

The Education Imperative

Bridges for Schools Program

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 Hispanics/Latinos 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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The Education Imperative®

Catholic school vitality, parish vitality, and Church vitality are closely connected and interdependent. The Education Imperative is a research-based program of the Crimsonbridge Foundation seeking to increase access, enrollment, and Hispanic engagement in Catholic schools. The Education Imperative takes a whole-community approach and works in partnership with principals, teachers, pastors, families, and students, helping dioceses and schools to be welcoming and inclusive. Launched in 2015, the program has a comprehensive multi-pronged strategy, investing in leadership, organizational capacity, and community outreach. Education Imperative strategies include expanding Spanish communications, parent engagement, bilingual staffing, culturally competent leadership, and tuition assistance.

The vision driving the Education Imperative – 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

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.



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
Hispanic²

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

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



“Neighbors in this part of the Archdiocese of Washington should see how much our youthful Hispanic community lives in unity, peace, and in love.”

– **CARDINAL GREGORY**, Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington, Mass to Commemorate National Hispanic Heritage Month at Saint Martin of Tours Catholic School, 2023

The Education Imperative Multi-pronged Strategy

Partnering with Schools and Dioceses

Crimsonbridge partners with schools and dioceses committed to building a culture of inclusion through cultural competency, communications and outreach.

Crimsonbridge investments have supported:

- **New full-time positions** at the Archdiocese of Washington (ADW) Catholic Schools Office and its Secretariat of Communications, including a Hispanic Enrollment specialist and bilingual communications staff, working with schools, parishes, and parents to increase Latino enrollment, school vitality and parish participation.
- Direct work and **grants to schools** through the Bridges for Schools Program. Bridges for Schools currently serves schools in the Archdiocese of Washington, the Diocese of Arlington, and the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.
- Establishment of a **diocesan Parent Ambassadors group** that uses grassroots marketing, recruitment, and mentoring approaches to engage new parents.
- Creation of extensive **new Spanish-language school and parish communications resources** at the Archdiocese level, including a fully bilingual website and social media content.

Supporting Catholic School Leaders and Teachers

Studies show that school leadership engagement is critical to building a school culture that is welcoming and meets the needs of all students. There is a correlation between increased enrollment and retention and school leadership that is informed, engaged, and culturally competent.

Crimsonbridge investments have supported:

- **Professional Development by the University of Notre Dame.** The Latino Enrollment Institute of the University of Notre Dame held a two-day conference at the ADW to provide training for principals, pastors, and school staff on fostering a welcoming environment and growing Latino enrollment.
- **Research and programming** focused on increasing the representation of Latino leaders in Catholic education, including the **University of Notre Dame's Latino Educator and Administrator Development Program** and the **Boston College Roche Center for Catholic Education's Cultivating Talent Report.**
- **Mentorship and Collaborative Cohort Programs** for school leaders, administration, and faculty.

Tuition Assistance for Students

The common misconception that financial need is the primary barrier to Hispanic enrollment and retention in Catholic schools often leads to one-sided approaches and less than optimal results. The Crimsonbridge Foundation created the Education Imperative Fund to provide tuition assistance as **one piece of a holistic approach** to serving students and families. Crimsonbridge partners with the Latino Student Fund (LSF), a regional nonprofit, to increase the availability of partial scholarships for new students to attend Catholic schools in the ADW. Schools must demonstrate they are making systemic improvements toward welcoming and engaging Hispanic students and their families to qualify.

The Bridges for Schools Program

Bridges for Schools is a crucial part of the Crimsonbridge Foundation's Education Imperative.

Through Bridges for Schools, the Crimsonbridge Foundation provides funding and tools for schools to invest in bilingual communications, parent engagement strategies, cultural competency, and more.

Bridges for Schools is growing each year, and the program recently expanded to a third Archdiocese.

Learn more in the following pages!

Education Imperative Impact 2015-2023

Investments to Date

Since 2015, the Crimsonbridge Foundation and its affiliate, Crimsonbridge Group, have invested over \$2 million towards the Education Imperative. Grants have been awarded to the Archdiocese of Washington Catholic Schools Office, schools in three (arch)dioceses, two universities, and several nonprofits.



In 2023, there are

1,296

more Hispanic students

in Archdiocese of Washington Catholic schools than in 2015, an increase of

47%

3 new staff positions

in Archdiocese of Washington Catholic Schools Office and Office of Communications focused on Hispanic family outreach and engagement



104 students
at
10 schools

have been supported by the Education Imperative Fund with partial scholarships

Our Partners:

40
Catholic Schools

2
Universities

5
Nonprofits

3
Archdioceses/Dioceses

30 Parent Ambassadors

targeting parishes for Catholic school outreach in the Archdiocese of Washington



Latino Student Fund

90% of Education Imperative Fund

students participate in supplemental Latino Student Fund programming, including tutoring, college prep, SAT classes, and ESL classes for parents.

Archdiocese of Washington Hispanic enrollment increased from

10% to 16%



10 Principals

mentored through the Latino Enrollment Institute's Principal Mentorship Program



47 Schools

participated in the University of Notre Dame's Latino Enrollment Institute in DC in 2018

40 Schools

received funding and capacity building support through Bridges for Schools

10 Latino Educators

from the Greater Washington region selected for leadership development training through the University of Notre Dame's Latino Educator and Administrator Development Program



The Bridges for Schools Program

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 seeks to increase school access, enrollment, vitality, and Hispanic engagement in Catholic schools. Through Bridges for Schools, the Crimsonbridge Foundation provides funding and tools for schools to invest in Spanish and bilingual communications, parent engagement strategies, cultural competency, and more.

Since 2015, Crimsonbridge has worked alongside school, diocesan, nonprofit, and foundation partners committed to strengthening Catholic schools and fostering welcoming communities. Through these partnerships, Crimsonbridge incorporated the voices and perspectives of students, parents, teachers, principals, and Catholic school leaders into our program strategy.



“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**, President and CEO, Academy of the Holy Cross, Kensington, MD



Every school's needs and priorities differ, and school leaders know their community best. Each Bridges for Schools grant is tailored to the self-identified needs of the school and their goals related to enrollment and family engagement. Bridges for Schools grants have supported:

- Human translation of school materials to inform and improve parent engagement in school registration, activities, high school or college preparation process, etc.
- In-person translation at meetings and events
- Parent engagement strategies
- Spanish language website content
- Latino Family Liaisons or bilingual front office staff
- Spanish language or bilingual video and audio
- Parent Ambassador programs (Madrinas model)
- Representative photography (photos that capture the diversity of a school community)
- Culturally responsive imagery and art

The Bridges for Schools Program Guide

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.



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

Catalytic Grants for Schools

Bridges for Schools is a catalyst for creating practices, programming, staffing, and communications collateral 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	Provide interpretation at school events Ensure regular newsletters, eblasts, social media posts, and text messages go out in English and Spanish
More expansive marketing	Add Spanish content to the website and social media Create new admissions material Produce bilingual (or Spanish language) videos Take representative photos for marketing materials
Parent engagement	Build a Parent Ambassador or Madrinas (Godparent) Program. Madrinas or parent ambassadors can be paid a stipend.
Increasing the accessibility of bilingual staff	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	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	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 auto-translating services or apps, refreshments, transportation, paid advertising, scholarships, or academic support services.*

Bridges for Schools Impact 2018-2023

Small Grants can be transformational!



Average grant size of

\$3,400

95%

of schools increased or maintained their Hispanic enrollment



More than **95** small grants: awarded since 2018



40

school partners serving more than

12,000

students in

3

archdioceses/dioceses

Some schools saw enrollment increases of over

10%

post Bridges for Schools



More than **90%** of schools increased the spanish resources available



50% of schools

used the funding to increase bilingual staffing

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



“Thanks to the support of Bridges for Schools, Holy Redeemer School has increased its Hispanic enrollment from 14% to 27% over the course of 4 years!”

—KATRINA FERNANDEZ, Principal, Holy Redeemer School, College Park, MD

Bridges for Schools Grant Process - Key Components

Grant Application Timeline for Eligible Schools

1. **Spring:** Schools contact the foundation to apply.
2. **Summer:** Schools submit their grant applications. Applications are reviewed by foundation staff 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 for updating official school materials and website content. Fully bilingual parents or staff may be appropriate for translating weekly school memos or parent notices.
 - Translation work should ALWAYS be reviewed by two or more fluent Spanish speakers for accuracy.
 - 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

“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**, Principal, Sacred Heart School, Washington, DC

The [Madrinas Model](#) was designed by the Alliance for Catholic Education at the University of Notre Dame.

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?

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

Communications:

Parent engagement:

Bilingual staff:

Cultural responsiveness:

What strategies might we consider for year two of Bridges for Schools and in the future?



The Education Imperative - Bridges for Schools Partners 2018-2023



Catholic Schools
A Faith-Based Education
that Lasts a Lifetime



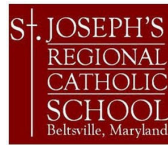
Catholic Schools
Office of Catholic Schools



ARCHDIOCESE of PHILADELPHIA SCHOOLS
AMERICA'S FIRST CATHOLIC SCHOOLS



OUR LADY OF MERCY
CATHOLIC SCHOOL



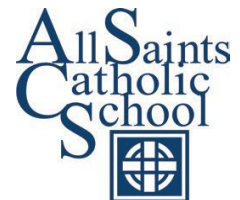
Georgetown Visitation
PREPARATORY SCHOOL



BLESSED SACRAMENT SCHOOL



OUR LADY of GOOD COUNSEL HIGH SCHOOL

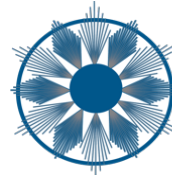




St. Helena-Incarnation
CATHOLIC SCHOOL
An Independence Mission School



Connelly Foundation



St. Thomas Aquinas
CATHOLIC SCHOOL
AN INDEPENDENCE MISSI♥N SCHOOL



Bridges for Schools 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 and are prepared to sustain the work that was catalyzed through the Bridges for Schools process.



AWARD OF DISTINCTION
GALARDÓN DE DISTINCIÓN



“Bridges for Schools has given us the tools we need to leverage the gifts and talents of our Hispanic families in hopes of bringing more families into our community. It has been such a joy to see what can happen when an entire community is supported and encouraged to work together!”

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

Opportunities to Partner

As we expand aspects of this work into other regions and dioceses, there are many points of entry for partnership and investment. Connect with Crimsonbridge to learn how you can participate in the Education Imperative or help bring the model to other dioceses.

The Crimsonbridge Foundation expresses its gratitude to Bishop Mario E. Dorsonville for his leadership and support. Bishop Dorsonville has been a trusted advisor and friend since the launch of the Crimsonbridge’s Education Imperative in 2015. He is a steadfast advocate and champion for the engagement of Hispanic families in the life of our Church, schools, and parishes.



“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**, Bishop of the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux, Former Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C.

“For philanthropy, Bridges for Schools is a strategic investment that strengthens schools, supports student success, increases family engagement, and contributes to a more inclusive and connected Catholic community.”

DANIELLE M. REYES, President & Chief Executive Officer, Crimsonbridge Foundation

Learn More!

programs@crimsonbridge.org

crimsonbridge.org/bridges-for-schools

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