



eNEWS

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Back to School - a Time for Optimism and Caution

September always brings with it the excitement and anticipation of another school year. Children buy new notebooks and pens, teachers prepare materials for their classes, and principals make sure their schools are ready to open. September is always exciting for us at Research for Action (RFA) as well. Summers offer a time to study data gathered from the previous year and plan for the one ahead. September means returning to the schools, seeing eager students ready to learn, and teachers fresh from a summer break.

This year, in Philadelphia, however, the start of school brings a level of uncertainty because of the many leadership changes that occurred over the summer in both the school district and the School Reform Commission (SRC).

We have watched with interest the changes of this summer and we offer a note of optimism and caution. We are encouraged that Commissioner Sandra Dungee-Glenn will be chairing the SRC in the coming year. She brings experience, dedication, and an understanding of the district's strengths and needs. Thomas Brady, the interim CEO, appears poised to effectively guide the opening of school.

The caution comes as we consider the numerous decisions that lie ahead: the choice of a permanent CEO, the gelling of a new SRC, the hiring for the other leadership positions, and priorities for budget allocations. We encourage wider public involvement and a more vigorous civic accountability. Much good has been accomplished in the past five years, but there are challenging decisions ahead. We hope that new leaders, at all levels, will consider next steps carefully, listen to community voices, and allow good research to help them make prudent and wise decisions.

Jolley Bruce Christman, Ph.D. and Eva Gold, Ph.D. - Founders and Principals

Summer Presentations by RFA Staff and Youth Researchers

Cheryl Jones-Walker, an RFA graduate assistant, and youth researcher Lawrence Jones of the Philadelphia Student Union (PSU), participated in a panel, "Turning Knowledge into Action," at the 2007 *Free Minds/Free People* conference in Chicago. They discussed [Writing to be Heard](#), RFA's action research collaboration with PSU and Youth United for Change, and the West Philadelphia High School youth researchers' findings on parent participation in urban high schools.

Eva Gold, Gretchen Suess, and three youth researchers presented to Temple VOICES staff and youth, about the research

and writing process and their research findings on three School District of Philadelphia high schools.

In addition, Teach For America (TFA) distributed the youth researcher reports to all 126 new TFA teachers as part of the summer orientation program. Dina Portnoy, Director of the Masters Program at the University of Pennsylvania for TFA teachers, commented that another "influence of the reports is that...they have helped these teachers see students as participants in the effort to help others learn about urban schools." New TFA teachers also received RFA's [Privatization "Philly Style"](#) and [Time to Engage](#) reports as part of their orientation.

Waterbury Summit on Secondary Education

Rebecca Reumann-Moore, Cecily Mitchell, and Eva Gold attended the *Waterbury Summit on Secondary Education: Re-visioning the American High School for an Engaged Citizenry* (June 2007) at Pennsylvania State University. RFA staff and associate Ruth Curran Neild gave the following presentations: "Pennsylvania High School Coaching Initiative (PAHSCI) - Nurturing Teacher Leaders: Building Teacher Capacity to Improve Student Learning," "Going Small: Philadelphia's High School Reform Plan," and "What Can We Learn about High School Dropouts from School District and Agency Data."

RFA in the News

Research for Action recently appeared in the [Daily News](#). A letter to the editor written by Eva Gold and Suzanne Blanc titled, "Not Up to Snuff on Parent Participation" was published on July 30, 2007. In addition, on August 14, 2007, Jolley Bruce Christman was quoted in a column by Ronnie Polaneczky titled, "Exciting moment' for schools?"

Inside RFA

Shani Adia Evans has joined RFA as a Senior Research Assistant. Shani recently graduated from the Education Policy Master's Program at the Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania. Her master's thesis considered the accessibility of high school choice options for children of low-income families. Prior to coming to RFA, Evans worked in a variety of educational settings including youth development and after-school programs. She also served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Gabon, Central Africa from 2003 to 2005.

Editors' Note

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