



e NEWS

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Dear Friends of RFA,

Federal, state, and district policies that use standardized tests as the central metric for accountability have fueled the fervor for data about what students know and can do. Our study, [Learning to Learn from Data](#), demonstrates that data-driven decision-making can foster organizational learning in low-performing schools. However, our research also suggests that many common assumptions about data use are overly simplistic.

The notion of using data for instructional and school improvement has a straightforward logic to it: a teacher gets data about what her students have learned, she examines the data to see where her students are strong and weak, she modifies what and how she teaches so that her students learn more, and as teachers across the school engage in this process, the school as a whole improves.

Our research complicates these assumptions. It shows that effective data use is a social activity that takes place over an extended period of time. Drawing on theories about how organizations learn, our research indicates that, in order for data to be useful, they must become part of a continuous cycle of improvement. However, in many cases, immediate pressure to raise test scores hindered the shared and deep examination of data required for educators to reflect on practice and make substantive improvements.

Nevertheless, we also witnessed how people, tools, and processes were able to mediate the destructive aspects of a high stakes accountability environment. In the language of organizational learning, these schools enacted practices that contributed to teachers' individual learning and professional growth, while at the same time fortifying a shared understanding of the challenges, goals, and path ahead for the school.

We hope you will join RFA researchers as we report findings from this and other RFA research projects at the sessions listed below of the [American Educational Research Association \(AERA\)](#) 2008 Annual Meeting.

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

RFA Sessions at AERA Annual Meeting

Routine Checkups: What's the Prognosis for Improving Schools and Student Learning With Interim Assessments?

Symposium jointly organized by RFA and the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE)
Thursday March 27th, 4:05pm - 6:05am
Crowne Plaza Hotel Times Square / Broadway Ballroom, Act II, 4th Floor

Symposium Presentations:

Building With Benchmarks: The Role of Interim Benchmark Assessments in Creating Change in the Seville School District

Katrina E. Bulkley (Montclair State University), Margaret E. Goertz, Nancy Lawrence (CPRE, University of Pennsylvania)

Instructional Guidance, Collegial Work: Evidence on Teachers' Use of Benchmarks From a Large-Scale Survey

Ruth Curran Neild (Johns Hopkins University)

Learning to Learn From Benchmark Assessment Data: What Is Happening in Instructional Communities?

Suzanne Blanc, Jolley Bruce Christman (Research for Action)

Learning to Learn from Benchmark Assessment Data: How Teachers Analyze Results and Modify Instruction

Leslie Nabors Olah, Nancy Lawrence, Matthew Riggan (CPRE)

Presidential Session: Civic Capacity and Urban Education: Looking Back, Looking Forward

Wednesday March 26th, 12:25pm - 1:55pm

Hilton New York / Sutton Complex, Sutton South, 2nd Floor

Presentation: *Privatizing Civic Engagement: Markets, Schools, and the Challenge to Civic Capacity for School Reform in Philadelphia*

Maia Cucchiara, Eva Gold (Research for Action), Elaine Simon (University of Pennsylvania)

Implementation and Impact of Literacy Coaches: A K-12 Perspective

Wednesday March 26th, 8:15am - 10:15am

New York Marriott Marquis Times Square / Soho Complex, Olmstead Room, 7th Floor

Presentation: *Promising Inroads: Findings From a Study of the First Two Years of the Pennsylvania High School Coaching Initiative*

Diane Brown (Research for Action)

Examining Differences in the Distribution of Teachers to Schools

Thursday March 27th, 10:35am - 12:05pm

New York Marriott Marquis Times Square / Shubert Complex, Uris Room, 6th Floor

Presentation: *Trends in Teacher Recruitment, Retention, and Distribution in Philadelphia: 2002-2006* Elizabeth Useem (Research for Action), Robert Offenber, Elizabeth N. Farley-Ripple (University of Pennsylvania)

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