



RESEARCH for ***ACTION***

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# Annual Report

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FISCAL YEAR

JULY 2004 -

JUNE 2005

## **RESEARCH FOR ACTION MISSION**

*Through research and action, Research for Action seeks to improve the education opportunities and outcomes of urban youth by strengthening public schools and enriching the civic and community dialogue about public education. We share our research with parent and community leaders, educators, students, and policy makers with the goals of building a shared critique of educational inequality and strategizing about school reform that is socially just.*



## A LETTER FROM THE FOUNDERS

The past year was one of enormous growth and activity for RESEARCH for ACTION (RFA). *Learning from Philadelphia's School Reform* project continued full throttle as did our ongoing formative evaluation studies. In addition we initiated work on several other evaluations. We welcomed new staff and expanded our office space to accommodate this growth. All in all we are energized to be engaged in research on the knotty problems of urban public schools and value the opportunities to collaborate with other colleagues and scholars. All of this is outlined in greater detail in this annual report.

RFA continues to draw national attention as an organization that exemplifies the value of being a locally-focused, applied research organization. We were mentioned in the winter, 2005 issue of *Voices in Urban Education* (VUE), published by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, as an organization that typifies the “kind of close relationship that helps bridge the gap between research and practice...and ensures that research is attuned to local conditions.” Interest in organizations like RFA which serve this role is growing and RFA has joined with other “place-based” research groups to submit a proposal for an interactive panel at AERA titled: *Actionable research in the service of school improvement: The role of independent place-based research organizations*.

Of particular note is the announcement that RFA received a two and a half year \$437,000 grant from the Spencer Foundation to study how Philadelphia school teachers and administrators use data to inform instructional decisions. While the interest in and enthusiasm for data collection and use in schools is high, little is known about how teachers and principals learn to analyze this information and apply it to practice and what the impact is on the kinds of instructional decisions that they make and on student achievement. The grant was one of only three major grants awarded by the prestigious Chicago-based Spencer Foundation.

The Spencer grant will fund a new aspect of our comprehensive multi-year study which investigates Philadelphia's complex and radical school reform effort. The grant will focus on 86 low-performing elementary and middle schools identified by state takeover to receive a range of special interventions including increased funding and management by both for and non-profit organizations.

We have organized this annual report into two primary sections: the first focuses on our research and highlights the work we are doing in the three areas of policy studies, formative evaluation, and action research. The second section provides information on organizational finances and capacity. As you review the information, we believe you will see, as we do, the work of a dedicated staff and board. Those of us who work at RFA take our mission seriously, understanding that what we learn and share can help to improve the educational opportunities and outcomes for urban youth. Celebrate with us another successful year and thank you for your continued interest in **RESEARCH for ACTION**.

Jolley Bruce Christman, Ph.D.

Founder/Principal

Eva Gold, Ph.D.

Founder/Principal

## RESEARCH: POLICY STUDIES

### Learning from Philadelphia's School Reform

RFA's primary policy focus continues to be its ongoing work on the multi-year study and public information initiative, *Learning from Philadelphia's School Reform*. RFA is spearheading this project which brings together a multidisciplinary collaborative of regional scholars to analyze Philadelphia's school reform. This reform is unprecedented in its level of private management of public schools and is being watched by national education reformers and leaders especially as the mandates of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) are enforced and other districts turn to outside providers to manage low-performing schools. In this study, RFA is also collaborating with Johns Hopkins University to compare the impact of different reform strategies on student achievement in middle grades mathematics and science and is providing information based on our earlier evaluations of Philadelphia's systemic change efforts.

This year, RFA published another major report - the second in a series on teacher quality, an article on small learning communities, and a poster on Making Adequate Yearly Progress. Furthermore, RFA staff met with local Philadelphia stakeholders to inform them of findings, observations, and concerns and received much media coverage, both local and national around its work. In addition, RFA researchers presented several papers that focused on the development and expansion of the diverse provider model and its impact on teaching and learning, on civic and community engagement, teacher quality and on lessons learned from the first three years of study. This project is supported with lead funding from the William Penn Foundation, The Pew Charitable Trusts, and Carnegie Corporation of New York.

#### Selected Publications

The 2004-05 teacher quality report focused on the difficult issue of teacher recruitment and retention. The report, released in April at a public event in Philadelphia, was authored by Ruth Curran Neild, Betsey Useem, and Liz Farley and titled: *The Quest for Quality: Recruiting and Retaining Teachers in Philadelphia*. The report takes note of some positive trends: an increase in teacher applications, a slight increase in the percentage of new teachers who were fully certified, and an increase in teacher retention rates. It also raises concerns about the need for proper content-area certification in middle grades, more certified special education teachers and the continuing inequity in the distribution of credentialed and experienced teachers in the schools with the highest proportion of low-income students.

*Making AYP: Pennsylvania Edition* was a poster board game created by Benjamin Herold in a sense of fun and disclosure to display the complicated and circuitous route that districts need to follow to meet the requirements of achieving their adequate yearly progress goals as set out under regulations of No Child Left Behind. Published in collaboration with *Philadelphia Public School Notebook*, the poster has been widely praised and requested from districts around the state and country.

#### Stakeholder Meetings

RFA researchers met with members of local Philadelphia organizations including, top school district leadership, the Philadelphia Student Union, Youth United for Change, the Philadelphia Education First Compact, and the University Partners to review several publications and recent findings in order to keep these key stakeholders well-informed about the current reform.

## Selected Presentations

RFA researchers presented their findings in many different forums as a way of broadening our public outreach around the *Learning...* study.

The *Joint Venture* power point presentation about the privatization of the district was given in a New York City meeting sponsored by the Ford Foundation for funders of education reform and again at the Ethnography in Education conference at the University of Pennsylvania, and to the Consortium for Chicago School Research.

*Blurring the Boundaries: Private Sector Involvement in Philadelphia Schools*, a paper which elaborated the findings in the Joint Venture powerpoint, was presented at the annual conference of the American Educational Research Association (AERA).

*The Quest for Quality: Recruiting and Retaining Teachers in Philadelphia* report was released in a public forum which drew a diverse audience of about 100 people with many school district administrators and teachers. A panel included, along with the authors, a representative of the district office of human resources, a school principal, and the director of the Philadelphia Education Fund.

*District Capacity to Scale up Reform Mathematics* was a paper presented at the National Association of Teachers of Mathematics. This paper focused on the implementation of reform mathematics curricula in 10 districts in the greater Philadelphia region.

## Media Coverage

RFA continues its close association with the *Philadelphia Public School Notebook*, a local advocacy newspaper that publishes quarterly and focuses solely on the Philadelphia public schools. RFA staff contributed several articles about our research findings and reports to each issue. We had extensive media coverage around the release of the teacher recruitment and retention report including articles in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Daily News, Education Daily*, a national daily newsletter, the *Education Notebook*, an e-newsletter out of Harrisburg. A link to the report and a brief summary were also placed on *NewsBlast*, the weekly on-line newsletter of the Public Education Network. An hour-long discussion at WHY? about the report with the author hosted by Marty Moss-Cohane of Radio Times received much response and was also aired later on WHY?-TV.

## RESEARCH: POLICY STUDIES

### Public Education Network

A second major policy focus involved a project evaluation and report for the Public Education Network (PEN). The report reviewed the impact of Local Education Funds (LEFs) on their local public schools and their civic enterprise around public education in their communities. Titled *Crafting A Civic Stage for Education Reform: Understanding the Work and Accomplishments of Local Education Funds*, the paper focused on fourteen LEFs around the country. The report noted that LEFs are working to improve public education and defined their unique contribution; articulated an overall theory of change operating across the work of all LEFs; and developed an indicators framework to identify areas of impact on schools and communities. "Because they work at the intersection of community development and education reform," the authors noted, "LEFs are uniquely situated to connect these two strands in efforts to improve community economic and social conditions." Leaders at PEN told RFA researchers that their work will be an enormous help to them as they consider ways to increase their influence and provide even greater assistance to districts nationwide.

### Other Policy Publications:

*Bringing Community Organizing into the School Reform Picture*, *Non-profit Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, September 2004, by Eva Gold, Elaine Simon, Leah Mundell, and Chris Brown of the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform.

*A New Conception of Parent Engagement: Community Organizing for School Reform*, a book chapter, *The SAGE Handbook of Education Leadership, Advances in Theory, Research and Practice*, SAGE Press, 2005, by Eva Gold, Elaine Simon, and Chris Brown.

## RESEARCH: FORMATIVE EVALUATIONS

At RFA we find formative evaluations to be especially rewarding as we see and appreciate the complex goals organizations are trying to accomplish, and enjoy the chance to collaborate and contribute to the achievement of these goals by giving them feedback and suggestions. Formative evaluation provides timely and useful information during the course of the evaluation so that organizations can make mid-course corrections as needed. They help build people's skills and knowledge by helping them recast issues and problems as challenges to discuss and address. We work with an organization's stakeholders to identify important questions to address. We find that when stakeholders play a part in raising questions and conducting research they are more likely to make use of evaluation findings and recommendations. During the past year, RFA worked with several organizations to evaluate their work in strengthening public education.

### New Evaluations - 2004-2005

RFA received funding from the Annenberg Foundation to be the evaluator of a new three-year project called the **PA High School Coaching Initiative** which will take place in eleven districts in Pennsylvania. The RFA evaluation will look at the initiative's implementation and impact. The evaluation will provide ongoing data and analysis to help program leaders problem solve, improve decision-making and make mid-course corrections.

**Parent Leadership Academies (PLA)** is an important new program in the Philadelphia School District, funded by the William Penn Foundation, which asked RFA to be the evaluator. Initial interviews have taken place and RFA has given preliminary feedback to program leaders on issues such as time and commitment of members of the Parent Advisory Board, the positioning of the PLA within the district, and the need for clarification of the role of the Home and School Associations within the overall effort.

Our evaluation of the **White-Williams Scholars** program focused in 2004-05 on their Peer Academic Development (PAD) Program and the development of a new standardized curriculum. RFA gave feedback on this program and developed an indicators framework to provide White-Williams with a tool to use as they continue to implement, refine, monitor, and reflect on the performance of the PAD standardized curriculum.

### Ongoing and Long Term Evaluations

Math and science continue to be growing areas of interest and work for RFA as we are now involved with four separate studies involving these disciplines. **MetroMath**, funded by the National Science Foundation, seeks to develop a new generation of leaders in mathematics education for urban schools and the **New Jersey Graduate K-12 Partnership** is designed to link graduate students in mathematics and science with middle school students and teachers. RFA continues to provide valuable formative feedback to these two programs about building partnerships and contextualizing their work within the broader field of mathematics and science reform.

**The Greater Philadelphia Secondary Mathematics Program** is also supported by the National Science Foundation. RFA is studying curriculum implementation in ten districts in the greater Philadelphia area. We are looking at the human, social, material and structural facets of organizational capacity, at the characteristics and impact of school leadership, and at interactions within and among instructional communities.

RFA is about to complete a 20-month study of the **Philadelphia Say Yes to Education (SYTE)** program. SYTE is a college tuition reimbursement initiative for children from low-income families. The program also provides financial support for advanced education to the parents and siblings of SYTE students. Consistent with the holistic approach of the program, RFA examined the effects and outcomes of program supports on the individual child, family, and the school. In order to understand both effects and outcomes, RFA developed a mixed method research design. Quantitative analysis of student outcomes provides comparative measures of academic and behavioral progress between SYTE students and their peers while qualitative data provides a picture of the program's processes and dynamics, yielding insight into how the program works and its effect.

RFA has been the evaluator of the **GEAR UP** program in the School District of Philadelphia since its inception in 1999 and we believe our input has helped to frame the program and provide suggestions for ways to strengthen and improve it. This year we provided a Year Five Evaluation Summary Report. Our contract with GEAR UP will be completed in 2005.

In Trenton, our collaborative relationship with district leadership has meant that RFA has examined many programs over the years including **Leadership for Education Achievement (LEAD)** and we look forward to continuing this partnership in the coming year. RFA researchers hope to present a panel on *How Does a District Learn? Leadership Practices for Defining and Solving Problems in an Urban School District* at AERA this year which will focus partly on RFA work in Trenton.

### **Selected Publications**

*Small Learning Communities that Really Work* was published in *Phi Delta Kappan* and written by Jolley Bruce Christman and Jonathan Supovitz from the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE). This article reflected work done in schools in Philadelphia and Cincinnati that are using small learning communities as a way to improve and enhance education in their schools. The study was part of work completed during the Children Achieving reform which was part of the larger Annenberg Challenge nationally. The authors outlined the steps that need to be taken to be sure that small learning communities stay focused on instruction. This paper was shared with administrators in the Trenton School District and with directors of intermediate units in the counties surrounding Philadelphia.

## ACTION RESEARCH AND YOUTH ORGANIZING

In the 1990's RFA set a strategic goal to conduct quality research on student perspectives about their schools and provide technical assistance to youth organizing groups. For the past several years, youth activism and student voices have been a major focus of RFA's work. RFA supports the development of youth around the building of leadership and literacy skills so that they can participate in positive change in their schools and communities. To that end, we were active again this past year with two specific programs.

Our **Summer Action Research Camp** expanded this year, thanks to additional funding from the Goldsmith-Greenfield Foundation, Inc., to a full week program that involved approximately 40 youth from a variety of community based organizations. Students learned valuable skills in research design, data analysis and presentation and received support and encouragement to use these new skills to investigate issues of importance to them. Participating students were identified as being involved in social action/justice projects in their own communities.

Our project with **Youth United for Change** and the **Philadelphia Student Union**, funded in part by the Surdna Foundation and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, is a part of the *Learning from Philadelphia's School Reform* study. We are working with students to document their campaigns to transform their large neighborhood high schools into small schools. We have been especially attentive to the ways in which the student groups not only work with the district, but also build neighborhood allies and connect with the broader Philadelphia school reform community to increase their clout.

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## ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

As noted earlier, this has been a year of tremendous growth and change for RFA which has enabled the organization to expand its work and outreach.

RFA staff grew by several people this year, with both senior researchers and research assistants to work on the expanding *Learning...* project, as well as the new evaluations and action research initiatives. Our new associates bring strong talent and skills, which we believe will make us better able to meet the numerous demands that our projects bring and continue to foster a collaborative and meaningful work environment.

Funding was expanded significantly with new funds from the Annenberg Foundation, and the major grant from the Spencer Foundation which will also allow RFA to expand its research within the *Learning* project.

Communications work expanded with the hiring of a part time consultant to work internally with RFA staff, establish some communications strategies and tools to streamline work, and focus solely on communications to support RFA researchers in their work.

Professional development focused this year on the issue of equity in the post Brown era. Researchers and staff met several times to discuss this topic and enjoyed a special session with Charles Payne who led a discussion on this issue.

## FINANCIAL SUMMARY

### FINANCIAL POSITION\*

as of year ending June 30, 2005

#### ASSETS

Cash and Equivalents	663,519
Contracts and Grants Receivable	975,036
Prepaid Expenses	18,873
Fixed Assets (Net)	75,867
Deposits	<u>6,083</u>

**TOTAL ASSETS** 1,739,378

#### LIABILITIES

Accounts Payable	22,150
Other Liabilities	<u>24,956</u>

**TOTAL LIABILITIES** 56,561

#### NET ASSETS

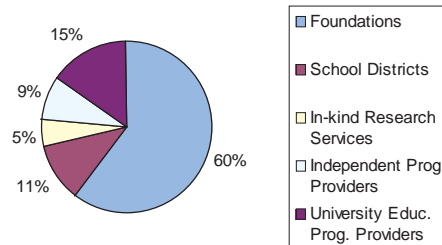
Unrestricted	256,710
Temporarily Restricted	<u>1,426,107</u>

**TOTAL NET ASSETS** 1,682,817

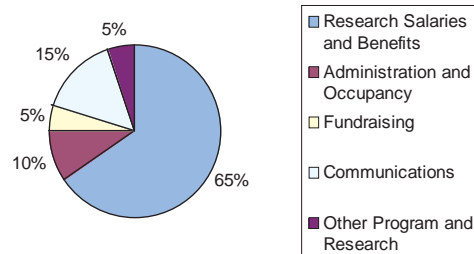
**Total Liabilities and Net Assets** 1,739,378

### ACTIVITIES

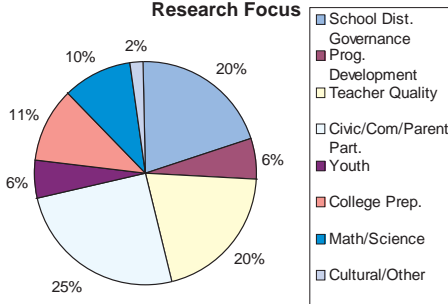
#### Revenue Sources



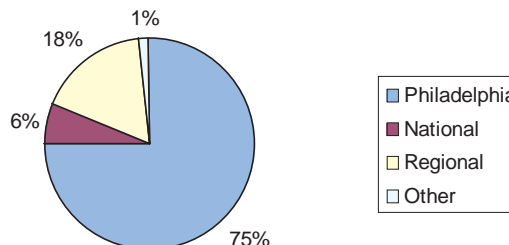
#### Expenditures



#### Research Focus



#### Geographic



\* This condensed financial information for the year ending June 30, 2005 has been derived from Research for Action's financial statements audited by Margolis and Co., PC, independent auditors. The condensed financial information should be read in conjunction with the 2005 audited financial statements and related notes. To obtain a copy of the complete 2005 audited financial statements, contact Research for Action in Philadelphia, PA.

## BOARD

The Research for Action board also made significant strides this year. Board members are assisting staff in creating a new five-year strategic plan. The Board will help RFA reflect on the current environment in public education and the challenges of expansion, managing growth effectively, and the contribution we can make in the changing world of public education. John Claypool has agreed to chair the Board in 2005-06, and will be assisted by an executive committee to help streamline decisions and information flow.

We have been grateful for the hard work and leadership of all Board members including those members who are rotating off the board. These include former chair Judy Buchanan, Christie Balka, Ronald Hinton, Timothy Potts, and Amy Rhodes; our thanks to them for their support and guidance these past years.

### Board Of Directors 2004-2005

#### Irv Ackelsberg

Managing Attorney  
Community Legal Services

#### Christie Balka

Executive Director  
Bread & Roses Community Fund

#### Judy Buchanan

Deputy Director  
National Writing Project

#### Jolley B. Christman

Principal, Research for Action

#### John Claypool

Executive Director  
American Institute of Architects

#### Mike DiBerardinas

Secretary of Dept. of Conservation  
and Natural Resources  
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

#### Diedre Farmbry

Executive Director  
The Urban Education Fund

#### Eva Gold

Principal, Research for Action

#### Ronald E. Hinton, Jr.

President  
Allegheny West Foundation

#### Jean Hunt

Executive Director  
Campaign for Working Families

#### Madeline Miller

Retired Teacher

#### Rochelle Nichols-Solomon

Director, Schools for a New Society  
Academy for Educational  
Development

#### David Paul

President  
Fiscal Strategies Group, Inc.

#### Timothy Potts

Director  
Pennsylvania School Reform  
Network

#### Amy Rhodes

Community Outreach Coordinator  
Philadelphia Public School  
Notebook

#### Joan P. Shapiro

Chairperson  
Department of Educational  
Leadership and Policy Studies  
Temple University

#### Warren Simmons

Executive Director  
Annenberg Institute of School  
Reform

#### Steve Weimar

Executive Director  
The Math Forum

### Staff

#### Eva Gold, Ph.D.

Principal  
Director of *Learning...*

#### Jolley B. Christman, Ph.D.

Principal  
Director of *Learning...*

#### Judith A. Adamson, M.B.A.

Managing Director / CFO

#### Suzanne Blanc, Ph.D.

Senior Research Associate  
Director of *Learning...*

#### Diane Brown, Ed.D.

Senior Research Associate

#### Jacquelyn Dale

Financial Assistant

#### Kendra DeLarge

Office Manager

#### Pierre du Plessis

Research Assistant

#### Tracey Hartmann, Ph.D.

Research Associate

#### Benjamin Herold, M.Ed.

Senior Research Assistant /  
Communications

#### Kristine Lewis, Ph.D.

Research Associate

#### Rebecca Reumann-Moore, Ph.D.

Research Associate

#### Morgan Riffer

Research and Technology Assistant

#### Gretchen Suess, M.A.

Senior Research Assistant

#### Other Directors of *Learning from Philadelphia's School Reform* project

#### Elizabeth Useem, Ed.D.

Independent Consultant

#### Ruth Curran Neild, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Education  
Graduate School of Education  
University of Pennsylvania





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