Innovative Staffing to Personalize Learning:
CRISTO REY SAN JOSE JESUIT HIGH SCHOOL

SAN JOSE, CA

This case study is part of a series about schools that use non-traditional staffing arrangements to personalize learning. All schools profiled have demonstrated noteworthy student achievement results.

Cristo Rey San Jose, a private high school in San Jose, California, is part of a network of 32 Catholic schools focused on preparing underserved students for college. The school uses co-teaching, differentiated teaching roles, tutors, and online learning software to personalize its math courses according to each student's needs, and administrators give teachers daily observations and weekly coaching to help them improve. Cristo Rey San Jose covers its operating costs, including its staffing model, through private donations, a work-study program, and income-adjusted tuition payments from students' families.

Educator roles and responsibilities

- **Math teacher:** Lead whole-group instruction; lead small-group instruction; co-teach with fellow teachers; adjust instruction based on student learning data; build relationships with students
- **Math coach:** Support students as they work through online course content; review student data; use learning data to organize groups for small-group instruction, peer tutoring, and projects; give students feedback on study habits and note taking
- **Tutor:** Provide individual and small-group instruction to students who need additional support

Key instructional practices

- Whole-group & small-group instruction; individual tutoring
- Small groups adjusted daily based on data; grouped by same & mixed learning levels
- Teachers differentiate levels for each student through assignments & adaptive software; students advance based on mastery
- Students help set learning goals & have some choice in learning experiences
- Students do some work in peer teams
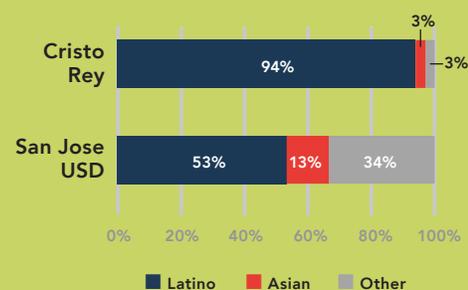- Teachers coach students in social & emotional skills

Technology use

- Blended learning: **Flex**
- Provides students with differentiated content instruction; assesses student mastery
- Provides teachers with digital data system so they can individually & as a team track each student's progress, and adjust instruction & student groupings as needed
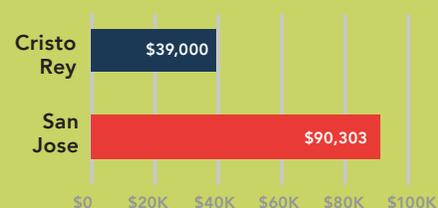
SCHOOL PROFILE, 2016–17
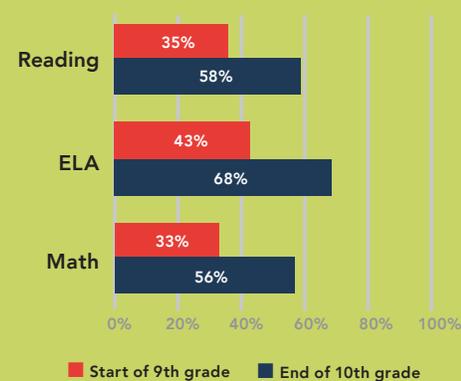
Campuses: 1
Grades: 9–12
Enrollment: 472

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Cristo Rey: Latino 94%, Asian 3%, Other 3%
San Jose USD: Latino 53%, Asian 13%, Other 34%

■ Latino ■ Asian ■ Other

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Cristo Rey: $39,000
San Jose: $90,303

STUDENT PROFICIENCY

Reading: Start of 9th grade 35%, End of 10th grade 58%
ELA: Start of 9th grade 43%, End of 10th grade 68%
Math: Start of 9th grade 33%, End of 10th grade 56%

■ Start of 9th grade ■ End of 10th grade

THE CRISTO REY TEACHING AND LEARNING EXPERIENCE

As Joe Albers prepared to open Cristo Rey San Jose, a Jesuit high school, as its founding principal in 2014, he was on the lookout for innovative ways to prepare students from San Jose's disadvantaged communities to complete college and become accomplished leaders. He knew that many would start with significant gaps in their education, making it hard for them to meet the expectations of rigorous, college-preparatory courses. So Albers decided to make blended learning a key instructional strategy in many courses, in an attempt to help teachers tailor their instruction to each student's needs.

Three years later, the school's blended-learning practices seemed to be working, given the progress students were making in reaching grade-level proficiency on NWEA MAP benchmark assessments. But Albers wondered if his teachers could accomplish more with their students using a staffing arrangement that allowed them to specialize within their teaching roles. He focused on trying this in math, where Cristo Rey's use of the Flex model of blended learning made it easier to rethink teacher roles and responsibilities.

Staffing model

Albers notes seven instructional responsibilities that fall to Cristo Rey's math teachers:

1. Teach overview lessons in person when students start and complete each unit in the online learning curriculum.
2. Teach lessons in person when students struggle with a topic in the online learning software.
3. Develop student project assignments that engage students in critical thinking and real-life applications.
4. Monitor learning data, and adjust instruction and guidance as needed to ensure that students are making adequate progress in the online curriculum to complete their courses by the end of the school year.
5. Form student groups based on common learning needs for small-group lessons, or on heterogenous learning needs for students tutoring one another in study groups.
6. Give students feedback on academic habits such as setting goals, asking for help, and working in groups using a comprehensive rubric.
7. Grade students' math notebooks to ensure that they develop note-taking skills that help them commit the content they master to long-term memory.

With 30 students learning at various levels in each class, covering all those activities was challenging for a single teacher, so Albers and his team designed a new staffing arrangement that would divide these activities among two roles.

Two **math teachers** would share responsibility for two combined classes that each had about 30 students. They would be content experts with strong skills in math pedagogy, and would be primarily responsible for activities one through three in Albers' list: teaching unit overview lessons, teaching targeted lessons on topics not well addressed by the learning software, and guiding students through projects to enrich and deepen their understanding. Additionally, each teaching pair would work with a **math learning coach** who would focus on the rest of the activities in Albers' list: monitoring student data, organizing student groups for tutoring or small-group lessons, giving students feedback on their academic habits, and grading students' math notebooks.

In 2016–17, Cristo Rey asked two math teachers whose classes shared a common learning space to begin experimenting with some elements of this staffing model. Then, in 2017–18, the school implemented this in all math courses and brought on three new math coaches to support the model. The three math coaches are recent college graduates who are interested in teaching careers. They are considered "paid volunteers" because they are compensated with free housing and a small living stipend.

Tutors also play a key role in Cristo Rey's math courses. Cristo Rey's tutors are unpaid, volunteer college students who work at the school two hours a week through a service learning program at Santa Clara University, a nearby Jesuit University. Tutors focus on helping students when they are stuck by providing individual and small-group instruction during math class time. Each 60-student class has support from one or two tutors.

Coaching teachers is another important part of Cristo Rey's staffing model. Members of the school's administrative team observe teachers every day and set up weekly coaching sessions in which they discuss how to improve classroom management, instruction, and implementation of new programs.

The student learning experience

During a regular school day, students at Cristo Rey follow a typical schedule of seven one-hour class periods. During their math period, students study in a large, open learning lab with movable furniture that serves as the learning space for two concurrent math classes. These classes use a Flex blended-learning model in which students move among learning activities at their own pace. Online instruction is the backbone of student learning, and teachers provide support and in-person help on a flexible, as-needed basis. As students work **independently** or in **small groups** through the online content, math teachers pull those who need additional support or enrichment into **individual or small-group lessons and activities.** As students work on their online course assignments, the math coach checks in with them on their progress and provides additional support. Additionally, students who are struggling with a topic or need clarification on an assignment can seek assistance from one of the math teachers, the math coach, or one of the tutors supporting the course.

FIGURE 1. STAFFING ARRANGEMENT

Tutor

Math Teacher

Math Coach

60 students
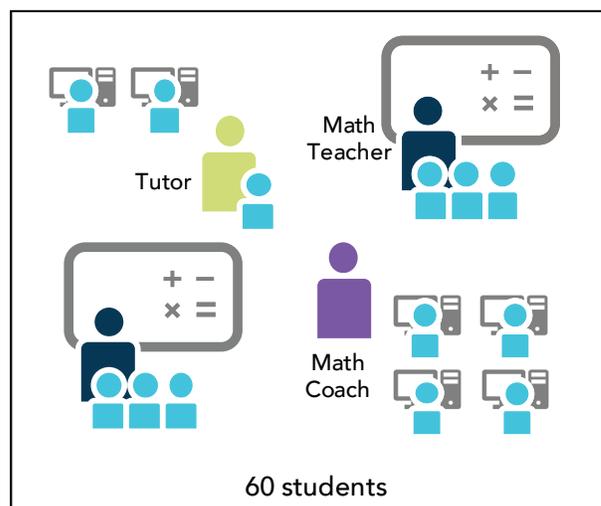
Technology use

Turning some tasks over to technology revolutionizes the school's ability to make teacher time more efficient and effective, Albers says. Cristo Rey's online math software, **ALEKS**, delivers basic content instruction, assesses students' mastery, and provides real-time data on each student's needs and progress. ALEKS's adaptive learning system continuously evaluates students' content mastery and directs them to activities aligned with their individual learning needs. As students work, ALEKS generates reports that teachers use for meeting with students about their learning goals and for forming student groups for small-group lessons and projects. Albers especially appreciates the data the ALEKS dashboard provides: "I can see a whole student, I can see the whole class, I can choose by a topic and figure out who's tried it and who has failed and who needs more support.…It's just mind-blowing!"

Compensation and funding model

Cristo Rey is a private school that only serves students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, so the school relies on a combination of funding sources to cover its operating costs. The median teacher salary at Cristo Rey is $77,868 per year. For comparison, the starting salary in the San Jose Unified School District was $54,958 in 2016–17, and a certificated teacher in the district with

10 years of experience would receive base pay of $74,655; the average salary for California teachers is $77,179[1]. The school brings in 52 percent of its funding through fundraising and donations and 5 percent from families through tuition. The remaining 43 percent comes through a student work-study program: Every day, all students from one of the four grade levels travel by bus to work in professional office settings at nearby companies or organizations. Over the course of each week, four students share the job responsibilities for one entry-level position, and the companies pay Cristo Rey $32,000 annually for the four students' work. The work-study program helps students develop professional habits and explore potential careers while allowing the school to charge families an income-adjusted tuition rate, which typically ranges from $10 to $180 per month.

Endnotes

[1] For the San Jose Unified salary chart, see San Jose Unified School District. (n.d.) Salary Schedule B-2. Retrieved from http://sjusd.org/schools/human_resources/downloads/SJTA_Salary_Tables_.pdf. For the California salary, see table C-5 in: National Education Association. (2017, May). Rankings & Estimates: Rankings of the states 2016 and estimates of school statistics 2017. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/2017_Rankings_and_Estimates_Report-FINAL-SECURED.pdf