

Bridges for Schools

Building Welcoming, Diverse, and Engaged
School Communities



CRIMSONBRIDGE
FOUNDATION

About Crimsonbridge

The Crimsonbridge Foundation is an entrepreneurial philanthropic organization that builds bridges of collaboration to create transformative solutions to improve the lives of our nation's youth and families. We innovate and strategically invest in education, leadership development, environmental sustainability, and capacity building programs to help America's youth and nonprofit organizations achieve their potential.

"We envision thriving Catholic schools and parishes where families feel welcomed and engaged as part of a broader community. By working together as partners, we can ensure that Catholic schools remain a revitalizing force for the Church and beacons of hope for our country."

– **GABRIELA SMITH**, Founder and Executive Chair, Crimsonbridge Foundation



"Bridges for Schools provides a framework of research-based strategies for welcoming and engaging students and families, and each school makes those ideas a reality in a way that aligns with their mission and needs. It has been a privilege collaborating with Catholic school leaders who are committed to building strong communities where every family feels valued and respected, and diversity is celebrated as a gift."

– **CAITLIN MAYO**, Senior Program Officer, Crimsonbridge Foundation

"We must urgently redouble our efforts to better reach Hispanic/Latino families and to welcome, embrace, mentor, and form Hispanic/Latino young people in [Catholic schools, colleges, and universities]. Catholic schools need to develop strategies for accessibility and retention (financial and cultural) for Hispanic/Latino families and other underserved communities, respecting the rich diversity of our Catholic community."

**United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
2023 National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic/Latino Ministry**

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Introduction

Schools are special places where children and their families learn, connect, and thrive. Bridges for Schools is an innovative research-based program aimed at creating a sense of belonging and meaningful engagement within a school community. This program is a key part of the Crimsonbridge Foundation's Education Imperative[®], which increases access, enrollment, vitality, and Hispanic* engagement in Catholic schools.

Since 2015, Crimsonbridge has worked alongside school, diocesan, nonprofit, and foundation partners committed to strengthening Catholic schools and fostering inclusive communities. Through these partnerships, we incorporated the voices and perspectives of students, parents, teachers, principals, and Catholic school leaders into our whole-community approach to welcoming and engaging Latino families in Catholic education.



WHAT IS A WHOLE-COMMUNITY APPROACH?

For this work to be truly successful, there is a role for everyone: students, parents, teachers, school leaders, dioceses, Catholic Schools Offices, parishes, and philanthropy. Although one of the initial goals of this work was to engage more Latino families in Catholic education, we have heard from partners time and again that cultivating welcoming and inclusive school communities benefits all students and families.

**In an effort to be inclusive towards all who self-identify as Hispanic or Latino, we have used both terms throughout this guide.*

Bridges for Schools

The Bridges for Schools program was created in response to school leaders' requests for more resources and support to welcome and engage Hispanic students and families in their school communities. The Crimsonbridge Foundation provides funding and tools for schools to invest in Spanish and bilingual communications, parent engagement strategies, cultural competency, and more.



PRINCIPALS CREDIT BRIDGES FOR SCHOOLS WITH:

- Increasing parent and family engagement, which is proven to lead to better student outcomes
- Creating a welcoming environment that fosters a sense of belonging for all families
- Boosting morale in the school community due to better communication and culturally responsive practices

"Participation in Bridges for Schools helped bridge a stronger relationship between our Hispanic families and the school community... Our Hispanic families actively participate more in school activities, which has greatly benefited our whole school community. This program has had an impact on all its members!"

– **ANN GILLESPIE**, Former Principal,
St. John the Evangelist, Clinton, MD

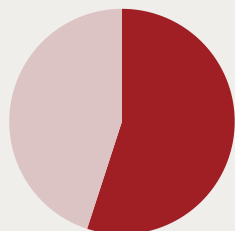
Increasing Enrollment & Engagement

The vision driving Bridges for Schools – success for all!

- Thriving Catholic schools with strong enrollment
- Schools that contribute to parish and Church vitality by welcoming students and families into the sacramental life of the Church
- School communities with vibrant parent engagement, where all families are invited to share their gifts and talents
- Schools that are representative of the rich and beautiful diversity of the Catholic Church in the United States

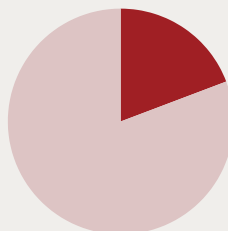
Why focus on Hispanic engagement and education?

Because the potential is extraordinary - For our schools and parishes, our communities, and our country.



55%

of Catholic school-age students in the United States identify as Hispanic¹



Only

19.3%

of students enrolled in Catholic schools are Hispanic.²

1. Boston College, Catholic Schools in an Increasingly Hispanic Church, 2016

2. National Catholic Educational Association 2022-2023 Catholic School Enrollment Update

“Through Bridges for Schools, Holy Cross has been able to better serve our bilingual families. Having readily accessible materials in Spanish is not only important to those who would benefit from them, but also signaled to all families the inclusive and progressive values of our community.”

– **KATHLEEN R. PREBBLE**, Former President and CEO, Academy of the Holy Cross, Kensington, MD

Crimsonbridge launched Bridges for Schools in 2018, in response to lessons learned after hosting the Latino Enrollment Institute (LEI), in partnership with the Archdiocese of Washington. LEI is a program of the University of Notre Dame that provides schools with marketing strategies and school culture interventions to better attract and serve Latino families. Following the training, school leaders expressed a need for capacity-building resources to welcome and serve Latino families more intentionally.



Catalytic Grants for Schools

Bridges for Schools is a catalyst for creating practices, programming, staffing, and communications materials to support schools' student enrollment and family engagement goals. Fostering communities of belonging is a journey that requires ongoing attention and investment. To ensure sustainability, we encourage schools to capture the benefits and positive outcomes of their Bridges for Schools work and to share them with their school board, pastor, and any relevant budgeting committees so that funding continues to be raised and allocated for this valuable, inclusive, and necessary work.

AREA OF FOCUS	HOW SCHOOLS CAN USE A BRIDGES FOR SCHOOLS GRANT
Inclusive communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide interpretation at school events • Ensure regular newsletters, eblasts, social media posts, and text messages go out in English and Spanish
More expansive marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add Spanish content to the website and social media • Create new admissions materials • Produce bilingual (or Spanish language) videos • Take representative photos for marketing materials
Parent engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a Parent Ambassador or "Madrinas" (Godparent) Program. Madrinass or parent ambassadors can be paid a stipend.
Increasing the accessibility of bilingual staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a stipend to support bilingual staff members to serve as a family engagement liaison. In addition to providing support during the recruitment and enrollment process, liaison duties could include supporting parents in accessing school choice programs or acting as a resource during the high school or college prep process.
Creating a culturally responsive community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide professional development sessions specifically focused on culturally responsive practices • Display imagery and art reflecting diverse backgrounds • Host events to build community (Hispanic heritage night, Marian celebrations, etc.)
Miscellaneous - as defined by the school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crimsonbridge encourages schools to present other ideas to support student enrollment and engagement efforts*

"At our school, prospective Latino parents can look forward to sending their daughter to a school where they feel comfortable because, through Bridges for Schools, the school provides services to parents in their language. Their access to the school liaison is personable, direct, and dignified."

– **PATRICIA BARRETO**, Latino Parent Liaison, Elizabeth Seton High School, Bladensburg, MD

**Bridges for Schools grants cannot be used for computers/tablets, food, travel, tuition assistance, paid advertising, or one-off events for Hispanic Heritage Month.*

Small grants can be transformational!



Average grant size of
\$3,300

95%

of schools increased or maintained
their Hispanic enrollment



More than **125** small grants
awarded since 2018



50

school partners
serving more than

14,500

students in

4

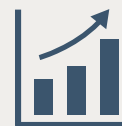
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Some schools saw
enrollment increases of
over

10%

post Bridges for Schools



More than **90%** of schools
increased Spanish resources available

Nearly **90%** of school partners have
participated in the program for more than a year



50% of schools

used the funding
to increase bilingual staffing



Bridges for Schools Grant Process – Key Components

Grant Application Timeline for Eligible Schools

1. **Spring:** Schools contact the foundation to learn more about applying.
2. **Summer:** Eligible schools are invited to submit grant applications. Applications are reviewed and grants are awarded on a rolling basis.
3. **Fall:** Schools get started on their projects. Final reports are due at the end of the school year.

Schools provide the following information in the application:

1. School name
2. Total school enrollment and % Hispanic enrollment
3. Grant request amount
4. Summary of the proposed project (2-3 paragraphs)
5. Intended project results
6. Project budget
7. Principal contact information

Examples of awarded projects

Website translation:

School A will use the grant to translate the most important pages of our school website into Spanish. The school's Spanish teacher will complete the translation. A second teacher (who is also fully bilingual) will check the translation. We plan to translate 5-7 pages of the website to start.

Hispanic/Latino Outreach Liaison:

School B will use the grant to provide a stipend for a Hispanic/Latino Outreach Liaison to provide Mass announcements and information tables at our parish, serve as a featured speaker for Spanish-speaking families at our school open house events, and join the school's Welcome Committee to assist new Spanish-speaking families in acclimating to our school community.

Bilingual welcome video:

School C will use the grant to work with a vendor to produce a welcome video for marketing purposes. The vendor will create two versions of the video, one in English and one in Spanish. The video will include a welcome from the principal and many photos of the school community. The video will be featured on the homepage of the website and shared on social media.



How to Decide What Your School Needs

While there is no “one size fits all” approach, schools have prioritized the following projects:

- **Translation support** – translation of print and digital materials. Tips to consider:
 - Professional vendors* are encouraged to update official school materials and website content. Fully bilingual parents or staff may be appropriate for translating weekly school memos or parent notices.
 - To provide the most accurate version of staff-translated texts, assign at least two bilingual staff members to translation tasks so that a second member can review the translation.
 - Auto-translation services (i.e., Google Translate) are discouraged as they often miss cultural nuances.
 - Translation work can be done in phases. This includes a gradual rollout of your website or social media.
 - For school videos, adding Spanish language voiceovers is a highly effective and affordable alternative to creating new videos.
- **Interpretation support** – financial stipend for a staff member or parent who provides interpretation services at meetings and events
- **Professional development** for staff in support of creating a culturally responsive community
- **Parent Ambassador Program** – resources for launching a Madrinas Program or other parent engagement strategies. Parents are your school’s best advocates!
- **Staffing** – support for paid Latino family liaisons or bilingual front office staff

*Crimsonbridge can provide vendor suggestions for website translation, video work, etc. Reach out to programs@crimsonbridge.org for more information.



MADRINAS PROGRAM

An outreach program to recruit and retain Latino families in Catholic schools, the Madrinas Model is designed to increase Latino enrollment by creating and strengthening the connection between Latino families and the school while fostering a culture of support for children’s academic education and spiritual formation. A network of Madrinas can assist Catholic schools by taking on three vital roles:

- Marketing
- Recruiting
- Mentoring new families

The Madrinas Model was designed by the Alliance for Catholic Education at the University of Notre Dame.

“We believe that the Madrinas Program allowed our Hispanic families to form relationships and find connection and voice in the community, ensuring they wanted to remain a part of the community for future years.”

– **ELISE HEIL**, Former Principal, Sacred Heart School, Washington, DC

Let's work together to create a plan that works best for your school.

Every school's needs and priorities differ, and school leaders know their community best!

What is our school doing well when it comes to welcoming and engaging families? How are we fostering a sense of belonging and a culture of inclusion? What are our strengths?

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Where are there opportunities for us to improve? What can we do during the upcoming school year?

Communications:

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Parent Engagement:

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Bilingual Staff:

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Cultural Responsiveness:

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Where are there opportunities for us to improve? What can we do during the upcoming school year?

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Bridges for Schools Partners 2018 - 2024



Catholic Schools
A Faith-Based Education
that Lasts a Lifetime



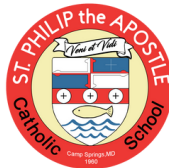
OUR LADY OF MERCY
CATHOLIC SCHOOL



**St. Mary
of the
Assumption
Catholic School**
TRADITION OF EXCELLENCE
EST. 1925



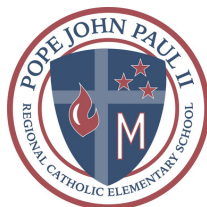
**Georgetown
Visitation**
PREPARATORY SCHOOL



**BLESSED SACRAMENT
SCHOOL**



*Connelly
Foundation*



Award of Distinction

The Bridges for Schools Award of Distinction is presented to schools in recognition of their commitment to fostering a welcoming school community and building capacity to engage Hispanic students and families. These schools have actively participated in Bridges for Schools for five years or more. The Award of Distinction comes with a capstone grant that the school can use to continue the work that was catalyzed through the Bridges for Schools process.



“The vibrant Hispanic presence in the US Catholic Church continues to grow steadily, bringing life to our parishes across the nation. Today, we are called to bring this thriving presence to our Catholic schools by increasing representation of Hispanic students in our classrooms.”

– **THE MOST REVEREND MARIO E. DORSONVILLE**, Late Bishop of the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux, Former Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C.



Most Reverend Bishop Mario E. Dorsonville

1960 - 2024

Bishop Mario E. Dorsonville played a vital role in the success of the Crimsonbridge Foundation’s Education Imperative and Bridges for Schools programs. A trusted adviser and dear friend to the Foundation, Bishop Dorsonville was a steadfast advocate and champion for the engagement of Hispanic families in the life of our Church, schools, and parishes. We will always be grateful for his leadership, support, and friendship.



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www.bridgesforschools.org



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