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# Campaign pumps millions into Catholic schools

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A fundraising initiative launched in 2007 to raise money for Catholic schools in the area has raised \$62 million so far, bringing much-needed renovations to campuses in Brockton and Dorchester.

Philanthropist [Jack Connors](#), co-founder of Boston ad agency **Hill Holliday**, spearheaded the Campaign for Catholic Schools five years ago at the request of Cardinal [Sean O'Malley](#).

The campaign, fueled largely by money from corporate donors and the Yawkey Foundations, has brought \$40 million to renovation projects at the Trinity Catholic Academy in Brockton and the [Pope John Paul II](#) Catholic Academy in Dorchester. Another renovation project is under way at Pope John Paul's Lower Mills campus.

The remaining money has been spent on a new curriculum for the schools, textbooks, desks, technology and teacher salary increases as part of a performance-based system.

"If anybody had told us five years ago that we'd raise this money, we would have been shocked," Connors said. "In total dollars we've raised, it's impressive."

The consolidation of several Catholic schools in the area happened alongside the fundraising campaign. In Brockton, for example, three parish schools closed in June 2007 and Trinity Catholic Academy reopened in two newly renovated school buildings in September 2007.

In Dorchester, seven parish schools closed in June 2008, opening the following September as [Pope John Paul II](#) Catholic Academy consolidated into four campus schools. Funds from the campaign have funded renovations at two of those school buildings so far, and two more projects are on tap at the Lower Mills and Mattapan campuses.

The campaign also raised \$4.5 million to rehab Catholic Charity's St. Peter's Teen Center on Bowdoin Street in Dorchester.

The Campaign for Catholic Schools is the fundraising offshoot of the 2010 Initiative, a strategic planning effort started in 2005 to improve Catholic schools in the area.

About two years ago, Connors corralled a well-heeled group of financial supporters, among them top executives from EMC, Liberty Mutual, Putnam and [John Hancock](#). Connors said he gave that group a tour of the Dorchester schools and asked each of them to donate \$2 million. Their companies each donated \$1 million instead, he said, but the smaller amount was hardly a disappointment.

"One million dollars for a Catholic school in Dorchester? You've got to be kidding," Connors said. "There was a lot of gratitude about it."

[Joseph Petrowski](#), CEO at the Framingham-based Cumberland Farms Gulf Group, has personally donated \$20,000 to the cause. He remembers his childhood spent at St. Edward Elementary School in Brockton, now part of Trinity Catholic Academy. Petrowski went on to Boston College High School and later to Harvard. "I'm the product of a great Catholic education," Petrowski said.

[Robert Atchinson](#), managing director of Boston-based Adage Capital, is heading up the fundraising for the Lower Mills campus with help from co-chairman [John Sebastian](#), a managing director at Goldman Sachs, and a committee of local business executives.

Atchinson said he has approached nearly 100 financial firms in Boston, and is now reaching out to real estate and law firms, hosting breakfast meetings to discuss the campaign and the value of Catholic education.

"They believe there's some different ways we can approach education than we're seeing in the public schools," Atchinson said. "When we show them how successful this Catholic School model has been, most of the time they commit."

Connors said it will cost between \$16 million and \$18 million to complete the work at the two remaining schools in Dorchester. He said the campaign's goals haven't changed much in the past five years, even if the projects are different now.

"There was just a goal of drawing a line in the sand to stop closing (Catholic) schools," Connors said. "I always thought this would be long-term."