

2015

A YEAR IN REVIEW

*Building Knowledge for Policy and Practice
in the Education Community*



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for ACTION

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



During each of my six years at the helm of RFA, a consistent theme has emerged in our annual reports—one of growth, change, development, and expansion. The changes have been internal—attracting new staff, strengthening and expanding our research skills and methods, and expanding our communications capacity. And they've been external, too—competing for and winning new projects; launching the Philadelphia Education Research Consortium; collaborating with diverse partners; and, in 2013, moving our offices to Center City Philadelphia.

Those themes held true in 2015.

Having created an exceptionally strong research and administrative infrastructure, this year we turned our attention to increasing our public impact. Through our robust policy work, we redoubled efforts to connect stakeholders and partners with research that speaks to the most pressing questions and discussions in the education field. We sought opportunities to inform the news media about intersections between our work and emerging education topics. And, we endeavored to reach new audiences through social networking and other diverse communication channels.

Our growing portfolio of projects is also a reflection of our increasing impact. RFA is now actively engaged in research, evaluation and policy analysis in 16 states. And we have deepened our focus close to home as well, with meaningful new work in Philadelphia as well as new projects with Pennsylvania and neighboring states.

This year also presented us with an exciting opportunity—a unique moment in time to revisit our public image and branding to ensure that it speaks to the mission, rigor, and professionalism that RFA has cultivated during the organization's 23 years in operation.

I'm so pleased to use this annual report to introduce you to RFA's new logo and website. We think you'll agree that both are built to clearly convey RFA's core focus on education, and provide our partners, colleagues, and the public with better, easier access to our body of work.

I welcome you to read this annual report for a behind-the-scenes look into how we created our new website and public image, and of course to see a snapshot of our exciting body of work that will take us into 2016 and beyond.

KATHLEEN M. SHAW, PH.D.

Executive Director

SPOTLIGHT ON POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

If you listen to the news at all, you can't escape it—a college education has never been so important, and it has never been so out of reach for so many. What role can research play in ensuring that disadvantaged students have a real chance of getting into, and graduating from, college?

RFA has built a strong complement of research and evaluation projects in the postsecondary policy arena. Our work combines a full array of research methods with the first-hand experience our staff brings from state government, college and university teaching, and postsecondary administration. With a particular focus on issues of access, success, and equity, RFA's postsecondary work spans in-depth examinations of school-based college access centers to large-scale analyses of state- and system-level postsecondary policy change. All of RFA's postsecondary work is informed by our deep knowledge of K-12 education and college readiness policy and practice.

POSTSECONDARY PROJECTS

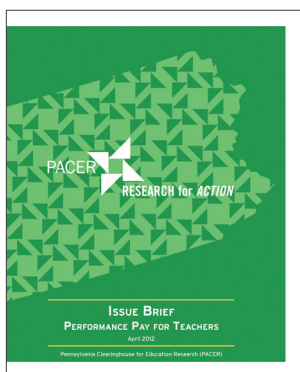
Our work in the postsecondary arena is supported by a broad range of local and national foundations, non-profits, federal agencies, and state education organizations. Current and recent projects include:

- ***Examining the Implementation of Outcomes-Based Funding in Three States.*** RFA is conducting two parallel studies—one for the Gates Foundation and one for the Lumina Foundation—on how two- and four-year higher education institutions in three states respond to Outcomes-Based Funding (OBF) reforms. This mixed-methods evaluation includes a policy analysis to develop a nuanced picture of the parameters of OBF in each state, coupled with in-depth institutional case studies in each state to understand how implementation of OBF is impacting institutional policy and practice. We are also conducting comprehensive quantitative analyses of the impact of these policies on key student outcomes.
- ***Examining the Use of Multiple Measures for Postsecondary Student Placement.*** RFA is leading a multi-year project examining state and system policies to expand the amount of data used to assess college readiness. Our research includes a 50-state survey, as well as case studies of innovative institutional practice. A toolkit to guide implementation of effective placement policies will emerge in 2016.
- ***Documenting the Scope of Alternative Teacher Certification Programs in New Jersey.*** The Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center (MACC) provides technical assistance to states in the region as they work to improve and reform education. As a MACC partner, RFA works with the New Jersey Department of Education to examine its alternative teacher certification landscape.
- ***Evaluating the Effect of University-Based “Inside-Out” Programs.*** RFA is undertaking a preliminary evaluation of the Inside-Out Prison Exchange program, housed at Temple University. For over a decade, Inside-Out has been training university faculty to teach courses within adult correctional facilities that bring these adults together with university students.
- ***Examining New Profit’s Engaged Investor Model.*** RFA is conducting a mixed-methods, multi-year evaluation of New Profit’s role as an intermediary for six national college access organizations (YouthBuild, Single Stop, Year Up, National College Advising Corps, College Summit, and iMentor) to examine the unique influence of New Profit on the outcomes achieved by each of the sub-grantee organizations throughout the duration of the SIF grant funding period.

Read more about these projects at www.researchforaction.org.

RFA'S WORK AT THE STATE LEVEL

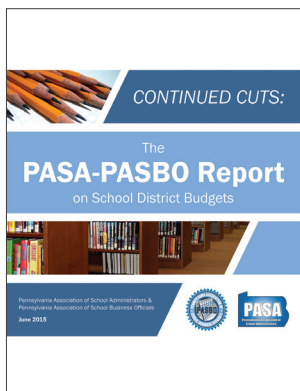
RFA is partnering directly with state education agencies, education beat journalists, and stakeholder organizations in Pennsylvania and neighboring states to ensure that education policymaking and debates are driven by research and evidence.



Tracking Pennsylvania's Most Relevant Education Policy Topics through PACER

The Pennsylvania Clearinghouse for Education Research continues to thrive. PACER provides state policymakers and journalists with research briefs and original analysis that address current debates in Harrisburg; over the past year, our team has tackled the performance of the state's cyber charter schools, school district governance, Pennsylvania's school rating system, and standardized testing and the opt-out movement.

RFA also works to inform education policy debates through regular commentaries in a diverse array of outlets—from *Education Week* to the state's leading daily metros (*Philadelphia Inquirer* and *Daily News* and *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*) to the *Philadelphia Public School Notebook*. Through this work, RFA staff are able to extend the reach of our research, and broaden the state and civic debates on education reform.



Working for a Fair School Funding Formula

A key highlight of RFA's efforts in 2014-15 centered on our service as the research partner for the Pennsylvania Campaign for Fair Education Funding, a network of education, civil rights, labor, and faith-based organizations working to correct the fact that Pennsylvania is one of just three states nationwide without a predictable school funding formula. The campaign commissioned independent studies on the state of Pennsylvania school finance, and partnered with the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators and the Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials to survey school districts on the impact of the state's school funding crisis. These survey results led to a series of reports, *Continued Cuts*, which informed major components of Governor Wolf's proposed 2015-16 education budget.

Providing Technical Assistance to the Pennsylvania Alliance for Career and Technical Training Network (PACTT)

PACTT commissioned RFA to provide research consultation and technical assistance to support its efforts to develop and effectively utilize a data collection system to assess the scope and effectiveness of education provided to students in juvenile justice facilities.

Examining Delaware's Teacher Evaluation System

RFA is partnering with the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of its teacher evaluation system, known as DPAS-II. Our mixed methods examination includes a statewide survey of educators, as well as case studies of several school districts. This work directly informs DDOE's efforts to continue to refine and improve the implementation, support and effectiveness of these systems.

RFA AT HOME IN PHILADELPHIA



LAUNCHING THE PHILADELPHIA EDUCATION RESEARCH CONSORTIUM

In late 2014, RFA launched the Philadelphia Education Research Consortium, or PERC—an innovative partnership designed to provide research and analyses on some of the city’s most pressing education issues. We forged this partnership with the School District of Philadelphia and the city’s charter school sector, with a three-year grant from the William Penn Foundation.

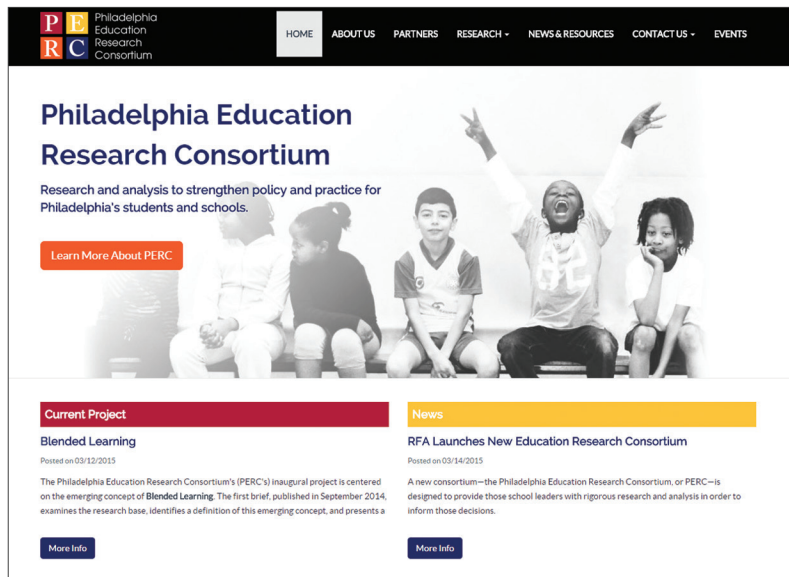
PERC draws on the rich research expertise in Philadelphia—both within RFA and from three of the city’s major research universities—to conduct research that meets the information needs identified by Philadelphia’s public schools.

PERC’s research agenda is driven by the city’s school district and charter schools, not the interests of researchers. This orientation ensures that PERC will provide timely, actionable analysis aligned with the highest priorities of Philadelphia’s educators.

PERC’s inaugural research project centered upon Blended Learning, and resulted in two reports, which are now available on the PERC website. As we enter this school year, we will continue to track blended learning activities across the city’s schools. We are also launching a multi-year study of English Language Learners.

Learn more—and read our latest research—at www.phillyeducationresearch.org. And, be sure to follow PERC on Twitter at @PHLedresearch.

“PERC conducts research to meet the needs of Philadelphia’s public schools.”
- PERC Announcement



CONTINUING INVESTMENTS AT HOME

RFA remains deeply committed to conducting research that benefits schools and students on our home turf of Philadelphia. In addition to the launch of PERC, we have also been engaged in the following Philadelphia-based projects:

Evaluating 21st Century Community Learning Center OST Programs

RFA serves as the local evaluator for 16 organizations in Philadelphia—including Catholic Social Services, Congreso, Education Works, Penn’s Netter Center, Pan American Charter School, Philadelphia Health Management Corporation, and others. These sites have been funded through a federal grant to create OST after-school activities in their communities to enrich students’ academic growth. RFA researchers are currently conducting a mixed-methods evaluation of each site to determine the impact of program activities on students’ educational outcomes. In addition, RFA uses knowledge and data generated from the evaluation to examine cross-city OST outcomes to provide the first comprehensive look at Philadelphia’s growing OST sector.

Studying the Free Library of Philadelphia’s “Maker Jaww” Initiative

There is increasing recognition that creativity and access to creative projects play an essential role in education, and the “maker movement” is growing as a result. RFA is evaluating an initiative at the Free Library of Philadelphia that provides intergenerational access to science, technology, engineering, arts, and math (STEAM) programming and projects designed to provide creative spaces for community members in libraries in underserved neighborhoods of North Philadelphia.

Evaluating ArtWell’s HeartBeat Program

ArtWell was founded in 2000 to respond to the chronic community violence in Philadelphia by introducing a preventive, educational, arts-oriented approach to reach underserved communities and youth facing discrimination, poverty, violence, and the everyday challenges of growing up. Its mission is to engage young people in reflection and creative expression to discover and honor their strengths and those of others. RFA serves as the evaluator for ArtWell’s HeartBeat program, which provides weekly music education programming to K-5 students in Philadelphia public schools.

Evaluating Arts Integration with the Mural Arts Program

RFA is partnering with Philadelphia’s Mural Arts Program to conduct a two-year, mixed-methods study to assess the impact of an arts integration initiative in four Philadelphia schools. In the first year, we will highlight perceptions of administrators, teachers, and Mural Arts teaching artists on the successes and challenges of arts integration and the initiative’s impact on youth. In the second year, we will underscore youth perceptions of the program’s influence. Additionally, RFA’s study will analyze the program’s impact on students’ academics, school behavior and attendance.

A NEW LOOK FOR RFA

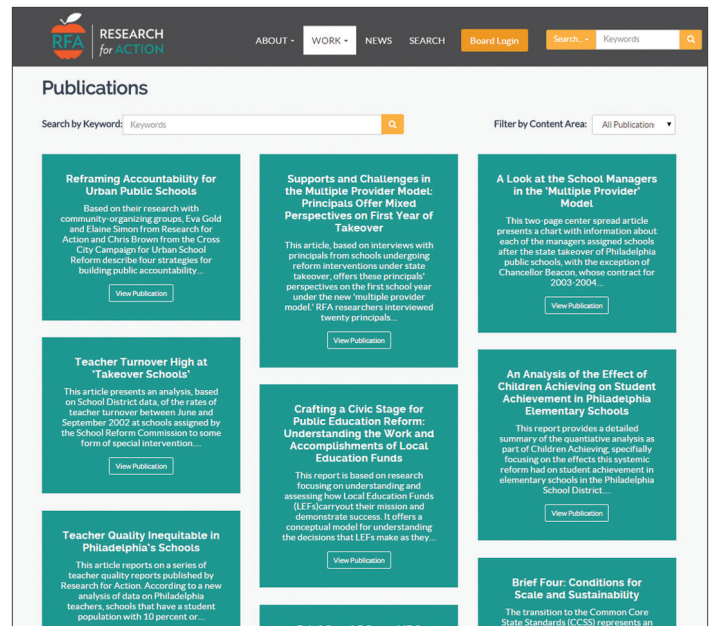
A NEW WEBSITE

RFA has faced a unique and exciting challenge in building and designing a website. As demand for our work grows, how do we easily and attractively feature more than 20 years of research and publications? And how do we provide our visitors and stakeholders with timely policy research, commentary, and information on emerging education topics?

Over the past year, RFA partnered with Yikes Web Design and Development, a Philadelphia-based web firm, to rethink our online strategy and presence. And we are so pleased with the results.

Our new website features an interactive search function to ensure that the information you're looking for is at your fingertips. It has a prominent link on our homepage to connect you to the latest news and reports from RFA, and it is fully integrated with our social networking channels to ensure that you're kept up to date at all times.

Be sure to visit our website—and bookmark it—for access to the latest research and analysis on education in Philadelphia and beyond.



A NEW LOGO

RFA was founded 23 years ago, and while much has changed, much has also remained the same—namely, our commitment to conducting high-quality research aimed at improving education. We spent the past year examining our branding and print and online presence, and we realized that it was also the optimal time to update our logo.

We think you'll immediately see why. The new logo places us literally and figuratively inside education and more accurately reflects our commitment to conducting and designing education research that is accessible to all audiences.



RFA IN THE NEWS

RFA's communications strategy is simple: *we are committed to ensuring that our research is*

**TIMELY AND
RELEVANT**



**ACCESSIBLE AND
ACTIONABLE**



We work to place our research in the hands of decision-makers and stakeholders at all levels. We also consistently strive to improve and diversify the look and feel of our publications and deliverables—which include written reports, PowerPoint decks, policy briefs, executive summaries, webinars, interactive maps, and infographics.

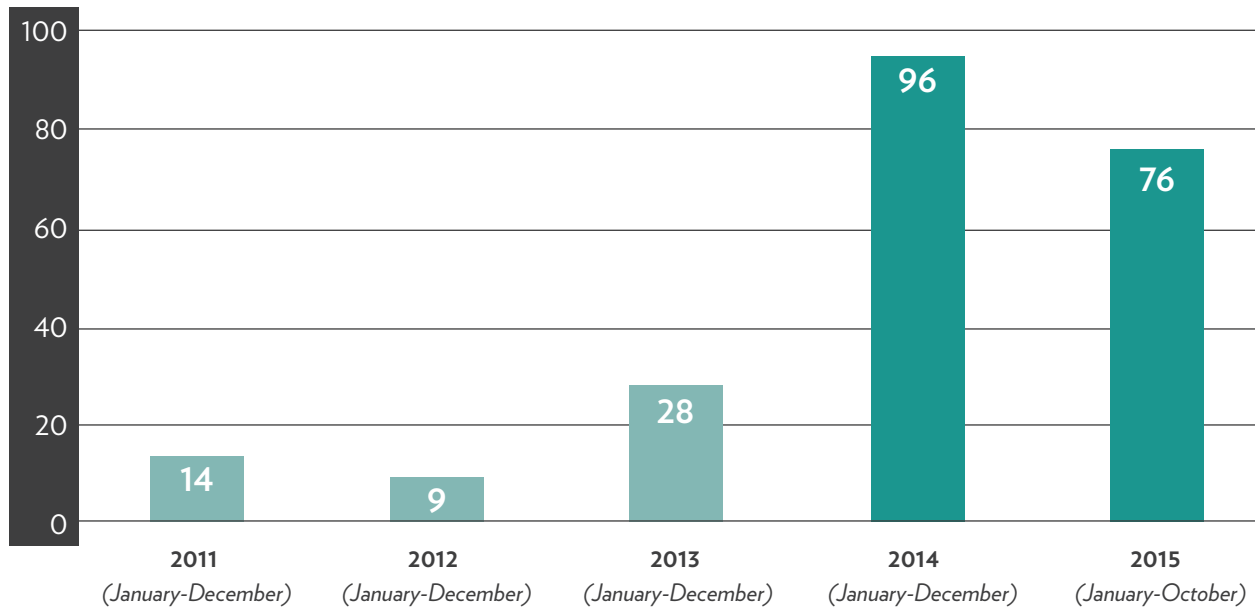
**THE WALL STREET
JOURNAL.**

Philadelphia Public School
thenotebook

The Patriot-News

RFA was particularly successful in informing the news media this year. Since January 2014, RFA has been cited in high-profile media outlets more than 150 times, including nearly a dozen RFA-authored opinion pieces and commentaries, and multiple interviews on-air through television and radio channels. RFA's visibility has grown dramatically over the past five years, and we are on track to have a record-breaking year in 2015.

TOTAL MEDIA HITS

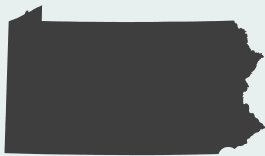


KEY MEDIA OUTLETS FEATURING RFA IN 2015



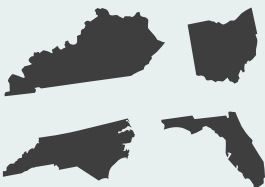
National

- Associated Press
- Education Week
- Marketplace (*from American Public Media/NPR*)
- The Nation
- The Wall Street Journal



Pennsylvania

- Allentown Morning Call
- CBS News Philadelphia
- Hanover Evening Sun
- Harrisburg Patriot-News
- Indiana Gazette
- KYW News Radio (*Philadelphia*)
- Lancaster New Era
- NewsWorks/WHYY (*Philadelphia's NPR affiliate*)
- NBC News Philadelphia
- Philadelphia Daily News
- Philadelphia Inquirer
- Philadelphia Magazine
- Philadelphia Public School Notebook
- Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
- Pocono Record
- Pottstown Mercury
- Reading Eagle
- Scranton Times-Tribune
- WESA (*Pittsburgh's NPR affiliate*)
- Daily Local News (*West Chester*)
- WITF (*Harrisburg's NPR affiliate*)
- York Daily Record



Other States

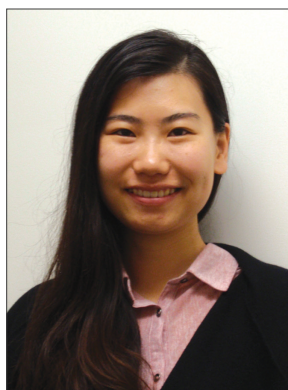
- Charlotte Observer (*North Carolina*)
- Cincinnati Enquirer (*Ohio*)
- Lexington Leader-Herald (*Kentucky*)
- Palm Beach Post (*Florida*)

RFA'S INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

RFA is committed to developing and nurturing the next generation of education researchers. At any given time, we employ nearly a dozen interns at all levels—bachelor's, master's, and Ph.D.—and from many different institutions of higher education. By working at RFA, interns play a hands-on role in the day-to-day implementation of our research projects. They accompany our researchers into the field, conduct analyses, attend team meetings, and write up their findings.

Learn more about our internship program by visiting www.researchforaction.org.

A SELECTION OF RFA INTERNS FROM 2014-15



“I sit on team meetings, and I participate, and I learn. I’m getting something from my internship at RFA that will help me with my career path.”

- Former RFA Intern

RFA'S PORTFOLIO OF PROJECTS



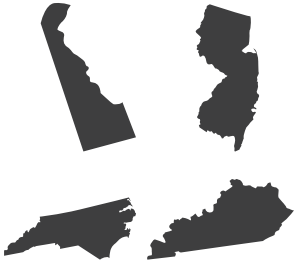
PHILADELPHIA

- An evaluation of multiple organizations that provide after-school enrichment activities through federal 21st Century Community Learning Center grants
- A research partnership with the North Philadelphia Education Compact (NPEC), a collaboration among charter schools and social service organizations in eastern North Philadelphia
- An evaluation of the Inside-Out Prison Exchange program housed at Temple University
- An evaluation of the Free Library of Philadelphia's "Maker Jaw'n" STEAM initiative that provides creative spaces for community members in underserved neighborhood libraries
- An evaluation of ArtWell's HeartBeat program, which provides weekly music education programming in K-5 schools in Philadelphia
- A research partnership with the Franklin Institute to develop dashboard metrics to evaluate community participation in public events
- An arts integration evaluation in four high schools in Philadelphia with the Mural Arts Program
- An evaluation of supply and demand of ESL services and programming in Philadelphia's diverse neighborhoods for the Pew Charitable Trusts
- A research partnership to provide support and technical assistance to education organizing organizations in Philadelphia (CPEP)



STATEWIDE

- Policy research linked to current education debates in Pennsylvania (PACER), with support from the Heinz Endowments and the Philadelphia Foundation
- A research partnership with the Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials (PASBO) and the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA) to develop and implement a statewide survey on the impact of declining state support for education
- Research consultation services in an effort to set quality education standards and develop a data collection system for Pennsylvania Alliance for Career and Technical Training (PACTT) juvenile justice facilities



IN THE REGION AND BEYOND

- Delaware: An evaluation of Delaware's teacher evaluation system (DPAS-II) for the State Department of Education
- New Jersey: A research partnership with the Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center (MACC) focused on the state's alternative teacher certification routes
- North Carolina: An evaluation of a one-to-one laptop initiative (XO Champions) in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, funded by the Knight Foundation
- Kentucky: An evaluation for the Hope Street Group on how the organization can effectively recruit and develop teacher fellows in Kentucky
- An evaluation of competency-based education initiatives in New Hampshire for the Nellie Mae Education Foundation
- A five-year study in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District to evaluate Project LIFT
- An evaluation of Early Reading Matters in elementary schools in New York City



NATIONAL

- An evaluation of after-school arts programming in Boys & Girls Clubs for the Wallace Foundation
- An evaluation of how two- and four-year higher education institutions in three states respond to Outcomes-Based Funding (OBF) reforms, for the Gates Foundation
- A parallel study of outcomes-based funding for the Lumina Foundation
- An examination of assessment and placement exam reforms in community colleges in Virginia, North Carolina, and Florida for the Gates Foundation
- A multi-year evaluation of Elev8, a community schools initiative in four sites for The Atlantic Philanthropies
- A three-state examination of multiple measures used to improve postsecondary placement and retention for the Gates Foundation
- An evaluation of the Gates Foundation-funded Common Assignment Study of instructional units aligned to the Common Core State Standards
- An evaluation of the engaged investor model for New Profit, Inc., based in Boston

FUNDERS AND CLIENTS

FUNDERS AND CLIENTS

- 21st Century Community Learning Center Grant Programs
- ArtWell
- The Atlantic Philanthropies
- Annie E. Casey Foundation
- Communities for Public Education Reform
- Samuel S. Fels Fund
- The Franklin Institute
- Free Library of Philadelphia
- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- The Heinz Endowments
- Hope Street Group
- John S. and James L. Knight Foundation
- Literacy Design Collaborative
- Lumina Foundation
- Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center
- Mural Arts Program
- Nellie Mae Education Foundation
- New Profit, Inc.
- North Philadelphia Education Compact
- The William Penn Foundation
- Pennsylvania Academic and Career Technical Training Alliance
- Pew Charitable Trust
- The Philadelphia Foundation
- Project LIFT
- Stoneleigh Foundation
- Temple University
- Wallace Foundation
- WHYY Public Broadcasting

RESEARCH PARTNERS

- American Institutes of Research
- Education Justice Network
- The Franklin Institute
- McClanahan Associates, Inc.
- The National Center for Research on Education, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) at UCLA
- North Philadelphia Education Compact
- Pathways Strategies
- Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials
- Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators
- Pennsylvania School Funding Campaign
- School District of Philadelphia
- Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity (SCALE) at Stanford University
- Westat
- WestEd

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University of Pennsylvania, Graduate School of Education



NOTE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



My fellow board members and I have an intimate, inside perspective from which we view the inner-workings of RFA. We have the distinct responsibility to review the organization's finances, examine hiring practices, set strategic direction, and conduct long-term planning.

But, in our various roles in academia, in public schools, law firms, and other education organizations, we also have an external role: we are long-time consumers of RFA's work.

That is why it has been so exciting to watch RFA's public visibility grow and mature this year. From its impressive cadre of projects, to the launch of its beautiful new website, to its sophisticated, polished publications, to its near-constant presence in the pages of newspapers and on the airwaves of radio, RFA has solidified its role as a thought-leader and opinion-setter on all matters of education policy and research.

I hope you will join me and my fellow board members in continuing to support RFA's efforts to conduct meaningful, pressing work in this city, across Pennsylvania, and throughout the nation. Visit the new website, read the latest publications, consider RFA's perspective on current events in education—these steps ensure that RFA continues to use its superior research skills for the good of our students, our schools, and the policies that govern education.

JAMES EARL DAVIS, PH.D.

Chair, RFA Board of Directors
Professor, Temple University

“RFA is not conducting research for research's sake, but it's research that can really make a difference.”

- Former RFA Intern



RFA'S VITAL STATS



29 STAFF MEMBERS



28 FUNDERS & CLIENTS



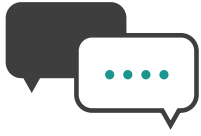
26 CONCURRENT PROJECTS



100 Approximate number of
PUBLICATIONS WRITTEN THIS YEAR



16 Number of
STATES IN WHICH WE WORKED THIS YEAR



150 Number of
PRINT/RADIO ARTICLES CITING RFA
and reaching millions across PA & the US this year



Number of
13 **OPINION/COMMENTARY PIECES**
AUTHORED BY RFA
that have appeared in major publications this year



Number of
25,000 **VISITS TO RFA'S WEBSITE**
THIS YEAR



Number of
1,225 **TWITTER FOLLOWERS TO DATE**



100's **OF RETWEETS, BLOG POSTS,**
CITATIONS
across multiple platforms



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