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Dear Friends of RFA,

Under No Child Left Behind, urban school districts have increasingly turned to interim assessments, administered at regular intervals, to help gauge student progress in advance of annual state exams. These assessments have spawned growing debate among educators, assessment experts, and the testing industry: *are they worth the significant investment of money and time?*

In our new report, *Making the Most of Interim Assessment Data: Lessons from Philadelphia*, and the *executive summary*, Research for Action (RFA) weighs in on this issue. The School District of Philadelphia (SDP) was an early adopter of interim assessments, implementing the exams in 2003. Unlike teachers in some other regions, Philadelphia elementary and middle grades teachers rated these "Benchmark" assessments, developed by the SDP in collaboration with Princeton Review, highly.



However, the study found that enthusiasm did not necessarily correlate with higher rates of student achievement. What *did* predict student success were three factors -- instructional leadership, collective responsibility, and use of the SDP's Core Curriculum.

The report underscores the value of investment in ongoing data interpretation that emphasizes teachers' learning within formal instructional communities, such as grade groups of teachers. That investment means creating time in teachers' schedules to share assessment information and address results, supporting changes to instructional strategies in response to the information, and regularly assessing the feedback loop itself to ensure the positive impact on student learning. This approach, used in tandem with the core curriculum in a school with a positive professional climate, proved to be the clearest path to success.

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

### **Methodology**

*Making the Most of Interim Assessment Data: Lessons from Philadelphia* is one of the first large-scale empirical studies on the use of interim assessments and their impact on student achievement. RFA researchers examined the use and impact of interim assessment data from 2005 - 2007 in elementary and middle grades across the District. The three-year multi-method study draws on student achievement and demographic data; responses from a district-wide teacher survey; and in-depth, qualitative research in ten schools.

This report contributes to a larger debate about the value of interim assessments. To read more about the debate, please see:

- "[Testing Faces Ups and Downs Amid Recession.](#)" *Education Week*, May 13, 2009
- "[Test Students to Enrich High School Teaching, Brief Urges.](#)" *Education Week*, March 26, 2008
- "[L.A. teachers' union calls for boycott of testing.](#)" *Los Angeles Times*, January 28, 2009
- "[Test Industry Split Over 'Formative' Assessment.](#)" *Education Week*, September 16, 2008

#### **RFA in the News**

Betsy Useem, a Senior Research Consultant wrote "[Other cities outstrip Philadelphia in recruiting, hiring teachers](#)" in the Summer 2009 edition of the *Philadelphia Public School Notebook*.

RFA's 2007 report *Closing the Teacher Quality Gap in Philadelphia: New Hope and Old Hurdles* was quoted in two articles in the Summer 2009 edition of the *Philadelphia Public School Notebook*: "[Recruiting special education teachers proves to be a challenge for the District,](#)" and "[District, with fits and starts, inches toward teacher equity,](#)"

Eva Gold, Maia Cucchiara, and Elaine Simon show how the market-based approach to public education thwarted the development of civic capacity in "[Market-Oriented Education Reforms: The Cost to Civic Capacity in Philadelphia,](#)" which appeared in the Spring 2009 issue of *Voices in Urban Education*.

RFA's 2009 report *Effective Organizational Practices for Middle and High School Grades* was featured in the May 1 *Public Education Network's* weekly *NewsBlast*.

#### **Editor's Note**

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

#### **Editors**

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