

DENA's Lasallian urban schools: another reflection on calls from the Peripheries

The schools and ministries in the District of Eastern North America (DENA) are part of the worldwide Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. At the most recent General Chapter there were two important calls to the Districts for global Lasallian action:

- *Better meet the needs of the world's underserved population by renewing our emphasis on serving the marginalized members of our society.*
- *Truly become 1LaSalleby working with Lasallians throughout the world, creating a more cohesive global network to grow our Lasallian educational mission.*

In January, both of these priorities were the focus at a special experience in our District. Br. Robert Schaefer, Provincial/Visitor, welcomed three General Councilors from the Generalate in Rome for a week-long visit to DENA to foster collaboration and networking. Br. Carlos Gomez, Vicar General; Br. Ricardo Laguda, General Councilor; and Br. Chris Patiño, General Councilor, attended a series of visits and meetings throughout DENA for sharing with their fellow Lasallians. They heard about our District's many strengths and successes as well as our challenges and shared their diverse experiences from global Districts throughout the world. These gatherings highlighted various constituencies of DENA, including vocations, communities, education, administration, and leadership.

An important priority of this visit was the focus on DENA's Lasallian urban schools, and DENA's long history of being a beacon of hope for urban students in at-risk and financially fragile communities. The Brothers spent two days visiting and meeting with staff, students, and leaders at four secondary schools located in urban areas: Bishop Loughlin Memorial High School, Brooklyn, NY; La Salle Academy, New York, NY; Saint Raphael Academy, Pawtucket, RI; and West Catholic Preparatory High School, Philadelphia, PA.

The Councilors concluded their visit by participating in the Lasallian Urban Education Summit on January 16, 2025. Led by Mr. James Logan, leaders from the four urban secondary schools, members of DENA's Leadership Team and the Office for Mission & Ministry, and the Councilors gathered as one Lasallian family for a full day of fellowship and sharing. Topics presented and discussed at the Summit included: Diversity of Student Population, Diversity of Academic Needs, Trauma and Violence, and Financial Viability.

The Summit encouraged reflection and collaboration to strengthen the Lasallian educational mission. It also reaffirmed DENA's commitment to providing hope and creating opportunity for all urban students, and especially those students in need, following in the footsteps of our Founder, St. John Baptist de La Salle. He began his educational ministry because he was called to help the youths who did not come from wealthy families, and for whom no formal education was offered. He believed that the only way for a youth to rise out of poverty was through education.

During the visits and at the Summit, each of the four schools had the opportunity to share their successes and hear from the Councilors about their fellow urban Lasallian schools throughout the world.

A few highlights of these DENA Lasallian secondary schools are: West Catholic Preparatory High School enrollment has increased with the past academic year having the largest incoming freshmen class and overall school enrollment since 2008. This remarkable growth not only signifies the appeal of the school's educational environment to students and their families, but also underscores the value West Catholic Prep brings to the local urban community.

Saint Raphael's Academy, over the past decade, has seen a thirty-five percent increase in enrollment, an expansion of the campus footprint, and a highly successful capital campaign. Their recently completed campaign well exceeded its financial goal, with the funds being used to establish an endowment and for classroom improvements.

Bishop Loughlin Memorial High School, among other innovations, has instituted Project Lead the Way (PLTW), with two honors courses of study: Biomedical Science Courses and Engineering Courses. A PLTW administered end-of-course online test is required and advanced scoring on this test may lead to college

credits, preferential admissions, and scholarship consideration.

La Salle Academy has established student-focused programs such as the Guest Lecture Series, a program inviting industry leaders and professionals into the classroom. Guest lecturers bring unique insights to class giving students the opportunity to explore future possibilities. The Paul Francis Writing Center offers students guidance in crafting term papers and resumes as they hone their writing skills.

Additional comprehensive programs that help secondary students excel, such as incoming freshman support programs, and partnerships with local colleges and universities, are part of the upper tier educational experience at these DENA secondary schools located in urban areas. Outstanding educators and commitment to excellence, coupled with support of the socio-emotional needs of the students, is a hallmark of our Lasallian urban secondary schools.

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