



eNEWS

April 2008

VOLUME 2 NUMBER 4

Dear Friends of RFA,

Charter schools have proven to be popular among Philadelphia families. Since the first four Philadelphia charter schools opened in 1997, their number has grown to over sixty schools now enrolling more than 30,000 students. Charter schools are publically funded and operate with minimal district oversight. The growth of charter schools is subject to lively debate both in Philadelphia and in other parts of the country. Charter school advocates argue that these schools provide opportunities for instructional innovation, provide high quality school options for students, and create healthy competition between schools. Opponents counter that charters threaten educational equity and undermine the financial stability of public school districts.

Research for Action is pleased to have had an opportunity to address some of these issues in our recent work with the [RAND Corporation](#), [Mathematica](#), and the Accountability Review Council (ARC), the independent body that monitors School District of Philadelphia reform efforts. While this research is not a comprehensive evaluation of Philadelphia charter schools, it does make a significant contribution to the evidence about charter schools in the city.

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

RFA Conducts Research on Philadelphia Charter Schools

[*Evaluating the Performance of Philadelphia's Charter Schools*](#), by Ron Zimmer (RAND), Suzanne Blanc (Research for Action), Brian Gill (Mathematica), and Jolley Bruce Christman (Research for Action), considers the effect of charter schools on the academic achievement of Philadelphia students. The study examines test score gains of individual students who attended both traditional public schools and charter schools between 2002 and 2007. By examining the performance of students who switched between traditional public schools and charter schools, the researchers were able to compare the gains of the same students in two different settings. Findings from this study were released as a working paper and will also contribute to a national study of charter schools to be released by RAND later this year.

In addition, findings from the RAND/RFA/Mathematica study were included in [*The Status of 2006-07 Academic Performance in the School District of Philadelphia*](#), the ARC report presented to the Philadelphia School Reform Commission (SRC) in March 2008. RFA also contributed descriptive information about the range and diversity of charter schools to the ARC report.

Key findings from the RAND/RFA/Mathematica study include:

- Students' average gains when attending charter schools are statistically indistinguishable from the gains they

experienced while at traditional public schools.

- Charter schools are attracting students whose prior achievement levels are slightly below the district-wide average, but higher than the average achievement levels of the traditional public schools they left.

- Students transferring to charter schools generally transfer to schools with slightly higher populations of students of the same race or ethnicity.

As charter schools enroll a growing number of Philadelphia public school students, Research for Action continues to pursue opportunities to study their development.

RFA Awarded Grant from Samuel S. Fels Fund

A graduate student will join RFA this summer through the [Fels Internship in Community Service](#). The Fels intern will study issues facing immigrant communities and the secondary schools that serve them.

RFA's Work Recognized at Ethnography Forum

On February 29th, Dr. Kathleen Hall moderated an [Ethnography Forum](#) session that celebrated RFA's sixteen year history in Philadelphia. Over 100 people were in attendance as Eva Gold and Jolley Bruce Christman reflected upon and discussed RFA's accomplishments and challenges.

Inside RFA

Sara Getz has joined RFA through the [Philly Fellows Program](#). Sara recently graduated from Temple University with a B.A. in Political Science. Sara is interested in educational access and equity, specifically among immigrant students and English Language Learners. She is particularly interested in the role of community and grassroots organizations in education reform.

Editor's Note

RFA eNews is a publication of Research for Action. Please email us your thoughts and comments at info@researchforaction.org. We respect your privacy and will not share your contact information.

To unsubscribe or change your options, please go to this URL:

<http://gossamersoft.com/mailman/listinfo/researchforaction>

Editor

Shani Adia Evans

Copyright 2008 Research for Action

www.researchforaction.org