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Introduction

Schools are special places where children and their families learn, connect, and thrive. Bridges for Schools is an innovative program aimed at creating a sense of belonging and meaningful engagement within a school community. This program is a crucial part of the Crimsonbridge Foundation’s whole-community approach through a larger initiative, the Education Imperative®, which has helped increase Hispanic family engagement and student enrollment in Catholic schools.

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

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.
The Bridges for Schools Program is our response to a request from school leaders for more resources and support to welcome and engage Hispanic students and families in their school communities.

“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 of its members!”

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

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
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? The potential is great!

55% of Catholic school-age students in the United States identify as Hispanic\(^1\)

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, 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.
Small grants can make an impact!

- **$** Average grant size of $3,000
- **95%** of schools increased or maintained their Hispanic enrollment
- **26** school partners serving more than 7,000 students in 3 archdioceses/dioceses
- Some schools saw enrollment increases of over 10% post Bridges for Schools
- More than **70** small grants awarded since 2018
- More than **90%** of schools increased the Spanish resources available
- **Nearly 90%** of school partners have participated in the program for more than one year
- **50%** of schools used the funding to increase bilingual staffing

*Program impact 2018-2022*
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREA OF FOCUS</th>
<th>HOW SCHOOLS CAN USE A BRIDGES FOR SCHOOLS GRANT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive communication</td>
<td>• Provide interpretation at school events</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Ensure regular newsletters, eblasts, social media posts, and text messages go out in English and Spanish</td>
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<tr>
<td>More expansive marketing</td>
<td>• Add Spanish content to the website and social media</td>
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<td>• Create new admissions materials</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Produce bilingual (or Spanish language) videos</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Take representative photos for marketing materials</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent engagement</td>
<td>• Build a Parent Ambassador or Madrinas (Godparent) Program. Madrinas or parent ambassadors can be paid a stipend.</td>
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<td>Increasing the accessibility of bilingual staff</td>
<td>• 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.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creating a culturally responsive community</td>
<td>• Provide professional development sessions specifically focused on culturally responsive practices</td>
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<td>• Display imagery and art reflecting diverse backgrounds</td>
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<td>• Host events to build community (Hispanic heritage night, Marian celebrations, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous - as defined by the school</td>
<td>• Crimsonbridge encourages schools to present other ideas to support student enrollment and engagement efforts*</td>
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“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.
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.
Every school’s needs and priorities differ, and school leaders know their community best. Let’s work together to create a plan that works best for your school.

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?
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
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.
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.
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 Foundation’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.
The Crimsonbridge Foundation is an independent private operating foundation 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.