

Imagine 2014: Quality Choices

Just the Facts

Since the presentation of *Imagine 2014* to the SRC and public, there have been positive comments, editorials and support for the full implementation of the goals and strategies of this strategic plan. People are excited about this plan and what it could mean for Philadelphia's children. However, particular attention has been focused on the concept of *Renaissance Schools*, and the strategy to "close failing schools and embrace bold new educational approaches with proven track records for success that include in-district restructuring and external partnerships." This fact sheet is developed to clarify elements of the proposed strategy so that the staff and the entire community can focus its attention and efforts to ensure that all of our children have access to a high quality education.

Q. Why is closing failing schools and reopening them as *Renaissance Schools* a viable strategy for improving achievement and student outcomes?

The district has a 47% drop-out rate. In many of our failing schools the drop-out rate is higher than the district average. Too many schools have failed students for many years, some for a decade or more. It is time that the district stop tolerating mediocrity, failure or excuses about why we can't provide great schools and great choices for all families.*

Q. Have *Renaissance Schools* been identified?

No. *The District has not identified the criteria to determine which schools will become *Renaissance Schools*. There will be an extensive set of data and performance measures that will be used to review each school's progress over an extended period of time.*

Q. Is the district putting schools up for grabs?

Absolutely not. *The district will work in conjunction with the affected parents and families in each school to choose **ONLY** instructional models with a proven track record of success that best fit the needs and desires of that particular community.*

Q. What does a proven track record of success really mean?

Instructional models that have led to dramatic improvement in student achievement.

Q. Will the district hand over 20 neighborhood schools to Charter Management Organizations (CMO) and Education Management Organizations (EMO)?

No. *The district plans to restructure a number of the failing schools as in-district charters (very similar to the district's previous "restructured schools model") with the autonomy to select staff and make decisions in the best interest of the school community, free of some of the process challenges and contractual restrictions. In addition, the district will solicit other proposals from successful principals, charters and other organizations including PFT that have demonstrated experience in producing successful student outcomes.*

** from Project U-Turn*

Q. How will the district hold the CMOs and EMOs selected to run *Renaissance Schools* accountable for student results?

Renaissance Schools will be held to the same high standards and performance outcomes as all other district schools. Annual school report cards will be available for the parents and the larger Philadelphia community on the progress of these schools.

Q. How will the school community be involved?

Parents and school communities will be invited to review proposals, recommend the model of their choice, participate on site visitation teams and in the selection of staff, and fully participate in the transition process.

Q. What about the students? Will they be displaced in the new schools?

No. *All students will remain in the new schools able to take full advantage of the new instructional program and accompanying resources.*

Q. Why is this process different from past practice?

In the past, communities were not involved in the process of selecting the school models of their choice. In the past, students were dispersed to other schools while the new school accepted only one grade at a time. And, in the past, contractors were paid regardless of student results. Payment and continuation of contracts will be dependent on student results.

Q. What is the timeline for implementation of the *Renaissance Schools Program*?

Spring/Summer 2009: *Initiate RFP process to select pool of qualified Renaissance School providers*
Summer/Fall 2009: *Identify approximately 10 Renaissance Schools and begin matching process*

-District Review

-Community Review

-Recommendations of school and provider matches to SRC

Winter 2010: *Transition process begins with District, school community, and new provider*

Fall 2010: *Opening of new school with current student population*

Q. What about the *Empowerment Schools Program*?

This year, the district allocated an additional \$18 million to our lowest performing schools. The goal of the Empowerment Schools Program is to target resources to the critical support areas that challenge the teaching and learning process in order to accelerate student achievement, thus, reducing the number of schools that may be eligible to become Renaissance Schools. The Empowerment Schools Program will continue as a strategy for improving student achievement in the strategic plan.

Q. Where did this plan come from?

It is a compilation of the working groups, various reports, task forces, community meetings, parent roundtables, transition team recommendations and the best thinking of district staff. It builds upon learning from past reform efforts in Philadelphia and what we know works in other school districts across the county line or nation.