

## In Chicago, Discipline That Builds Dreams

By George F. Will

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CHICAGO -- Waves of Slovenians, Bohemians, Irish, Italians and others have crested and receded, and today the Pilsen neighborhood of this polyglot city is a heartland Ellis Island, a port of entry for Mexican immigrants. There is a neighborhood school to teach their children important things -- math and history, of course, but also how to navigate a revolving door, how to behave in an elevator, and how to identify the salad fork and the soup spoon.

From Cristo Rey Jesuit High School you can see the Sears Tower to the north, where some students work. All the students work somewhere -- at more than 100 companies and law firms -- one day a week, at jobs paying \$20 an hour, the money going directly to the school, covering 70 percent of its costs.

To work in the Sears Tower, a student must pass through something perhaps not encountered in his or her family's Mexican village or in Pilsen -- a revolving door -- and might have to change elevators en route to the tower's upper floors. Before going to work, many of the school's 14-year-old ninth-graders, like their parents, have never been downtown.

The summer before beginning at CRJHS, ninth-graders go to a behavioral boot camp where they get what David Whitman calls "a dose of cultural imperialism" to inculcate bourgeois values, from personal hygiene to table manners. The school believes that some Latino traditions should be tempered: Many of the students had been raised to show respect by speaking quietly and avoiding eye contact while softly shaking hands. That is not how things are done downtown in the city of broad shoulders. Before long, the children are introducing themselves with firm handshakes and are introducing their parents to the Loop.

Cristo Rey is one of six "no excuses" schools around the nation that Whitman examined in a new book, "Sweating the Small Stuff: Inner-City Schools and the New Paternalism." Father James Gartland, now CRJHS's president, was back in America on a break from his work in Peru when he was assigned to walk Pilsen's streets and discover how the church might serve. He asked people, "What do you dream?" and "Why did you leave Mexico?" The answers pointed to what CRJHS has become.

It began in 1996 with 79 students meeting in the four corners of a roller-skating rink. Today the 540 students -- most from two-parent families with an average of five members and an income of \$38,000 -- enjoy an old parish school, refurbished and expanded. About one-third of those admitted to the ninth grade do not graduate, half because they cannot cope academically, others because they chafe under CRJHS's three hours of homework a night and its strict dress and discipline codes.

The school exists to nurture a culture of achievement for children with no other option for college preparation, including those who in public schools might be diverted onto a vocational track. It is not skimming off the cream of the crop of local students; it rejects any who can get accepted by, and afford, other Catholic schools. Some especially promising students are directed to Catholic schools that offer scholarships. Which makes CRJHS's college placement rate especially remarkable: In the past seven years, 99 percent of graduates have been accepted by at least one college, 75 percent of them four-year institutions.

CRJHS can have its work program, its entirely college preparatory courses ("the old, dead white man's curriculum," says an English teacher cheerfully), its zero tolerance of disorder (from gang symbols down to chewing gum), its enforcement of decorum (couples dancing suggestively are told to "leave some space there for the Holy Spirit") and its requirement that every family pay something, if only as little as \$25 a month. It can have all this because it is not shackled by bureaucracy or unions, as public schools are.

The "Cristo Rey model" is as American as another Chicago-area startup, McDonald's. And like McDonald's, the first of which was in suburban Des Plaines, the model is being replicated. The Cristo Rey Network now has 22 schools around the country, with four more coming by 2010.

People, communities and countries often make costly mistakes because they don't know what it is that they don't know. But regarding the education of inner-city minorities, America's problem is that it doesn't know what a few Americans, such as those who have created the Cristo Rey model, do know. Three students who tied as CRJHS's valedictorians in June are now at Stanford, Brown and Georgetown.