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'Work-Study' School Set For 2007

Facility Patterned On Cristo Rey Plan

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By *Jay Mathews*
Washington Post Staff Writer
Friday, January 20, 2006; Page B01

The first private high school in the area to support itself largely through wages earned by students working one day a week for local employers will open in Takoma Park in fall 2007, the Archdiocese of Washington announced yesterday.

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Archdiocese officials said the new Cristo Rey school, based on a work-study model first tried in inner-city Chicago 10 years ago, will be its first new archdiocese high school in more than 55 years. It will open on the site of Our Lady of Sorrows School, a parish elementary school closing this year because of declining enrollment.

The Cristo Rey model has been hailed by many Catholic educators as a way to reverse the decline of parochial schools in inner cities and also give low-income students a way to earn private school tuition that their families cannot afford.

"Cristo Rey offers moderate- and low-income families something new," said Patricia Weitzel-O'Neill, superintendent of Catholic schools for the archdiocese, in a statement. "The Cristo Rey model not only makes a quality Catholic education affordable, but it also engages the business and



Work-study is affordable for many, Patricia Weitzel-O'Neill said. (Archdiocese Of Washington - Archdiocese Of Washington)

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broader community directly in these young people's lives, increasing their opportunities for success beyond high school."

Jeff Thielman, vice president for development and new initiatives for the Cristo Rey's network of 11 schools, said that more than 25 Washington area companies have signed letters committing to hiring students at the new school. He said the school will pay 70 percent of its operating costs through students' wages; 15 percent will come from small tuitions and the remaining 15 percent through fundraising.

The Takoma Park school, to be staffed by the Salesians of Don Bosco, Eastern Province -- an order focused on education -- is scheduled to start with 100 ninth-graders and grow eventually to about 500 students. Steve Shafran, former director-president of Don Bosco Preparatory High School in Ramsey, N.J., has been named project manager and will be the school's first president, the archdiocese said.

Weitzel-O'Neill said she is working with principals of other Catholic schools in the Washington area to find spaces this fall for Our Lady of Sorrows students. The school's enrollment has dropped 44 percent since 2001; it now has only 137 students.

Tuition for the new high school has not been set, but at the Chicago school, per pupil annual costs are about \$8,500, and the students pay only \$2,200, with half receiving financial aid.

Eight more Cristo Rey schools, including the one in Takoma Park and one in Baltimore, are planned over the next two years.

John P. Foley, a Jesuit educational missionary, created Cristo Rey's first school in the Pilsen/Little Village section of southwest Chicago at the suggestion of management consultant Richard Murray. Foley, now president of the Cristo Rey network, has said that at the beginning, it was not clear how powerful an educational tool the work-study program would be. But Cristo Rey students in Chicago, almost all Hispanic and 93 percent low-income, saw the relevance of much of what they were learning in school when they started working for bankers and lawyers in Chicago, he said, and acquired skills that helped them find jobs to pay their ways through college.

When Foley took some of his Chicago students to speak in Los Angeles, a California teenager asked, "Don't you think it's nuts that

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you are doing all this work and don't see any money out of it?"

A Cristo Rey student answered, "Maybe I don't see any money, but I get an education."

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