

Philadelphia's Renaissance Schools

*A Report on Start Up and
Early Implementation*

Prepared for the Accountability Review Council
by Research for Action

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About Research for Action

Research for Action (RFA) is a Philadelphia-based nonprofit organization. We seek to use research as the basis for the improvement of educational opportunities and outcomes for traditionally underserved students. Our work is designed to strengthen public schools and postsecondary institutions; provide research-based recommendations to policymakers, practitioners and the public at the local, state and national levels; and enrich the civic and community dialogue about public education. For more information, please visit our website at www.researchforaction.org.

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Philadelphia's Renaissance Schools: Start Up and Early Implementation Executive Summary

May 2011

Overview

In April 2009, Superintendent Arlene Ackerman announced her reform plan for the School District of Philadelphia (the District) – *Imagine 2014*. Among other major initiatives, *Imagine 2014* laid the groundwork for Philadelphia's Renaissance Schools Initiative. The Renaissance Initiative, set to enter its second year in 2011-12, is an effort to dramatically change student outcomes in the District's lowest performing schools. This document summarizes key findings from RFA's research conducted between March 2010 and January 2011 on start up and early implementation of the initiative.

Data Collection

The report is based on the following data in **Figure 1**:

Figure 1. Data Collection

Start Up March - August 2010	Early Implementation September 2010 - January 2011
Qualitative Data	
Interviews	
7 school principals/assistant principals 13 SAC chairs and members 7 Central Office staff 6 charter-managed school leaders Total: 33 interview respondents	26 school principals/assistant principals 32 other school leaders 13 SAC chairs 6 Central Office staff Total: 76 interview respondents
Teacher Focus Groups	
	14 teacher focus groups 11 returning teacher focus groups Total: 86 teachers
Observations	
7 SAC meetings and trainings 6 Promise Academy data review meetings 2 Promise Academy orientation sessions Total: 15 observations	13 school tours 33 classroom observations 7 school professional development sessions 2 SAC meetings and trainings 1 Promise Academy principals' meeting Total: 56 observations
Quantitative Data	
RFA surveys of 12 SAC chairs, 13 principals, and 86 teachers School-level data from the District and charter managers for the 13 Renaissance Schools and the District's 100 other Empowerment schools on: - student enrollment and characteristics as of November 1 in 2008, 2009 and 2010 - attendance, lateness, and suspensions in the first marking period of 2008, 2009 and 2010 - teacher characteristics as of November 1 in 2008, 2009 and 2010	

Theory of Action

The theory of action that undergirds the Renaissance Initiative focuses on three critical levers for change: creating a positive school climate, cultivating community ownership, and establishing effective leadership and staff. When these levers operate within a strong environment of accountability, the theory posits they will lead to a set of interim outcomes that will ultimately result in dramatic improvement in student achievement.

Our research focused on documenting and analyzing efforts to establish the following aspects of the reform model and key findings from each brief are summarized here:

- Student Enrollment and School Climate;
- School Advisory Councils; and

- School Leadership and Staffing

We examined changes within individual schools, and also compared changes across the two Renaissance School models (Promise Academies and charter-managed schools). Each brief is designed to be a stand-alone document, but the most comprehensive portrait of the Renaissance School Initiative in its early stages can be arrived at by a careful review of all three.

Findings on Early Implementation

Student Enrollment and School Climate

One of the early goals of the Renaissance Initiative was to dramatically improve the school climate, which refers to the intangible tone or feeling inside the school building. Findings in this brief examine student enrollment, climate-related interventions, and student attendance, lateness, and suspensions.

Enrollment:

- The 13 Renaissance schools remained neighborhood schools and served mostly African American, Latino, and low-income students.
- Six of seven charter-managed schools saw an increase in student enrollment, while Promise Academies, on average, did not.
- Charter-managed school leadership reported having difficulty preparing for their students due to challenges in accessing past data on their students.

Climate-Related Interventions and Strategies:

- Five schools (four charter, one Promise Academy) stood out for having school-wide systems for improving climate. Efforts to establish systems at the Promise Academies were affected by the late rollout of the “Promise Academy Way.”
- There were noticeable improvements in the physical appearance of all schools, as well as a messaging strategy that aimed to communicate consistent values, norms, and expectations.
- All schools had a significant number of non-teaching adults present in the building, which appeared to reduce discipline problems.
- Strengthening school-parent-community ties was a goal and a challenge for most schools.

Attendance, Lateness and Suspensions:

- During the first marking period, all but one school saw an increase in Average Daily Attendance (ADA), when compared to previous years and to other Empowerment Schools.
- There was no significant change in lateness in the charter-managed schools from prior years, while on average the Promise Academies saw a noticeable increase.
- Overall, there was significant variation in suspension rates among the charter-managed schools in particular, which suggests that these schools had different disciplinary policies.

School Advisory Councils

School Advisory Councils (SACs) were a central aspect of the Renaissance Initiative. They were designed to address the absence of parent and community engagement in recent reform efforts and to give parents and community a voice in their schools. Overall, a snapshot of the SACs in early winter 2011 showed that they could be characterized in three different ways:

- **Active** SACs, which had a chair, a solid core of members, and an actionable agenda.
- SACs **In Process**, which had been slowed by instability, had a different perspective from the District on their purpose, and/or had not yet moved forward with an agenda.
- **Suspended Development** describes SACs whose activities had been disrupted by changeover and/or had tensions between members and their principal or charter manager.

These early developments were affected by several key areas: leadership and core membership, understanding of goals and roles, and access to resources.

Leadership and Core Members:

- SAC chairs frequently identified themselves as long-time members of a school's community, and half of the chairs were a parent or guardian of a child in the school.
- SAC chairs from both the Promise Academies and charter-managed schools used similar words to describe SAC members: "energized," "committed," "enthusiastic," "amazing," "hopeful," and "diligent."
- Reaching the required 51% parent participation has been a particular challenge for some SACs.

- Almost every SAC chair reported a falling-off in membership in the fall, which created the need to recruit again, especially parents.

Understanding of Goals and Roles:

- Relations between principals and SACs, and SACs and charter managers, were generally positive.
- Principals, SAC chairs, and District administrators had different perspectives on the role of SACs. Some principals doubted that SACs had the capacity to carry out their responsibilities, while SAC chairs saw themselves as critical players in supporting school improvement.
- The District, especially with charter-managed schools, saw the SACs as their eyes and ears in the school. The role of the Promise Academy SACs, however, was less clear.

Access to Resources:

- Many SAC members believed they should have received a budget and resources, as well as additional training, to execute their responsibilities.
- Support for the Promise Academy SACs was distributed among a number of school-based and central office staff.

School Leadership and Staffing

As part of the Renaissance Initiative, the district implemented a number of interventions designed to strengthen leadership, put in place committed teachers, and ensure that staff had the tools and supports needed to enhance instruction. This included bringing in new leadership, replacing at least 50% of the existing staff and giving the principal the autonomy to hire new staff, as well as instituting systems for instructional improvement.

School Leadership

- New principals were put in place for 10 out of 13 Renaissance Schools, and many principals were relatively new to the principalship in general.
- All principals had a vision for turning around their respective schools. However, they differed in their ability to create a positive mission-oriented school culture, which contributed to variation in the level of teacher morale and buy-in across schools.

Teaching Staff:

- Promise Academy principals and charter managers sought committed, energetic teachers, and expressed excitement about their staff's potential.
- A compressed timeline made the teacher selection process challenging. By the time hiring efforts began, many current teachers had already sought new positions, leaving a large number of inexperienced teachers in the recruitment pool.
- There were significant changes in the characteristics of teachers in the Renaissance schools from previous years and in comparison to similar schools (called Empowerment Schools) not in the Renaissance Initiative.
 - **Full certification.** The percentage of fully certified teachers in both the Promise Academies and Charter-managed schools was significantly lower than the percentage at the Empowerment Schools, and decreased from previous years.
 - **No certification and intern certification.** Charter-managed schools experienced a 21% increase in the percentage of teachers who were not certified. Promise Academies did not employ any teachers lacking certification, but the percentage of teachers with intern or emergency certification rose markedly.
 - **Experience level and age.** Teachers in the Renaissance Schools were less experienced and younger than those in Empowerment Schools. The experience level and average age decreased from previous years.
 - **Racial composition.** Charter-managed schools had an increase in the percentage of white teachers, while Promise Academies had a decrease. There were no changes in racial composition in Empowerment Schools.
- Staff in all schools cultivated strong collaborative relationships, though some teachers reported collaborating during structured time while others had to develop their own systems.
- The presence of a significant number of new teachers was seen as a challenge by more experienced teachers.

Instructional System:

- Student achievement was frequently monitored across all schools through a benchmark assessment system; however, few schools reported using data to drive changes in practice.

- Most schools had prescribed curricula focused on reading and math; however, the amount of flexibility reported by teachers in curricular use varied across schools.
- Despite the existence of processes for teacher evaluation across all schools, teachers in most schools reported that instructional feedback was rare and expectations were often changing.
- All schools had systems of distributed leadership and common planning time for collaboration, but in the majority of schools, these structures were not consistently used to drive instructional improvement.

Recommendations

Student Enrollment and School Climate

- The District should ensure all principals have early access to the school building and that student performance and special needs data are available well before the school year begins.
- The District and charter managers should establish an early focus on establishing a school-wide system of behavioral support so that summer orientations give sufficient time to explicate both instructional and behavioral support systems.

School Advisory Councils

- More training and resources are needed for SAC chairs, principals and charter managers. These trainings should occur at school sites and be targeted based on need.
- The Promise Academy SACs would benefit from a single source of Central Office support that is dedicated to making certain the SACs function well.
- Conflict and tension should be anticipated, and the District should have in place mechanisms for working through differences before problems debilitate and/or delegitimize either the District or the SAC.

School Leadership and Staffing

- The District and charter managers should develop a strategy for meeting the needs of a teaching force that is significantly younger, less experienced, and alternatively certified.
- The District and charter managers should establish clear performance expectations and provide consistent feedback.

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- Principals should ensure that time is protected for professional development, to ensure that teachers can establish a strong professional culture focused on using data to drive improvements and spread effective practice.

Future Research

This research was conducted in the start-up months of Philadelphia’s Renaissance Schools Initiative. As such, the findings and recommendations focus on important lessons for mid-course correction with this initial cohort, and for the start-up of the next cohort of 18 Renaissance Schools. In these early months of the Renaissance Initiative, we found substantial variation among schools in their efforts to implement policies and practices in the key areas that we examined. This variation existed as much within the charter-managed and Promise Academy models as between them.

We recommend that the District, as well as funders concerned with educational reform, invest in further research including:

- A study of **the effectiveness of the Renaissance Initiative in impacting student outcomes** at Promise Academies, charter-managed schools, and other models used in future rounds of the initiative.
- Research on the **impact of the Renaissance Initiative on other schools and neighborhoods** in the District that have *not* been selected for turnaround.
- Continued examination of **the relationship between charter management organizations (CMOs) and the District**. The relationship is evolving as the District grants charter management organizations management of neighborhood schools, resulting in greater autonomy than other District-managed schools and greater monitoring and accountability than other charter schools.



Philadelphia's Renaissance Schools: Start Up and Early Implementation

Introduction

In April 2009, Superintendent Arlene Ackerman announced her reform plan for the School District of Philadelphia (the District) – *Imagine 2014*. Among other major initiatives, *Imagine 2014* laid the groundwork for Philadelphia's Renaissance Schools Initiative. The Renaissance Initiative, set to enter its second year in 2011-12, is an effort to change student outcomes in the District's lowest performing schools. The design of the initiative reflects national trends and federal policies, which propose to transform chronically underperforming schools through *turnaround efforts*. Rather than making incremental changes, *school turnaround* reforms like the Renaissance Initiative intend to effect dramatic student improvement in just two to three years, by bringing in new leadership, reconstituting school staff, and increasing student supports and opportunities for learning.¹

Building on the Past

The Renaissance Initiative is the second wave of Philadelphia school reform in a decade to use external school managers as a remedy for low-performing schools. The first wave followed the 2001 state takeover of the school district, when Philadelphia became the largest experiment in the use of private providers – largely educational management organizations (EMOs) – which ran 45 District schools, while 21 others underwent significant reforms designed and managed by the District. This first wave became known as Philadelphia's diverse provider model.

In developing the Renaissance Initiative, the District took into account lessons learned in the diverse provider model, a top-down reform which had elicited significant public pushback and on average, received no academic gains beyond other District schools.² In contrast, the Renaissance Initiative

¹ Herman, R., Dawson, P., Dee, T., Greene, J., Maynard, R., Redding, S., & Darwin, M. (2008). *Turning around chronically low-performing schools: A practice guide* (NCEE #2008-4020). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/publications/practiceguides>

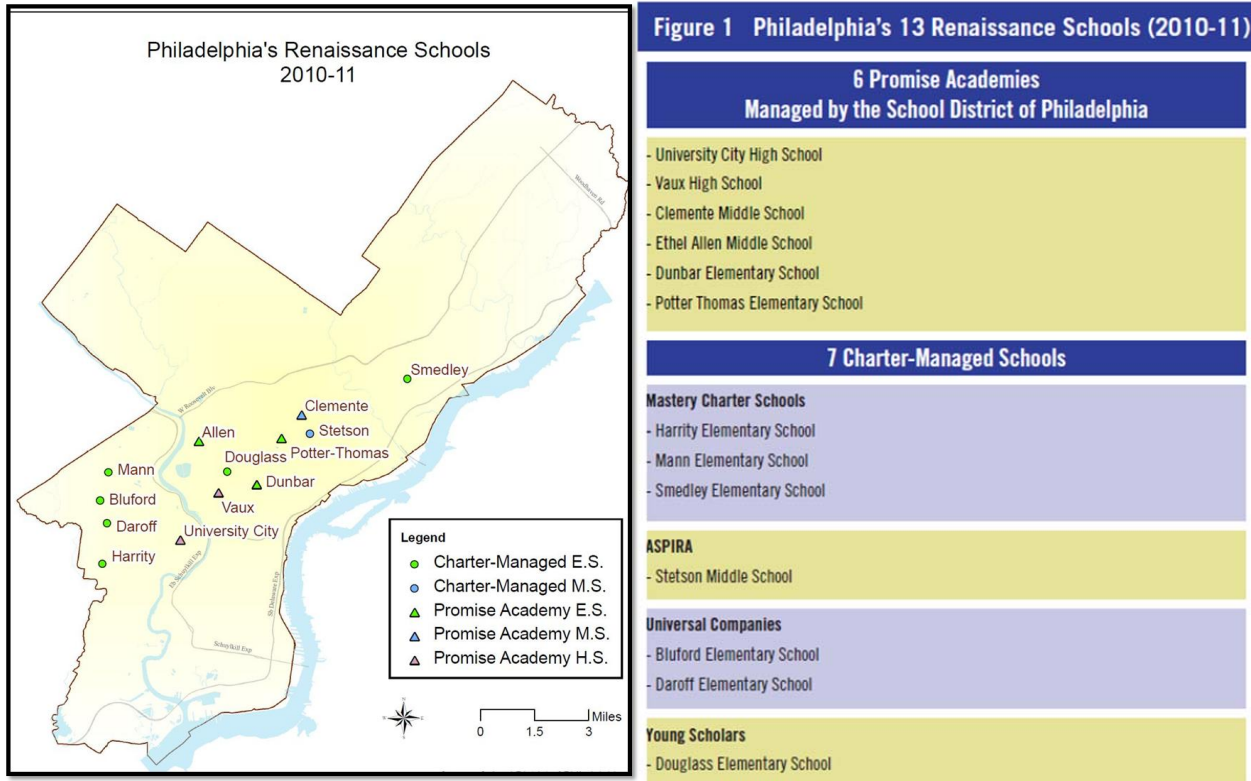
² Privately managed schools saw no significant effects (positive or negative); District-managed "restructured" schools saw some effect in math. See: Gill, B., Zimmer, R., Christman, J., & Blanc, S. (2007). *State takeover, school restructuring, private management, and student achievement in Philadelphia*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

was guided by recommendations from a citywide citizen advisory board, which helped to foster public buy-in. Similar to the first wave of reform, some of the schools identified for intervention would remain under District management, while others would be managed by external, private sector groups called turnaround teams. As opposed to the EMOs, these turnaround teams would be selected based on evidence of prior success and they would have contracts with the District granting them autonomy over personnel, budget, curriculum, and instruction, but would remain accountable to the District for student outcomes. And, as was the case with the EMO schools, these schools would remain neighborhood schools, admitting any student from within their catchment areas or feeder patterns without requiring an admissions process. Finally, in the Renaissance Initiative, parents and community would be integral to matching schools with external turnaround teams, providing input to school leadership, and monitoring implementation of educational programs and student achievement.

The Renaissance Schools

The District's decision to institute a turnaround strategy in some of its lowest performing schools was made possible in January 2010 by a groundbreaking agreement with the teachers' union. The new contract allowed for the revamping of school staffs in Renaissance schools, site selection of teachers, and an extension of the work day and year to allow for extended learning time.

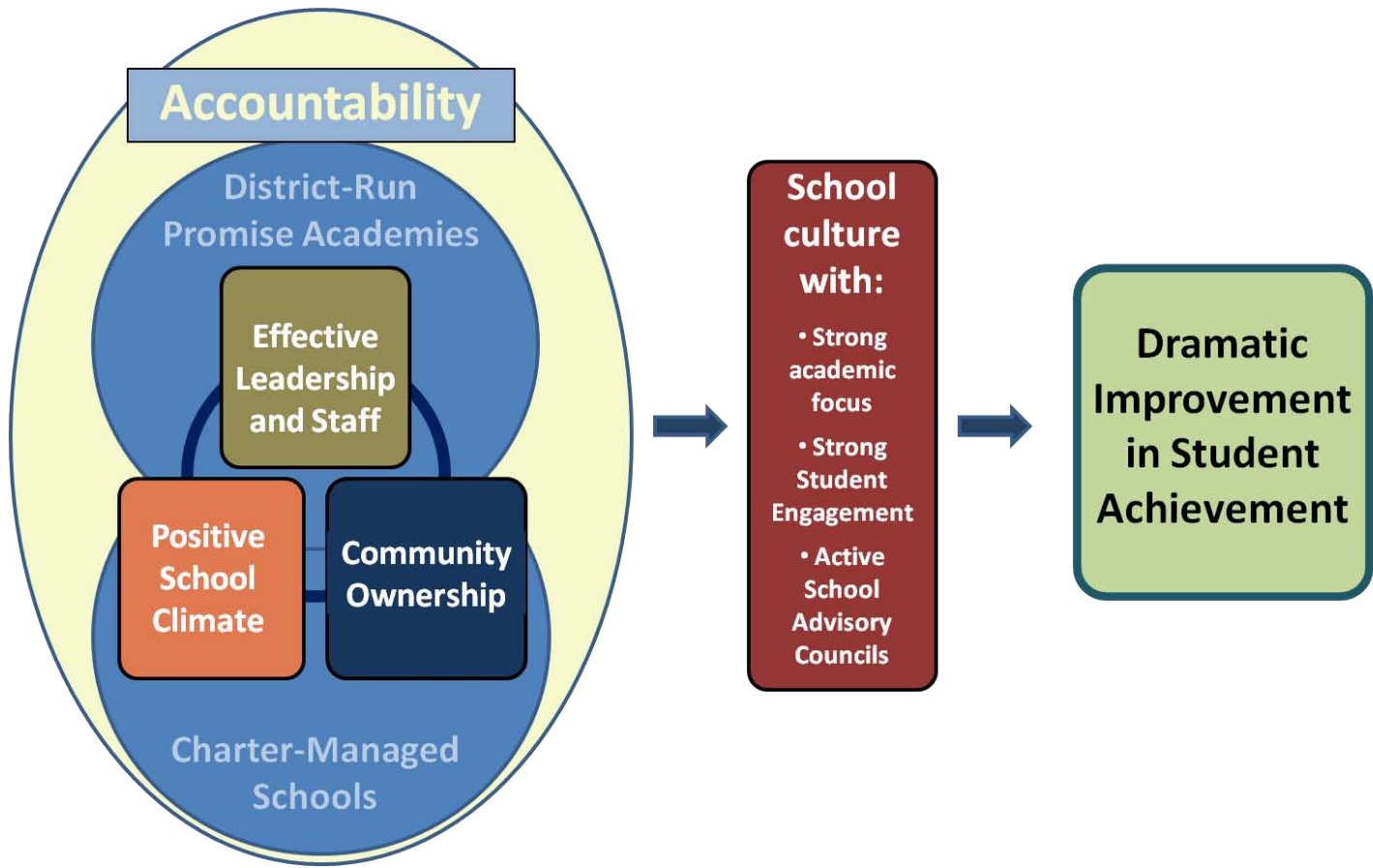
Additionally, increases in state and federal dollars increased the District budget and supported the Renaissance Initiative in its first year. In January 2010, the District identified 14 schools to open as Renaissance schools in the 2010-11 school year. None had made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the preceding five years, and all had earned a score of 10 – the most unsatisfactory – on the District's 2008-09 School Performance Index. By March 2010, six were designated "Promise Academies," and would be run by the District. School Advisory Councils (SACs), formed of parents, community members, and school staff, were then involved in a process that ultimately matched an additional seven schools with charter school managers, which functioned as external turnaround teams. The District postponed one school's match for the following school year. See **Figure 1** below for identification of the 13 Renaissance Schools.



Theory of Action

Figure 2 presents the theory underlying the design of the Renaissance Initiative, as articulated in interviews we conducted of key stakeholders in the summer of 2010. As the diagram shows, establishing effective leadership and staff, creating a positive school climate, and cultivating community ownership within a broader context of accountability are considered key levers for change in the Renaissance schools. When these operate within a strong environment of accountability, the theory states, they will lead to a set of interim outcomes that will ultimately result in dramatic improvement in student achievement.

Figure 2. Theory of Action



This Study

In June 2010, the Accountability Review Council, established in 2002 by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to monitor District reforms, commissioned Research for Action (RFA) to conduct a study of the start up and early implementation of the Renaissance Initiative. Guided by the theory of action that underlies the reform initiative, our research focused on documenting and analyzing efforts to establish the following aspects of the reform model:

- Positive school climate;
- Community ownership; and
- Effective leadership and staff.

In examining these three critical aspects of the Renaissance Initiative, we examined changes within individual schools, and also compared changes across the two Renaissance School models (Promise Academies and charter-managed schools).

Methodology

Data Collection

Our analysis was based on a range of quantitative and qualitative data collected during two main periods of implementation: start-up (March 2010-August 2010); and early implementation (September 2010-January 2011). A summary of the data collected in each of these two phases can be seen in **Table 1**.

Table 1 Data Sources	
Start Up March - August 2010	Early Implementation September 2010 - January 2011
Qualitative Data	
Interviews	
7 school principals/assistant principals 13 SAC chairs and members 7 Central Office staff 6 charter-managed school leaders Total: 33 interview respondents	26 school principals/assistant principals 32 other school leaders 13 SAC chairs 6 Central Office staff Total: 76 interview respondents
Teacher Focus Groups	
	14 teacher focus groups 11 returning teacher focus groups Total: 86 teachers
Observations	
7 SAC meetings and trainings 6 Promise Academy data review meetings 2 Promise Academy orientation sessions Total: 15 observations	13 school tours 33 classroom observations 7 school professional development sessions 2 SAC meetings and trainings 1 Promise Academy principals' meeting Total: 56 observations
Documents & Media Coverage	
<p>From the District's Central Office: School Quality Reviews, public communications, SAC handbook and training/application materials, SAC by-laws, documents from Promise Academy meetings, charter manager strategic plans</p> <p>From school principals: schedule of a typical school day or week, communications sent home, list of school personnel, sample lesson plans and curriculum guides, teacher evaluation guide/rubric, student and parent handbooks</p> <p>Media coverage: <i>Education Week, Philadelphia Daily News, Philadelphia Public School Notebook, Philadelphia Inquirer, Philadelphia Tribune, WHYY News Radio</i></p>	
Quantitative Data	
<p>RFA surveys of 12 SAC chairs, 13 principals, and 86 teachers</p> <p>School-level data from the District and charter managers for the 13 Renaissance Schools and the District's 100 other Empowerment schools on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - student enrollment and characteristics as of November 1 in 2008, 2009 and 2010 - attendance, lateness, and suspensions in the first marking period of 2008, 2009 and 2010 - teacher characteristics as of November 1 in 2008, 2009 and 2010 	

Data Analysis

We utilized a series of standard analytic techniques to examine our data.

1. Qualitative Analysis

- Developed a framework for our analysis based on dimensions of school organization commonly identified in the existing literature on school improvement and school turnaround.
- Used the framework and a close reading of field notes to identify common themes that emerged across the data, and then coded all observation notes and interview transcripts.
- Used coded data to write analytic memos for each of the 13 Renaissance Schools.
- Analyzed school memos for commonalities and variations that emerged across all schools and between the two models (Promise Academies and charter-managed schools).

2. Quantitative Analysis

- Ran descriptive analyses of responses to RFA surveys.
- Compared means for charter-managed schools and Promise Academies with a comparison group of the District's 100 other Empowerment schools, for student and teacher variables.
- Calculated changes in student and teacher variables over the past three school years (2008-09, 2009-10, 2010-11).
- For select teacher variables, ran one-way ANOVA and post-hoc tests to determine statistical significance in the variation between the 2010 means for the charter-managed schools, Promise Academies and Empowerment schools.

Summary

We have organized our findings in three briefs:

- Student Enrollment and School Climate;
- School Advisory Councils; and

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- School Leadership and Staffing.

Each brief is designed to be a stand-alone document, but the most comprehensive portrait of the Renaissance Initiative in its early stages can be arrived at by a careful review of all three. It is our hope that these briefs can help inform the District's efforts to improve its schools, contribute to public awareness about the Renaissance Initiative, and point to important areas to follow as the Initiative continues to expand and evolve.



Student Enrollment and School Climate at Philadelphia’s Renaissance Schools: Start Up and Early Implementation

March 2011

I. Introduction

One of the early goals of the Renaissance Schools Initiative was to dramatically improve school climate, which refers to the intangible tone or feeling inside a school building, or “the quality and character of school life.”¹ Researchers have commonly identified four areas as key components of a positive school climate: supportive relationships among teachers and students; sense of safety within the school; physical environment; and quality teaching and learning.²

Efforts to establish a positive school climate were a primary focus of principals, charter managers, and the District’s Promise Academy office in year one of the Renaissance Schools Initiative, and activities aimed at achieving this goal varied across the schools.

This brief presents results from a larger research project conducted by Research for Action (RFA) for the Accountability Review Council that focuses on several aspects of the early stages of the Renaissance Schools Initiative (Renaissance Initiative) from March 2010 – January 2011:

- School Advisory Councils;
- Student Enrollment and School Climate; and
- School Leadership and Staffing.

Results for each of these topics are summarized in a research brief. An introductory chapter provides an overview of the larger research project, and a conclusion summarizes our

¹ Cohen, J., McCabe, E. M., Michelli, N. M., & Pickeral, T. (2009). School climate: Research, policy, practice, and teacher education. *Teachers College Record*, 111(1), 180-213, page 182.

² These four areas are adapted from a synthesis of research developed by the Center for Social and Emotional Education. There is not yet widespread agreement on how school climate should be operationalized and validly assessed. See: Center for Social and Emotional Education (2010, January). *School climate research summary*. (School Climate Brief, Vol. 1, No. 1). New York: Author.

recommendations for the Renaissance Schools Initiative as a whole as it continues to be implemented and expanded.³

In the remainder of this brief, our findings are organized into the following sections:

- **Enrollment** examines the schools' status as neighborhood schools, and describes the students who attend them.
- **Climate-Related Interventions and Strategies** focuses on schools' efforts to:
 - 1) establish a *sense of safety*,
 - 2) create a *positive physical environment*, and
 - 3) nurture *supportive relationships*.
- A section that examines **Attendance, Lateness and Suspensions** as indicators of school climate.

Methodology

Figure 1. Data collection

This brief focuses on student enrollment and school climate, and is based on data collected in two rounds. Round one (June-August 2010) explored the early focus and activities of the Renaissance school leadership, and round two (September 2010-January 2011) focused on student enrollment and the implementation of interventions to improve climate in the first months of the school year.

The qualitative data analyzed includes:

- Interviews with the 10 central office staff, 4 charter managers, 15 SAC chairs or acting chairs, 14 school principals (two from one school), and 32 other school leaders (e.g., assistant principals, instructional coaches, counselors, and parent ombudsmen).
- 14 focus groups with new and returning teachers
- 13 school visits (these included observations of classrooms, grade group meetings, and a school tour)
- Review of student and staff handbooks, District's 2010-11 Code of Student Conduct, other documents related to parent engagement or behavioral support

The quantitative data analyzed includes:

- RFA surveys of 12 SAC chairs, 13 principals, and 86 teachers
- School-level data from the School District of Philadelphia (the District) and charter managers on student enrollment and characteristics, attendance, lateness, and suspensions.

³ The full set of briefs can be found at <http://www.researchforaction.org>.

II. Enrollment

In this section, we examine issues of enrollment in the Renaissance schools, the characteristics of their students, and the challenges created by these factors in some schools.

1. The District and the four charter managers agreed that the charter-managed Renaissance schools would remain neighborhood schools with catchment areas.

Most charter schools in Philadelphia enroll students from across the city through an application process and computerized lottery. In contrast, as a mandate of the Renaissance Initiative, the seven charter-managed schools were required to enroll any student from their catchment area in the neighborhood they served. One District official explained the charter schools' new position in the District's system of schools:

These are not niche schools. They are neighborhoods schools. That is hugely different for most of the charter operators. . . . This student lives in your neighborhood, so you have to serve this student. You don't get to throw this kid out at all under any circumstances. That has been tough. The charter management organizations come in with their own model: student behavior, expectations of what parents should and should not do. They don't get to pre-interview people [to make sure it is a good match].

2. Charter-managed school leadership reported having difficulty preparing for their students due to challenges in accessing past data on their students.

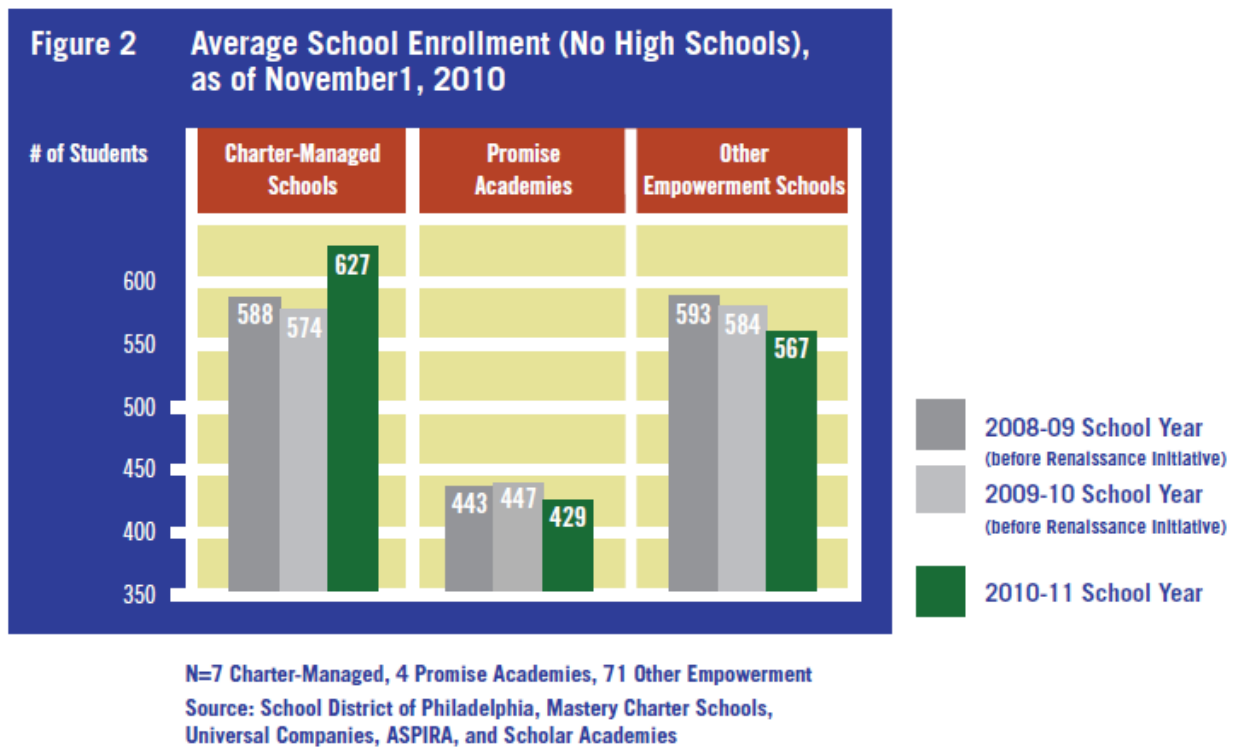
Leadership and teachers at the charter-managed schools reported that having access to student records from past years would have helped them prepare for the academic and behavioral needs of their students. However, they had difficulty obtaining records from the District over the summer. "Had I known about the student population," explained one instructional coach, "had I even had access to test scores and been able to do some analysis of data, had we really understood the levels of behavioral things that had been happening, we could have planned better."

3. Six of seven charter-managed schools saw an increase in student enrollment, while Promise Academies, on average, did not.

As is evident in **Figure 2**, the average enrollment in charter-managed schools rose by 53 students between November 2009 and November 2010. All but one charter-managed school experienced

increased enrollment, and two grew by more than 100 students – increasing by 16.3% and 26.2% respectively. As a result, these schools were serving significant numbers of new students in the 2010-11 school year – as much as 43% of their student population. At least two charter-managed schools added new classes and new staff partway into the school year, while another school unexpectedly increased class sizes school-wide.

In contrast, as **Figure 2** also shows, the average enrollment *decreased* between the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years in Promise Academies and other Empowerment schools – by 18 and 17 students respectively.⁴ Several interview subjects suggested that the transition to a charter school attracted attention in the community that the Promise Academies did not generate in the same way. In addition, all of the charter-managed schools underwent a process that involved parents and community members in matching their neighborhood school with an external manager, which may have led to increased awareness and enrollments in charter-managed schools.



⁴ High schools were not included in this analysis because enrollment in high schools across the District decreased over the past two years, and none were run by charter managers in the 2010-11 Renaissance Initiative.

4. **The 13 Renaissance schools served mostly African American, Latino, and low-income students. The 6 Promise Academies served a comparatively high number of special education students.**

The characteristics of students served by the 13 Renaissance schools did not change significantly in 2010-11, when compared with prior years. **Figure 3** shows that, collectively, the Promise Academies served a higher percentage of Latino students (31%) than the charter-managed schools and other Empowerment Schools. The Promise Academies’ Latino students were concentrated in two schools located in neighborhoods with high Latino populations. Also, fewer than 2% of Renaissance students were White or Asian – noticeably fewer than the students in Empowerment Schools.

As is evident in **Figure 3**, nearly one fourth of students in the Promise Academies were special education students, compared to 13% in charter-managed schools and 19% in the Empowerment Schools. The Promise Academies also served proportionately more ELL students, again concentrated in the two schools that served mostly Latino students.



III. Climate-Related Interventions

Improved school climate was reported in 11 of the 13 Renaissance schools. In many cases, those who were familiar with a school in past years perceived the improvements more positively than those who were new. One principal said, “People who saw the school last year see a 180-degree change. I am floored because this [climate as it is] is not what we want. It can be better than this.”

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This difference was supported by our survey data: When asked to rate their school's climate, returning teachers, on average, gave higher ratings than new teachers, and SAC chairs, on average, gave higher ratings than both teachers and principals.

Only two schools – both Promise Academies – received consistently negative reports on climate from various stakeholders. In other schools, we heard reports like this, from a returning teacher:

There is no running around the hallways, the fire bell does not go off. It would go off four times – if not more – a day last year. It goes off when we have mandatory fire drills. Kids are not roaming the halls, they're not running around, we don't have screaming and yelling, it's overall calm. Teachers are calm, kids seem more calm.

In half the schools where stakeholders reported improvements, leadership and teachers still described challenges in classroom management and overall climate.

Below we outline our findings about the Renaissance schools' efforts to engineer a positive school climate in:

- Nurturing supportive relationships among students, school staff, and parents;
- Establishing a sense of safety;
- Creating a positive physical environment.

Nurturing Supportive Relationships

Renaissance schools implemented a variety of interventions aimed at cultivating supportive relationships among students, staff, parents, and community. **Figure 4** describes six common interventions that emerged in our data. Two of these – School Advisory Councils and an increased number non-teaching staff – were observed in all 13 schools. In addition, most schools provided students with enrichment activities and small learning environments, which encouraged relationship-building among adults and students at school. Most schools also made efforts to connect with parents and community through outreach activities and home contact. Below **Figure 4**, we highlight three findings related to particular interventions.

Figure 4 Interventions for Nurturing Supportive Relationships

Intervention	Description
School Advisory Council (SAC)	The District mandated that each school have a council composed of parents and community members.
Additional supports for students and families	Schools employed an increased number of non-teaching staff who provided a variety of services, social and behavioral supports, and referrals to outside resources.
Student enrichment activities	Most schools had special classes (i.e. dance), after-school programs, and/or extracurricular activities. Promise Academies were also to have an extra hour at the end of the day designated for enrichment, as well as Saturday field trips (had not happened as of January 2011).
Smaller learning environments	These included smaller class sizes, high school academies, and in two schools, a school within a school as part of their behavioral support system.
Parent engagement and community outreach activities	Schools and SACs planned Back to School Night, "Coffee with the Principal," parent workshops, volunteer opportunities for parents, staff neighborhood walks, and family cookouts.
Home contact	Teachers, counselors and other school staff called home (for positive and negative reasons), met with parents/guardians, sent newsletters home, and made home visits.

- Widespread: Implemented with some success in all Renaissance Schools
- Shared: Implemented with some success in more than half of Renaissance Schools
- Occasional/Rare: Implemented in fewer than half of Renaissance Schools

1. Additional social services and behavioral support staff helped address student needs and provided the opportunity for adult-student relationships.

All schools received added resources for social services and behavioral support staff. While parent ombudsmen and student advisor positions were common across all Empowerment Schools, Promise Academies had the added support from a full-time nurse, a full-time resource specialist, and a half-time social worker. In addition, the student-to-counselor ratio in Promise Academies was the same or better than in other Empowerment schools. An extra counselor was provided to Promise Academies if their student-to-counselor ratio approached the range that would normally warrant an additional counselor. Charter-managed schools all had multiple social and behavioral supports in place, including contracts with outside agencies. One SAC chair from a charter-managed school observed:

There are more support services, outside resources, outside partnerships [than last year]. Psychiatric evaluations are done quicker. Behavior, emotional, and psychological problems are being addressed

quicker, and resources being made available that were not there before. They are doing home visits. We have too often shoved those issues under the carpet until it is too late.

2. Having a significant number of non-teaching adults present in the schools appeared to reduce discipline problems.

The increased adult presence was apparent to us in our school observations. “It’s really about the adults making themselves present in the hallways and even outside during dismissals,” said one principal. “There are a lot more people who [the students] can talk to, a lot more eyes out watching for smaller infractions,” said a school leader at a different school. We also heard from teachers that these non-teaching staff provided important support for their instruction by being available to spend time with students who misbehaved in class.

3. Strengthening school-parent-community ties was a goal and a challenge for most schools.

School leaders across school types expressed the importance of engaging parents and community members in their schools, and a number of stakeholders reported that involvement had increased this year. Interview subjects described a variety of efforts to build school-parent-community ties. **Figure 5** identifies four approaches to parent and community engagement that emerged from our interviews and observations.

Despite the Renaissance Schools’ efforts, interviews repeatedly revealed that strengthening school-parent-community ties was difficult and not as prevalent as stakeholders would have liked. In some schools, teachers complained that parents were not on board with the higher expectations the school imposed on students and families. As one teacher said, “I don’t know if parents were really prepared for everything that was required of them.” Other staff reported low participation in parent workshops. One factor contributing to this challenge was raised by two Promise Academy principals, who were unhappy with their ombudsmen’s efforts to engage parents and wished they could have hired a new person into this position.

Figure 5 Four Approaches to Parent and Community Engagement

Approach	Description	Schools*
Service Approach	Focus on providing social services to students and families. They often had a room designed as a resource center for parents and families, and had school leaders who articulated a goal that the school be a “one stop shop” that offered a variety of services.	2 charter-managed schools 1 Promise Academy
Parent Volunteers Approach	Focus on providing parents with opportunities to volunteer (i.e. in classrooms or as cafeteria monitors). They typically had a core of 8-12 parents who were regular volunteers in the school.	2 Promise Academies
Achievement Approach	Focus on parents as supporters of student academic progress. Contact with parents was largely school-based and emphasized regularly updating parents on student behavior and academic performance.	4 charter-managed schools
Integrative Approach	Focus on positioning schools as active members in the community. Integrated community and family into school life. They communicated this value to students, parents and community members in a variety of ways.	1 charter-managed school 1 Promise Academy

* The classification of schools is based on our qualitative analysis of interviews, observations, and documents. We did not have sufficient data on parent and community engagement on two Promise Academies to suggest the most appropriate classification, and they are therefore missing from the figure.

Establishing a Sense of Safety

All Renaissance Schools put in place interventions designed to increase safety. As outlined in **Figure 6**, all 13 schools enforced a uniform policy, which, according to staff and SAC chairs, helped establish order, increased student confidence, and improved student behavior. “You are dressed up, you look a little more presentable, you act differently,” explained one counselor. All 13 schools also put in place routines and procedures that were to be practiced regularly school-wide, but at some schools, these routines were changed multiple times during the fall, undermining the goal of establishing a structured and predictable environment.

Figure 6 also shows that leadership at all but a few schools articulated the importance of clearly communicating behavioral expectations and ensuring that they were consistent school-wide. Expectations were presented both verbally and through identical posters that appeared in classrooms and hallways. As one staff member told us, “It’s about consistency, and giving the

students as much structure as possible.” In addition, nearly all the schools used rewards to positively reinforce students’ good behavior and traditional consequences – including in- and out-of-school suspensions, and, less often, disciplinary transfers – to discipline unacceptable behavior. We found some evidence that a few schools of both types were also using non-traditional consequences including restorative practices and a school-within-a-school. Below **Figure 6** we discuss how the seven interventions described in the figure were implemented across schools.

Figure 6 Interventions for Establishing a Sense of Safety	
Intervention	Description
Uniforms	All schools emphasized uniform compliance as important. A number provided resources (i.e. extra ties) when family economic situations made it difficult to abide by a strict uniform policy.
Consistent routines and procedures	These included clearly communicated and consistent arrival, dismissal and clas transition procedures, as well as regularly scheduled assemblies or “town hall” meetings.
School-wide behavioral expectations	Behavioral expectations were consistent school-wide and were clearly communicated. In contrast, a few schools appeared to allow teachers more autonomy in developing classroom-level rules.
School-wide behavioral reward systems	Positive behavior was reinforced through informal affirmation (i.e. high fives) and through formal rewards (i.e. public recognition, new privileges, concrete gifts). In several schools, staff awarded - or subtracted - points or “dollars” to students throughout the day.
Suspensions	In-school and out-of-school suspensions. Notably, one charter-managed school did not suspend any students (in the first marking period) - see “school within a school” below.
Disciplinary transfers	Promise Academies reported fewer disciplinary transfers than in prior years (first marking period), and the other charter-managed schools reported zero. One charter manager was contracting with an alternative school in order to transfer students in the future.
Restorative practices	These are strategies that focus on restoring relationships, rather than solely punishing students.
School within a school	At one charter-managed school, students identified for disruptive behavior were transferred to an academy occupying one floor of the school building, run by an outside contractor. The academy followed the same curriculum and similar procedures as the rest of the school, but with greater structure.

■ Widespread: Implemented with some success in all Renaissance Schools
■ Shared: Implemented with some success in more than half of Renaissance Schools
■ Occasional/Rare: Implemented in fewer than half of Renaissance Schools

1. Five schools (four charter, one Promise Academy) stood out for having school-wide systems rather than fragmented interventions.

These five schools implemented their set of climate-related interventions as a coherent, school-wide system, giving teachers and students a sense of order because they could know what to expect from

one day to the next. These schools consistently reinforced their behavioral expectations with rewards and consequences, and a structured set of routines and procedures. As one teacher described it, “There’s been a large push by the administration to make the kids understand that these things are not okay, and that there won’t just be individual teacher consequences but there will be a school-wide consequence.” A teacher at a second school echoed this sentiment: “It is definitely not a place where if you go with one teacher, you can get away with it, so that consistency is a huge factor.”

Two factors may have contributed to the success of these five schools in implementing well-integrated school-wide systems for managing behavior. Charter managers (and, in one case, an outside contractor) with established models for behavioral support system had an advantage when compared to other school managers and leaders, who had to invent and modify their behavioral support systems after the school year had already begun. Additionally, schools that completed their hiring process sooner had more time before the beginning of the school year to orient teachers and foster their buy-in. We heard repeatedly that teacher buy-in was essential to establishing the consistency necessary for a school-wide behavioral support system to function.

2. Climate at the Promise Academies was affected by the late rollout of the “Promise Academy Way.”

Promise Academy principals and assistant principals reported that they had difficulty establishing strong systems, in part because of the late rollout of “the Promise Academy Way,” a portfolio of norms and procedures developed by the District for the Promise Academies, which was introduced in late November 2010. One principal explained:

The only thing that happened, though, is that now we have a binder of the Promise Academy Way, which actually needed to be developed before – last year, really, before we started the program. Because now, once again, we have to do things that are thrown on us in the middle . . . [after] school has started.

Creating a Positive Physical Environment

The Renaissance Schools made efforts to improve their school climate by making changes to the school’s physical environment. As described in **Figure 7**, we observed new paint in all 13 schools, as well as visual materials that intended to communicate consistent school-wide messages. Most schools made additional improvements to their physical plant, sometimes with the help of non-

District funding. Below **Figure 7**, we highlight three findings related to the physical appearance of the Renaissance Schools.

Figure 7 Interventions for Creating a Positive Physical Environment	
Intervention	Description
New paint	All schools freshly painted at least some classrooms and hallways. A number used bright, warm colors.
Consistency of messaging	School used posters and other visuals to reinforce certain words and phrases (i.e. the Promise Academy Pledge or “Excellence. No Excuses”), often promoting school-wide values and norms, high expectations, and college-going.
Other improvements to physical plant	These included new or additional lighting, new furniture, and removal of unused material from neglected spaces.

- Widespread: Implemented with some success in **all** Renaissance Schools
- Shared: Implemented with some success in **more than half** of Renaissance Schools
- Occasional/Rare: Implemented in **fewer than half** of Renaissance Schools

1. Making noticeable improvements to the school buildings was a prominent early strategy in all 13 schools.

Warm, bright environments were noticeable in many of the Renaissance Schools. In some cases, physical improvements were already underway prior to the Renaissance Initiative: One charter-managed school opened in a brand new facility, and one Promise Academy boasted a brand new, much-improved library. We heard from school leaders, particularly in the charter-managed schools, however, that it would have been helpful to have access to their assigned building earlier in the summer; many didn’t gain access until August.

Two factors contributed to the physical improvements to schools. First, at Promise Academies, we heard that the District gave these schools special attention and, as one staff person said, “When you became a Promise Academy, you became a priority, so you got your air conditioning and your heat fixed.” Second, at least three of the four charter managers used funding from other sources to supplement District-allocated funds, which allowed them to make additional improvements, such as purchasing new furniture.

2. The physical environment of the schools reflected a college-going focus.

Banners, posters, and college pennants decorated hallways and classrooms, which emphasized that college-going behavior was a goal for students at Renaissance Schools. Promise Academy teachers were required to post the name of their alma mater and their degree(s) outside their classroom doorways, and we observed similar practices in several charter schools. In a number of schools, homerooms were each named after universities – usually prestigious ones – and one school in particular planned to take students on trips to visit the universities for which their homerooms were named.

3. The use of posters in schools reflected a consistent messaging strategy that aimed to communicate consistent values, norms, and expectations, but was not always popular among teachers.

The District’s Promise Academy office and two of the charter managers each provided their respective schools with a standard set of posters that appeared throughout their hallways and classrooms. These posters communicated messages related to school values, norms, behavioral expectations, consequences, rewards, and/or test-takings strategies. Most of them also carried the Promise Academy or charter manager’s logo in one corner – essentially displaying the school’s “brand.”

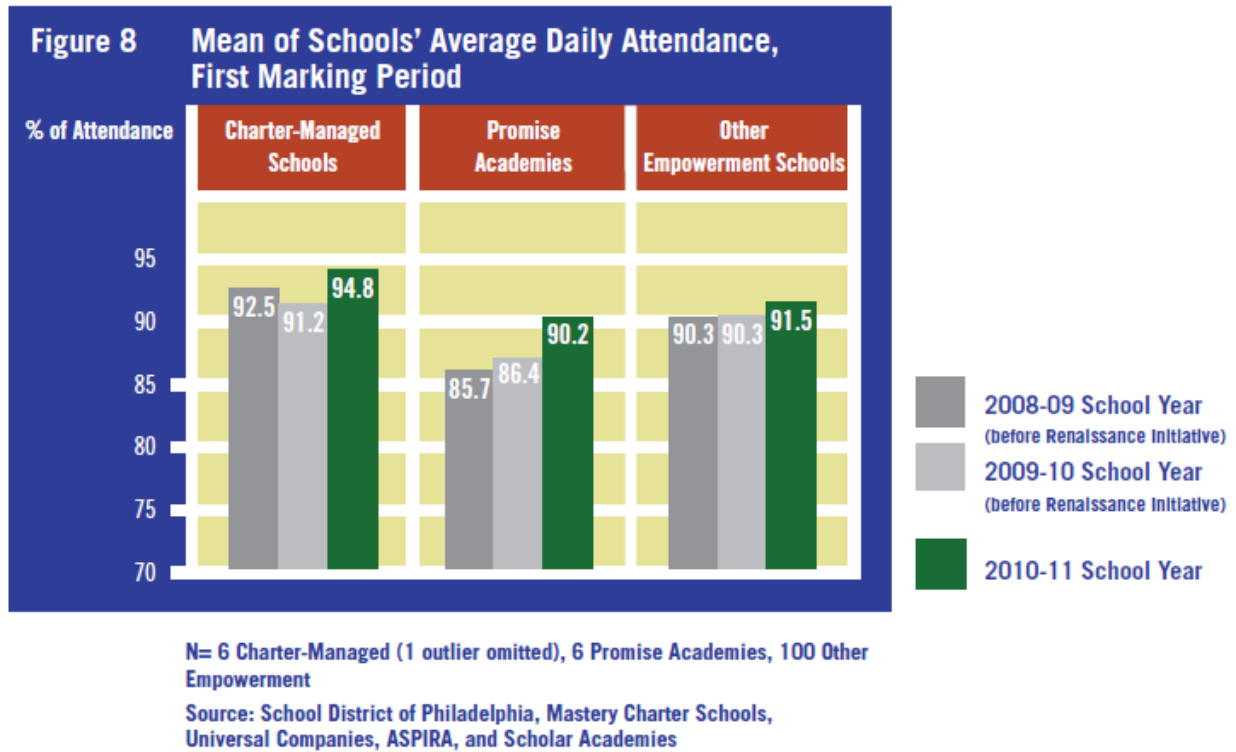
The posters were intended to contribute to instructional coherence and a single school culture by communicating consistent messages school-wide. However, several Promise Academy teachers in particular expressed frustration with the large number of required posters and felt that the District was placing too much emphasis on them. One, for example, said, “We have a million and one things in our rooms. I don’t think that helps the kids. It just looks like clutter.”

IV. Attendance, Lateness, and Suspensions

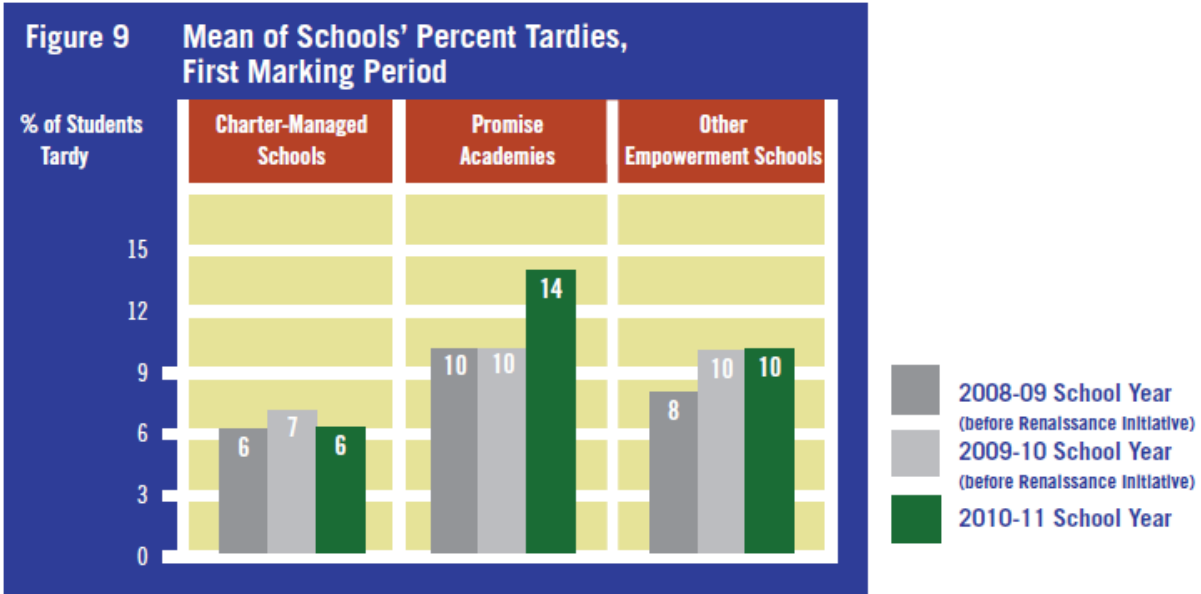
- a. Attendance. One indicator of improvements in climate and student engagement was the increase in average daily attendance (ADA). During the first marking period, all but 13 schools saw an increase in ADA, when compared to the previous two years.⁵ As is evident in **Figure 8**, the mean ADA increased in Empowerment schools district-wide, but the increase was greater in the charter-managed schools and Promise Academies. “Our attendance is higher than it has been

⁵ The one charter-managed school with a lower ADA in 2010-11 was an outlier, reporting a decrease in ADA from 90% to 85%, and is not included in **Figure 8** because of the significant effect it has on the overall mean for charter-managed schools.

probably in a decade,” said one Promise Academy principal. “Something is going right. The kids want to come to school. I think they’re seeing that someone cares.”



- b. Lateness. As **Figure 9** shows, the charter-managed schools and the other Empowerment schools, on average, saw no significant change in lateness between 2009-10 and 2010-11, while the Promise Academies saw a noticeable increase. This trend is due to a marked increase in tardiness at three specific Promise Academies. Several of these principals raised high levels of tardiness as a concern.



N= 6 Charter-Managed, 6 Promise Academies, 100 Other Empowerment
Source: School District of Philadelphia, Mastery Charter Schools, Universal Companies, ASPIRA, and Scholar Academies

- c. Out-of-school Suspensions. Out-of-school suspensions reflect, to some degree, (1) the extent to which unruly behavior and other infractions affected school climate and (2) the extent to which schools used suspensions as a consequence over alternative interventions. However, because schools do not consistently suspend students for the same reasons, and because – as some teachers told us – principals will sometimes err against suspending students, their schools’ statistics are more favorable, and the data should be interpreted with caution.

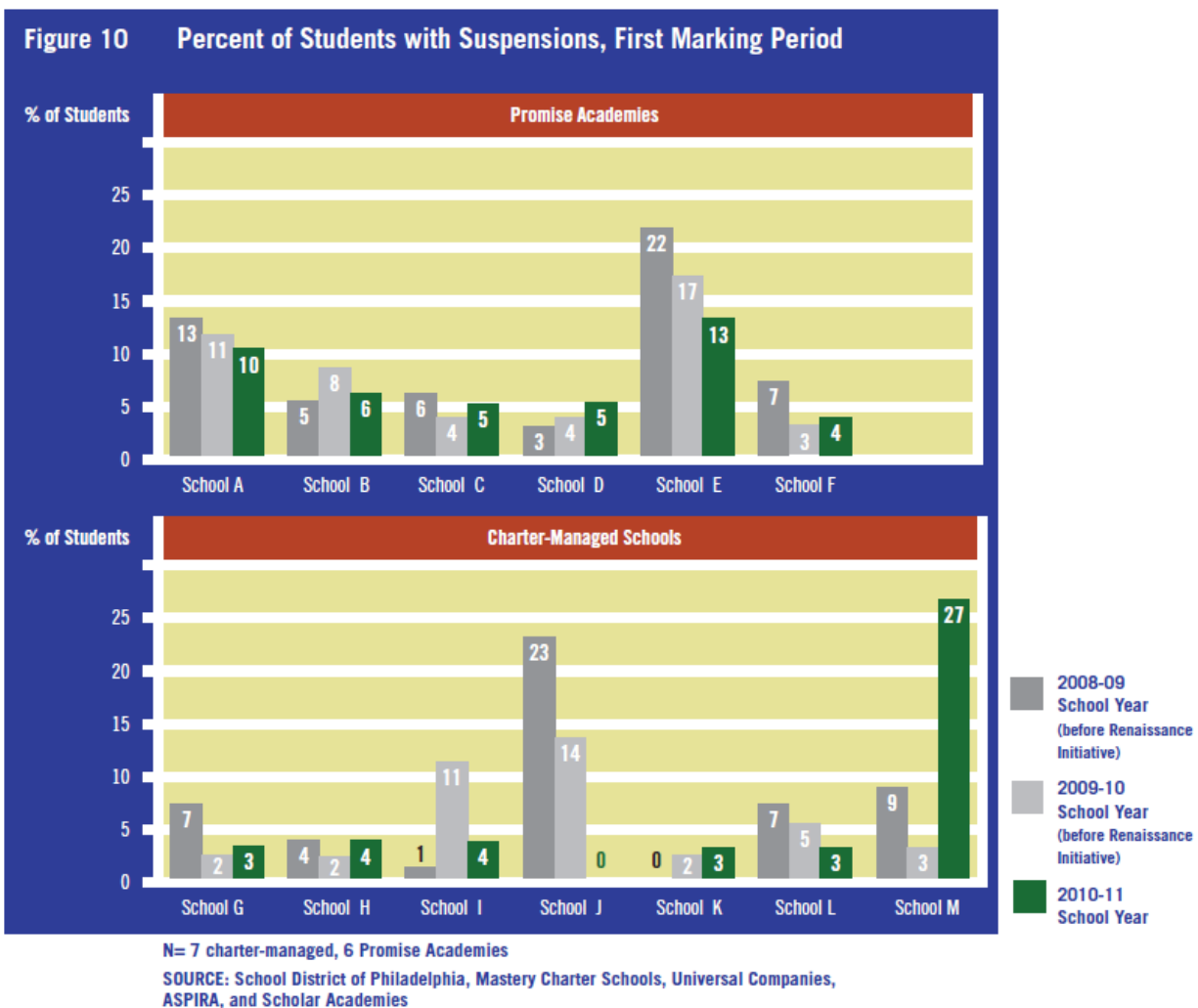


Figure 10 shows the suspension rates at each of the 13 Renaissance Schools in the past three school years. One charter-managed school (School M) suspended almost 25% more students in the first marking period in 2010-11 than during the first marking period in the prior year, while another (School J) saw a marked decrease – from 14% of students suspended to zero. We heard from principals at two schools with increases in suspensions, including School M in **Figure 10**, that this was an area of concern, and that they were taking steps to reduce their suspension rates.

Overall, there was significant variation in suspension rates among the charter-managed schools in particular, which suggests that these schools had different disciplinary policies in use. While the Promise Academies were required to follow the same disciplinary policies and procedures as all other schools in the District, it was not clear the extent to which the charter-managed schools also

followed the District’s Code of Student Conduct, or whether they were allowed more flexibility in developing their own disciplinary policies.

V. Recommendations

The Renaissance Initiative in 2010-11 operated on the assumption that low academic achievement was, in part, the result of negative school climate characterized in prior years by low expectations and morale, undisciplined student behavior, and inadequate, unattractive facilities. As such, all 13 schools made concerted efforts to establish interventions that would improve relationships, safety, and facilities. Our data suggest they had varied success. While we cannot explain the variation between schools with certainty, we do have some evidence to suggest that not all schools began the year on equal footing. The differences appear to be partly attributable to (1) differences in when teacher hiring was completed at each school, (2) the extent to which a system of climate-related interventions was in place from the first day of school, and similarly (3) whether the school leader or charter manager had prior experience with implementing a behavioral support system, or whether they had to invent and modify their system through the fall. With these contributing factors in mind, we propose the following recommendations to continue to improve school climate in future years of the Renaissance Initiative.

1. The District should ensure that student performance and special needs data is available to schools, including charter-managed schools, well before the school year begins.

At minimum, charter managers should have early access to District data and special education paperwork for those students who attended their “match” school in prior years.

2. The District and charter managers should focus early on establishing a school-wide system of behavioral support. In order to do this, we recommend that the District:

- **Create a school-wide strategy for establishing a positive climate at the Promise Academies in advance of the school year.** This would allow principals and teachers the time necessary to be oriented to the system and consider how it integrates into their school context, rather than having to introduce new interventions partway through the fall, as happened in 2010-11.

- **Lengthen summer orientation for Promise Academy teachers in order to give sufficient time to both instructional and behavior support systems.** All teachers should receive a well-developed orientation to their school’s behavioral expectations, including details of how these would be communicated, enforced, and rewarded to further develop shared understandings and buy-in.
 - **The District and the charter managers should closely examine the differences in disciplinary policies used across schools, particularly in charter-managed schools.** There may be some lessons to learn from the wide variation in the use of suspensions at charter-managed schools.
- 3. Promise Academy principals and charter managers should have access to their assigned school buildings well before the school year begins.**

Earlier access to the school buildings would allow principals and charter managers more time to evaluate and plan for improvements to the physical plant of the schools. This may mean finding alternative locations for summer school and other summer activities that use the building.

VI. Future Research

Climate indicators can be an important benchmark of school improvement. As such, it will be critical to continue to track changes in climate at Renaissance Schools. Research that focuses on climate issues can also produce a set of best practices around school-wide behavioral systems that can help guide reforms aimed at climate change in schools throughout the District. In addition, future research should examine changes in student enrollment at Renaissance Schools. Some charter schools were attracting new students from their catchment areas, and it will be important to learn whether they, or the Promise Academy schools, lead to an increase in the number of students these schools are serving. Future research should:

- Continue to focus on the resources, supports and practices necessary for establishing and sustaining a positive school culture and improving school safety;
- Examine the success of schools in developing a school-wide system of behavioral support;
- Analyze interim climate outcomes, including attendance, tardies, suspensions, and serious incidents;
- Continue to monitor student enrollment.

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School Advisory Councils in Philadelphia's Renaissance Schools: Start Up and Early Implementation

March 2011

I. Introduction

School Advisory Councils (SACs) are a central aspect of the Renaissance Schools Initiative, Philadelphia's school turnaround model. SACs are unique to Philadelphia; at the national level, parent and community engagement has been largely absent in discussions on school turnaround.¹ For this reason alone, they are important to watch closely.

SACs are designed to address the absence of parent and community engagement in recent School District of Philadelphia reform efforts. Their purpose is to give parents and community a voice in their schools, and thereby earn their buy-in to the proposed changes. SAC members are charged with building closer community/school connections and have input into school programs and procedures. But perhaps more striking, they are designed to boost accountability: although *advisory* in nature, the SACs are charged with reporting to the central office on the fidelity of reforms at their schools, and on the school's progress in improving student outcomes. Their function is especially notable in relation to the charter-managed schools: they create a mechanism for accountability between the charter managers and the District that does not exist in any other charter school's relationship to the District. **Figure 1** illustrates the overall design of the SACs: their intended composition, service requirements, and responsibilities.

¹ Baroody, K. (2011). *Turning around the nation's lowest performing schools: Five steps districts can take to improve their chances of success*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress; Herman, R., Dawson, P., Dee, T., Greene, J., Maynard, R., Redding, S., and Darwin, M. (2008). *Turning round chronically low-performing schools: A practice guide* (NCEE #2008-4020). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/publications/practiceguides>.

Figure 1. District Guidelines for the School Advisory Councils

Composition of SACs:

- 7-21 members, including two student members in high schools
- 51% of members should be parents
- Other members can include representatives from local community, business, economic-development, and faith-based organizations, elected officials, community residents, educators, and/or college or university representatives. All community stakeholders must service or work with families of the school.
- SAC officers should include an elected chair, vice or co-chair, and a secretary

Service:

- Annual elections, with members serving a two-year term.
- Vacancies filled through an appointment of an elected alternate
- Monthly meetings

Roles and Responsibilities & Bylaws:

- Each SAC writes its own bylaws, modeled on a guide provided by the District
- Councils are to focus on school improvement and student achievement and submit regular reports to the District

Sources: School District of Philadelphia. (2010). *The School Advisory Council handbook: A resource guide for the school community*; Office of Parent, Family, and Community Engagement & Faith-Based Partnerships, School District of Philadelphia. (2010). *Updated School Advisory Council Development & Recruitment Timeline* [Handout].

Although it is too early in the life of the SACs to determine their effectiveness, we did see differences in their early development. Some that started slow in spring 2010 had picked up momentum by winter 2011, while others that had started strong were experiencing a falling off of activity by winter 2010. Different trajectories were often related to variation in: leadership and core membership; clarity about purposes, goals and authority; and access to adequate guidance, training, and resources.

This brief presents results from a larger research project conducted by Research for Action (RFA) for the Accountability Review Council that focuses on several aspects of the early stages of the Renaissance Schools Initiative from March 2010 – January 2011:

- School Advisory Councils
- Student Enrollment and School Climate; and
- School Leadership and Staffing.

Results for each of these topics are summarized in a research brief. An introductory chapter provides an overview of the larger research project, and a conclusion summarizes our recommendations for the Renaissance Schools Initiative as a whole as it continues to be implemented and expanded.²

In the remainder of this brief, we provide a progress report on the creation and early activities of the SACS. We include the methodology (see **Figure 2**); a timeline of the start-up and early implementation of the SACS; a taxonomy of the SACS based on their early development; and initial successes and challenges in three key areas we have identified as important to the early development of school councils. The brief concludes with a set of recommendations for strengthening the SACS.

Methodology

Figure 2. Data collection

Data was collected for this brief in two rounds: March – August 2010, which focused on the start up and early activities of the SACS; September 2010 – January 2011, which focused on the implementation of the SACS in the first months of the Renaissance schools. The data analyzed for this brief includes:

- 15 interviews with SAC chairs or acting chairs, 3 with SAC vice chairs, 4 with SAC members, 14 school principals (2 in one school), 4 charter managers, 5 school-based parent ombudsmen and 2 parent liaisons, and 10 central office staff, and 1 consultant to the Central Office;
- Observations of 5 SAC meetings and 3 District SAC orientations and trainings;
- An RFA Survey of SAC chairs; and
- Review of SAC orientation materials, a sample MOU with charter managers, the SAC Handbook, and sample SAC by-laws.

Timeline: Start-Up and Early Implementation

In February 2010, the District invited parents, community members and school staff to apply for SAC membership. SACS began their work in March 2010 and it continued into the 2010-2011 school year. A summary of their start-up and early implementation timeline and activities can be seen in **Figure 3**.

² The full set of briefs can be found at <http://www.researchforaction.org>.

Figure 3 Timeline of SAC Start Up

	Promise Academy SACs	Charter-Managed SACs
Winter/Spring 2010 <i>January - May 2010</i> - Announcement of Renaissance Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recruitment to SACs - Applications submitted - Member acceptances - District orientation (for all SACs, prior to announcement of Promise Academies) - District announcement of Promise Academies - Officer elections - Writing of by-laws 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recruitment to SACs - Applications submitted - Member acceptances - District orientation (for all SACs, prior to announcement of Promise Academies) - Announcement of potential turnaround teams to be matched with Renaissance Schools that were not Promise Academies - Review of six proposals, one from each potential turnaround team - Site visits to schools already under the management of turnaround teams - Community meetings with the potential turnaround teams - Recommendation to the Superintendent, stating their first, second and third choices for match with a turnaround team
Summer 2010 <i>June - August 2010</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sporadic meetings and hiatus in communication with the District - August event celebrating initial SACs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sporadic meetings and hiatus in communication with the District - August event to debrief experience of making the match and review of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between charter managers and the SAC, outlining each of their roles and responsibilities - Examples of August activities: assist in parent and community outreach events
Fall 2010 <i>September 2010 - January 2011</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New elections <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recruitment - Applications submitted - Member acceptances - Officer elections - Monthly meetings - Examples of activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trainings - School walkthroughs - Review of school data - Participation in School Improvement Plan - Recruit parents to SAC and/or volunteer in schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Monthly meetings - Examples of activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trainings - School walkthroughs - Review of school data and other activities to prepare first quarterly report - Writing and submission of first quarterly report - Cross-site meeting discussing first quarterly report

A Taxonomy of the Renaissance School SACs

Overall, a snapshot of the SACs in early winter 2011 showed that they could be characterized in three different ways: **Active** SACs, SACs **In Process**, and SACs in **Suspended Development**. (See **Figure 4** for a description of the characteristics of each.) These characterizations, however, are fluid: although they may appear to be along a developmental continuum, we caution that a progression from one level to another is not a given, and that achieving a specific level of development is not necessarily a permanent status. These characterizations are not meant to imply a measure of effectiveness, because it is still too early in their functioning to make such a judgment. Instead, this taxonomy provides a picture of how well the SACs have been able to establish themselves, and how they have begun functioning during the early months of their formation.

Figure 4 An Emergent Taxonomy of the SACs	
Number of Schools	Stage of Development
6	Active SACs had a chair, a solid core of members, and agenda which they felt able to move on.
5	In Process SACs had been slowed by instability in chair or membership; had a different perspective on their purpose than their principal or charter manager; and/or had not yet moved forward on an agenda they had set for themselves.
2	Suspended Development describes SACs whose activities had been disrupted by changeover in their chair or leadership, a lack of participation; and/or unresolved tensions between SAC members and their principal or charter manager.

II. Early Successes and Challenges

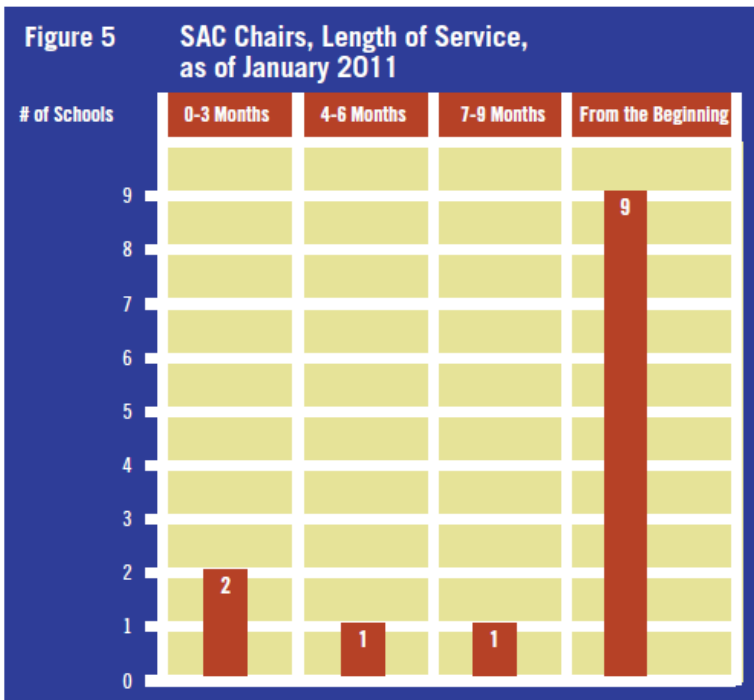
As the timeline in Figure 3 shows, the SACs were formed after the announcement of which schools would be Promise Academies, and which would be matched with an external turnaround team. This was a turbulent time in the District; many parents and communities members were uncertain about how these changes would affect the governance, staffing, and climate of their schools. While some were excited about the possibilities, others were angry or worried. It was in this heightened environment of possibilities and tensions in which the SACs took shape and began their work.

In this section, we examine the early successes and challenges of the SACs in the three key areas that are most related to the development and functioning of these entities in the long term: leadership and core members; the SAC's roles and responsibilities; and the degree to which the SACs had access to resources to carry out their goals.

Leadership and Core Members

1. SAC Chair Characteristics

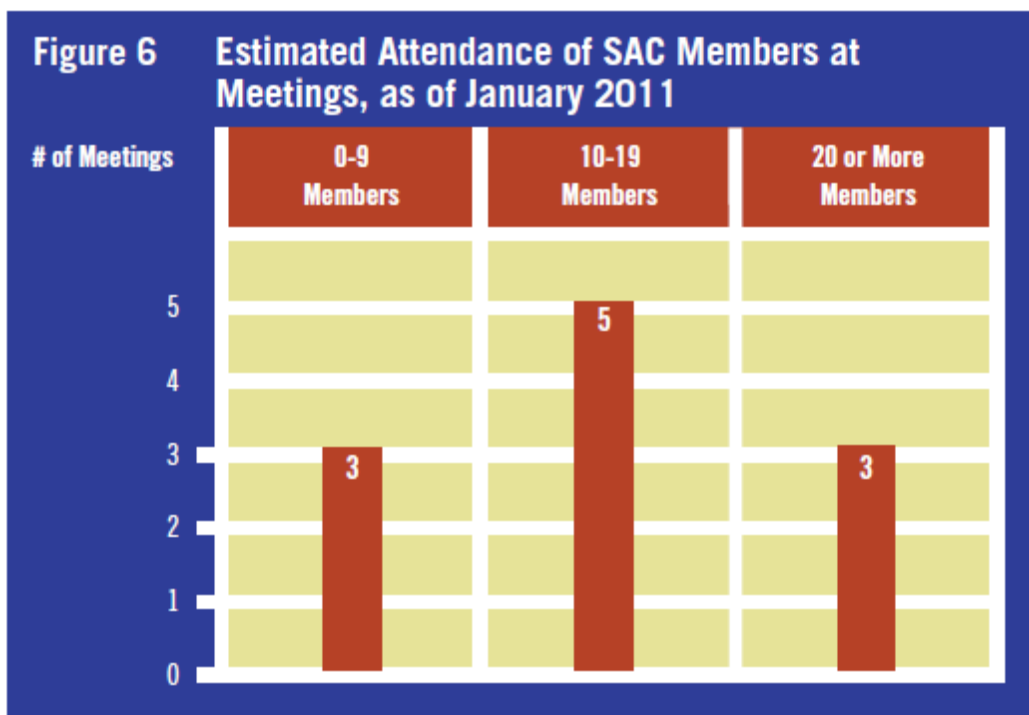
As **Figure 5** shows, as of January 2011, nine SAC chairs had been in place since the SAC was formed. However, three had significantly shorter tenures. Two identified as “acting” chairs. Slightly more than half (7 of 13) of the chairs identified themselves as parents or guardians of children in their school.



N= 7 Charter-Managed, 6 Promise Academies
 Source: Research for Action SAC Chair Survey

2. SAC Member Meeting Attendance

There was wide variation in the number of times a SAC had met since September 2010: some SACs met just a couple of times, while others met as frequently as three or four times a month. **Figure 6** shows that nearly half of the SACs have 10-19 members attending most meetings. However, SAC chairs reported that participation could vary widely from meeting to meeting, with as few as five members to as many as 30 attending.



N= 5 Charter-Managed, 6 Promise Academies
Source: Research for Action SAC Chair Survey

3. SAC Parent Participation

Reaching the required 51% parent participation has been a particular challenge for some SACs. In interviews conducted in late fall 2010, we asked SAC chairs (and in one case, a school principal) about the level of parent participation on the SACs. Six reported that they met the 51% majority, six reported they did not, and one was unsure.

In February 2010, when parents and community members first applied to be SAC members, anyone who applied was accepted. The District’s decision to be inclusive generated a broad sense of community involvement in the process. As one SAC chair observed, she had “seen and heard the excitement around change [to the school] in the community ... the attention [to] the students, into what is happening in the school,” which resulted from their community meetings around the matching process. In a number of cases, however, the inclusive process led to non-parents outnumbering parents, undermining the District goal of having 51% parent membership on every SAC. The District urged SACs that did not have 51% parents to recruit more parents. Despite frustration with the extra work this required, many did and most SACs reported success. In some

cases, however, SACs solved the problem by distinguishing between voting and non-voting members, so that all votes had 51% parent participation.

4. SAC Membership Longevity

By the fall of 2010, almost every SAC chair reported a falling-off in membership, which created the need to recruit again, especially parents. As one SAC co-chair reported in November 2010, “We still do not have parent involvement and you can’t really have a SAC without parents.”

On the charter-managed school side, many thought that membership attrition was largely due to burn out – the result of very heavy time demands during the spring matching process. Others thought that a lack of communication between the District and SACs during the summer, after each school was matched with a charter school operator, created confusion about the future purpose of the SACs, and in doing so, contributed to membership loss.

On the Promise Academy side, the District held an August event, thanking SAC members for their work, and then required new elections in the fall, which some believed contributed to the challenge of sustaining a core group and majority parent participation. Those who were already on the SAC could apply again, and be reelected, but as one newly elected SAC chair explained, this directive discouraged some participants.

I understand they [the SAC] had some things in place last year and they had been working diligently through the summer, but the school board came in this year and said everything had to be redone. And I guess probably through frustration, some people kind of backed away. So a whole new committee had to be formed.

Most Promise Academy SACs complied, but some resisted the directive and simply proceeded to meet. “Actually we just said we weren’t going to do it. ... Because that cuts off our continuity. It interrupts our process. We didn’t want that to happen, so we collectively said no, we didn’t want to do that.”

5. Motivation and Commitment of SAC Members

- a. Many SAC chairs were motivated by their desire to contribute to the well-being of their local community and its children, and they often attributed the same community-mindedness to other SAC members.

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SAC chairs frequently identified themselves as long-time members of a school's community, and half were a parent or guardian of a child in the school. They saw one benefit of their participation as the well-being of their child, but they also frequently mentioned the welfare of other children, or the longer-term development of their neighborhoods. As one Promise Academy SAC chair explained, "I'm an alumni, graduated from [this school] in '79. My mother and father also went to [this school]. I'm a member of the community and an interested parent." Another who had lived in her community for 47 years and was a local pastor and business owner told us:

I was the school police officer over at [the school] and because of my community activism I noticed the need for a strong voice advocating for the school and community. So students would have opportunities for adequate and mainstream education... in order to propel them to be productive members of society. ... You must engage the community. They will carry the banner for you and be the watchful eye. (Charter-managed school SAC Chair)

These SAC chairs and others like them also reported that SAC members were motivated by their community commitment. For example, one commented, the SAC members are "committed... because these are people from the community. ... [they are interested in] how we can better serve the community and the kids." (Promise Academy SAC Chair) In a similar vein another remarked, "We hope the school will be the center of our community for the near future and the far future. So the community is actively involved." (Promise Academy Acting SAC Chair)

- b.** SAC chairs from both the Promise Academies and charter-managed schools used similar words to describe SAC members: "energized," "committed," "enthusiastic," "amazing," "hopeful," and "diligent."

Across the board, SAC chairs appraised their members highly. For example, when we asked SAC chairs for words that described members, one SAC chair reflected:

Amazing. We really want to see the school succeed. That's number one ... Hopeful. We want children to get the better education that they deserve and we are ensuring that it happens. Diligent – in regard to the task we were charged with ... on being an active working group. (Charter-managed school SAC Chair)

Understanding of Goals and Roles

1. Relations between principals and SACs, and SACs and charter managers, were generally positive.

Most principals reported attending SAC meetings, although they were not formal members. In some cases, charter managers attended instead of, or in addition to, the principal of a charter-managed school. In only one case, in a charter-managed school, did neither the principal nor the charter manager attend with regularity. The SAC meetings were not the only contact between SAC chairs and the principals. Many SAC chairs reported that because they were in the school regularly (often as a volunteer) they had frequent informal exchanges with the principal. This was true of the school where the principal did not attend the SAC meetings as well.

2. Some principals and charter managers expressed doubts that SAC members understood their role and/or had the capacity to carry out their monitoring responsibilities.

A positive personal relationship, however, did not mean that some principals and some charter managers did not have doubts about the role of the SACs. For example, one principal of a charter-managed school believed that while his SAC requested data, its members did not know how to analyze data, and that it was the same data that he and the District were looking at anyway. He questioned the District's motive for creating SACs, wondering if the district was trying to be able to say they are providing "empowerment" without really doing it. "You're making it seem like they are doing something and they're not," he told us. He also commented that the SAC had no resources, so they could not solve problems any better than he could. Another principal from a Promise Academy questioned the capacity of the SACs to interpret the data at all, stating, "We are asking sometimes – not all of them, some – unskilled, untrained, sometimes unprofessional (*sic*) people to take on some skilled professional tasks without training."

Several principals expressed doubt about the influence of the SACs. For example, one charter-managed school principal stated, "They [the SACs] operate much more like a governing body, even though they're not, but they are kind of led to believe they were," while a Promise Academy principal commented, "So for some reason they got into this grandiose idea that they're in charge. So I have to kind of back them up and let them know I am in charge here, so my idea of them is that they support us and whatever we need to do."

Not every principal was uncomfortable with or unsure about the role of the SACs. For example, several reported understanding the importance of SACs as partners watching over reforms.

They help us to evaluate progress towards our goals--holding us accountable to what we said we were going to do. The members we have on the SAC have been part of this community for 20, 30, 40 years and some are parents to students here. ... They keep us accountable, but this is our community and we want to see these things happen too. Those are the things we want to see also and we have them to support us.

3. Most SAC chairs saw themselves as critical players within a complex system of school support.

Most SAC chairs interpreted their function as supportive and focused on improving the school, and less like a “watchdog” or dominating force. In fact, many saw themselves as a “liaison” that ensured communication among all the players. The following statements by SAC chairs reflected the orientation we found most common.

[I see the SAC] to be an intermediary group or network between the district, principal and school. The SAC functions as one part of three in a sort of checks and balance system. If they [the principal and teachers] have any issues we try to work them out and can bring issues to the District.

(Promise Academy SAC Chair)

If you're concerned about what's happening with the children and the school, how can the community and parents better serve? We work hand in hand. ... We're here to help make the school better ... The only way we can do that is if we as a community – not just staff and not just the parents, but also people who live in this community, alumni of the school, if we all involve ourselves, it will work out better for the children. (Promise Academy SAC Chair)

Several SAC chairs believed that in addition to what the District prescribed, they had a commitment to strengthen their school in other ways. For example, a Promise Academy SAC chair told us there were things that the SAC would like to initiate itself, including fundraising because they had no Home and School organization, setting up a welcoming parent room, better connecting the parents and children, and increasing parent participation on the council.

4. Central Office staff believed that the most important role of the charter-managed school SACs was its focus on keeping the schools, district and charter school managers accountable.

Central Office staff working with the charter-managed schools saw a dual accountability role for the SACs: monitoring the charter managers, and monitoring the District – to be sure both parties kept their promises and commitments. The Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), which the District issued in August 2010, were a tool to guide the SACs and charter managers in this process. As one Central Office staff member explained:

Dr. Ackerman said we didn't give away these schools. They are still our neighborhood schools. This [charter] team is leading the turnaround but we want to be there and to hear, and the SAC is that role: to make sure the implementation of Renaissance will work. We are checking along the way and not waiting to the end of each year to check-in ... and the SAC is really key.

Another Central Office staff member involved with the charter school managers and SACs referred to the SACs as “the eyes and ears about what is going on. They are the temperature check.”

Central Office staff also pointed out times in which the SAC had held the District accountable, especially around facilities issues. As one staff member explained, “They are in the middle so they are keeping everyone honest.” Another commented that the SACs “advocate where they can support the turnaround team and hold the district accountable. ... We are hearing it directly. We are not getting a call just because one entity wants it. It is ‘They [charter manager] want it, SAC wants it’”

5. The role of the Promise Academy SACs was less clear.

The Promise Academy SACs did not have as clear a monitoring role as the charter-managed school SACs, and one Central Office staff member reported that a future challenge will be to make them more meaningful. As this staff member reflected,

SACs are a big area of concern. How do we connect their work to this overall [Promise Academy] model? I know [the District's Office of Parent, Family, Community Engagement, and Faith-based Partnerships] and the parent ombudsmen are very involved with them, but how connected are they to us [the Promise Academy office] and to the instructional side of things?

This leader went on to explain that it was important to better define the role of the SACs because “... right now we go to them for certain things [school action plan and budget] and then other times I don’t know, it is up to the school to engage them or not.” In other words, although the Promise Academy SACs were intended to give input to the school action plan and school budget, their authority was unclear. A formal mechanism did not appear to exist for the circulation of their recommendations back to the District’s Promise Academy office, and what influence they had at the school level appeared to be at the discretion of the principal.

Access to Resources, including Training, to Carry Out Goals

1. Many SAC members believed they should have received a budget and resources.

SAC chairs from both Promise Academies and charter-managed schools believed that sustaining membership and carrying out the work of the SACs would be easier if they had a budget for food, childcare and other needs, as well as for their activities. As one charter-managed school SAC chair explained:

Many SAC members felt we were spending 5-10 hrs a week with no stipend or incentive. Just a free will offering of our own time. . . and we felt we were giving an exorbitant amount of time, with nothing in return. One of the things they should do is to give incentives to SAC members so we can say to parents, ‘We are having a pizza party; there will be door prizes.’ That will help get the parents involved.”

2. SAC chairs said they and their members needed more training.

The requirements of SAC members were substantial. In order to fulfill their monitoring role, SAC members went on school walkthroughs, examined data, and observed classrooms, halls, and other public spaces. In some cases, they were invited to attend sessions where teachers were reviewing student data. However, SAC chairs reported that they did not believe the training that they and their members were receiving was adequate. Some noted that they had professionals on their SACs who could help them in some of their tasks. And while many acknowledged that the District had held some orientations and trainings, many chairs believed that they and their members needed more training to be able to carry out their responsibilities.

The opinion of one Promise Academy Acting SAC chair was a strong exception to this general rule. She believed that she and the other SAC members at her school had received all the training they

needed, most likely because, as she observed, her school's SAC participated in trainings in record numbers.

3. District supports for SACs varied by the type of school to which they were attached.

- a. Support for the Charter School SACs. The charter-managed school SACs have been supported by the Office of Charter, Partnership and New Schools through start-up and early implementation. Two staff members – one assigned to existing SACs, and one hired in the fall to support new SACs – attended every SAC meeting, provided all trainings, and were available to answer questions on demand. As one of these staff members explained to us, they thought it was important to continue their intensive support to the SACs because,

Long-term, we debated what the role of the District support would be with the SAC. We created these entities and they are supposed to report in four years so we can't just let them go. We need to have some consistency in membership, understanding of the role and strong leadership as we go along the way. For them [SAC members] to invest so much time, the District needed to invest the same amount of time. ... To show this is valuable work.

- b. Support for the Promise Academy SACs. The District's Office of Parent, Family, Community Engagement, and Faith-based Partnerships (OPFCEFP) provided oversight and support for Promise Academy SACs during the Summer 2010 start-up phase. The school-based parent ombudsman was also charged with support for the SACs, but the understanding of what that meant varied, with some ombudsmen being very involved, others not, and some confusion about whether the parent ombudsman could be a SAC member.

In summer 2010, the District established its Office for Promise Academies, and that office included a "Promise" parent ombudsman for all Promise Academies. He provided support to the school-based ombudsmen, but only a small part of that support concerned the SACs, as only a fraction of the work of the school-based parent ombudsman was to support the SACs. While the school-based parent ombudsman attended all or most SAC meetings, the central office Promise parent ombudsman did not. For the Promise Academy SACs, as for all other SACs in District schools, OPFCEFP arranged most trainings, although the Promise parent ombudsman sometimes tailored training to the needs of the Promise SACs. In late fall 2010, the Promise parent ombudsman position in the Central Office turned over, and the new ombudsman was still defining her responsibilities. The staff of the Office of Charter, Partnership and New Schools offered to be

involved in her training, with the notion that it would be beneficial to bring greater alignment between the SACs in the Promise Academies and charter-managed schools.

III. Recommendations

Creating SACs was an unfamiliar task for the District. In addition, the SACs were created in a climate charged with hope and tension. Many involved with their formation pointed out that the plan for them was being developed simultaneously with their start-up and early implementation. Starting from scratch, needing to implement quickly, and inventing as they go made the early months of SAC formation especially demanding, stretching District capacity as well as the capacity of many SAC members. However, there were encouraging signs as well. The majority of the SACs were either fully-functioning or in the process of moving forward, and many SAC participants were reported to be engaged and committed. Below, we make several recommendations designed to strengthen the SACs and their role in the Renaissance Initiative.

1. The District should create conditions conducive to building a stable core of SAC members.

Specific suggestions include pacing the work required of SAC members, maintaining close communication, and assessing requirements that might lead to a disruption of participation.

Lessons learned about how to sustain SAC participation will be critical to the future of the present cohort of SACs and to future SACs; the fact that the District will not be “inventing along the way” should help to stabilize the process of SAC development.

2. Provide SAC chairs and members with more training and support.

Many of the tasks SAC members were being asked to fulfill were new to them. Some found themselves relying on professionals among SAC members to help with tasks. The literature on school councils points out that training at school sites, and often by individuals who are independent of a District, is crucial to building the kind of cohesiveness, autonomy, and skills needed to make groups like SACs effective.

3. Provide principals and charter managers with more training and support in how to work with SACs.

Principals and charter-managers alike need to understand how SACs' input can contribute to educational practices and to accountability. It cannot be assumed that principals or charter managers are able to build collaboration with non-educators. This type of professional development is needed for the SACs to build the kinds of partnerships with principals that studies on school councils identify as critical to their effectiveness.

4. The Promise Academy SACs would benefit from a single source of Central Office support that is dedicated to making certain the SACs function well.

Support for the Promise Academy SACs was distributed among a number of Central Office staff and a parent ombudsman at the school level. The broad distribution of support meant that no one person had primary responsibility for the SACs, and it also led to a lack of clarity about their role.

5. Provide SACs with the resources needed to carry out their activities.

SACs were volunteer organizations which gave many parents and community an entry point to supporting school reform. Yet SAC responsibilities require considerable time and effort. Many SAC chairs believed it would be easier to attract and sustain SAC members if they had a budget for food, childcare and other necessities. In addition, a few wished they had a budget for activities, such as printing and/or holding community events. Without such a budget, some were making plans to fundraise.

6. Conflict and tension should be anticipated, and the District should have in place mechanisms for working through differences before problems debilitate and/or delegitimize either the District or the SAC.

Whenever there are multiple sources invested with authority – even if some are advisory in nature – there are bound to be moments of difference, tension and conflict. There was also evidence of some conflict between principals and SACs, which has slowed the development of some of the SACs.

The District needs to identify means through which conflict can be mediated and productively turned into problem identification and problem solving – before power struggles erupt. Apparently, such positive conflict resolution has occurred between at least one SAC and charter manager, but it has not been the rule.

In addition to a means for resolving conflict, there should be a clear guide and set of expectations – ahead of time – for the instances when disagreements cannot be resolved.

IV. Future Research

The SACs are an aspect of the Renaissance Schools Initiative that sets Philadelphia apart from turnaround school efforts across the country. As such, it will be important to continue to examine whether and how they have an effect on the success of the initiative. This study began what could productively be a longitudinal study of SACs in Philadelphia. As the SACs mature, future research should:

- Continue to focus on the resources and supports necessary for establishing and sustaining the SACS;
- Identify the factors and conditions associated with successful SACs, as well as those that inhibit SAC success;
- Determine the contributions that SACs make to school turnaround;
- Examine what effect the SACs have on broad-based community involvement in education and neighborhood revitalization.

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School Leadership and Staffing in Philadelphia’s Renaissance Schools: Start Up and Early Implementation

March 2011

I. Introduction

The U.S. Department of Education made school leadership and staffing a core focus of turnaround efforts, requiring schools to replace the principal and at least 50% of teachers, provide appropriate instructional supports, and allow a governance structure with more autonomy for the principal over staff selection.¹ The turnaround approach assumes that school culture and practice can be changed by providing new principals with the autonomy to select their teachers.²

The School District of Philadelphia’s Renaissance Schools Initiative reflects a similar theory of action. Accordingly, the district has implemented a number of interventions designed to strengthen leadership, put in place committed teachers, and ensure that staff has the tools and supports needed to improve instruction. This research brief examines these efforts to improve school leadership and staffing in Philadelphia’s Renaissance Schools.

At this stage of the initiative, we do not have enough evidence to make claims as to whether the interventions have led to the kind of leadership and instruction that will impact student learning and achievement. However, our data do suggest that changes in leadership, composition of the staff, and instructional systems have occurred, and that the changes have contributed to variations in staff response across schools. We draw from this analysis to offer several overarching recommendations for improving the effectiveness of leadership and teaching in Renaissance Schools and to suggest areas for future research.

¹U.S. Department of Education (2009). *School improvement grants; Final rule*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/legislation/FedRegister/finrule/2009-4/121009a.html>

² Murphy, J., & Meyers, C. V. (2008). *Turning around failing schools: Leadership lessons from the organizational sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press; Calkins, A., Guenther, W., Belfiore, G., & Lash, D. (2007). *The turnaround challenge: Why America’s best opportunity to dramatically improve student achievement lies in our worst-performing schools*. Boston, MA: Mass Insight Education & Research Institute.

This brief presents results from a larger research project conducted by Research for Action (RFA) for the Accountability Review Council that focuses on several aspects of the early stages of the Renaissance Initiative from March 2010 – January 2011:

- School Advisory Councils;
- Student Enrollment and School Climate; and
- School Leadership and Staffing.

Results for each of these topics are summarized in a research brief. An introductory chapter provides an overview of the larger research project, and a conclusion summarizes our recommendations for the Renaissance Schools Initiative as a whole as it continues to be implemented and expanded.³

Methodology

Figure 1. Data Collection

This brief focuses on school leadership and staffing, and is based on data collected in two rounds. In our analysis, we draw on both quantitative and qualitative data collected from a variety of sources.

Start Up (March – August 2010):

- 7 interviews with school principals and assistant principals
- 6 interviews with charter managers
- 2 interview with Central Office staff

Early Implementation (September 2010 – January 2011):

- 13 principal surveys
- 26 interview with school principals and assistant principals
- 32 interview with school leaders (i.e. counselors, instructional coaches)
- 14 new teacher focus groups (total of 62 teachers)
- 11 returning teacher focus groups (total of 24 teachers)
- 33 classroom observations
- 7 observations of school-based teacher professional development
- 1 observation of a Promise Academy principal meeting

This data is supplemented with human resources data on the characteristics of the teaching force in the 2008-09, 2009-10, and 2010-11 school year, in all Renaissance Schools and other Empowerment Schools, which serve as a set of comparison schools.

³ The full set of briefs can be found at <http://www.researchforaction.org>.

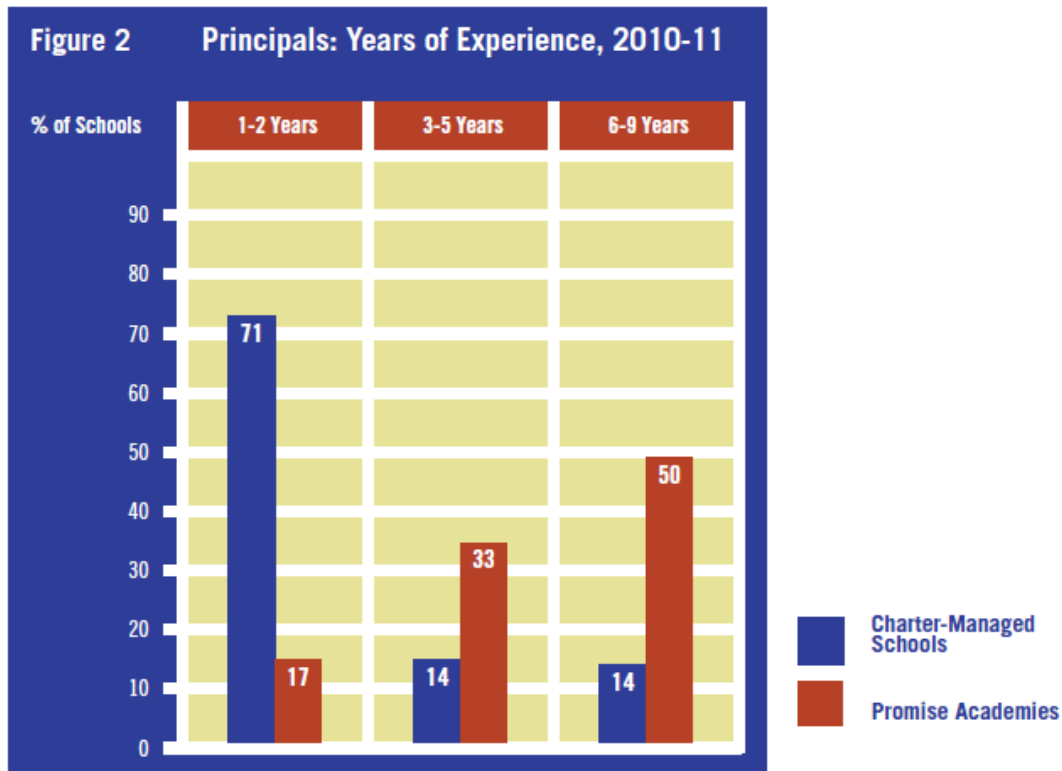
II. School Leadership

Ensuring that Renaissance Schools have strong leadership in place was a cornerstone of this reform model. Below we examine several key dimensions of building effective school leadership: (1) experience and vision of principals, (2) systems for distributing leadership, and (3) processes for supporting and monitoring principal practice.

Principal Experience and Vision

1. New principals were put in place for 10 of the 13 Renaissance Schools, and many Renaissance School principals were new to the principalship in general.

Ten of the thirteen principals hired were not leaders in their schools in the 2009-2010 school year. As **Figure 2** illustrates, none of the principals in any of the Renaissance Schools had ten or more years of experience, though they all had prior teaching experience, many within the District. One Promise Academy principal was replaced by a member of the Central Office support staff in October for failure to meet district expectations.



N= 7 Charter-Managed, 6 Promise Academies
 Source: Research for Action Principal Survey

2. Promise Academy principals had more experience than the principals in charter-managed schools.

Five of the seven principals in the charter-managed schools had two or fewer years of experience as a principal, whereas only one of the Promise Academy principals fell into this category. Three of the six Promise Academy principals had six to nine years' experience as a principal compared with only one of the seven charter principals.

3. All principals had a vision for turning around their respective schools; however they differed in their ability to create a positive mission-oriented school culture.

All principals were committed to high expectations for all students and most expressed that their long-term vision was to ensure that students were prepared for college. However, they varied in their ability to invest teachers in a shared mission. In focus groups with both new and returning teachers at all of the Renaissance Schools, teachers communicated that the support of the leadership at their school influenced their level of morale and the overall school culture.

Teachers in four charter-managed schools reported feeling very supported by leadership in their work in the early months of schools. These teachers, such as the one below, communicated that leadership had helped to create a shared positive culture:

As a teacher, resource-wise there's nothing else I need from leadership... It's just a different sense of working here. Everyone seems to love it here and it's more fun when you're with people who are enjoying the kids and it's very positive.

Conversely, in several Promise Academies and charter-managed schools, teachers conveyed frustration, sharing that the administration had cultivated an “us versus them” school culture. The teacher stated that, “the environment here is reactionary. You don't know until you mess up and get in trouble.”

Systems for Distributing Leadership

1. Support positions were established to distribute leadership responsibilities.

Both the Promise Academies and charter-managed schools established leadership teams, including assistant principals, school-based instructional specialists, deans, master teachers, climate managers and parent liaisons. Principals clearly recognized that a traditional model of a principal and an

assistant principal was insufficient to support the rapid change required in a turnaround effort. A charter principal expressed this need for distributed leadership: “To be successful, we’re going to need more people than just the principal and AP to make decisions.”

2. Significant numbers of new leadership staff posed both opportunities and challenges.

In about half of the schools, teachers expressed appreciation for the additional support that distributed models of leadership offered. However, many principals commented that while they supported a distributed management approach, it was difficult to implement in an environment with so many new staff who had not previously worked together. In some schools, this appeared to result in a lack of coherence. As a teacher in a Promise Academy noted of her school, “One drawback may be there might be too many dispersions and too many people going around and they are trying to implement too much at one time.”

Support and Monitoring Processes

1. Centralized systems were created to support principals, though some were slow to develop.

The District and charter managers offered a wide range of supports for Renaissance School principals. Supports typically included weekly walkthroughs and regular meetings with principals in other Renaissance Schools. In general, principals said that they felt supported in their work. “If I have questions, they support me. If I need training, they give it to us. They’re very supportive of what we do. We’re definitely not in this alone,” remarked one principal.

However, many Promise Academies principals shared that early in the school year, structure was lacking, as many of the systems for discipline and instruction were being developed as the year progressed. For example, it was not until November that principals received the Promise Academy manual, detailing discipline and other school-based procedures, and all said the document would be incredibly useful moving forward. As one Promise Academy principal noted, “We now have a more clear approach as to what the mission is and we are now working from the same playbook.”

2. Principals in charter managed schools reported more autonomy over non-hiring decisions than Promise Academy principals.

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In some charter-managed schools, principals had been given the authority to develop the vision and mission, allocate funds, and institute discipline and instructional policies that were appropriate for their particular school context. One principal remarked, “they took the handcuffs off so you can do what you want to do.” In contrast, several Promise Academy principals felt constrained by centralized mandates, which led to feelings of frustration among some members of leadership and staff:

We have been trying to develop a model for the school, but have had to change because the district now wants things uniform. It would have been helpful to have known what that uniformity was before beginning to develop our own model. (Principal in a Promise Academy)

Differing issues and initiatives will play out differently in each school and the schools should have the flexibility to address those issues as such. I think there is a significant overabundance of micro-management from above that is hampering our ability to fight key issues. (Teacher in a Promise Academy)

III. Teaching Staff

Establishing a strong, committed teaching staff is a core strategy of the Renaissance Initiative. In this section, we examine changes in the demographic characteristics and composition of the teaching workforce in turnaround schools and use qualitative data sources to explore teachers’, as well as school and District leaders’, perceptions of staffing changes.

Recruitment and Selection Processes

1. Promise Academies engaged in new teacher selection processes, which gave principals the autonomy to hire their own staff.

In Promise Academies, a standardized process for selection was established by the Central Office. All candidates were to be interviewed by a site selection committee, consisting of multiple stakeholders – i.e. parents, teachers, and administrators – and then observed during a 20 minute demonstration lesson. Though multiple stakeholders were involved in the process, the principal held the ultimate responsibility for making the final hiring decision.

2. Principals appreciated the opportunity to select their teachers.

All Renaissance School principals appreciated the autonomy to select their teachers, indicating that it gave them the opportunity to build their own team:

When you go to war, you want to go to war with your soldiers, not somebody else's. This was just a wonderful opportunity... to see if in fact it will be successful if an administrator picks his own staff. (Promise Academy Principal)

3. Charter-managed schools employed either a local or national approach to recruiting teachers.

In the first pathway, charters began recruitment efforts only after they were officially selected to manage a school, and as a result, recruitment efforts were mainly local. In the second pathway, charters had already developed business plans for growth and engaged in raising funds to support that growth, which enabled them to take the risk of hiring staff before the match had been finalized. For these charters, recruitment efforts were national in scope.

4. Promise Academy principals and charter managers sought committed, energetic teachers, and expressed excitement about staff's potential.

Across both charter-managed schools and Promise Academies, principals indicated that they were looking for candidates who possessed specific traits – commitment to the mission, energy and passion about teaching, a good fit with the team, and the ability to build relationships with students to engage them in the learning process. A Promise Academy assistant principal provided her perspective on the site selection process: “We’re looking for people who are committed and willing to go above and beyond what the Promise Academy is even asking for.”

Over the summer months, we consistently heard from principals in both Promise Academies and charter-managed schools that they felt positive about the commitment of their staff. One charter manager shared that: “In terms of alignment with our mission and their level of energy – because turnaround requires a lot of energy – I feel really good about who we have.”

5. A compressed timeline made the teacher selection process challenging.

A rushed timeline made the process of staff recruitment and selection challenging. Given the large number of force-transfer employees, the District Human Resources department instituted a "hiring freeze" on all new hires beginning May 5, 2010, which effectively closed the site selection process

district-wide until the displaced teachers found positions.⁴ The hiring freeze was not lifted until August, at which point the process was opened up to external candidates.⁵ By the time schools were matched with charter-providers (or the Promise Academy hiring process had begun) in May, many current teachers had already sought new positions, leaving a large number of inexperienced teachers in the recruitment pool.

Even in late July, several Promise Academies had significant numbers of teacher vacancies. Though this was a trend across all Promise Academies, District officials shared that it was particularly acute for certain types of schools – in some middle and high schools and schools with many vacancies to fill, for example. Though some charter-managed schools had the financial capacity to start the hiring process prior to the match, even these principals and charter providers reported that staff was not hired as far in advance of the beginning of the school year as desired.

Teacher Demographics

The profile of teachers shifted considerably across the Renaissance Schools. **Figure 3** summarizes the characteristics of teachers in both Promise Academies (N=6) and charter-managed schools (N=7) in the 2010-11 school year, and compares each of the school models against the Empowerment Schools (N=100), which are similar in both demographics and achievement level, but were not part of the Renaissance Schools initiative this year. Statistical significance is reported for the differences between the three types of school models (Promise v. Charter, Promise v. Empowerment, and Charter v. Empowerment). Below we highlight the most striking findings.

⁴ Socolar, P. (2010, May 6). A wrench in the site selection process: No new teachers allowed. *The Philadelphia Public School Notebook*.

⁵ Phila. schools need 100 new teachers. (2010, August 26). *CBS Philly*.

Figure 3 Teacher Demographics: Comparison of Promise Academies, Charter-Managed Schools and Empowerment Schools, as of November 1, 2010

	Renaissance Schools		Comparison Schools	Statistical Significance (Scheffe)		
	Promise Academies	Charter-Managed Schools	Other Empowerment Schools	Promise v. Charter	Promise v. Empowerment	Charter v. Empowerment
Average Percent Fully Certified Teachers	67.0%	64.6%	88.9%		*	*
Average Percent Intern Certified	20.1%	11.6%	6.8%		*	
Average Percent Emergency Certified	12.9%	1.9%	4.2%	*	*	
Average Percent Not Certified	0	21.9%	0	*		*
Average Years of Teaching in SDP	4.0	4.0^	9.0		*	
Average Age of Teachers	34.2	28.1	40.9	*	*	*
Percent Teachers New to SDP	42.5%	34.4%^	8.0%		*	
Percent Teachers Returning from 2009-10 School Year	24.1%	5.5%	76.8	*	*	*
Percent Teachers White	54.0%	75.4%	65.2	*		

* Indicates Scheffe post hoc criterion of significance at $p < .01$

^ Significance is not reported because the requested data was unavailable for three charter-managed schools in 2010-11

1. There were few returning teachers in most of the Renaissance Schools.

Only 5.5% of staff returned to charter-managed Renaissance Schools, and 24% of staff returned to Promise Academies in the 2010-11 school year. Three charters did not have any returning teachers, while only one had more than 10% of returning teachers, at 26%. In comparison, Empowerment Schools had a 77% retention rate.

2. In most Renaissance Schools, teachers reported that very few existing teachers even reapplied for their positions.

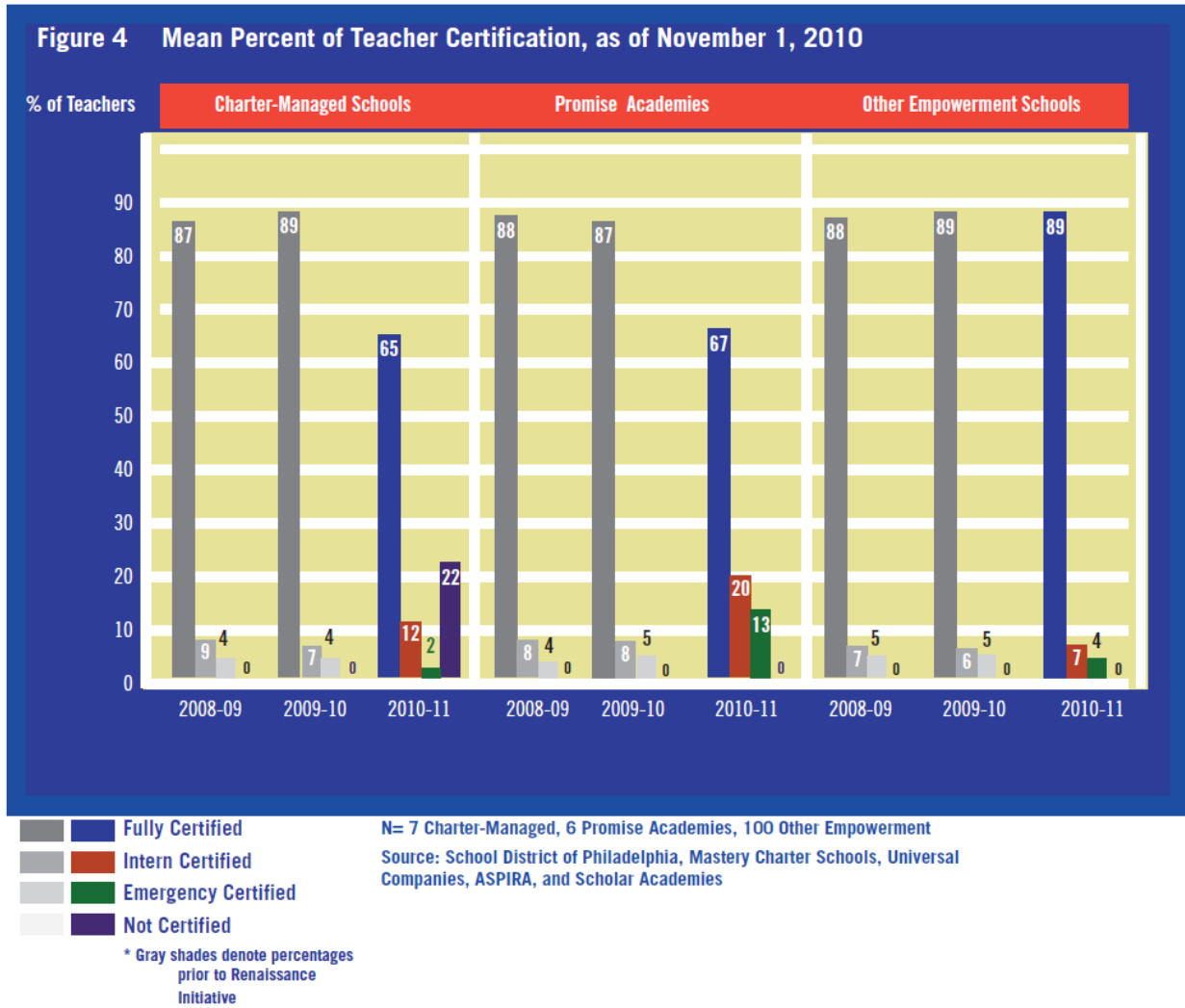
We heard from returning teachers that others had wanted to stay in the school, but were unable to take the risk that they would not be offered a position given the delay in the selection process. In other cases, returning teachers said that the changes were not well communicated to existing staff, many of whom distrusted the process and therefore decided not to seek reassignment.

3. The percentage of fully certified teachers in both the Promise Academies and charter-managed schools was significantly lower than the percentage at the Empowerment Schools.

Figure 3 illustrates that 67% of Promise Academy teachers were fully certified, as were 65% of charter-managed teachers. In contrast, 89% of teachers were fully certified at the Empowerment Schools in the 2010-11 school year.

4. The percentage of fully certified teachers decreased in both the Charter-managed and Promise Academy schools.

As **Figure 4** illustrates, differences in the percentage of fully certified teachers emerged in 2010-11, the first year of the Renaissance Initiative. During the two years prior to the Renaissance Initiative (2008-09 and 2009-10), the percentage of fully certified teachers was stable across all three school categories, ranging from 87% to 90%. However, during the 2010-11 school year, the percentage of fully certified teachers in the Charter-managed schools fell by 25%, and by 30% in the Promise Academies. In contrast, the percentage of fully certified teachers in the Empowerment Schools remained stable across these school years.



5. Charter-managed schools experienced a 22% increase in teachers who were not certified.

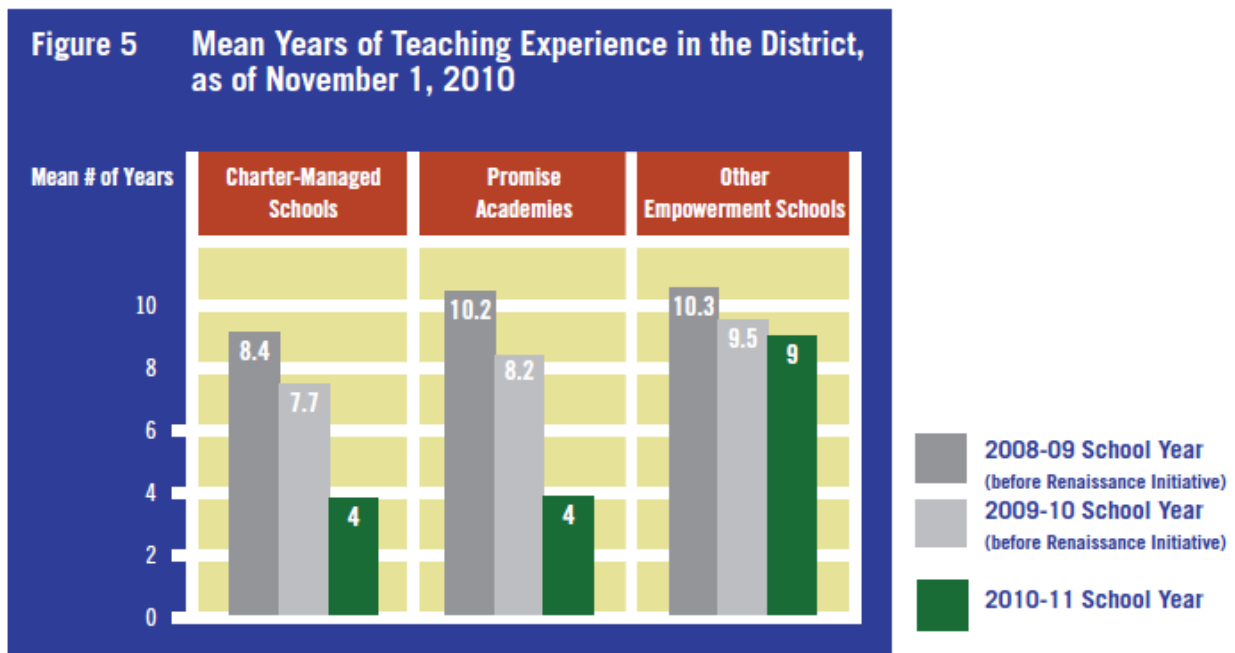
The percentage of intern-certified teachers also rose, from 7% in 2009-10 to 12% in 2010-11, as can be seen in **Figure 4**.

6. Promise Academies did not employ any teachers lacking certification, but the percentage of teachers with intern or emergency certification rose.

When compared with the previous two school years, Promise Academies in 2010-11 increased the percentage of teachers with intern certifications from 8% to 20%; and the percentage of teachers with emergency certification rose from 5% to 13%.

7. Teachers in the Renaissance Schools are less experienced and younger than those in similar comparison schools.

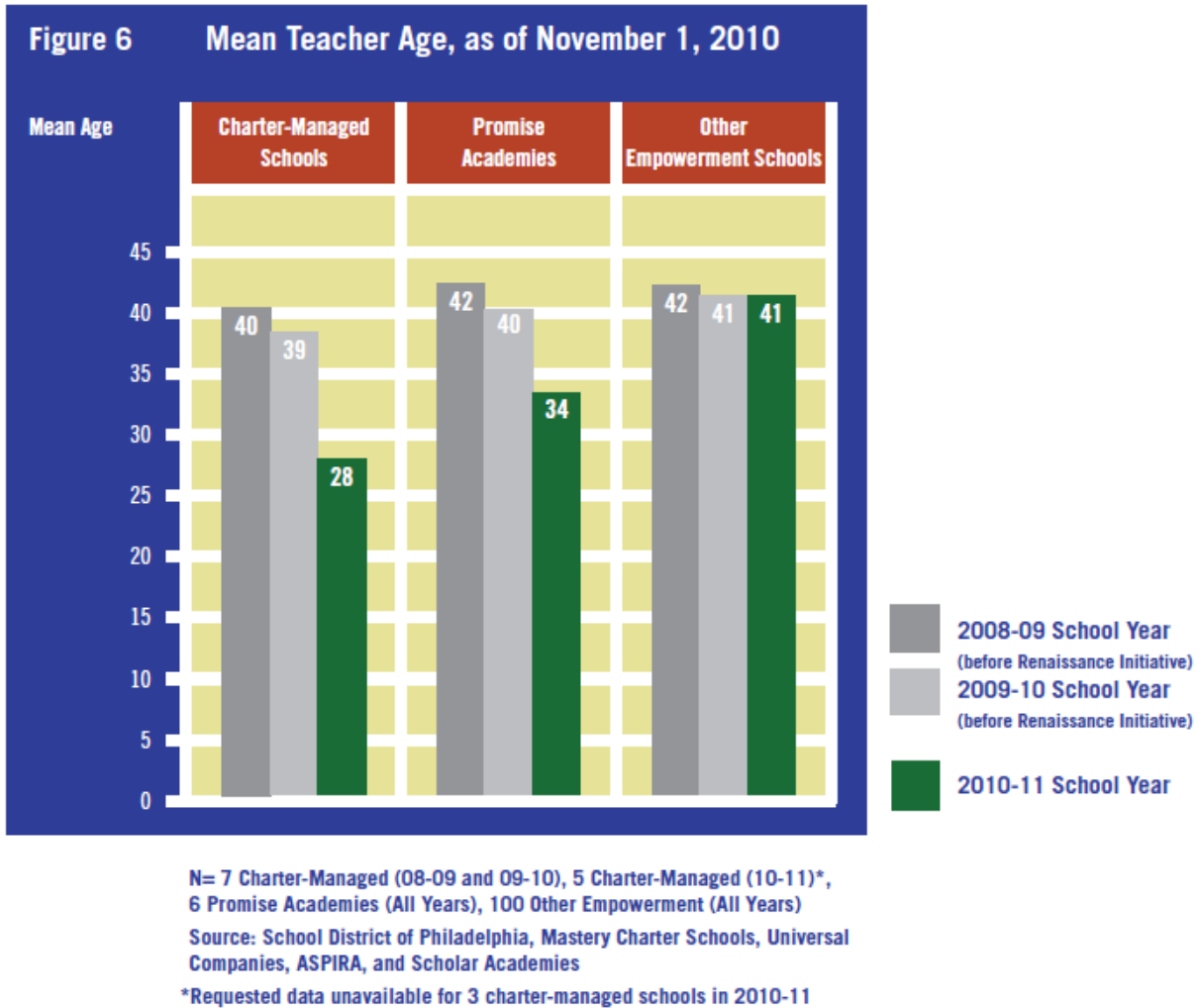
Figure 5 shows that on average, teachers in Promise Academies and charter-managed schools in 2010-11 had four years of teaching experience in the District, compared to nine years of experience among teachers in Empowerment Schools. Additionally, 43% of teachers in Promise Academies and 34% of teachers in charter-managed schools were in their first year teaching in the district, compared with 8% first-year teachers in the Empowerment Schools. As **Figure 6** depicts, teachers in both types of Renaissance Schools were also considerably younger than those in Empowerment Schools. These differences were a significant departure from prior years.



N= 7 Charter-Managed (08-09 and 09-10), 4 Charter-Managed (10-11)*, 6 Promise Academies (All Years), 100 Other Empowerment (All Years)

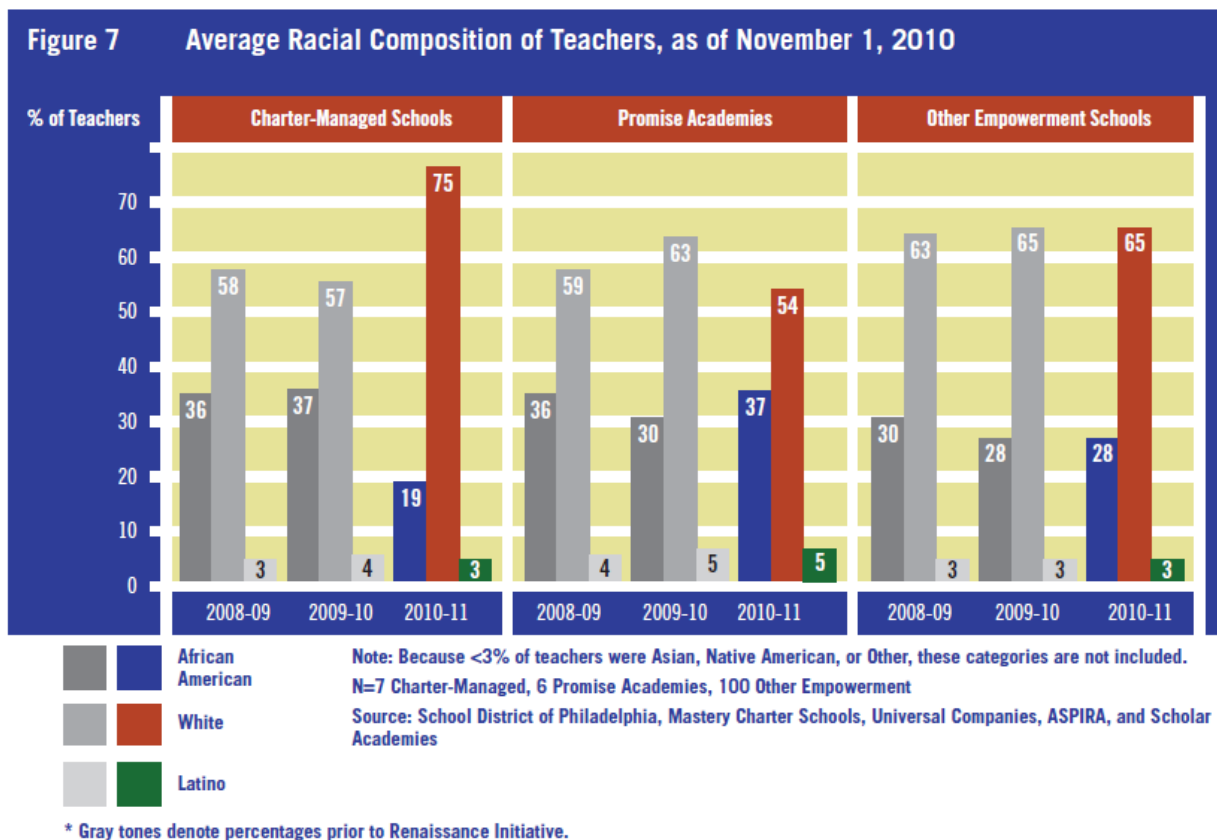
Source: School District of Philadelphia, Mastery Charter Schools, Universal Companies, ASPIRA, and Scholar Academies

*Requested data unavailable for 3 charter-managed schools in 2010-11



8. The racial composition of the Renaissance Schools teaching staff changed, but differently for charter-managed schools and Promise Academies.

Charter-managed schools had an increase in the percentage of white teachers (from 57% in 2009-10 to 75% in 2010-11) and a decrease in the percentage of African-American teachers (from 37% in 2009-10 to 19% in 2010-11). As demonstrated in **Figure 7**, these trends did not hold in Promise Academies, which saw a decrease in the percentage of white teachers (from 63% in 2009-10 to 54% in 2010-11) and an increase in the percentage of African-American teachers (from 30% in 2009-10 to 37% in 2010-11). In comparison, the racial composition of teachers in the Empowerment Schools remained constant between the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school year, with 65% white teachers and 28% African-American teachers.



Teacher Culture and Collaboration

1. Teachers in all schools demonstrated a strong work ethic and a commitment to their students.

According to a teacher at a charter-managed school, “you have to have the belief that students can achieve no matter what background they come from.” Teachers and principals asserted that, to achieve these ambitious goals, the work of teachers in Renaissance Schools required additional effort, flexibility, patience, and a relentless pursuit of results. In the words of a Promise Academy instructional coach, a successful Renaissance School teacher is “beyond 9-5, a team player, open to different ideas, always growing, learning, and reflecting.”

2. Staff in all schools cultivated strong collaborative relationships, though the nature of collaboration differed.

The type of collaboration varied considerably across both Promise Academies and charter-managed schools.

- a. In several charter-managed schools and Promise Academies, leadership created protected time for teacher collaboration on a weekly basis and teachers reported using this time effectively to share successes and brainstorm solutions to challenging situations.
- b. In the remaining schools, teachers reported that though time for collaboration existed, it was not always preserved or used efficiently and as such, teachers developed their own systems for working together, often outside of school hours.

3. The presence of a significant number of new teachers was seen as a challenge by more experienced teachers.

A teacher at a charter-managed school echoed a common perspective we heard across returning teacher focus groups, that “you can be the most dedicated first year teacher but you’re just not going to be as effective.” As the year progressed, many returning teachers suggested that new teacher energy was waning, with one remarking that “now is the time of year when it’s burnout time.”

Though more experienced teachers recognized that the high level of energy brought by new teachers was important, they believed that the desired goal should be to strike a balance between new and experienced staff, which would help create a more supportive professional teaching culture. One teacher at a Promise Academy shared his perspective:

We also lost a lot of great teachers. You have to have some real good anchors if you want to turn a school around. I mean new teachers bring a lot of good energy but it needs to be 50/50. New teachers can draw from their experience.

IV. Instructional System

In this section, we discuss trends in instructional practices across schools, and the systems established to focus on improving practice. **Figure 8** uses a color-coding system to indicate the prevalence of strategies across all Renaissance schools.

Figure 8 Interventions for Instructional Focus	
Intervention or Strategy	Description
Benchmark assessments and data systems	Designed to periodically monitor student progress
Scope and sequence for standards	Used to help pace and scaffold instruction
Curricular focus	Focused on reading and math achievement
Extra support for struggling students	Provided during school hours (pull-outs, co-teaching, small group instruction) and after hours (extended day and Saturday school)
Systems for monitoring teacher performance	Created rubrics for measuring teacher practice and leadership positions for monitoring performance
Orientation for new staff members	Introduced new staff members to expectations and curricula
Coaching model	Developed coaching models, where teachers were frequently observed and given feedback or instructional improvement
Consistent classroom appearance	Standardized classroom appearance, with rules, procedures, and other instructional expectations posted
Structured and objective-driven lessons	Required teachers to submit lesson plans with consistent objective-driven structure
Data use to guide changes in practice	Utilized collaborative structures to examine data and establish priority areas for instructional focus

■ Widespread: Implemented with some success in all Renaissance Schools
■ Shared: Implemented with some success in more than half of Renaissance Schools
■ Occasional/Rare: Implemented in fewer than half of Renaissance Schools

Below, we highlight findings related to strategies that emerged as strengths or challenges in establishing an instructional system in the following areas: (1) data and curricular initiatives and (2) systems of evaluation and support.

Data and Curricular Initiatives

- 1. Student achievement was frequently monitored across all schools through a benchmark assessment system; however, few schools were using data to drive changes in practice.**

All Renaissance Schools had systems for periodically collecting student achievement data, but we observed variation in teachers’ use of data to establish priority areas for instructional focus and

create action plans for modifying instruction. One charter-managed school principal described how data was used in her school to drive performance:

So, it's constantly looking at what kids should be learning, plan and teach, adjust your planning, predict how they're going to do on the assessment, planning and reteach, adjust my instruction, how did they do on the assessment, plan, teach, adjust my instruction. It's a constant cycle. Looking at the data, teaching, data, teaching.

Many teachers and principals believed that using data to inform instruction was an ideal process for data use; however, few schools had been able to put systems in place in the early months of the school year to facilitate these practices.

2. Most schools had prescribed curricula focused on reading and math; however, the amount of flexibility in curricular use varied across schools.

All Renaissance Schools had a clear scope and sequence for how standards should be taught during the course of the year, and with the exception of one school, curricula was centrally determined. The amount of flexibility to modify curricula, however, varied considerably across schools. Many teachers, in both Promise Academy and charter-managed school focus groups, expressed frustration with the scripted nature of the curriculum. One teacher said, “There’s a lot more directives on what we have to do rather than just allowing us to use our knowledge of a teacher and what needs to be done.”

Several charter-managed schools allowed for modifications in the pacing of curriculum. Teachers in these schools reported that they appreciated the autonomy to make modifications based on their professional judgment. However, in one of these charter-managed schools, the instructional coach shared that curricular flexibility was a challenge as well as an asset:

I think our curriculum's greatest strength is also its biggest weakness, which is this idea of a teacher created curriculum, that has that great investment piece, really be able to invest the kids and engage the kids in stuff that they're interested in and using that, but then it is also really time-consuming and difficult to do and to do well. Our first year teachers who don't have experience with curriculum are really struggling because they've never done it before.

3. Lessons were objective-driven and focused on improving students' performance on assessments.

In all schools, teachers were required to submit lesson plans on a regular basis for review. In most schools, these plans adhered to a structured approach to designing lessons (i.e. getting students ready for instruction, direct instruction, checking for understanding and guided practice, independent practice and assessment). Teachers and principals in the majority of schools also described their efforts as focused on improving performance on assessments, though the emphasis on test-taking skills was more pronounced among some Promise Academies and charter-managed schools than others. To ensure that all students met standards, extra academic supports were provided for students both during school hours (pull-outs, co-teaching) and after hours (extended day and Saturday school).

Systems of Teacher Evaluation and Support

1. Teacher evaluation systems in all schools were based on a framework for assessing instructional practice and incorporated both formal and informal observation.

Though the specific rubrics used to assess instructional practice varied across schools, all emphasized objective-driven instruction and the importance of a positive classroom environment. Most systems relied exclusively on observational practices to evaluate teacher practice, though multiple types of data collection were used – i.e. formal observations, targeted observations on particular skills, and walkthroughs. One charter-provider also used student growth on assessments and principals' ratings of teachers on a rubric detailing the schools' core values.

2. Despite similarities, the clarity of expectations and consistency of implementation of teacher evaluation practices varied considerably across schools.

Teachers in schools managed by one of the charter providers reported that a strong evaluation system was in place that helped them to focus on improving instruction. They used the following phrases to describe the system: “coherent,” “fair and consistent,” “straightforward,” “helpful and concrete.” Performance expectations were clearly communicated from the beginning of the school year and were consistently reinforced. A teacher at one of these schools stated, “There are no surprises. I know exactly what I'm supposed to be doing.”

Yet in several Promise Academies and charter-managed schools, many teachers shared that the system had not been in place from the beginning of the year and as such, felt like expectations were constantly in flux. One teacher said, “There is a sense of not having a clear expectation of what is happening on a day-to-day basis, but also being held to a standard which was not fully explained to us.”

3. Feedback from teacher evaluation was rare and not always focused on instructional improvement.

This was particularly evident in several of the Promise Academies, where teachers consistently reported frequent monitoring, but noted that feedback in the early months of the school year focused more on classroom environment rather than instructional practice.

4. The use of new structures to support teacher development also differed across schools.

As mentioned above, Renaissance Schools developed systems of distributed leadership to provide instructional support and instituted common planning time to create a structure for collaboration. However, we observed significant variation across schools in the time devoted to using these structures to improve teacher practice.

- a. In schools managed by one charter provider, instructional coaches were frequently in teacher classrooms and common planning time was focused on instructional improvement. Teachers at schools with consistently-implemented instructional coaching systems reported feeling very supported in their work
- b. In the majority of the remaining schools, however, we heard from teachers and school leaders that common planning time was often used for other purposes and that instructional support staff were overwhelmed with many other competing responsibilities. Teachers in these schools were more likely to communicate that they lacked the skills necessary to improve their instruction.

Teachers, principals, and instructional support staff indicated that these differences originated at orientation. In some schools, orientation was instrumental in setting teachers up for success. One teacher in a charter-managed school stated, “Everything was given to you [at orientation] so that way, you had access to everything you needed.”

However, in other schools, teachers and principals reported that orientation contained too much information in a short amount of time, which led participants to feel overwhelmed. A principal at a Promise Academy said, “The orientation was like an over-immersion of information. It quickly introduced a high level of angst.”

V. Recommendations

1. The District and charter managers should start the teacher staffing process earlier.

Starting and completing the staffing process earlier will enable principals to recruit new candidates that possess the skills and dispositions necessary to be effective turnaround teachers, as well as to expediently place all force-transferred teachers to minimize the negative impact on the overall system.

2. The District and charter managers should develop a strategy for meeting the needs of a teaching force that is significantly younger, less experienced, and alternatively certified.

The magnitude of staffing changes in both types of Renaissance Schools is significant and poses both opportunities and challenges. Developing a plan for productively managing these changes will help ensure that both veteran and new teachers have the support needed to be effective teachers and colleagues.

3. The District and charter managers should provide differentiated support for principals to help them develop essential leadership competencies.

The District and charter managers should utilize their existing structures of support to focus on building principals’ skills in several areas that are particularly relevant for the work in Renaissance Schools, including how to set a clear vision, work with and inspire diverse stakeholders in realizing that mission, establish effective structures for professional collaboration, and leverage instructional systems and processes to improve practice.

4. The District and charter managers should establish clear performance expectations and provide consistent feedback.

Clear expectations for teacher performance should be established at orientation and structures should be in place to monitor progress toward goals and offer teachers consistent and meaningful feedback on instructional practice.

5. **Principals should ensure that time is protected for professional development, to ensure that teachers can establish a strong professional culture focused on using data to drive improvements and spreading effective practice.**

Principals should ensure that time for teacher professional development is protected and to the extent possible, that instructional support personnel are able to spend their day working exclusively with teachers to improve their practice. Efforts should be made to develop strong collaborative structures, which recognize that instruction is not just about developing individual teacher skill, but also about cultivating the collective capacity necessary to bring about school-level changes.

VI. Future Research

Given the timing of this report, we were not able to examine whether the implemented interventions led to improvements in school leadership or changes in teacher practice and could only begin to suggest emerging trends in teacher satisfaction and morale. It is important that research continue to track these changes, and in future years explore the relationship between these changes and student achievement. Specifically, researchers should investigate the following:

- **Changes in composition and distribution of teacher corps.** It is important for future research to continue to track the demographic characteristics of the teaching force in Renaissance schools to see if current trends persist over time. It is also important to examine the impact of the teacher selection processes on the redistribution of teachers across the district.
- **Trends in teacher turnover and satisfaction.** Researchers should examine the individual characteristics of teachers who are most likely to leave their schools and the District, as well how certain school-based factors (such as model of turnaround, size, grade level, teachers' satisfaction with working conditions) affect turnover rates in Renaissance Schools.
- **The impact of changes in staffing and school leadership on student achievement.** Exploring the relationship between these interim changes and important student achievement outcomes will be critical to understanding the role that these factors play in the turnaround process.

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Conclusion

This research was conducted in the start-up months of Philadelphia’s Renaissance Schools Initiative. Findings and recommendations from this study focus on important lessons for mid-course correction with the initial cohort of Renaissance schools, and for the start-up of the next cohort of 18 Renaissance Schools, which will open in fall 2011. We also believe the experience in Philadelphia with “turnaround” has significance for other school districts working to change student outcomes in persistently low-performing schools. Studies on the effect of turnaround models on school improvement are still scant, and these briefs set the groundwork for investigating the key levers of change in Philadelphia’s turnaround effort, including identifying the important qualitative and quantitative indicators to track over time. The data collection for this study was completed in January 2011, just months into the first school year of the Renaissance schools, and it was completed too soon to examine student performance outcomes, which should be the subject of future studies.

The Renaissance Schools Initiative was conceived and implemented at a time when the District had ample financial resources. The District had benefited both from increases in state funding and from federal stimulus dollars. The next round of the Renaissance Initiative will unfold in a very different financial era—one of austerity, with draconian cuts in central office staffing likely. Although Philadelphia’s superintendent has made it clear that scarce education dollars will be tilted toward low-performing schools, continuing to provide the kinds of extra supports that we found across all the Renaissance schools in this first round will be a challenge. This is a challenge other school districts are likely to face as well, and it will be important to learn how different districts manage financial pressures, while continuing to press for improvement in their persistently low-performing schools.

Our research focused on school climate, school leadership and staffing, and school advisory councils – the three areas that we identified in our theory of action as the expected levers of change. Each of these areas is discussed separately in this report, because each area is distinct and has its own set of interventions, findings, and recommendations. But as the theory of action on page iv of the Introduction shows, these three areas should function as a dynamic, within a context of accountability. It is the synergy created by this dynamic, in conjunction with strong student and

teacher accountability, which is expected to lead to a dramatic improvement in student achievement in a relatively short time-- two-to-three years.

In these early months of the Renaissance Initiative, we found substantial variation among schools in their efforts to implement policies and practices in the key areas that we examined. This variation existed as much within the charter-managed and Promise Academy models as between them. We identified three overarching factors that contributed to this variation: rushed timeline for start up, “inventing as you go”, and as a consequence of both of these, stretched District capacity. In addition, the District is at the helm of an increasingly complex array of public schools, with a range governance structures and school cultures. This “portfolio of schools” demands new ways of working with schools, which also can be taxing on the District’s capacity. Finally, we found that not all schools entered the Renaissance Initiative at the same point. Some charter managers had already planned for and raised money for expansion and the Renaissance Initiative became their opportunity. They could hire earlier and had more evolved teacher support systems and/or behavioral systems. Other schools, both charter-managed and Promise Academies, were able to retain more returning teachers, which meant they did not have as many new teachers to support. In both cases, these schools were at an advantage and able to start up more easily than others.

Each of the briefs in this report has recommendations pertinent to its particular focus. Here we suggest an overarching recommendation to facilitate the tracking of changes taking place in the schools, and which will allow future studies to better determine the relationship between new policies and practices and improved student performance.

- The charter-managed schools and the District should agree on a common set of student, school climate and human resources variables to be systematically collected by all District and charter-managed schools, and that data should be housed in the District database.

This would create new requirements especially for the charter managers, but would facilitate research that examines common elements across all Renaissance schools, and seeks to draw inferences around student improvement. It would also help the District maintain a consistent, comprehensive record of Renaissance School progress and performance.

Finally, we suggest that research continue on the Renaissance Initiative and its relatively new reform model of turnaround. In the briefs, we have suggested research areas relevant to the three levers of

change-- climate, leadership and school staff, and the school advisory committees. Here we suggest that future research also address additional overarching areas:

- The effectiveness of the Renaissance Initiative in impacting student outcomes at Promise Academies, charter-managed schools, and other models used in future rounds of the initiative;
- The relationship between the three levers of change, and the conditions necessary to implement and sustain successful Renaissance School;
- The impact of the Renaissance Initiative on other schools and neighborhoods in the District that have *not* been selected for turnaround, including facilities, resources and other supports; and
- An examination of the relationship between charter management organizations (CMOs) and other entities that manage schools in the future and the District. The relationship is evolving as the District grants CMOs management of neighborhood schools—with greater autonomy than other District-managed schools and greater monitoring and accountability than other charter schools.

Ultimately, the District and public will want to know which schools and/or models are successful and why, and what District policies and practices are necessary to support and sustain high performing schools, as well as a high performing system of schools. Answering these important questions will be critical not only to Philadelphia, but also to school districts across the country.