2016–17
Year-end Report

DECEMBER 2017
A TRAILBLAZING SCHOOL NETWORK

Partnership Schools (PNYC) is a trailblazing school management organization that is shaping the next generation of urban Catholic education. In 2013, thanks to a groundbreaking agreement with the Archdiocese of New York, PNYC was granted full operational control of six Pre-K to 8th grade schools. PNYC believes that great schools are guided by faith and values, grounded in rigorous content, supported by quality professional development, and animated by a clear vision.

Serving the Underserved
In the 2016–17 school year, PNYC served 2,068 students across our network of six schools, three in Harlem: Mt. Carmel-Holy Rosary, Our Lady Queen of Angels, and St. Mark the Evangelist; and three in the South Bronx: Immaculate Conception, Sacred Heart, and St. Athanasius.

Living in some of the most underserved New York City neighborhoods—and in two of the nation’s poorest Congressional districts—82% of Partnership students received need-based scholarships, with a median family income of $24,000. In 2016–17, approximately 70% of Partnership students were eligible for free- and reduced-priced lunch and 82% received need-based scholarships. Demographically, 67% were Hispanic, 29% were African-American, 63% were Catholic, and 9% were English language learners.

Last year, the school network was guided by over 270 talented teachers, staff, and school leaders. It was also supported by a network team of 22 individuals, including nationally recognized education, finance, and operational leaders. PNYC was steered by a Board of Trustees that includes 27 accomplished (and acclaimed) professionals and visionary leaders from both the business and nonprofit fields.

DEFYING EXPECTATIONS
In 2016–17, Partnership Schools continued to defy expectations of what is possible in urban Catholic schools in an era of increased competition and accountability. We created a sustainable fundraising plan, systematized our school budgeting processes and procedures, refined systems to ensure compliant and efficient school operations, nurtured students in warm, safe, and inspiring learning environments, and invested in teacher growth and development through strategic investments in curriculum, professional development, and talent.

The following outlines the progress of our key initiatives in 2016–17, including academics, enrollment, and high school placement, as well as a summary of last year’s finances.
Impressive Gains in Three Years

When we launched our academic plan four years ago, we said that we wanted to “flip the curve,” so that we would ultimately have as many students scoring at Level 4 as were once scoring at Level 1 on the New York State English Language Arts (ELA) and math assessments. Today, we are well on our way towards that target.

“At OLQA, children and learning come first...I’ve learned if you work hard you can achieve your dreams.”
—Gael, 7th grade
What’s more, in 2017, Partnership Schools demonstrated gains on the New York State ELA test that outpaced state and city averages for the third straight year, and ELA achievement in our six schools is on par with all but a few of the city’s most well-known charter networks.

Even more impressively, our achievement has jumped 25 percentage points in both ELA and math over the past three years. That means that our students—who lagged their peers just three years ago—are now on par with or beating the state, city, and charter school averages in both core content areas.

These results demonstrate our ability to dramatically improve student achievement while still keeping costs down.
In ELA, we moved the needle from 43% proficient in 2016 to 47% proficient in 2017. And we’re pleased that we not only moved students on the “cusp” of proficiency, but we shrunk the number of students scoring at the lowest level while also increasing the number of students scoring at the highest level.

We are heartened by this continued “slow and steady” approach to improving literacy. Our results demonstrate that our focus on improving literacy by increasing students’ content knowledge and vocabulary is making a difference. And we are pleased at the progress we are making towards our goal of “flipping the curve.”

In math, we saw our network average dip slightly from 45% to 42% proficiency. While we were disappointed to see this decrease, we were not surprised. By midyear our internal math curricular assessment data indicated that we would see a slight decrease. It is also important to put this dip in a broader context. Specifically: we know of no organization that has not met occasional blips on the path towards game-changing achievement. That said, we want to ensure our math scores improve, and so, we are now differentiating school support based on each school’s specific needs and revamping our direct-to-teacher coaching.

Of course, as student achievement improves, each successive percentage point gain is more difficult to achieve than the last. Moreover, as a network our focus is on ensuring students learn and fully understand the rigorous content and the essential skills we know they’ll need later in life.

That is to say: our aim is to ensure that our student achievement gains are a reflection of student mastery of core content, not the result of quick fixes or test prep. That’s why we expect our continued growth to be slower and steadier—the kind of improvement that results from effective instruction, authentic student understanding of important skills, and real mastery of core content.

**Stabilizing Enrollment**

Over the past four years, while urban Catholic schools around the country have seen a precipitous decline in enrollment, Partnership Schools’ enrollment has stabilized. Two schools, Our Lady Queen of Angels and St. Athanasius, maintained healthy enrollments near capacity—94% and 97%, respectively. Over 100 students were on waitlists for 22 classrooms across our six schools for the 2017–18 school year. What’s more, our student retention this past year averaged 86% network-wide, showing that families are committed to our schools. In fact, our school with the most transient community had 90% retention—the highest in the network.

We have more than 1,500 new students and families inquiring about our schools each year. As we look to the next enrollment season, we aim to build on this momentum and drive enrollment increases across all schools.

To that end, in 2016–17, we undertook a thorough, network-wide audit of enrollment progress, activities, and challenges to ensure that the systems and structures we have in place will drive enrollment increases. This network-wide audit helped us better
diagnose the areas where schools are doing well and the areas where we can make strategic tweaks and improvements that we think will drive change in 2018. In particular, we learned that our schools consistently re-register more than 80% of students each year and that demand is high, but we still lost interested families between inquiry and enrollment. Said more simply: our biggest enrollment challenge is converting interest to enrollment. Moving forward, we are devoting increased time, energy, and resources to this effort.

We have already begun planning for next year by developing targeted professional development for each member of the enrollment team—from the Directors of School Operations to the Operations Associates and greeters who are the first people new families see when they come into our school buildings. We plan to continue this professional development throughout the year, and we are adding frequent, customized school-site support that we believe will help build ownership and capacity in each school community.

**Putting Students on a Path to Success**

At Partnership Schools, we also realize that our work is part of a lifelong effort to help our students grow in knowledge and virtue. Therefore, we focus not only on ensuring all of our students thrive while in our care, but also that they apply to and enroll in high schools that will continue to prepare them—spiritually and academically—for college, service, and life.

To that end, we have developed a high school placement program that aims to do two

$1.85 million offered in 4-year scholarships and aid!

“Applying to high school in New York City can be very daunting, but I felt constantly supported throughout the process....it felt much more manageable with my school’s help. It felt like I had a whole team behind me!” —Asha, Partnership Schools Alumna 2017
First, to build strong relationships with top Catholic, private, and public schools around the city so that all schools know about the work we are doing to improve academic preparation and to prepare students for the future. Second, to arm students with the skills and resources they need to apply to, to get accepted to, and to get the financial support they need to attend top tier schools.

2016–17 saw an increase in the number of Partnership students matriculating at top tier schools. Additionally, the number of individual students who received financial or merit-based awards increased to 73 students in 2017, from 44 students in 2016. Correspondingly, the total dollar amount awarded to Partnership students last year nearly doubled going from $970,000 in 2016 to $1.85MM in 2017.

**HOW IT ALL ADDS UP**

**An Excellent Education at a Fraction of the Cost**

In 2016–17, our per-pupil cost was $9,700, one of the most affordable and cost-effective in New York City. In comparison, charter and public schools cost $18,931 and $20,078 per student, respectively, and those numbers fail to take into account additional private investments being made in those schools.

We are maximizing every dollar to drive results and change. We choose wisely and invest strategically in our leaders, teachers, and nearly 2,100 students we serve. In 2016–17, over 80% of total operating expenses were spent on instruction and school operations.
Required philanthropic support $14.2MM

$5.7MM
Provided from Partnership investment earnings and reserves

$8.5MM
Annual funds raised by Partnership in 2016–17

Thus, we rely on the generosity of many individuals and foundations to support our schools. Our total expenses in 2016–17 were $21.2MM (including capital) and, to fund this, philanthropic support of $14.2MM was required (including scholarships). We raised $8.5MM from donors with the remainder coming from PNYC’s investment earnings and reserves.

LOOKING AHEAD

The 2016–17 school year brought its fair share of successes and challenges. We saw impressive 25 percentage point gains over three years in ELA and math, in spite of a slight dip in math achievement. We modestly improved enrollment and high school placement results, and we hit key operational objectives. While we are delighted with this progress, we recognize that we still have much to accomplish in the coming years to help our schools and our students reach their full potential in this era of increased accountability and transparency. Our commitment to providing a transformational educational experience is unwavering. The work we do simply would not be possible without the generosity of our partners.
Thank you for your support, and we look forward to continuing our work into the 2017–18 school year, our milestone fifth year.

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