



e NEWS

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Dear Friend of RFA,

We are ending 2007 with the release of [A Philadelphia Story: Building Civic Capacity for School Reform in a Privatizing System](#). The report comes at a key moment for all of us committed to improving Philadelphia's public schools. The Pennsylvania General Assembly, commissioned what may be the most thorough costing out study done in the country and that report, [Costing Out the Resources Needed to Meet Pennsylvania's Public Education Goals](#), documents what it would cost for all students in Pennsylvania public schools to receive a quality education. It gives advocates the data needed to hold the state legislature accountable to provide equity for Philadelphia as well as for 473 of the state's other 591 school districts. But this effort will not succeed unless all sectors of the Philadelphia community put aside their individual agendas and mobilize their constituencies to send a clear, strong message to our legislators.

Research for Action's study on building civic capacity for school reform offers insights about how to overcome the challenges to mobilizing around a shared agenda for change. We hope that our report will guide Mayor-elect Nutter, who has put education high on his list of priorities, the School Reform Commission, and the new CEO of the School District of Philadelphia, as well as other civic, government, and community leaders as they seek fair funding for all of Pennsylvania's students - especially those with greatest need.

Below, we share a few of the key findings of our research into building civic capacity and invite you to read the [executive summary](#) or the [full report](#).

On behalf of all of us at Research for Action we wish you a wonderful holiday season.

Peace,

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

### A Philadelphia Story: Building Civic Capacity for School Reform in a Privatizing System

Research for Action (RFA) recently released a report on civic capacity in our multi-year study, [Learning from Philadelphia's School Reform](#). It challenges all sectors of the city to work together to "pursue the collective good of school improvement."

Philadelphia is at a crossroads. On the one hand, the state takeover of the district and resulting reforms have focused civic attention on education. On the other hand, progress towards a broad-based agenda for our schools that connects

revitalization of the city with improvement of its public education system remains elusive in the absence of the civic capacity to craft, implement and sustain a reform plan.

Philadelphia is in the forefront of cities nationwide that are choosing to adopt a private management approach to school reform. This privatization creates unique obstacles to building civic capacity in Philadelphia:

- **Equity vs. Economic Growth:** finding a niche in the global economy has intensified existing tensions between the goals of equity and economic growth
- **Lack of Transparency:** top-down decision making and closed-door policies make it difficult for civic actors to hold the district accountable for school performance and equity
- **Hierarchical Relationships:** the hierarchical structure of contracts and partnerships discourages cross-group collaboration
- **Lack of Inclusiveness:** groups with prestige and resources are advantaged in their relations with the district over groups representing low-income constituencies. All need to be able to collaborate as equals.

*A Philadelphia Story: Building Civic Capacity for School Reform in a Privatizing System* presents case studies of five local organizations engaged in school reform: [The Center City Schools Initiative](#), [Youth United for Change](#), the [Philadelphia Student Union](#), the [Black Alliance for Educational Options](#), and the [Education First Compact](#). These groups represent a variety of types of involvement, a range of views on the role of market forces in school reform, as well as different constituencies and parts of the city.

## Editors' Note

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