

WRITING TO BE HEARD

What Olney teachers say about their students and school



Rasheeda Enoch

Gerardo Zuviri

*A project of Research for Action in cooperation with Youth United for Change
as part of the Learning from Philadelphia's School Reform
research and public awareness initiative.*



RESEARCH for ACTION

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Foreword

Research for Action (RFA) has worked with student members of Youth United for Change (YUC) and Philadelphia Student Union (PSU) for the past two and half years. Over that time, these young people have committed themselves to learning social science research methods and conducted a study of their changing schools. We think you will find their reports compelling; they give voice to students' lived experience at their high schools.

The motivation of these young people to be youth researchers stems from their activist commitment to make their high schools better places for all students. As youth researchers, their research is intended to support the YUC and PSU small schools campaigns at Kensington, Olney, and West Philadelphia High Schools.

Some of the achievements of these youth researchers are their willingness to do the hard work of learning new skills and completing the entire research process, including creating outstanding research products. Throughout, the youth researchers have developed their presentation skills as they spoke about their work in a range of settings, including a public action for their small schools campaigns, presentations to Teach for America teachers, a panel discussion for Bryn Mawr College education students, and a seminar with RFA research staff and board.

During the first year of the project (December 2004-May 2005), the youth researchers learned the skills of participant-observation and taking fieldnotes, and keeping reflective journals. Their fieldnotes and journals became the data for their first product, a graphic road map that illustrated the course of their small schools campaigns that year (see Appendix A). The youth researchers then attended the RFA Youth in Action summer research camp where they learned how to conduct interviews, focus groups and surveys, as well as do document searches using the internet. In the second year of the project, the youth researchers applied their new research skills to questions they posed about their changing schools. From September 2005 to May 2006, they read about small schools (see the Bibliography) and they gathered data (see Appendix B for the research instruments that guided their data collection). In addition, they kept reflective journals. In August 2006 the youth researchers attended an RFA

Writing to be Heard Institute, where they worked as an interpretive community, analyzing their data individually, in school teams and across teams, and turning their research into written products. Fall 2006 was devoted to revision, and finalizing their reports.

RFA staff served as guides, teachers and mentors throughout this project. Marsha Pincus, a Philadelphia Writing Project Teacher-Consultant and high school English teacher, helped design and lead the Writing to be Heard summer institute. The principals of the three new small Kensington schools, Olney 705 and West Philadelphia welcomed the students as researchers. The teachers at the Kensington small schools and Olney 705 were generous in their support of the data collection. Parents of PSU members openly shared their experiences and beliefs with the youth researchers. The adult chapter organizers worked with the youth researchers and RFA to determine important audiences for the youth research and to help formulate recommendations based upon the research findings.

As school reformers, there is much to learn from young people about their learning environments. We believe these reports demonstrate the powerful contributions young people can make to their high school communities when they engage in rigorous and systematic investigations of their schools and are surrounded by a community of caring and concerned adults committed to urban youth and school improvement. The findings in these reports are the conclusions of the youth researchers themselves. They are now fully ready for the next phase of their work-- sharing their research findings with a wide range of audiences concerned about the future of urban public high schools. We welcome these youth researchers to the broader research community concerned with social justice and high school transformation.

*– Eva Gold, Kristine Lewis, Gretchen Sues,
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Research for Action Youth Researcher WRITING TO BE HEARD Report Series:

- *Building Respectful Communities—Kensington Students Examine Adult-Student Relationships in their New Small Schools*
 - *What Olney Teachers Say about Their Students and School*
- *Parents Speak Up and Out About Parent Participation in Urban Public High Schools*

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SCHOOL BACKGROUND

Olney High School is located on 100 W. Duncannon Street in Philadelphia, PA. It is a five story high school that has a football field directly across the street which takes up a whole city block. On the same side but at the next corner there is a mini market that has a blue banner that hangs at the top of it. Surrounding this school stands a Cousins Supermarket which is located in the same area as an Auto Zone. Across the street from that parking lot is a pizza store that goes by the name of Bally's. Row houses surround the school and are throughout the neighborhood. When you enter the school building from the front, there will be two staircases that lead you to the two separate schools that now exist (Olney 704 and Olney 705). When you walk through the door that leads you to the school of your choice you will see the main office. At this moment you can explore life at Olney High School.

The 2005-2006 year at Olney High School was the first year that Olney was spilt into two medium-sized schools. This report is about one of those schools, Olney 705 East. As reported from the School District website during the 2005-2006 school year,¹ the race and ethnic composition of Olney 705 East High School was 62.9% African Americans, 2% Whites, 8.8% Asians 25.6% Latinos, and 0.9% others. At the time of our study, Olney 705 had 50 teachers and half the teachers were new to the school. Not only were there many new teachers but many of them were placed as teachers of honors as well as AP classes. In total, Olney 705 had 1131 students.

A program called Youth United for Change (YUC) came up with the idea for small schools at Olney. After struggling for several years, in 2005 – 2006 Olney was split into two medium sized schools by erecting a wall down the middle of the

¹ *Information about the schools comes from: the School District of Philadelphia School Profiles, 2005-2006.*

school building. The two sides of the school were renamed Olney 704, with Law and Creative and Performing Arts, and Olney 705, with Business, Carpentry, and Medical. Within this first year, Olney turned into a disaster. There were fights at least once a week, and the schools were always on the news. Thus far, in the 2006 – 2007 school year, Olney 704 and 705 have changed and there is less violence.

The topic of this research project is teachers' perspectives on Olney 705 and its students. We made this our topic because the student researchers felt that Olney high school teachers need to have more input and decision making about things that affect them. We also felt that teachers were interested in the activities and other issues that occur at their school.

THE RESEARCH QUESTION AND DATA COLLECTION

Our research was guided by our observation that our school was dirty and we wanted to look at how that affected the relationship between students and the teachers in the school. By looking at the topic question we really decided to change it because we found out that the questions we were asking had to deal with teachers' perceptions of the school and not how dirty the school was. From there we went in a different direction and we began asking questions about the teachers' perceptions of the school and of the students. We read some articles about other youth organizations that are working on small schools and we used those articles to give us ideas on how to gather the information we needed to investigate our question.

We, the youth researchers, created the questions for our survey of teachers and from there our research mentors from Research for Action placed the questions in a survey format. Research mentors and the youth researchers shared the survey with the school principal who then approved it and gave permission to conduct the survey. We then decided on how we were going to distribute the survey to the teachers and how we were going to collect them once the teachers filled them out. At first we came up with the idea of putting the survey in every teacher's mailbox but we also looked at the fact that we wanted the survey back as soon as possible. From there we made the decision to just walk from classroom to classroom and ask the teachers if they would fill the surveys out for us while we stood there, and if they could not fill it out at the time, we asked them for a time to come back and either pick it up or give them the survey. We did a good job with the response rate since 36 out of 50 teachers completed the survey, meaning that only 14 teachers refused to do it.

We also wanted to do a focus group to see if any teachers had any additional issues they wanted to put on the table that they were not able to talk about on the survey. Out of the 36 teachers that answered the survey, 6 of them wanted to be part of a

focus group and this focus group was conducted after school. The questions from the focus group were questions that would give us a better understanding of how the teachers felt about the school and the students.

After the survey and the focus group were done we met and we analyzed the data. We looked for themes that emerged from both the survey and the focus group. The section that follows discusses those themes. From all of the articles that we have read during this project we saw that they all talked about the success they had and not the struggle they went through to get what they needed. We believe that our research helps to fill the gap by telling a story about the struggle we are going through towards having successful small schools.

Our research helps to fill the gap by telling a story about the struggle ... [to have] successful small schools.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

GERARDO ZUVIRI

All people concerned about Olney High School need to really find out where the money for public education is being spent since the teachers at our school perceive that there are not enough resources in the school. According to the statistical results of the teacher survey we created, I learned that the teachers at Olney High School (705) feel that there are insufficient financial resources coming to the school, with 26 out of 36 teachers agreeing with this point of view. The survey information was followed by a focus group with a small group of the teachers we had surveyed, in which we gathered more

information on issues such as resources available at the school. First, the teachers believe that the school has money to spend but it is being spent on the wrong things. Second, teachers believe that they and the students are going out and finding their own resources. Third, the teachers sometimes believe that the resources are there but teachers just can not find them.

At the school, non-instructional supplies are being bought, but they are not the supplies that teachers believe they need most in order to teach their classes. Some of the teachers feel that the materials that are being bought are completely unnecessary. For example, one teacher expressed her thoughts on this by saying:

Money's not spent in the right place. There's money there but it's spent on alarm systems that run on battery juice. They spend it on new doors, painting, cameras, and locks that we don't use... When it could be spent on novels so kids can take them home and read them versus having to photocopy and not being able to use the photocopy machine because of the cheap version.

Other teachers complain that every resource that they do have connects with another set of resources that they do not have. One teacher explained to us that:

I open every math book and everything refers to the TI-83 calculator. I've been begging for it! And my class at least gets to use it. But not all the classes have access to them. And it's not just the calculator, the computers. I understand that you can't have a computer in every classroom, it is just too unrealistic.

All the resource issues are important to teachers, but one of the most important issues is that the teachers feel they need computers in every classroom. For example, one of the teachers told us:

Well, one {issue} I think we can start with is more computers in the building, more access to computers, and not just for students but for students and teachers.

Teachers believe that due to the lack of sufficient financial resources the teachers are forced to go out and buy the resources they need to teach their class. Along with the issue of teachers going out and purchasing resources with their own money, some of the teachers also feel that they have put time into the job that they are not required to and for which they are not being reimbursed. Several teachers had something to say about this. Here is how one of them feels about this issue:

And we didn't have enough money, so I did volunteer my time more than the amount I've been paid for with extra duty, and I've never even seen a dime yet.

It is not just the teachers that must purchase materials or donate their time. The teachers feel that the students are forced to go out and find and buy their own resources too, especially the resources they need the most. As one teacher said:

I'm impressed by how proactive certain students and groups of students are seeking the outside resources and programs that are necessary for their success that Olney may not have offered... Often they've gone out and found it elsewhere.

As a student at this school where these issues are occurring, my experience is consistent with the teachers' perceptions. I could definitely say that these issues are true because there have been several times where I was forced to go out and find and buy the resources that I need, such as when I went out and bought the TI-83 calculator for my math class that I needed when I knew that it should have been provided within the school walls.

Lack of sufficient resources is only one problem revealed by our research. Teachers also perceived that sometimes there are

resources that the teachers need that are in the school, but they do not know how to find them and how to acquire them.

These materials have actually been harder to acquire since the

school was split into two different schools. There were some teachers that felt that they needed to have some type of system so they could work this issue out in a calm and smooth way. This is how one of the teachers explained the difficulty of crossing to the other side (704) to acquire resources:

Teachers also perceived that sometimes there are resources that the teachers need that are in the school, but they do not know how to find them These materials have actually been harder to acquire since the school was split into two.

Yeab, because they used to write us up for going in there...to check them {the materials} out... and then there's no one to check them out from, because no one is technically in charge. You just find the key; grab a box and then run away! I mean it's like... there's no...It is this whole lack of systems...

It is not just that the teachers can not find the resources, they actually don't know how to acquire them. Here is another comment on how the teachers felt on this particular issue:

Same thing with the calculators as with the English department. If you want to go get a class a set of—even just a class set of novels—you have to... one, figure out a time to go to the other side because the book closet is on the 704 side.

Also from my observations, I know that the separation has caused some confusion because I know that the English supply closet is on the other side of the school. Teachers reported that

it was hard for them to go out of their classes and go to the other side to get what they need from the supply closet.

Another issue that emerged from the research was the lack of infrastructure and poor communication that resulted from the division of the school. The teachers said that the split was not a well thought out plan because all the administration did was just build a wall right down the middle of the school. Now the administration is calling Olney High School two small schools. But the new schools are not small because they both have over a thousand students each. One teacher drew the connection between the lack of infrastructure and the poor communication saying:

I think along the same lines of communication there's also some issues with having the structure in place to have that communication take place. But yeah, I think that's a big problem when you're not having... I mean you have what? Half of the English Department, I guess, sitting here right now, yet we don't have department meetings because that's not the way things are structured.

Another teacher added:

It seems like the only way to communicate something is through a memo to every teachers' box or a PA announcement, which frankly are not the best ways to facilitate discussion.

Yet another teacher reported:

I'd say there are major communication problems. And it trickles down like teachers never really hear just even important announcements. Like for us, we have a really important form to fill out and no one ever told us until the day before the deadline. And we're like, 'Well thanks!'

In conclusion, the teachers believe that the resources available for them in their classrooms are inadequate, and even when they do have resources there is a mismatch between what they

have and what they need. The teachers believe that the resources that the administration is purchasing are not the most important ones to support the proper teaching. The process of putting up the wall and dividing the school into two was conducted too quickly and it caused confusion with the resources that are available because specific departmental book closets are located on only one side of the building or the other. So according to most of the teachers that were in the focus group the whole process of Olney High School being split up into two was not well thought out; the administration did not look at the effect that it would have if they did not build the same infrastructure on both of the sides of the school. There is a belief that Olney High School still has promise of becoming two small schools. To make this come true, the administration needs to make sure that the process is well thought out instead of just doing what they did the first time—just placing a wall in the middle of the school.

RASHEEDA ENOCH—*Lack of Communication and Low Expectations at Olney High School (705)*

This section of the report is based on information from the focus group and survey of Olney High School (705) teachers. It examines teachers' perceptions of their relationships with students and their expectations of students. It also reveals how communication between Olney staff, teachers, and students contributes to teachers' low expectations of their students. Despite these low expectations, teachers still feel that they have good relationships with their students.

Using the data from the survey and focus group with the teachers, we found evidence that teachers and students have a good relationship but teacher expectations and standards for the students are low. While most teachers feel that Olney High School has good student and teacher relationships (26 out of 36), they also feel that the school has low expectations and standards for the students. Survey results show that teachers have low expectations of students: 18 out of 36 teachers are not satisfied with the curriculum the Olney High School is receiving; and 30 out of 36 teachers feels that majority of Olney High School students will not be prepared for college.

The teachers that attended the focus group agreed that Olney High has good student-teacher relationships. One teacher stated,

I've noticed that most students are really willing to come in and talk about everything and be very honest, which I think is really a big strength. Because you know exactly where everyone is coming from.

Similarly, another teacher commented that it's good that students find their resources outside of the school. This teacher expressed,

I'm impressed by how proactive certain students are and groups of students are seeking the outside resources and help and programs that are necessary for their success {that} Olney may not have offered...{Often} they've gone out and found it elsewhere.

While teachers described good relationships with students, the teachers realized the whole administrations' (district, region, and school) decisions created low expectations for students. If the whole administration finds it hard to get the necessary materials and to communicate with teachers and students, then Olney High School teachers will have low expectations for students. One teacher stated,

I think overall when people talk—like the administration and stuff—they focus on the negative, but I think there are a lot of great students and great groups of kids who are really committed to education and academics and forming bonds with each other and teachers.

Using the data from the survey and focus group with the teachers, we found evidence that teachers and students have a good relationship but teacher expectations and standards for the students are low.

While the survey shows that teachers feel they have a good relationship with the students, the data from the focus group gives us reasons as to why Olney teachers' expectations and standards still remain low. Data from the teacher focus group supports the fact that the lack of communication is a result of low expectations and standards:

Teacher 1: *I'd say there are major communication problems. And it trickles down like teachers never really hear just even important announcements. Like for us, we have a really important form to fill out and no one ever told us until a day before the deadline....That's just an example, but you know messages that should be passed down to teachers that should inherently be passed down to students never happen.*

Teacher 2: *I think along the same lines of communication there's also some issues with having the structures in place to have that communication take place. We don't have meetings within a department or within a grade level or there's no... (Teacher 3 interjects)*

Teacher 3: *Infrastructure.*

Teacher 2: *(continuing) Right! Infrastructure would be a good word...in order to have those things happen. It seems like the only way to communicate something is through a memo to every teacher's box or a PA announcement, which frankly are not the best ways to facilitate discussion.*

The lack of communication between staff, teachers, and students connects to low expectations because if the principal does not share information with the teachers, then the information is not being passed down to the students. Without the students being informed about school rules and consequences, then the students will not have a clear understanding of what they need to do. There is no way for teachers to have high expectations of students, if students do not understand the rule and therefore cannot obey the rule.

Another example of the connection between lack of communication in the school and low expectations of students is the bell schedules and confusion about the rules:

Teacher 4: *The lack of communication with faculty is (not the only problem). (There is) also no communication with consistency with students...There are inconsistencies in regulations and rules being enforced. Students are confused often times as to what they should and should not do, what they can and cannot do. ...{For example} there's no bell schedules so no one knows when class begins... there's no structure for the students as well as the faculty.*

Teacher 1: *I think {we need} more student rules, but also consequences. I think that's in part because our discipline system has been very fluid throughout the year. It hasn't really been set and established and enforced consistently since September. So, I think that has manifested itself in lots of ways. But one of the ways that students themselves feel safe or at the very least they don't know what is the consequence of this action...Or what is the rule?*

Focus group discussions pointed out that a problem of lacking communication in the school contributes to low student expectations. If the staff changes the rules several times a week then that confuses the students. This can cause the students to get in trouble, which may result in a suspension for the students. If the students are suspended from school then they are not receiving their education. This problem brings low expectations because if the students are not attending class due to suspensions then teachers will not have high expectations for their students. It also brings lack of communication because the school has no bell schedule therefore the teachers and students are confused about when the classes begin and end. This lack of structure results in low expectations because the students can miss out on part of a class period because they leave a class too late, and classes can be interrupted by the students that come to class late. This causes low expectations because if a

teacher is not given a full class period, then the students are not receiving a whole class lesson. Therefore, there is no way a teacher can hold high expectations for students if they are missing part of every class lesson.

I question what good is it for the school to have positive student-teacher relationships if the staff has low expectations for their students.

These findings reveal many true feelings and beliefs of some of the teachers. It provides a clear understanding of teachers' perceptions of their students and the school. The survey and focus group data show the lack of communication throughout the school which contributes to low expectations and standards for the school and the students. There is a contradiction with the teachers saying they care for the students but an anonymous survey shows that teachers also don't think students are prepared to go to college due to the fact that the curriculum is not challenging.

With this in mind I question what good is it for the school to have positive student-teacher relationships if the staff has low expectations for their students. Therefore, if the whole administration builds a better education plan, then the teachers will likely have a higher expectation for the students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations to:	The Recommendations
DISTRICT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="460 354 922 451">• We must change the governance in our school to where the teachers have a say about what the school spends its money on (such as supplies).<li data-bbox="460 496 922 570">• Teachers as well as students should have input on what the school needs for the students to get their proper education.<li data-bbox="460 615 922 712">• Instead of having a structured budget they should give the school a large lump budget so the school can decide on what they want to spend it on.<li data-bbox="460 758 922 831">• Teachers know what they need to teach their students so they should have an input on what is bought for them.<li data-bbox="460 876 922 1047">• Teachers should have subject department meetings where both sides (704 & 705) could meet together. Teachers need to talk about resources, classes and things that will improve both of the schools, so there will be a better sense of communication between both of the schools.<li data-bbox="460 1092 922 1166">• Students should join teachers at staff development meetings to offer a student perspective at least once a month.<li data-bbox="460 1211 922 1326">• Resources should be distributed not just for teaching and learning but to seniors as well for some of the experiences that other “better” schools in the district have that our school does not have.

Recommendations to:	The Recommendations
PRINCIPAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teachers know what they need to teach their students so they should have an input on what is bought for them.• Teachers should have subject department meetings where both sides (704 & 705) could meet together. To talk about resources, classes and thing that will improve both of the schools. So there will be a better sense of communication between both of the schools.• Students should join teachers at staff development meeting to offer student perspective at least once a month.
STATE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resources should be distributed not just to teaching and learning but to the seniors as well. For some of the experiences that other “better” schools in the district have that our school does not have.
STUDENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students should combine with community groups and Home and School Association to speak out about school supplies.
COMMUNITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community groups should combine with student and Home and School Association to speak out about school supplies.
HOME AND SCHOOL ASSOCIATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Home and School Association should combine with students and community groups to speak out about school supplies.
EVERYBODY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students should speak out on the issue of supplies and materials.• Seniors should protest the absence of a senior yearbook, t-shirts, prom, and senior trip.

APPENDIX A - Graphic Road Map

CAMPAIGN HIGH POINT

STUDENTS FEEL SOMEWHAT VICTORIOUS

NAME OF HIGH POINT:
Announcement at SRC meaning that Olney would get small schools and a new building.

DATE OF HIGH POINT:
January 15, 2005

IN 2004-2005, OLNEY YUC CAMPAIGN FOR SMALL SCHOOLS GETS HALFWAY TOWARDS ITS GOAL OF SCHOOLS WITH 400 STUDENTS

SUMMARY OF HIGH POINT:
After Jerry Zwiri spoke in support of small schools for Olney High School, both Greg Williams and Paul Vallis announce that Olney High School is getting small schools and a new building. YUC students were there to support the speaker and when the announcement came about the students cheered.

January 2004
The announcement is made at a SRC meeting that Olney is starting small schools and a new building.

February 2005
S. Deegan - Olney gives permission for Olney to develop a School Design Plan.

April 2005
Committee is formed and students use Olney's YUC design.

November 2004
YUC students at Olney protest and gathered with small schools plan (400-800).

Students rally against conditions at Olney

CAMPAIGN LOW POINT

NAME OF LOW POINT:
New Principal comes to Olney from Baltimore

DATE OF LOW POINT:
November, 2004

SUMMARY OF LOW POINT:
YUC Olney students had been disappointed with the old principal and now we needed to start relationships with the new principal and show him our small schools campaign plan. This was a setback because the old principal knew what we wanted and he was supporting our campaign.

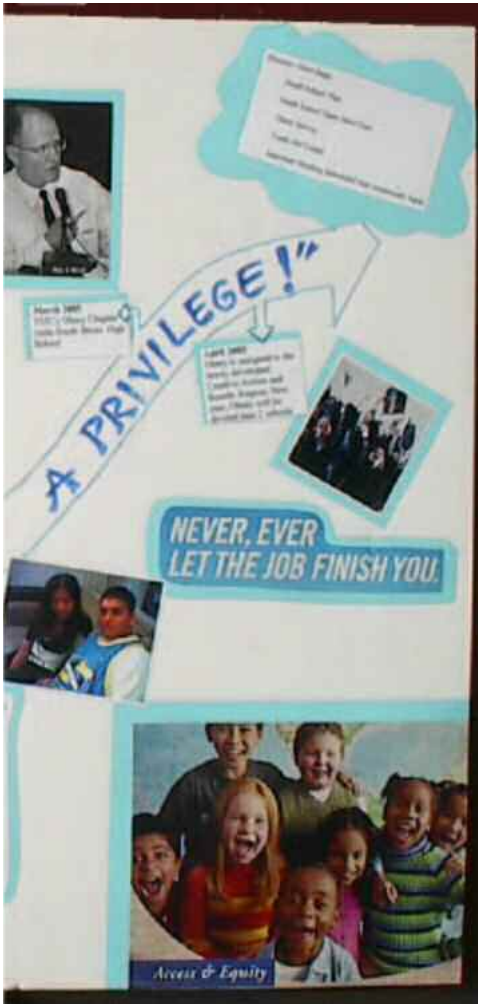
BY: SIDA DIN JERRY ZWIRI

"EDUCATION IS A RIGHT, NOT EDUCATION"

EDUCATION

YUC SMALL SCHOOLS PLAN FOR OLNEY HIGH SCHOOL

Olney High School



This roadmap traces the steps of the Olney YUC chapter during the second year of its campaign for small schools. The youth activists were exhilarated upon learning of the SRC's announcement that Olney would be transformed into small schools, and gravely disappointed by changes in District leadership at the school and regional levels. Nonetheless, the Olney YUC chapter persisted, and closed the 2004 – 2005 academic year on an optimistic note, reflected in the upswing of the title banner.

APPENDIX B - Research Instruments

OLNEY EAST 705 HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER SURVEY

This survey is being administered to gain important information about your experiences as a teacher at Olney East 705 High School. It is part of a student research project being conducted by Gerardo Zuviri and Rasheeda Enoch, with support from Research for Action. Principal Newton Brown has granted permission for this study. On this survey, you will be asked to provide factual information about yourself and your perceptions about the school. Your responses to this survey will be confidential and used for research purposes only. Thank you for your cooperation and the valuable information you will provide. Please indicate your answer as shown below:

Like this: ● Not like this: (✓) (X) (✓)

ABOUT OLNEY EAST 705

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about Olney East 705? Please indicate your most appropriate response for each item where 1=strongly agree and 5=strongly disagree.

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>				<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
	①	②	③	④	⑤
1. Students feel safe at this school.	①	②	③	④	⑤
2. Teachers are involved in the decision-making of this school.	①	②	③	④	⑤
3. This school has a bright future.	①	②	③	④	⑤
4. This school has good physical facilities (classrooms, cafeteria, library, etc.).	①	②	③	④	⑤
5. A sense of community exists between the teachers of this school.	①	②	③	④	⑤
6. This school has good administrative leadership.	①	②	③	④	⑤
7. Teachers are satisfied with the curriculum.	①	②	③	④	⑤
8. Students are eager and motivated to learn.	①	②	③	④	⑤
9. Parents are involved and have a presence at this school.	①	②	③	④	⑤
10. This school has high expectations and standards for students.	①	②	③	④	⑤
11. This school has a good relationship with the surrounding community.	①	②	③	④	⑤
12. The majority of Olney students will graduate prepared for college.	①	②	③	④	⑤
13. This school has sufficient financial resources.	①	②	③	④	⑤
14. Teachers are disenchanted with what can be accomplished at this school.	①	②	③	④	⑤
15. Teachers and students have good relationships at this school.	①	②	③	④	⑤

GENERAL INFORMATION

- What grade do you currently teach? 9 10 11 12
- How long have you been teaching, in any district? < 1 year 1 – 3 years 4 – 7 years
 8 – 10 years 10 – 15 years 16 years +
- How long have you been teaching at Olney? < 1 year 1 – 3 years 4 – 7 years
 8 – 10 years 10 – 15 years 16 years +
- Do you plan to be teaching at Olney next year? Yes No
- What is your gender? Male Female
- What is your age? 20 – 25 26 – 30 31 – 35 36 – 40
 41 – 45 46 – 50 51 – 55 56 +
- What is your ethnic background? Please identify: _____

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

If you would like to participate in a focus group discussion about topics addressed in this survey, please indicate which day you are available and your contact information. Gerardo and/or Rasheeda will contact you to confirm your appointment.

- Thursday, March 23, 3 – 3:30** **Thursday, March 30, 3 – 3:30**

Name:

Room number:

Email:

Thank you for completing and returning this survey!

**OLNEY EAST 705 HIGH SCHOOL
FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL**

We appreciate the opportunity to talk with all of you about Olney High School. Gerardo and Rasheeda are interested in learning about your experiences in and perspectives on the future of Olney High School. The insights that you share with us this afternoon will remain confidential, so we encourage to speak honestly about what aspects of Olney East 705 High School have worked so far, as well as what aspects of the school might benefit from improvements. Do you have any questions about this focus group discussion before we start?

1. We'd like to go around the room and ask everyone to state your name, how long you have been a teacher, and how long you have been a teacher at Olney 705 High School.
2. Why did you accept the offer to teach at Olney 705 High School?
3. What do you think are the strengths of Olney 705 High School?
4. What do you think are the weaknesses of Olney 705 High School?
5. What would you recommend to improve Olney 705 High School?
6. Please tell us what you know of small schools.
7. Do you think small school would be an effective reform model for Olney 705 High School?

APPENDIX C - REFLECTIONS

The youth researchers have had opportunities for reflection on their work with RFA throughout the project: through journal writing, peer feedback, end of meeting evaluations, and public forums. Below, you will see some of their comments in which they assess the opportunity the project offered to contribute to improving their schools, and to improving on their academic skills. Overall, they conveyed that the experience of working individually and collectively to research and write was an important experience – larger and different from anything they had previously undertaken.

About the experience:

“This is something new. It’s like I’ve never been through anything like this. I never really did research and stuff like this before. So just doing research to help my school and people at my school is just a good experience.”

“The journal was important to me because like we would write in our journal and then our mentors would reflect back on the words that we say--like they give a personal note.”

“Being a youth worker makes me proud of what I accomplished and proud of myself for what I have done. This also makes me proud of my peers to show we are leaders of today and will be tomorrow if we continue to do the right thing.”

Influence on school work:

“I’ve learned a lot from this writing. I became a better writer and my English teacher told me I got better. That’s how I knew.”

“[My English teacher] says I was a pretty good writer...but since I been doing this research and all this writing it seems like my writing has skyrocketed as part of the skills of learning how to write longer and just to write better.”

I learned that “now’s the time when you know you all have to start doing [multiple drafts] and it’s actually better for me to proof read something and then when I finish proof reading it to then go into my rough draft instead of just going to the final draft off the bat.” My teacher said “when I was writing my report on *The Crucible*...oh my gosh...your draft is so good, and I did like five of them. That’s all I kept thinking about was [people] telling me you’re going to start needing to do drafts.”

“I now observe everything around me and form my own opinions and act on them too. Participating in the research program helped me learn to do that. I actually improved my English skills in paragraph writing. When the honors teacher asks me to do an essay I now know how to use evidence or examples to back up my point.”

“I’m used to writing to myself or a close friend or a teacher, but when you have to write like past that, it’s harder because you got to make sense of it, and you got to make sense so that other people will know besides yourself. It’s a lot of corrections and all that [we] had to do. It was hard work but it paid off...I learned that I have to push myself and stop staying in my safe zone.”

Speaking out:

“I had to push myself to speak in front of everyone and then it made me feel like...the topic was really important, not only to us but to other people out there because they really were interested in knowing what we wanted to talk about so I had to dig deep and be brave enough to just do it and just say what I had to say and so I did and I was proud of myself for doing it.”

Working as a team:

“I learned how to work as a team. Because when I first came, I knew that that would be one of my problems. I never worked as a team, I work by myself. It’s just like playing a sport. If you think you’re the team then you’re going to go nowhere. Same with the project: If you don’t let people share their ideas and experiences, then it’s just not going to work.”

“When I looked at [the research report] I didn’t think I wrote all that. And my peers around me did a lot of stuff and so like when it all comes together and you see the final product, it’s crazy...in a good way!”

APPENDIX D - BIBLIOGRAPHY

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Rasheeda Enoch is a twelfth grader at Olney High School – 705. She is a member of Youth United for Change and has been a youth researcher for the past year and a half with Research for Action. In her spare time she does programs, reads books or spends time with her family and friends or just by herself. Her goal is to become a successful lawyer with a wonderful and healthy life.



“If you don’t like the look of things, lift your voice so you can make a change.”

Gerardo (Jerry) Zuviri is a twelfth grader at Olney High School – 705. He is a member of Youth United for Change and has been a youth researcher for the past two and a half years with Research for Action. In addition to being actively involved in his chapter’s efforts to transform Olney into a complex of small schools, Jerry is also a stellar athlete. He shares: “I love any kind of sports. I play tennis and football. I am a down-to-earth person. After high school, I want to continue my education and study biology or criminal justice.” Jerry aspires to become either a doctor or a lawyer after college. He volunteers at St. Christopher’s Hospital for Children, because he “likes helping kids.”





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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.



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