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Thursday, January 18, 2007

Archives

Christo Rey Jesuit High School: a new attitude about learning

by Dwight Hobbes

Increasingly, it is clear that inner-city parents desperately need alternatives to public school in general, and the Minneapolis Public School system in specific.

One hopes real hard that interim superintendent Dr. Bill Green, overseeing the district's business functions and academic achievements, will turn things around in the foreseeable future. Provided, of course, they have they good sense to give him the job. In the meantime, Minneapolis moms and dads must look at how the mess Green inherited presently impacts - more the point, impairs - student well being. How it continues to shortchange their children. And what viable alternatives exist.

The warehousing that has taken place at a stepped-up rate in Minneapolis over the past few years mirrors the nation's historic disregard for public school kids. One recourse that presents itself these days is an often-envied solution that for ages was way out of financial reach -- private school. It's not pervasive, but it is there: institutions whose funders will foot the bill if your child can meet academic requirements. They're not popping up on every corner and you can find yourself faced with the prospect of a waiting list. However, it is a lot better than nothing. And looks very good when you consider that effective public schools are the exception much more than they are the rule.

Accordingly, presented for your consideration: Cristo Rey Jesuit High School, a national, community-minded operation that opens its doors locally for the 2007-08 academic year (they're building a high school from the ground up in the Phillips Neighborhood). It's a place that you may well find agreeable to your wallet. In fact, the admissions director, Father Bill Johnson, flatly states, "If you can afford to send your child to our school, it's not the school for you." That's the level of their commitment to equal economic opportunity.

As the name indicates, it's a faith-based institution. If you're going to let the fact that a grounding in Christianity comes along with giving students smaller classes and better attention bother you, then this is not an option for you. Anybody else, let me share with you an experience I had when recruiters came to a particular K-8 school, we'll call it Faith Academy, looking for high school prospects. The rep for Minneapolis Public Schools - even though MPS offers studies that prepare students for college - spoke to parents and students about nothing except what amounts to trade school training: cosmetology, auto repair, and those kinds of things. There is, of course, nothing wrong with working in a beauty shop or a garage. There's also nothing wrong (and a whole lot right) with offering studies that prepare kids for entry into a university - something the MPS rep totally excluded from her recruiting spiel. Which, appalling as that is, actually

WEATHER

MSP



Temp: 21 F
Wind Chill: 13 F

[5 day forecast](#)



comes as not much of a surprise - the city's public school system did not start failing disenfranchised children yesterday. Or by accident.

Cristo Rey Jesuit High School offers, in addition to its educational curriculum, an opportunity that might have some parents wishing they could attend. It conducts a program which has jobs for its students at Allina and other corporations (banks, law firms, brokerage houses, and insurance companies) so that they can earn up to 75% of the cost of their college prep education. There's also a component of the program that lets the students take some of that money home. This Corporate Internship Program for the students is a unique offering among even the finest - and most expensive - private schools.

Long story short, Minneapolis Public Schools - with the advent of private alternatives - is no longer the only shop in town. And, if Cristo Rey Jesuit High School doesn't quite sound like your cup of tea, it's good to at least know it's there and, moreover, that it is not the only community resource. If it does sound like something you're interested in or if you just want to do some tire-kicking, you can call (612) 276-0140 and ask about stopping by their offices at East Lake St. and 10th Ave. What do have to lose? And what does your child have to gain?

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