

Viewpoint: A transformational educational opportunity for Atlanta's disadvantaged

Feb 10, 2017, 9:46am EST

Dave Fitzgerald Chairman of Fitzgerald & Co. and board member of Cristo Rey Atlanta Jesuit High School.



Dave Fitzgerald is the chairman of Fitzgerald + Co.

Most observers agree that a good education is a powerful catalyst for individual success. Those with good educations invariably achieve greater satisfaction in life, better jobs and salaries, and greater financial security for themselves and their families.

The growing gap in income within the nation and our city between the “haves” and “have nots” mandates a multiplicity of solutions. Despite the devotion of great resources of time and money – and the genuinely noble intentions of those who work tirelessly to improve educational opportunity – the situation in Georgia and in metro Atlanta remains troubling.

The newly published report on the “Top Ten Issues to Watch” by the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education ranks Georgia behind the national average in six of nine key indicators of success in achieving educational excellence, including high school graduation rates, reading and math proficiency and the percent of adults in our state with Associate’s or Bachelor’s degrees.

Perhaps the most impressive development in education in Atlanta in the past several years has been the work of [Cristo Rey](#) Atlanta Jesuit High School. Opened just three years ago on a simple premise – provide high school students of limited economic means access to a rigorous college preparatory education funded principally through a unique Corporate Work Study Program.

Like so much of Atlanta’s civic accomplishments, this is made possible by private industry making a commitment to help address a searing public issue in search of a solution.

[Cristo Rey](#) students get a world-class high school education while they gain real life work experience in one of more than 100 Corporate Work Study partner companies in metro Atlanta.

Today, 385 students in grades 9-11 – most who matriculated with one or two grade levels behind in reading and math ability – attend school for an extended day and an extended year to catch up academically. They also work one day each week in a white collar job made possible by the participation of one of our corporate partners.

This spring, [Cristo Rey](#) Atlanta will admit a new freshman class and the inaugural class of students will become seniors, destined to graduate in 2018.

The [Cristo Rey](#) model has been proven over time. The first such school opened in Chicago in 1996. [Cristo Rey](#) Atlanta is the 28th such school in the country. [Cristo Rey](#) is a Jesuit school, but there is no religious standard for its students, which include people of all faiths – the majority of our students are not Catholic.

Most importantly, in the 21 years of its existence, 100 percent of [Cristo Rey](#) graduates were accepted into college.

This transformational school – specifically designed to help motivated students and their families who might not otherwise have a chance at a fine education – is made possible by the contributions and partnerships of Atlanta's business community.

We're seeking more corporate partners to join the 101 companies, some of Atlanta's most famous, including Coca-Cola, UPS and Southern Company, as well as smaller companies, that would be willing to hire our students and provide them a life-altering opportunity.

You can find more information at cristoreyatlanta.org or by calling Bill Garrett at (404) 680-9054.