



President's Newsletter

February 12, 2019

On Wednesday, January 29th, President John McConnell addressed leadership partners of the school at a special event, The State of the School:

Good evening, and welcome to Cristo Rey for our special State of the School address and CEO reception. Tonight, this group includes not only our Work-Study Partners, but also a cross section of the collaborators that make the miracle of Cristo Rey possible: our most generous benefactors, Scholarship Partners, Board Members and other important partners like Temple University.

As most of you know, the other 36 Cristo Rey schools throughout the USA call themselves "The School that Works." And now, after eight years of "starting-up," I believe that we have earned that label.

Today, 513 students are enrolled in Cristo Rey Philadelphia; and they are nurtured and challenged by a talented team of mission-driven faculty and staff. We have finally moved into our permanent, new home – and it's all paid for!

Most importantly, about 300 of our graduates are in college today. As most of you know, 100% of our graduates have been admitted to a four-year college; 97% of them matriculate, and about 82% of them are currently persisting in college towards graduation. In May of this year, about 45 students from our first graduating class will graduate from college after four years, and we expect about 70% of that class to graduate in six years.

One student from our first graduating class has already graduated from college – one semester ahead of his class. And he has already begun his career in a full-time job in cyber security at Comcast.

Some of you know Johnathon to be a hardworking and ambitious young man. Many people like to call him extraordinary. We are all very proud of Johnathon. I agree that he is hardworking and ambitious. He is also optimistic and engaging. But that doesn't make him more extraordinary than many of his peers in the city.

Johnathon is successful because he wants it – but they all want to be successful! What was extraordinary for Johnathon were the opportunities that he took advantage of: scholarships from people like you, internships and summer jobs and mentors at Comcast.

Johnathon took advantage of opportunities that aren't available to other ordinary kids in Philadelphia.

In 2012, he was one of about 40,000 disadvantaged teenagers in Philadelphia who have little to no access to a quality college-prep high school education.

Think about that! Think about Citizens Bank Park filled with teenagers who want to be successful, but have almost no access to a quality college prep high school! So they know, even at 14 years of age, that they probably won't go to college, and they won't enjoy the advantages that a college degree provides.

Is this the kind of community we want to live in? Can we really afford to live in a community that ignores this catastrophe year after year? Our current system of

education wastes human potential and perpetuates generational poverty. None of us escape the consequences; living amidst the injustice of poverty dehumanizes all of us.

So, what does Cristo Rey have to offer for solving this enormous community problem? Some might say, “Not much! We are just one little school in North Philadelphia, and we only graduate about 120 seniors each year. And the Cristo Rey idea is all based on a work-study program that isn’t scalable.”

But I believe that is a misunderstanding of what makes us “the school that works,” and if we dig deeper, we see strategies and methods employed at Cristo Rey that can work anywhere. And those strategies go way beyond a work-study program.

We don’t claim any ownership of these strategies. None of them were invented here; all of them are taught in the School of Education at The University of Pennsylvania and all of the best graduate schools of education.

Here are some examples:

1. Cura personalis: We want our students to recognize and realize their full potential, and that means we must nurture all of the dimensions of growth that they need – not just academic growth in the classroom. So, we invest aggressively in staff and services to support our students’ physical and mental health, fitness, nutrition, safety, mindfulness and spirituality.
2. Our curriculum is focused on the modern needs of our unique students, such as communication skills, interpersonal skills, business literacy, financial literacy, philosophy (how to think for yourself, how to discern the truth, how to make good choices).
3. We employ the Principle of Subsidiarity in the way we make decisions in the school. Essentially, that means the decision-makers should be those closest to the issues of the decision. So, for example, my role in academics is to hire the best, most qualified Principal, but then to leave the responsibilities of academic decision-making to her.
4. Our teachers all use deliberate and practiced methods for student engagement in every classroom. Classroom work is student-centered. More on that from our Principal in a few minutes.
5. Our #1 hiring criteria for every role in the school is what we call “gets the mission.” Our mission is the success of the students, not the success of the adults. Adults at Cristo Rey need to genuinely love the students and put their interests first. That’s easy to say, but often hard to do.
6. Our #1 decision-making criteria for any kind of decision is: “what’s best for students?”

There is no single, silver bullet to the problem of education in Philadelphia, but if I had to pick a foundational Cristo Rey strategy for a school that works, it wouldn’t be the work-study program; it would be a strategy based on “what’s best for students.”

We are pleased with our first eight years, but we are not satisfied. We have exciting opportunities in our sights for improvement and for growth.

We know that we can improve and grow if we can keep this miraculous collaboration with you together. So, we thank you for all that you have done and, in advance, for sticking with us into our next chapter!



Celebrating our First College Graduate!

[Read the full story](#) on Johnathan, Cristo Rey Philadelphia's first college graduate, on Generocity, the online news platform for "good news" in Philadelphia.

Johnathan has come full circle since Cristo Rey, receiving a full-time job offer as a cyber security engineer at Comcast, where he worked for three years during high school in the work-study program.

