

**CHARACTER
EDUCATION
SERIES**

**PARTNERSHIP SCHOOLS:
TRADITION AND
TRANSITION IN THE
NEW YORK CATHOLIC
SCHOOL NETWORK**

by Clare Basil and Franklin Lee



The R Street Institute's Character Education Series is a collection of case studies that highlight particular programs around the country that are finding unique ways to fuse character education into their curriculums and pedagogies. Although each of the programs is unique and has its own nuanced approach, in the aggregate, these studies show that the desire for schools—at all levels—to strive for excellence and to produce good people and citizens is alive and well—and growing.



Foreword

As religious enterprises rooted in a rich moral tradition, it's not surprising that Catholic schools across America have long placed a great emphasis on character education. In this installment in R Street's series on civil society and character, Clare Basil and Franklin Lee explore how the seven Partnership Catholic schools have worked together in New York City to inculcate virtue in a highly diverse student body while simultaneously delivering a top-notch academic program.

Partnership, which operates in some of the city's poorer districts, brought together seven existing schools, the oldest of them founded before the Civil War, under a special agreement with the Archdiocese, which almost perfectly embodies Catholic Social Teaching's principle of subsidiarity. Some issues, like those of morals, are strongly informed by ancient religious teachings that the Church holds throughout the world; others, like detailed specifics of curriculums, are decided at the building or even classroom levels. In between, a central administration absorbs much bureaucratic busywork to free principals and teachers to focus on education. And Partnership's four key values—all of which were derived from things the schools were already practicing—inform this work.

The resulting school system provides over 2,000 students—overwhelmingly non-white, 85 percent on scholarship and 48 percent non-Catholic—with a high-quality education, while spending far less than the local public or charter schools. Indeed, the model is so successful that Partnership is looking to grow its footprint in the very near future. As much as anything else, Partnership's example demonstrates that a highly adapted, carefully constructed governance model that draws on principles of faith can create schools that produce good academic results and, there is every reason to believe, good people, too.


— Eli Lehrer,
President, R Street Institute

Introduction

Partnership Schools (Partnership) is a nonprofit that manages seven New York City Catholic schools, four in Harlem and three in the South Bronx. Partnership incorporates the core beliefs of the Catholic Church into its hiring, policies and practices, curriculum and instruction. While this grounds their character education, many of their students are non-Catholic—a testament to the fact that a rich character education can, and should, be available to all students regardless of faith.

Partnership Schools was formed in 2010 through an agreement between The Endowment for Inner-City Education and the Patrons Program, a nonprofit that facilitates systemic changes in Catholic elementary education in New York City. In 2013, they secured an agreement with the Archdiocese of New York for full, operational control of six Pre-K–eighth grade schools. This change shifted a number of responsibilities from parish pastors and school principals to the Partnership office.¹

¹ Betsy Shirley, “The era of the parochial school is over. Meet the Catholic educators searching for what’s next,” *America Magazine*, Jan. 25, 2019.



Since then, Partnership has made significant strides in academic achievement, complementing the schools’ work in character formation.

Since then, Partnership has made significant strides in academic achievement, complementing the schools' work in character formation. Unlike six years ago when Partnership struggled to get 20 percent of its students to pass state tests, they now routinely beat state, city and charter averages.² As early as 2016—only three years after the operation of their network schools began—Partnership raised their state English exam scores by 16.1 points, compared to the 13.7 point increase for city charter schools and 7.6 point increase for district schools.³ Similarly, their state math exam scores increased by 13 points, compared to 4.5 points for charters and 1.2 points for district schools.⁴ Partnership also managed to nearly double the percentage of students scoring “proficient” on the state’s English exam, from 22 to 43 percent, and nearly triple the math proficiency, from 17 to 45 percent.⁵ In addition, Partnership’s graduates have received over \$2.5 million annually in scholarship support to attend top high schools around New York City.⁶

Currently, over 2,000 students are educated in Partnership Schools.⁷ While the governance arrangement is unusual for Catholic K-12 education, some of its schools have been operating as far back as 1854.⁸ With the addition of another school, St Charles Borromeo in Harlem in 2019, Partnership shows signs of operational and academic health. The entire network’s approach is based on the values of integrity, humility, hard work and service, but each school retains its individual characteristics. Consequently, Partnership shows how a network of longstanding schools can maintain a uniform tradition and pursue joint initiatives while preserving the character and autonomy of individual schools.

2 Kathleen Porter-Magee, “Catholic on the Inside: Putting Values Back at the Center of Education Reform,” Manhattan Institute, December 2019.

3 Charles Upton Sahn, “Back from the Brink: Nonprofit Partnership Schools are reviving Catholic education in New York City,” *City Journal*, Aug. 25, 2016.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Porter-Magee.

7 “Our Network,” Partnership Schools, last accessed Aug. 28, 2020.

8 “Partnership Schools At-a-Glance,” Partnership Schools, last accessed Aug. 5, 2020.



Consistency and Pluralism

Within the Partnership governance model, there are five elements to all schools that make consistent character formation possible: the Catholic identity; the four core values; staff recruitment and professional development; curriculum and high school placement services. Partnership strives to strike a balance between network-level uniformity and school-level autonomy.⁹ This paper explores how Partnership maintains this singular vision of values across the network while preserving school-level decision-making by focusing on one of its schools, Saint Athanasius in the Bronx.

While Partnership's identity is rooted in the Catholic faith, students from all backgrounds are welcome; indeed, 48 percent of Partnership students are non-Catholic.¹⁰ Kathleen Porter-Magee, Superintendent and Chief Academic Officer at Partnership, explains:

Part of our mission as a church is service—especially service to the poor. Our educational endeavors aren't simply for the sake of evangelizing fellow Catholics, but are an extension of the church's commitment to service.¹¹

This is demonstrated not only in Partnership's willingness to accept students of all faiths and backgrounds, but also in their approach to character education. Rather than placing faith as a prerequisite for students to attain a quality education, Partnership provides educational opportunities to Catholic and non-Catholic students as a way to practice the church's commitment to service.

9 See, e.g., Russell Hittinger, "The Coherence of the Four Basic Principles of Catholic Social Doctrine: An Interpretation," *Pursuing the Common Good: How Solidarity and Subsidiarity Can Work Together* Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, *Acta 14* (Vatican City, 2008), pp. 75-123.

10 "Partnership Schools At-a-Glance."

11 Author interview with Kathleen Porter-Magee (telephone), May 26, 2020.


Faith, Reason and Character

Partnership believes that character education is not limited to schools in a faith tradition. Its approach—guided by the values of integrity, humility, service and hard work—can help form students’ character irrespective of their religious convictions.¹² While their schools are inspired by Catholic theology, Porter-Magee contends that faith is deeply rooted in and compatible with reason.¹³ The three tenets of faith that guide their approach to character are: the objectivity of truth, the belief that human beings are made in God’s image; and that habits of virtue lead to happiness.¹⁴

¹² “Core Values,” Partnership Schools, last accessed Aug. 8, 2020.

¹³ See, e.g., Pope John Paul II, “Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Relationship between Faith and Reason,” *St. Peter’s Basilica Feast of the Triumph of the Cross*, Sept. 14, 1998.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Porter-Magee.



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Four Core Values

Partnership is built around four core values: integrity, humility, service and hard work. When Partnership was founded and began bringing schools under its umbrella, each school was asked what values were most fundamental to its culture and mission. Partnership then identified and articulated the key values the schools collectively prioritized. So, the four core values were not newly introduced by Partnership and forced upon the schools; instead, the network named and emphasized what they already held in common. However, this codification process helped ensure that each value could be deliberately integrated into the schools' programming.

Porter-Magee is guided by the conviction that:

[I]n Catholic schools, there is something fundamentally working with regard to character education. Consequently, we had to be—and continue to be—very cautious not to sweep in with all our new reforms and unintentionally break something in the process that was already working well.¹⁵

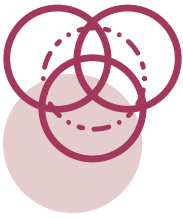
Since Catholic K-12 education is famously decentralized, one implication of Porter-Magee's view was that while the network would aim for some consistency in character education across its schools, the manner in which this instruction was brought to life could vary:

Partnership is not taking a model and simply implementing it in a new place. Of course, there are important decisions we make at the network level. But when it comes to the culture, which is so vital to character formation for how it concretely expresses these values, we largely leave this up to individual schools. Because Partnership believes school-level educators are best situated to build a culture that supports character formation, the network aims to relieve teachers and administrators of non-instructional tasks.¹⁶

Rather than struggling through administrative and managerial duties, the Partnership model allows principals, teachers and staff to focus on developing culture through the four core values.

¹⁵ Porter-Magee interview.

¹⁶ Ibid.



Integrity

The north star of Partnership’s core values is integrity. They take their definition from C.S. Lewis, who describes virtue as: “Doing the right thing, even when nobody is watching.”¹⁷ The moral framework that helps them discern what is “the right thing” is a “clear understanding of the moral principles and virtues on which the Catholic faith and tradition is built.”¹⁸ The network stresses that while the faith tradition understands these principles as rooted in revelation, Partnership believes they are compatible with reason, which makes them accessible to all students.¹⁹

Porter-Magee explains why Partnership chose integrity as their north star by illustrating where integrity is missing.²⁰ For instance, she notes that an emphasis on performance virtues—like determination and persistence—might lead to an attitude that virtue is “doing whatever it takes to succeed.”²¹ She is clear that performance virtues are valuable—even necessary—but insufficient.²² At Partnership, the emphasis on hard work is always complemented by a commitment to integrity. For example, hard work cannot include cheating. According to Porter-Magee: “We *don’t* do whatever it takes if it means compromising integrity. All of our hard work must take place within this framework and be subordinated to integrity.”²³



Humility and Service

Humility and service, the two core values next in the hierarchy, stem from Partnership’s belief that humans are social by nature and live best within community.²⁴ This implies that individuals must look outside of themselves in order to live virtuously, namely by entering into and participating in a larger community. Doing so in practice requires humility—recognizing one’s dependence upon and relation to others. These values find expression in habits that can be integrated within the classroom and the wider, local community through service projects, such as volunteering at institutions like nursing homes, foodbanks and soup kitchens, or by helping with food drives and fundraising activities.

17 “Core Values.”

18 Ibid.

19 See, e.g., John Paul II.; Daniel Maher, “Pope Benedict the XVI on Faith and Reason,” *Assumption College Digital Commons*, Summer 2009.

20 Porter-Magee interview.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

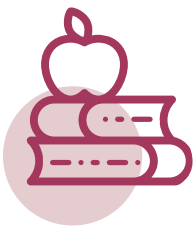
23 Ibid.

24 See, e.g., Pope John Paul II, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* No. 5, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (USCCB, 2004), pp. 56-57.

According to Saint Athanasius principal Jessica Ayber, for students to internalize these values and form habits that stem from them, school leaders and teachers must constantly be on the lookout for opportunities to actively practice them both inside and outside the classroom.²⁵ The manner in which this is done will always be evolving, even within individual schools. For example, in the 2019–2020 academic year, the Saint Athanasius school served 302 students from Pre-K through eighth grade, 88 percent of which were Hispanic.²⁶ The school’s primary means of inculcating service and humility is dubbed the “Amigos Program,” loosely translated from Spanish to mean: “The buddies program.”²⁷

In it, each student from the upper grades (four–eight) serves as a friend and mentor to a student from the lower levels (Pre-K–three). They have dedicated time set aside to read or perform arts and crafts together. Additionally, they are paired on field trips and eat lunch together on holidays. For the older students, this is meant to help them concretely serve those nearest them within their community.²⁸

Aybar stresses that service opportunities like this are extremely effective because one must think about the needs of those in closest proximity to them, even if it does not immediately seem that they are in need.²⁹ This also teaches younger students about humility and service—they witness an older peer offering their time and energy to another. Aybar also highlights the optional “breakfast buddies” program, in which middle school students are responsible for greeting younger students, picking them up in the morning and bringing them to morning assembly or breakfast, which is served free to low-income students.³⁰ Taken together, these programs are meant to give students the sense that they are embedded within a larger community and that someone is looking after them.



Hard Work

Lastly, hard work provides the means to achieve the other values of integrity, humility and service. Through hard work, each value can be practiced in one’s daily pursuits, both academic and extracurricular. Porter-Magee notes that recognizing the value of hard work is by no means unique to Partnership or Catholic education—it is stressed in countless schools.³¹ But Partnership sees hard work as valuable in and of itself because it is how students are taught to pursue the other values.

25 Author interview with Jessica Ayber (telephone), May 27, 2020.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Porter-Magee Interview.



The Saint Athanasius Story

Ayber started teaching at Saint Athanasius in 2012, one year before the school was incorporated into the Partnership network. This gives her a unique perspective into how the transition influenced the integration of values into school programming and culture.

At the suggestion of Partnership, Saint Athanasius began to devote the first 20-30 minutes of every morning to a “core values assembly” for all students. Ayber explains that this allows students to begin the morning in communal reflection on one of the core values and to consider how it can be integrated throughout the remainder of their day.³² According to Ayber, this is the primary medium by which they convey culture because it sets the tone for all that follows.³³ Not only does it place these values at the forefront of students’ minds, it also brings the awareness that they belong to a larger community of students pursuing the same principles.

While the content of these assemblies varies, there are themes that repeat: Music Monday, Tuesday Tales, Way to Go Wednesday, Thankful and Thoughtful Thursday and Freestyle Friday.³⁴ Due to COVID-19, Ayber was able to share a recent, recorded example in which she reads *The Good Egg* by Jory John and Pete Oswald, and she follows up with questions on how to think about one’s emotions in the context of integrity.³⁵ She explains this with the help of an optional coloring worksheet, which involves discerning what is inside and outside of one’s control, and what one should or should not worry about.

³² Ayber interview.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ [“The Good Egg with Mrs. Aybar and Guest!”](#) last accessed Aug. 8, 2020.

Aligning Values with Practices

It is worth examining how Partnership's governance and operations models help schools focus on virtue. Because of Partnership's aid in managing administrative functions, principals are able to focus their energy on ensuring that instructional practices are aligned with the network's values. For example, Ayber is able to perform an extended, daily walk-through of the school to observe how every classroom practices these values. Ayber notes that these are intentionally casual: "[To] keep a healthy culture, it is important that teachers don't feel like they are in the spotlight every day."³⁶ Nonetheless, after observing where Saint Athanasius has been excelling and where it is falling short, she leads a weekly, all-staff seminar to discuss how the team can better reflect their values in every practice, including school discipline, assignments, extracurriculars, pedagogy and more.

Altering Saint Athanasius' discipline policy to better align with Partnership's values and practices is one of the most substantial, ongoing changes that has resulted from joining the network. After observing the school for an extended time, Ayber decided to focus on a "restorative justice" policy rather than a punitive one to embody integrity and their Catholic identity.³⁷ The new policy offers disciplinary action not for the sake of "command and control" but to restore justice and order to the person wronged and the wrongdoer.

This began as a simple project.³⁸ In Phase One, she changed the language on the discipline form to require students to reflect on the four core values. Rather than

³⁶ Ayber interview.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid



simply stating what was done wrong, students were asked to describe how their actions failed to live up to the four core values and how re-integrating them into their actions could remedy the wrongdoing.

Phase Two involved intensifying this process for older students to prompt more in-depth reflection and understanding. Older students now enter into a “recess reflection” on a designated day of the week. This was instituted in part to separate the reflection from the moment that the issue took place. Ayber explains:

After a few days have passed, students can come back with a fresh head. All the emotions that were clouding their judgement at the time are cleared and they can actually reflect in a meaningful way because they are not so driven by the emotions of the moment.³⁹

As part of the reflection, students draw a picture to visualize an alternative action they could have taken.

Lastly, all correctional discipline includes an apology to the person who was wronged. This helps to cultivate humility through taking ownership of one’s wrongdoing. Ayber describes how these apologies follow a very specific formulation that includes an explanation of what they did wrong, why it was wrong, a pledge to avoid it in the future and a request for forgiveness.⁴⁰ Again, this fosters humility and is meant to help one re-enter the school culture and community with a clean slate.

This discipline-reform initiative is just one example of how Partnership has been able to elevate the role of character education within participating schools. By removing some of the daily responsibilities from teachers and administrators—helping with fundraising, hiring, curriculum development and more—Partnership has enabled educators to dedicate more energy to teaching and learning.⁴¹ For instance, now that teachers have reliable instructional resources, they are able to focus on pedagogy and consider how the core values can be incorporated into lessons across subjects.⁴² Additionally, teachers now have the time to lead a smaller, monthly “core values assembly” in addition to the daily morning assemblies. Once a month, teachers assemble students to reflect more deeply on the core values and how they relate to their particular age, grade level and subject of study.⁴³

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 For further reading on Partnership’s curriculum, see [Sahm](#).

42 For further reading on how a standardized curriculum can encourage creativity see Kathleen Porter-Magee, “[Is a Solid Curriculum a Constraint on Teacher Creativity?](#)” *Education Next*, Nov. 28, 2017.

43 Ayber interview.



Recruitment, Retention and Development

The average teacher tenure with Partnership is 10 years—about four times that of some large charter networks.⁴⁴ Retaining veteran educators to model school culture allows younger teachers to learn positive teaching methods while bringing fresh perspectives to the established approaches. The development of teachers is key to the Partnership model. Over the last two decades, a common approach to urban school reform has been the close-and-replace strategy: A struggling school is shuttered, and a new school is created to take its place. This enables a fresh start—a new school can build a strong culture from scratch instead of inheriting the dysfunctions of the previous school.

On the other hand, a “turnaround”—how Partnership approaches school improvement—is different. The idea is to preserve the school while making fundamental changes that promise to reorient its culture and performance. This is meant to be less disruptive than a closure, but it requires a great deal of attention to training new teachers and developing existing ones. Currently, a third of Partnership teachers have 0-3 years of experience; another third have 4-13 years; and the final third are veterans with 13 years of experience or more.⁴⁵

Partnership focuses on hiring, retention and development because it realizes that instilling character is largely a matter of personnel, not policy. This is in part why, when Partnership first formed, they began a centralized hiring process so that recruitment could be intentional and appropriately uniform across schools. Porter-Magee jokes that they act more like matchmakers than recruiters, pairing an individual teacher’s skills and interests with a school culture that fits.⁴⁶

Moreover, she adds that personnel management is not simply a matter of pulling in new people, but realizing the potential of teachers already present.⁴⁷ Rather than replacing large portions of staff when Partnership came on board, they chose to

⁴⁴ Eliza Shapiro, “Facing decline, Catholic schools form a charter-like network,” *Politico*, July 20, 2020.

⁴⁵ Porter-Magee interview.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

maintain a large group of teachers who could offer cultural continuity as the school transitioned. Porter Magee notes that school culture is, “largely driven by veteran teachers and leaders who have internalized and helped shape the school’s culture for so many years.”⁴⁸ Keeping these teachers was therefore essential to keeping character formation front and center.

Moreover, once teachers and staff are hired, Partnership believes training them—just as you would teach students—is essential. As Magee explains, implementing a clearly defined mission requires a staff fully committed to it.⁴⁹ An investment in the network’s adults is vital to the success of their character education model. Staff development occurs primarily at the school level, but all Partnership teachers come together every other month to explore a theme that ties their core values to their teaching practices. This, Ayber notes, is indispensable because without a larger collaborative community, teaching or leading in an individual school can feel like being stranded alone on an island.⁵⁰ Moreover, all seven Partnership principals meet monthly to reflect on effective ways to incorporate their values into habits and practices. Porter-Magee notes that Saint Athanasius’s shift to restorative discipline has been replicated in other schools, showing how Partnership schools can function as a kind of laboratory for one another.⁵¹

The idea is to preserve the school while making fundamental changes that promise to reorient its culture and performance.



48 Ibid.

49 For a more detailed explanation see Kathleen Porter-Magee, “[Why school culture is crucial to social and emotional learning](#),” American Enterprise Institute, May 18, 2020.

50 Ayber interview.

51 Porter-Magee interview.

Finance

With 85 percent of its students on scholarship, Partnership is unable—and unwilling—to set high tuition rates.⁵² As a result, it has less revenue than other schools in the city. In 2017–2018, Partnership spent \$9,950 per-student while New York City charter schools spent \$21,281 per-student and New York City district-run schools spent \$26,289 per student.⁵³ Partnership students have a median family income of only \$26,500 and the average, expected tuition per student is \$2,800.⁵⁴ This means Partnership must cover \$6,450 per student through government funding, philanthropic grants, individual donations and external scholarships.⁵⁵



Support Beyond the Classroom

Because character development is partially contingent on a school’s culture, Partnership works overtime to provide a supportive environment for the entire Partnership community. This includes helping parents. Porter Magee explains: “The way to connect the community and the parents is by knowing them, knowing who they are and what they need, and then finding a way to meet that need.”⁵⁶

There is a perception that parents from certain backgrounds might be less involved with their children; Partnership aims to recognize that this is not true. Porter-Magee explains: “Parent engagement might not be as low as one thinks. We have way too low of an expectation. Parents love [their] children; even if they don’t have the capacity to volunteer.”⁵⁷ For this reason, Partnership strives to support parents in the same way they support students:

A principal at Our Lady Queen of Angels in Spanish Harlem was struggling with the parents of a student who were not as involved as we wanted them to be. Serving a predominantly Latino, immigrant population where kids didn’t speak English at home, we tried to offer [English as a Second Language] ESL classes for parents.⁵⁸

⁵² Sahn.

⁵³ “Partnership Schools At-a-Glance.”

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Porter-Magee interview.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.



“*The way to connect the community and the parents is by knowing them, knowing who they are and what they need, and then finding a way to meet that need.*”

But the problem was deeper than that—parents were not signing up for the classes. They discovered some families were illiterate, so they were unable to read the handouts that were provided.⁵⁹ Accordingly, the ESL classes started with an oral course instead of going directly into reading and writing. Porter-Magee explained: “It’s not about parent engagement for the sake of academics, it is about building community and you get parent engagement as a part of that.”⁶⁰

The Saint Athanasius School Parent Association (SAPA) organizes events and dinners including an annual Walk-A-Thon.⁶¹ Recently, SAPA has started an open-mic forum where parents can openly share their thoughts. Aybar said: “I was super scared at first, but they have been so respectful—not yelling while providing constructive feedback.”⁶² The school engages parents in an array of activities including classes on healthy eating, discipline and how to pray at home with their families.

Partnership also recognizes that students often need help with physical health. Porter Magee describes an experience early in her tenure:

My first year, I was doing an instructional walk through. I talked to the principals regularly, mostly about curriculum instruction and the changes. One day, I am in Immaculate Conception School, and I peek in a classroom and it is set up as a dentist office. I was like, ‘What is going on?’ A Sister explained to me that every year, they bring in a local dentist to check the kids’ teeth. I think the great part is that it didn’t even occur for her to tell us that, because it is so much a part of who they are.⁶³

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 “[Parent Association](#),” Saint Athanasius School, last accessed Aug. 7, 2020.

62 Ayber interview.

63 Porter-Magee interview.

Porter-Magee believes that the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how Partnership sees its role in the larger community: “Our sense of service starts from our community needs.”⁶⁴ The network implemented several measures across their schools as a baseline of support for their community.⁶⁵ First, tuition will be waived for the duration of the school closure—amounting to a \$580,000 monthly loss for the schools.⁶⁶ Second, all staff—from teachers to cafeteria workers—will continue to be paid their full salaries. Finally, an emergency fund has been created to help needy families. So far, the fund has amassed \$895,000 in private donations, mainly from its own board of trustees.⁶⁷

Another Partnership priority is helping to place their graduates in the best high schools possible to ensure that the network’s positive influence lasts beyond eighth grade. Porter-Magee hopes that as a result of their efforts, they can encourage students who:

have a love of learning because they are hungry to understand truth, who are selfless and focused on giving back to the community and that they make life choices based on what is right for themselves, their family and community rather than just what feels right at the moment.⁶⁸

Partnership helps students navigate the competitive landscape of New York City secondary-school admissions by offering high school placement assistance to all students. Porter-Magee explains: “Our goal is to place each student in the best-fit high school where he or she will learn, grow and thrive.”⁶⁹ The advisory program begins in sixth grade and includes: preparation for high school placement tests; parent education; help with applications for scholarships; and assistance with applications for independent, public, charter and Catholic high schools.⁷⁰

In the longer-term, Partnership hopes to better understand how schools can help develop student character. While measuring character is difficult, Partnership is interested in finding ways to assess whether character formation leads to better life outcomes. Other organizations—including research bodies like the Character Assessment Initiative (Charassein) at the University of Arkansas—are interested in the same questions, so meaningful progress in the years ahead is possible.

64 Ibid.

65 Madeline Fry Schultz, “An Educational Partnership: A Catholic school network supports students, families, and staff amid the pandemic,” *Philanthropy Magazine*, last accessed Aug. 7, 2020.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

68 Porter-Magee interview.

69 Ibid.

70 “Academics and Student Life,” Partnership Schools, last accessed Aug. 7, 2020.

Our goal is to place each student in the best-fit high school where he or she will learn, grow and thrive.

Porter-Magee



Conclusion

In recent years, the number of Catholic schools in America has declined consistently.⁷¹ It is a sector that possesses great strengths, but faces serious challenges. From its start, Partnership has aimed to retain the strong culture of Catholic education while bringing needed reforms in operations, governance and curriculum.⁷²

In education circles, Partnership is recognized for its success in raising student test scores significantly. Although this is partly attributable to the network's innovations in content and instruction, the schools' strong, longstanding foundation of faith and virtue has also played an important role. The network recognized early on that student character was essential to academic success, that it formed through strong school culture and that strong school culture can be supported centrally, but must be led by educators.

Character formation may seem like a highly personalized effort, but its civic value is immense. Indeed, as Porter Magee states: "Our whole approach—which is an extension of who we are—is simply to ask: What do our communities need and how are we going to serve them? That frame makes all the difference."⁷³ Partnership's focus on integrity, humility, service and hard work helps build personal characteristics that enable students to grow into successful adults. But those principles also help young people recognize that they have a duty to others—these core beliefs produce individuals who can contribute meaningfully to their families, their neighborhoods and the broader community.

⁷¹ [Shapiro](#).

⁷² "Our Approach," Partnership Schools, last accessed Aug. 7, 2020.

⁷³ Porter-Magee interview.

ABOUT R STREET

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