

# suburban life



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By committing to innovation, leadership, and continual self-improvement, **Conwell-Egan Catholic High School** helps students prepare for college, career, and life in the real world.

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# Ready for Anything

By committing to innovation, leadership, and continual self-improvement, **Conwell-Egan Catholic High School** helps students prepare for college, career, and life in the real world.

**TOM LYNCH ENTERED BISHOP EGAN HIGH SCHOOL AS A FRESHMAN IN 1968.** Four years later, as he took his high school diploma and prepared to leave for college, he was a changed person.

"It reinforced the values my parents raised me with and gave me an education that enabled me to thrive in college," Lynch says of Bishop Egan, an all-boys Catholic high school in Lower Bucks County. "It's also where I made all of my best friends and built my confidence. It gave me a good foundation for the next stage of my life."

A lot has changed in the time since. While Lynch finished college and then entered the business world, ultimately rising to the position of CEO for a large public company, his alma mater underwent a dramatic transformation, too. Bishop Egan returned to its roots by merging with its all-girls counterpart, Bishop Conwell High School, to become Conwell-Egan Catholic High School, for boys and girls, in 1993.

By 2012, however, falling enrollment spurred the Archdiocese of Philadelphia to target the school for permanent closure. Lynch, who by then had returned to the school as Chairman of the Board, was among the many people who fought to keep the school open and succeeded

in "turning the ship around."

"We had to reengage donors, but in order to do that you have to have a compelling story," says Lynch, who became president of Conwell-Egan in 2018 after serving as Chairman of the Board for several years. "We wanted to make this school into a place that embraces innovation, continually augments the core curriculum, and offers the resources needed to prepare students for college and careers. That story appealed to a lot of people."

Having quickly reached a point of stabilization, Conwell-Egan has since risen like the proverbial phoenix. Its enrollment has climbed, the campus has benefited from several notable renovations both inside and out, and its academic programming has evolved to meet the changing needs of students eager to prepare for the future. Some of the most noteworthy improvements to the Conwell-Egan campus in recent years include the following:

- **THE CENTER FOR STUDENT LEADERSHIP.** Conwell-Egan renovated an old library into a state-of-the-art space designed to provide students with resources for college and career



Conwell-Egan has invested in the academic counseling and academic support students need to thrive.

readiness, leadership development, and more. Students use the center to apply for internship opportunities and mentorships, and also connect with leaders in industries they may be considering for careers. As part of its investment, the school has expanded its counseling team to four full-time counselors—a student-to-counselor ratio of 110:1, compared with the national average of 428:1—to support students in their post-graduation endeavors.

● **THE ACADEMIC RESOURCE CENTER.**

Students come to this innovative study space, known as the ARC, for academic support. Resources include individualized afterschool tutoring and access to an array of online and print materials to help students improve their academic performance. Principal Matthew Fischer cites key academic indicators from the first semester of the 2019-2020 school year—failures down 51 percent, and academic honors up 15 percent—to illustrate the ARC’s impact on student performance.

“Whether you’re No. 1 in your class or No. 120, our goal is that every student makes progress,” Lynch adds. “Between the ARC and our counseling services, we offer a lot of support and monitor each student’s progression to see where the challenges may be.”

● **REAL-WORLD ACADEMIC PROGRAMMING.**

Conwell-Egan’s academic program aims to prepare students for college and beyond by teaching essential skills such as problem solving, conflict resolution, and decision making. The curriculum has evolved to focus on real-life experiences, including in areas of study such as STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) and business. Fischer cites Brian Wurtz, an Egan alumnus (1984) who went on to become a chief technology officer and now leads the school’s engineering department.

“[Wurtz] is not just teaching an engineering

course; he’s showing what it means to be an engineer, explaining the skill set you need to do well in the field,” he says. “We’ve taken the same approach with our business courses. We’ve always offered courses in marketing, accounting, and entrepreneurship, but we now have a business curriculum to expose students to the different concepts within the field and prepare them to study business in college. The basic idea is to expose them to as many ideas as we can so they can make informed decisions about the future.”

● **A RENOVATED PERFORMING ARTS CENTER.**

Conwell-Egan’s leadership believes the arts are an essential part of every student’s development. The renovated Performing Arts Center has greatly expanded opportunities for students to express themselves through theater, music, and other forms of creative performance.

“When I first came here, we had maybe 15 students in the choir,” says Fischer. “As we continued our investment in the arts, the choir continued to improve and grow. In two to three years, we had up to 80 students in the choir. Last year we had 16 students who made All-Catholic choir, the most of any Catholic school [in the Philadelphia area].”

**Changing the Trajectory**

Conwell-Egan’s metamorphosis is due in part to funding from the Danaher Lynch Family Foundation (DLFF). Created in 2013 by Lynch and his wife, Patty, the DLFF supports education by investing in schools and students throughout Lower Bucks County. DLFF grants have helped Conwell-Egan fund vital renovation projects—the Performing Arts Center renovation, for example. The DLFF also helps students from Conwell-Egan and nine Lower Bucks elementary schools through scholarship programs that have the potential to “change the trajectory of their lives,” according to Susan DiLisio, the DLFF’s executive director.

“We started with four scholars in 2015, and the next year it jumped to 20,” DiLisio says. “Between elementary school and high school, we now have 162 students that receive scholarships, driven by the mission to help children unleash their potential.”

Through the DLFF CEC Scholarship Program, Conwell-Egan students may apply for three different scholarships: the DLFF Community Scholarship, the DLFF Performing Arts Scholarship, and the DLFF Visual Arts Scholarship. DiLisio suggests each scholarship, valued at \$2,000 per year, is “centered around a commitment to learn

how to give back and be active in their school community.”

“The goal is to develop students in areas such as initiative, accountability, leadership, and service,” she adds. “We want to instill in them early enough that the world is bigger than themselves. School is not just a classroom; it’s a place where they can build confidence and leadership, and find positive ways to express themselves.”

As Lynch follows Conwell-Egan’s upward trajectory, he keeps a close eye on indicators such as enrollment to determine whether the school is on the proper path. Enrollment has increased by 30 students this year, he says, the most in more than a decade. He also uses feedback from students, parents, and teachers as a good barometer.

“I think all of our constituents feel good about where we are as a school,” he says. “From the day students come here as freshmen, we’re focused on helping them make the connection between academics and the outside world. We see our job as not just giving them a real-world education, but making sure they have the skills required to succeed in life, and giving them the information and coaching they need to make more informed decisions about their future.” ■



Students express themselves through theater, music, and other forms of creative performance at the renovated Performing Arts Center.

➔ **Conwell-Egan Catholic High School**

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For more on the Danaher Lynch Family Foundation, visit dlff.org.