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DRAFT DAY

CRISTO REY STUDENTS ARE MATCHED WITH CORPORATE PARTNERS AS PART OF ITS WORK-STUDY PROGRAM

BY LOU PONSI 9/14/2023



CRISTO REY STUDENTS WERE MATCHED WITH THE CORPORATE WORK STUDY PARTNERS DURING A FESTIVE DRAFT DAY HELD ON AUG. 18. PHOTOS BY DREW KELLEY/DIOCESE OF ORANGE

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Since it was first announced that the Cristo Rey Network of high schools was opening up a school in Orange County, much has been reported about Cristo Rey's unique model of partnering with businesses and nonprofits thus enabling students with limited resources to receive a Catholic, college preparatory education at a fraction of what the cost would be without such a partnership.



CHEERING RELATIVES AND SUPPORTERS REACT TO CRISTO REY STUDENTS BE OFFICIALLY “DRAFTED” BY THEIR CORPORATE PARTNERS ON AUG. 18.

Cristo Rey students earn 45% of their tuition by working one day per week for a corporate partner, thus gaining work experience and building a professional resume right from the start of freshmen year.

The school also has a fundraising program to raise money for scholarships and support that extend beyond graduation and into higher education.

A highlight for Cristo Rey students and their families is Draft Day, a festive event where the students take the stage in front of cheering relatives and supporters to officially be “drafted” by their corporate partners.

Located in Santa Ana, Cristo Rey Orange County held its inaugural Draft Day for its 60-plus students on Aug. 18 at the Santa Ana Elks Lodge with hundreds of family members, corporate partners and school administrators looking on.

Amalia Orendain, 14, a Cristo Rey Orange County freshman, was drafted by City of Hope Orange County, one of the largest cancer research and treatment organizations in the United States.

“I’m ecstatic right now, but a little nervous as well,” Orendain said. “But I’m so grateful for the opportunity to be working in a corporate work-study program, where a lot of other people don’t get that opportunity, as well as to be in a Catholic school.”

Cristo Rey has schools in 23 states and the District of Columbia.

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Corporate partners commit to hosting up to four students per academic year at a total cost of \$36,500 or about \$9,000 per year per student.

“By partnering with us, you are unlocking that potential in our students,” said Cristo Rey Orange County President Stephen Holte, speaking directly to representatives of the nearly 40 corporate partners at the draft. “And we believe that opportunity fills the gap.”

Orange County is school number 39 in the network of Crist Rey schools across the country, and the third school to open in California.

“This is a proven model,” added Holte, “and by being here today, you’re joining this movement.”

Farmers & Merchants Bank has been a major supporter of the Diocese of Orange and Catholic education for several years and was among the founding corporate partners present at the Draft Day.

Kevin Tiber, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of Farmers Merchant and Trust, was the presenting sponsor of Draft Day.

The Cristo Rey students drafted by the bank will get a “full primer in the banking industry, really from soup to nuts,” Tiber said. “Our affinity is Catholic education. We saw Cristo Rey fitting within that whole spectrum of opportunities for Catholic education in Orange County...it is absolutely an opportunity for kids that perhaps otherwise would not be able to attend to find a way into a Catholic education and have that full opportunity that is afforded to many other kids in Orange County.”

Roughly 120 students applied to attend Cristo Rey Orange County, said Suzanne Denson, assistant director of high school’s corporate work study program.

Cristo Rey is not necessarily looking for straight-A students, Denson said, but for students who see the school as an opportunity receive a Catholic education and learn work skills.

“We look at the whole student,” Denson said. “We look at grades, we look at recommendations from teachers, we look at engagement and then we bring in students for interviews to ensure that they will have a successful match here at Cristo Rey. It could be straight A’s. We have straight A-students, but that’s not a requirement.”

Freshman Pablo Rodriguez, 13, first heard about Cristo Rey from teammates on his soccer team. His mother looked into the opportunity, attended an orientation and then enrolled her son into the school.

Rodriguez will be doing his work study program with Slater Builders, a commercial construction and design company in Costa Mesa. “I feel really good about it because I’m going to get a ton of experience out of this,” Rodriguez said. “Not only work experience, but I’m going to have experience for college too. So, I think I’ll be a step ahead of everybody.”

Cristo Rey does offer athletics and Rodriguez said he might play soccer.

The Diocese of Orange was among the corporate partners who drafted students for the work study program.

Other corporate partners include Northgate Market, the Orange County Sheriff’s Department, Kings Seafood Company, Children’s Hospital of Orange County, the County of Orange, Irvine Ranch Water District, University of California, Irvine, First American Financial, Orange County Transportation Authority and Stovall’s Hotels of Anaheim.

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