

Catholic Education Advancement Raising Funds for Students, Families, Schools

By Dan Pietrafesa
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The Catholic Education Advancement office stepped up its fund-raising efforts on behalf of families of Catholic school students in need of tuition assistance during the Covid-19 pandemic by raising more than \$3 million in less than a month for the Cardinal Dolan Covid-19 Emergency Tuition Assistance Fund.



Prince Pierre, left, and Schneider Pierre greet Cardinal Dolan at the 43rd annual Inner-City Scholarship Fund Awards Dinner at the Plaza Hotel in Manhattan last December. The Pierre brothers, who are Inner-City Scholarship Fund recipients, attend St. Charles Borromeo School in Harlem. Courtesy of Catholic Education Advancement

This is just one example of what the Catholic Education Advancement office does to assist students, families and Catholic schools in the archdiocese, even as its office at the New York Catholic Center in Manhattan was closed for almost four months due to the pandemic.

“We haven’t taken a day off,” Susan George, executive director of the Inner-City Scholarship Fund who oversees the Catholic Education Advancement office, told CNY. “We can’t. Everyone is trying to take vacation, and we’re all failing miserably because we can’t.

“Right now, we’re in a crisis and we have to help our families.”

The Cardinal Dolan Covid-19 Emergency Tuition Assistance Fund, established to assist families struggling financially as a result of the pandemic, helped almost 3,300 students with their tuition payments.

Ms. George hopes to raise another \$2 million by the end of the summer for this fund to continue assisting families struggling to pay tuition due to the pandemic at the start of the 2020-2021 school year.

She and her staff also oversee the Inner-City Scholarship Fund, which works in partnership with the schools and awarded more than \$12 million to over 11,000 Catholic school students in lower Westchester County, the Bronx, Manhattan and Staten Island during the 2019-2020 school year. The students are awarded funds, based on need, to pay 25 to 80 percent of their tuition.

The Inner-City Scholarship Fund, established in 1971 by Cardinal Terence Cooke, has 650 individual sponsorships in which a sponsor will assist one student with tuition. Ms. George said after mailing about one-third of the sponsors for the 2020-2021 school year, only one said they would be unable to offer a student tuition assistance.

An annual gala and awards dinner both raise more than \$1 million for the scholarship fund. This year's gala was held virtually in May due to the pandemic and raised \$800,000.

"We are very, very lucky in that people want to help the kids and make sure kids have the opportunity for a Catholic education," Ms. George said.

Cathy Hufnagel, who previously served the archdiocese for 38 years as a teacher and principal, is the deputy director for Champions for Quality Education, which has more than 5,000 donors and 200 volunteers who raise about \$1.5 million annually for technology, academic enhancements and enrichment programming at Catholic elementary schools.

"Our mission is to support and serve underserved schools by supporting them through programs, advisory boards to their schools as well as we run the capital improvement committee which provides our schools with a grant for small capital improvement projects up to \$40,000," she said.

Champions for Quality Education receives about 30 applications per year from schools for capital improvements and is able to help fund about 10 projects with the \$200,000 raised for capital improvements.

Of the \$200,000 total, \$30,000 is held for capital improvements in case of an emergency such as when Immaculate Conception School on Gun Hill Road in the Bronx suffered water damage to its gym floor last year.

"I think the work we do definitely fits our mission," Ms. Hufnagel said. "We're constantly working to expand the revenue and with that we'll expand the number of grants we give out as well as programs we do."

Michael Deegan, superintendent of schools in the archdiocese, is optimistic the work of Catholic Education Advancement office will open more opportunities for additional students to benefit from a Catholic school education as well as more programs for students to enrich their Catholic school experience.

"We work extremely well together," Deegan said. "They have a great appreciation for what they do, why they do it and how they do it."

The Catholic Education Advancement office has a staff of 22, with 12 solely dedicated to the Inner-City Scholarship Fund. Two staffers assist Ms. Hufnagel with Champions for Quality Education. The remaining staff supports both operations and other office endeavors such as marketing, events and administration.

"We have tremendous support from the cardinal," Ms. George said. "We work exceptionally well with the superintendent of schools and his office. The cardinal is our chairman and our champion. Who could ask for more than that?"