.gov/programs/stateprofiles/> (Accessed June 5, 2010).
- Payne, Ruby K. *A Framework For Understanding Poverty*. Highlands: aha! Process, 2005.
- Ravitch, Diane. *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing And Choice Are Undermining Education*. New York: Basic Books, 2010.
- _____. *Left Back: A Century of Battles Over School Reform*. New York: Touchstone, 2000.
- Ripley, Amanda. "Is Cash The Answer?" *Time*. April 19, 2010.
- Smarick, Andy. *Catholic Schools Become Charter Schools: Lessons From the Washington Experience*. Washington: Seton Educational Partners, 2010.
- Viebeck, Elise. "Save D.C's Catholic Schools." Black Alliance for Educational Options.
http://baeo.org/news?news_id=762 (accessed August 27, 2010).
- Washington Jesuit Academy. "Opening Doors To the Future."
<http://www.raffertyweiss.com/educational-video-production/index.html>
 (Accessed March 5, 2011).

Weaver, Ann. "Opportunity Scholarship Students Urge Congress to Reauthorize Program." *The Catholic Standard*, <http://www.catholicstandard.com/main.asp?SectionID=2&SubsectionID=21&ArticleID=441>. (accessed March 1, 2011).

Weis, Suzanne. "Research Sheds New Light on the Hispanic-White Achievement Gap." *The Progress of Education Reform 2004* 6, no. 3 (August 2004): 3.

Whitaker, Bill. "2009-2010 Annual Report." Washington Jesuit Academy.