

Imagine
2014

PRIORITIES • PROGRESS • PROMISES

A Year 2 Update

July 2010

July 8, 2010

Dear Friend of Education:

More than a year ago, after extensive input from more than 3,000 educators, parents, community members, and other stakeholders, we released *Imagine 2014*, our five-year strategic plan that won broad national praise for its creative and comprehensive approach to improving Philadelphia's public schools.

Today, on behalf of the school system's hard-working educators, students, parents, and partners, I am pleased to report on the significant progress we have made. As the following pages describe in more detail:

- Graduation rates are up to 60%
- More than half our students are meeting state standards in reading and math for the first time ever
- 7-point reading gains in high schools alone last year
- 58,000 students enrolled in summer school
- More than 12,000 parents taking courses at our Parent University
- And many more signs of encouraging momentum

While we pause to celebrate gains such as these, none of us can be totally satisfied ...yet. If we continue to improve at our current rate, it will not be until 2123 that every student is meeting the standards. Clearly, that's not good enough. Collectively, we need to pick up the pace so that we reach that goal by 2023, if not sooner.

This report, in addition to reporting on our progress to date, spells out the specific steps we'll take in the coming year to accelerate the pace of change.

Please join us as we continue to strive for excellence!

Respectfully,



Dr. Arlene Ackerman
Superintendent
School District of Philadelphia



Imagine 2014

Imagine 2014 began life in 2008 as a strategic plan—a collection of our bold hopes and specific ideas for the future of Philadelphia’s children. After a busy, productive year, the priorities for Phase 1 (2009–2010) have moved from “great idea!” to progress you can see.

This report highlights our progress on our priorities, and includes a look ahead to our strategic plans for the coming year.

The Bottom Line: Improved Student Learning

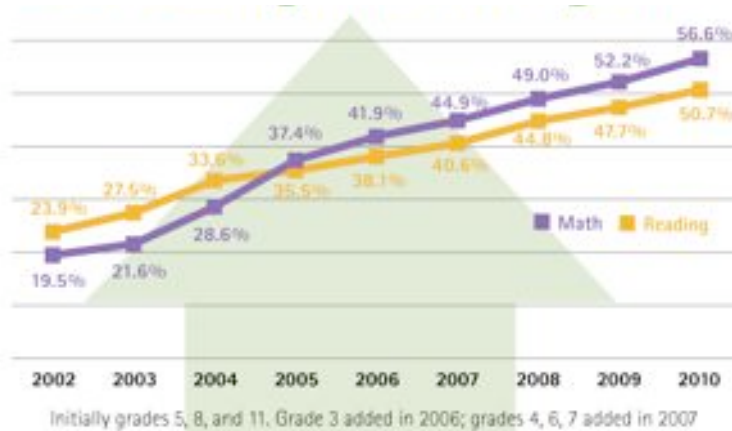
As the numbers and graphs show, our work is paying off in higher student achievement. Based on the 2010 preliminary PSSA results...

- For the first time, 50% or more of our students are meeting or exceeding state standards in math and reading.
- Over the past two years in math, we have increased from 49% to 56.6% of students scoring at proficient/advanced.
- In 2010, high schools had the largest reading gains ever with 45.1% of students now scoring at proficient/advanced, up from 37.8% in 2009.
- Over the past two years in reading, our students have improved from 44.8% to 50.7%. Again, in 2010, high schools improved the most.
- Our lowest-performing schools (Empowerment Schools) are making greater gains than the overall district average, thereby closing the achievement gap.
- Our six-year graduation rate continues to rise and has reached 60%.

The preliminary results are encouraging and worth applauding. They show that efforts to improve academic achievement in the city's public schools are slowly making a difference.

— Philadelphia Inquirer,
June 19, 2010

8 Straight Years of Reading and Math Gains



Imagine 2014. We Started with a Strategy.

In April 2009, after months of careful deliberation and extensive contributions from educators, parents, community leaders, and others, the School District of Philadelphia published a five-year strategic plan that began with a bold vision:

Imagine a great city system of schools in which teachers, principals, parents, staff, policymakers, and the entire community collectively focus all energy, efforts, planning and development, resources, and initiatives on building a 21st-century culture of achievement ... where children come first, excellence is the norm, talent is nurtured, opportunities are made equal, and success is measured by the steady improvement of teaching and learning in classrooms system-wide ... resulting in accelerated student progress ... a school system in which all students succeed, families have many quality choices, the staff is great, adults are accountable, and world-class operations support the entire enterprise.



The plan organized our work into five priority areas, each with specific commitments to action.

- 1. Student Success.** So that students will grow each year and graduate with the academic skills necessary for success in college, work, and life, we focused on providing specialized services, comprehensive supports, transition services, and high-quality instruction.
- 2. Quality Choices.** To give our students every chance to be successful, we focused on building a system of schools where success is supported, replicated, and rewarded, and failure is not tolerated.
- 3. Great Staff.** To have a talented staff that reflects the diversity of our student body, we focused on improvements in recruitment, development, evaluation, and compensation.
- 4. Accountable Adults.** To ensure that all employees understand the depth and breadth of their accountability for the success of our children, we focused on stronger performance evaluations and more regular progress reports on every school.
- 5. World-Class Operations.** To provide the best business and operational practices that support teaching and learning, we focused on more equity and more efficient service.

1. Student Success: Progress and Promises Going Forward

Quality instruction at all levels (preschool through high school), more individualized support for students, additional learning time, safe classrooms and schools, involved parents ... these are the cornerstones of a school system committed to strong achievement by all students. We have taken multiple steps to deliver on this commitment.

More Personal Attention for Students

Smaller class sizes in the early grades give teachers more time with each student. With the addition of Reading Recovery teachers, children work one-on-one and in small groups with these specialists to develop the most essential skill: reading. And more counselors help secondary school students get on track ... and stay there.

What We Have Done So Far

- Added 150 counselors for middle and high school students
- Reduced kindergarten class sizes: 1 teacher for every 20.4 students (Empowerment schools)
- Reduced 1st–3rd grade class sizes: 1 teacher for every 21 students (Empowerment schools)
- All high schools added an extra period to give students more flexibility in scheduling classes (Bonus: Teachers have time to plan lessons together)
- All 9th graders in comprehensive high schools now have individualized learning plans, outlining career goals and course-taking plans for their next four years

What We Plan Going Forward

- Maintain smaller classes and reading supports, an investment of over \$30 million
- Add elementary school counselors
- Have the middle school and high school counselor stay with their students through all the grades—ensuring closer personal relationships
- Open 3 Newcomer Learning Academies to help new immigrants transition to the American education system
- Plan more options for students, including an Early College High School, which gives students college credit while in high school, and expanded Career and Technical Education opportunities

Amid difficult budgetary times, many school districts have scaled back, or even largely eliminated, their summer school offerings... [but] at least some districts are actually scaling up summer school. The 161,000-student Philadelphia district is aiming to nearly double the size of its Summer Learning and More or SLAM, program.... The district is making 50,000 slots available for the program, which combines a focus on core academic skills with enrichment activities. That's an increase of 20,000 from last year.

— Education Week, June 24, 2010



Extra Learning Time

Summer school offers students the chance to catch up ... and get ahead. Summer school 2010 is organized so that high school students can take classes in the morning and go to a job site or internship in the afternoon.

What We Have Done So Far

- 58,000 students enrolled in Summer Learning and More (S.L.A.M.)
- More than 1,500 students participated in dual enrollment courses this past year, where they earned both high school and college credits
- Added an extra period of instruction for all students in comprehensive high schools
- Opened a Regional Talent Center to provide enrichment opportunities in arts, dance, music, etc.

What We Plan Going Forward

- Continue our expanded summer program
- Offer Gifted and Talented opportunities in all elementary schools
- Offer at least two world languages in all high schools (600 students and above)
- Offer a visual and performing arts program at every comprehensive high school
- Open a second Regional Talent Center
- Plan for an additional period in middle schools

More Support for Struggling Students

From hundreds of additional counselors and peer mediators to new Student Success Centers, we are now providing students with much more support to succeed in school.

What We Have Done So Far

- Opened 11 Student Success Centers at Empowerment high schools, providing academic and social support, career exploration and college preparation, and leadership development
- Added peer mediation coordinators at middle and high school: 100 coordinators trained, 64 schools have peer mediation programs
- Launched a dropout recovery program that reached more than 3,600 former students who have inquired about coming back to school
- Violent incidents down 29% since 2008
- 52 schools offered in-school suspension so that students could continue their studies
- Coordinated with city agencies such as the probation office and truancy court to provide extra support for students

“The teachers here know you’re going through some hard times and they still push you. They say, ‘Don’t give up, I’m here [to help].”

— Abigail Echavarría,
Excel North, a program for students who haven’t earned the expected number of credits for their age



What We Plan Going Forward

- Open 5 new Student Success Centers
- Open 1 new Re-engagement Center to help high school dropouts get back to school
- Add in-school suspension and peer mediation in 10 more schools

More Involved Parents

When parents are informed and involved, their children do better in school. Our parent programs have attracted national attention.

What We Have Done So Far

- Opened Regional Early Childhood Center at Feltonville in March 2010, which includes Head Start screenings, parent trainings, and home visits
- Served more than 12,000 parents in classes at 23 Parent University sites
- Hired 170 Parent Ombudsmen to facilitate and increase parental engagement
- Opened a Translation and Interpretation Center that translates materials into 8 languages and provides simultaneous translations at all parent meetings

What We Plan Going Forward

- Open Parent Resource Centers across the city
- Open 1 more Early Childhood Center in a high school
- Open 1 more Regional Early Childhood Center
- Add Parent University programs at all 6 Promise Academies
- Open Regional Enrollment Centers to help multilingual families determine the appropriate placement and needed supports for their children

Supported primarily by federal funds, the Philadelphia Parent Academy's "curriculum" runs the gamut from a 10-week math-literacy course to a multipart social-etiquette class to a one-day session on attendance and truancy that teaches parents about "compulsory education and attendance law."

— TIME magazine, Nov. 8, 2009



2. Quality Choices: Progress and Priorities Going Forward

We know what works. The city has many excellent schools. Our challenge is that we need to create many more of them. Parents and students deserve nothing less. And all schools, whether run by the district or external organizations, should be held to the same high standards. Our Empowerment Schools already are boosting student achievement in 107 of the city's struggling schools, while 13 of the very lowest-performing schools will benefit from even more sweeping changes this coming year.

What We Have Done So Far

- Added extra support at Empowerment Schools, including Corrective Reading and Math programs, nursing services, parent ombudsmen, student advisors, and instructional specialists
- School Advisory Councils of parents, community members, and educators gathered extensive community input and helped select partners for 13 Renaissance Charter Schools

What We Plan Going Forward

- Open 6 Promise Academies, the turnaround model that the school district will operate directly
- Oversee the opening of 7 Renaissance Schools, which will be managed by high-quality charter operators (Aspira, Mastery, Universal, and Young Scholars)
- Start the community-based process again to turn around additional schools in 2011–2012



The district now has the authority to reinvent chronically underperforming schools as Renaissance Schools and Promise Academies The superintendent has created a structure for success. She has focused resources where they will do the most good for those most in need.

— Gov. Edward G. Rendell, Representative Dwight Evans, Mayor Michael A. Nutter, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 24, 2010

Promise Academies have ...

- A structured curriculum including Corrective English and Corrective Math
- Two more hours each school day: one for instruction, one for enrichment
- School on Saturday every other week for field trips and other cultural enrichment programs
- Summer school to prevent loss of learning
- Uniforms
- Parent contracts to reinforce agreement with school rules
- And more!

3. Great Staff: Progress and Priorities Going Forward

Whether we are hiring beginning teachers or school principals, groundskeepers or accountants, we are looking for people who are highly skilled at what they do and committed to learning. Once they have become part of the School District of Philadelphia, it is our responsibility to keep them here—with competitive compensation packages, a supportive work environment, and professional development that helps them continuously improve. We have made important progress on several fronts.

What We Have Done So Far

- Strengthened supports for first-year teachers
- Opened new Professional Development Centers for all staff to take courses customized to their interests and needs
- Started planning tuition reimbursement program for teachers to earn Urban Education Masters degree
- Reached landmark contract agreement with Philadelphia Federation of Teachers. Among other features, most principals and school communities now have the flexibility to hire their own teaching staffs, while outstanding educators in selected schools can earn additional compensation
- Opened Office of Teacher Affairs to provide ongoing extra support

What We Plan Going Forward

- Open a High School for Future Teachers, starting in fall 2010
- Begin Peer Assistance and Review Program for new and struggling veteran teachers
- Start Leadership Institute, offering professional development for aspiring and veteran leaders
- Launch a “Grow-Your-Own” program to help current staff members earn their teacher certifications
- Continue the Teach in Philadelphia program to help mid-career professionals transition into the classroom

A historic labor agreement with the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers is one of Ackerman's most important accomplishments to date. It has been hailed by the Obama administration, a national teachers' union, and local advocacy groups as groundbreaking. Teachers can also expect more support when they're new or struggling, a better system for addressing school violence, pay for performance, and incentives to participate in reform of low-performing schools.

— Gov. Edward G. Rendell,
Representative Dwight Evans, Mayor
Michael A. Nutter, *Philadelphia Inquirer*,
June 24, 2010



4. Accountable Adults: Progress and Priorities Going Forward

The best laid plans are often put aside when there is no clear path forward and no way to measure progress. Every employee needs to understand how his or her work is directly linked to our ultimate goal: improved student learning. We have taken several important steps to hold all adults in the school system accountable for their work and to regularly report our progress to the community.

What We Have Done So Far

- Developed new performance measures and evaluations that hold central office staff accountable for providing great services to schools and parents
- Translated parent and student surveys into multiple languages and mounted an extensive outreach campaign that boosted returns significantly
- Staff from central office, regions, and schools began rating central office departments on their level of service and customer support
- Created report cards for every school and a district mid-year report to provide an easy-to-read and honest review of progress by each school and the school district toward our 2014 targets

What We Plan Going Forward

- Continue central office performance evaluations and link them to customized professional development
- Start recognition program for high-performing departments and individuals



5. World-Class Operations: Progress and Priorities Going Forward

When school districts “sweat the small stuff” (procurement, payroll, facilities, transportation, and similar back-office priorities), it makes it more likely that principals, teachers, and counselors will succeed with the “big stuff” — teaching students to read, write, do math and science, and master other essential skills they will need in the 21st century. A top priority for us has been to maximize the amount of dollars going to schools and classrooms while minimizing the amount spent on bureaucracy and administration.

What We Have Done So Far

- Extended central offices hours (8am–6pm) to give staff and parents more chances to receive timely support
- Initiated Weighted Student Funding: broad-based committee began reviewing “weights” for each student group, while nearly 60 schools participated in a pilot budget-development process

What We Plan Going Forward

- Complete Facilities Master Plan to ensure that District facilities are utilized in an effective and efficient manner
- Streamline business processes to better integrate procurement, payroll, human resources, and other systems
- Finalize student “weights” and have School Advisory Councils in all schools use Weighted Student Funding for spring 2011 budgeting



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