

[Home](#) > Philadelphia School Reform: Historical Roots and Reflections on the 2002-2003 School Year Under State Takeover A talk initially presented at The Friends Association of Higher Education and Friends Council on Education Conference at Swarthmore College and

PHILADELPHIA SCHOOL REFORM: HISTORICAL ROOTS AND REFLECTIONS ON THE 2002-2003 SCHOOL YEAR UNDER STATE TAKEOVER A TALK INITIALLY PRESENTED AT THE FRIENDS ASSOCIATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND FRIENDS COUNCIL ON EDUCATION CONFERENCE AT SWARTHMORE COLLEGE AND

Eva Travers

On Friday, June 20, 2003, the New York Times reported that, "This was the year that school reform began in Philadelphia. The state has taken over the school system, which had been failing for years and brought in seven outside managers to run 45 of the lowest performing elementary and middle schools." In fact, this was the school year that Philadelphia underwent probably the most radical urban education reform effort of any school district in the country, but it was hardly "the year that school reform *began* in Philadelphia."

Urban educational reform efforts that have been aptly characterized as "policy churn," always build upon layers of previous reforms. They are strongly influenced by the context in which the reforms are being attempted. This was definitely the case in Philadelphia, where an earlier reform agenda, called Children Achieving, had been implemented under David Hornbeck, the Superintendent of the Philadelphia School District from 1994-2000. Children Achieving consisted of an ambitious "systemic reform" plan for Philadelphia, including: the development of standards for teaching and learning; decentralized decision making and the division of the district into 22 clusters; the development of small learning communities within schools; the implementation of district-wide high stakes testing; and a commitment to seek adequate funding for the District.

In addition, the "experiments," or interventions that have occurred in the education of Philadelphia's school children during 2002-2003 are the result of a series of economic, political and ideological decisions at the state level during the 1990s. Finally, an additional factor layered on top of the previous local and state initiatives is No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the far-reaching federal education law passed in January, 2002 that specifies a series of consequences for schools and districts that do not meet its goals.

A prominent goal of NCLB is ensuring that all children, no matter what their circumstances (e.g., English Language Learners, special education students, children from low income backgrounds) make "adequate yearly progress" toward high academic standards and reach "proficiency" on state tests by 2014. Many of the most dire consequences mandated under NCLB for schools that do not achieve "adequate yearly progress" toward high academic standards or "proficiency" are already being implemented in Philadelphia as a result of the state takeover. The current reforms and reorganization of the Philadelphia School system, therefore, has massive implications for the changes in school district governance, curriculum, instructional strategies, upgrading teacher quality, and funding that potentially will be implemented in failing schools and districts nation-wide.

In this presentation, I will first discuss the history and context of the current Philadelphia education reforms under state takeover. Next I will discuss some of the key features of the educational reforms and the conflicting theories of action they represent. I will conclude with a discussion of some findings from the first year of a collaborative research and public awareness project in which I have been participating with a team of educational researchers at Research for Action.¹

Context

Financial Roots of the Takeover

The state takeover of the Philadelphia School District in December, 2001 has its roots in the chronic low test scores of district students and a history of inequitable financing which left the District with substantial and perpetual deficits in recent years. Some history of the education funding inequity in Pennsylvania is useful, in order to understand Philadelphia's particular financial predicament. Pennsylvania ranks significantly below the state average among states in terms of the percentage of state taxes devoted to education. As a result, many districts rely heavily on local property taxes, a situation that has produced gross inequities in school districts' per pupil spending. In 1993, the Pennsylvania legislature voted to freeze the funding formula, The "Education Subsidy for Basic Education," so that the funds allotted from the state to districts no longer increased in response to

increases in enrollment, proportion of students with special needs, ability to raise local taxes, etc. Since Philadelphia experienced increased enrollment during the 1990s and has a disproportionately high number of students with special needs, this legislation was especially harmful to the financial health of the Philadelphia School District. Even though Philadelphia's local tax rate is essentially double that of surrounding counties, property values in Philadelphia are so low that the school district was not able to compensate for the loss of state funds. Confronted with ongoing (\$200 million plus) deficits in projected district budgets and Superintendent Hornbeck's threat to adopt an unbalanced budget if the state did not provide sufficient funding to Philadelphia, in 1998 the Pennsylvania Legislature passed a takeover law, Act 46. Act 46 allows the state to take control of financially troubled school districts and was specifically written with Philadelphia in mind.

Two lawsuits were filed by the city and the Philadelphia School District in 1997 and 1998 to address these inadequate funding levels. The first, filed by the school district, the city and community leaders, contended that Pennsylvania did not provide a "thorough and efficient" education; it was dismissed outright by the state court. Even with the clause in the state constitution guaranteeing the right to a "thorough and efficient" education (This clause or one very similar to it has been the basis on which other states' court systems have recently evaluated the legality of state school finance plans), the Pennsylvania court ruled that the state was not required to consider the case. Pennsylvania has the distinction of being one of only a handful of states where the courts have rejected a school finance suit of this type without a hearing. The second case, a civil rights suit filed in Federal District Court, by the district, the city, and other interested parties, contended that the state's funding practices discriminate against school districts with large numbers of non-White students; The School District of Philadelphia was a key complainant in this case. The city agreed to put this case on hold when Mayor Street negotiated the "friendly" state takeover of the District, with the promise of additional funding from the state.

Educational Roots of the Takeover

Another key factor that triggered the state takeover of the district's schools was the extremely low levels of achievement of Philadelphia students on the state (PSSA) tests, levels that were mirrored in the achievement levels on SAT-9's (the nationally-normed test used by the District during the Hornbeck years). On the PSSA, which was first administered in 1996, students in most Philadelphia schools scored substantially below grade level. While there was an upward trend in the scores in the District overall during the Hornbeck years, and subsequent analysis has shown that District scores increased at a faster pace than the mean increases across the state, the absolute scores were still quite abysmal, as was the drop out rate for students in many middle and high schools in the district.

Standardized testing increasingly has been seen as the way to hold schools and districts accountable across the country. Chronic low achievement on the PSSA test in Philadelphia was addressed by the state legislature in 2000. That year, with the passage of the Education Empowerment Act, Philadelphia was put on a list of eleven Pennsylvania school districts that were slated for takeover in three years if PSSA test scores did not improve. Thus, in addition to having the authority to take over the District for financial reasons, the state now had the authority to take over the District for academic ones.

Political and Ideological Roots of the Takeover

In addition to the financial and academic achievement issues specific to Philadelphia, the takeover has also been supported by ideological and political forces at the state and national levels. Since the 1990s, "school choice" has been increasingly proposed by critics of the educational system as key to effective educational reform. The rationale for choice in urban districts is that parents, especially those with few economic options, should be able to move children out of failing schools. Now, under NCLB, after a school is designated as "in need of improvement" for two years in a row, parents have the option of choosing to place them in another public or charter school in the district.

In Pennsylvania, school choice had strong support, even before NCLB, in both the legislature and the statehouse. Vouchers were advocated by former Governor Ridge (chosen to be the head of the Department of Homeland Security after 9/11), and Republicans in the legislature twice tried to pass voucher bills so that parents could send their children to private schools using public funds. After these attempts failed, public charter school legislation in Pennsylvania was approved in 1997. At that point, charter schools became the major form of "choice" available in Pennsylvania. The number of charter schools in Philadelphia has expanded rapidly; currently there are over 45 charter schools in the district. Philadelphia has by far the largest number of charter schools in the state.

The takeover of the Philadelphia school system was supported by Pennsylvania legislators and Department of Education officials who espoused a market-based ideology, arguing that public school systems, especially in urban areas, are inefficient and the cause of the poor performance of their students. The rationale is that schools, like businesses, should be responsive to market forces, and that privatization and competition will result in inferior schools losing students (and eventually closing) and good schools thriving and increasing the proportion of students they serve. Following this theory, contracting out some or all of the key functions of public school systems and healthy competition between public and private schools that are funded with public dollars will result in increased productivity (i.e. academic achievement and graduation rates.). Charter schools are seen as the first step in breaking the stranglehold of the public system. While most of the existing Philadelphia charter schools were

not created in response to the takeover, conversion to charter school status is one of the strategies being implemented under the state takeover for a handful of the lowest-performing schools.

Recent History of The Takeover: How We Got To Where We Are Now

First phase: Summer - Fall 2001

In summer 2001, the state announced plans to take over the district due to both financial and academic achievement failures. Many legislators in Harrisburg argued publicly that the educational system in the Philadelphia was so broken that radical strategies were needed to fix it. The district hired Edison, Inc., a for-profit educational management company, for \$2.7 million, without an open bidding process, to evaluate the condition of the district and to make recommendations for the state takeover. The contract was given to Edison, despite the fact that the company previously had only managed schools and had no evaluation experience. (The process by which Edison got this contract became the subject of a lengthy and critical analysis by the PA Attorney General Robert Casey and U.S. Representative Chakkah Fatah.)

Edison issued its report in October 2001, proposing that up to 100 of the lowest-performing schools in the District should be placed under private management. While it did not actually suggest that Edison itself should be the management company to take over the schools, the implication was not hard to miss. The report also concluded that the Board of Education should be replaced by a five member School Reform Commission, which would then hire a CEO, and that most central administration functions should be contracted out.

After Edison's report, between October '02 and December '02 the city and state negotiated a "a friendly takeover" of the school system; "friendly" because the Governor promised to contribute an additional \$75 million to the district (although the final funding decision was actually in the hands of the legislature) and the city promised it would contribute an additional \$45 million so that the District schools could start the upcoming school year on an improved financial footing. The state then moved ahead with plans for a five member School Reform Commission to replace the existing School Board, which would take over running the district and hire a CEO.

The negotiation process leading to the formation of the SRC, however was not so friendly. Vigorous opposition from students, grassroots advocacy groups, unions, and the mayor yielded a final takeover plan quite different from Edison's original proposal. Mayor Street "drew a line in the sand" and refused to negotiate until the state withdrew its plan to hand over management of the district's Central Office to Edison. The SRC, which was initially to consist of four members appointed by the Governor and one appointed by the Mayor, ended up with three members appointed by the Governor and two by the Mayor.

Governor Schweiker (who took over after Ridge's departure for Washington D.C.), immediately appointed Jim Nevels chair of the SRC to implement the takeover. Nevels was then a member of the Board of Control in Chester, PA, the only other PA school district at the time under state takeover, and he resigned this post to become chair of the SRC. He immediately signed contracts worth millions of dollars with various consultants, even before the other four members of the SRC were appointed. Moreover, he announced, with the Governor's approval, that Edison was in line to manage 60 of the lowest-performing schools. After much public speculation, the other four SRC members were appointed.

Second phase: Winter - Spring 2002

The expectation that Edison would be appointed to manage such a large number of Philadelphia schools without any formal selection process became the focus of significant student and community protest. Shortly after Nevels was appointed, he reconsidered the plans for Edison, and announced that there would be an open process to select diverse providers, including for-profit and not-for-profit Educational Management Organizations (EMO's) and university partners to run individual schools. The District would also accept bids for contracts to provide services previously overseen by the central office, such as transportation, food service, and facilities management. In addition, Nevels announced that there would be a process to select community partners to work with the schools slated for takeover. (The community partnership component of the takeover was never actually implemented.)

While the SRC received proposals from 27 private providers to manage schools and 31 to provide district services, the role that Edison would ultimately play in the district was the topic of intense speculation. Community-based, and student opposition to Edison continued to mount as part of opposition to school takeovers by private for-profit companies more generally. Throughout the spring, the SRC held biweekly Wednesday meetings in the Board of Education building with a portion of each dedicated to community input; many of the SRC meetings were highly adversarial. Prior to one SRC meeting, student protesters surrounded the Board of Education building and the SRC meeting was forced to relocate.

Ultimately, the SRC identified 86 schools-elementary and middle schools, but not high schools - for management by private

providers or partnerships with universities, as well as a handful of schools to be converted to either charter or "independent" school status. (The "independent school" model never materialized when the SRC admitted that they were not able to distinguish them from charter schools.) Placement on the list of schools slated for takeover was based on the 1998-99 PSSA scores. This created an outcry from those schools whose PSSA scores had improved between 1999 and 2001. Some of these schools had even been cited as exemplary by the state for improving their test scores and had received monetary rewards. The SRC re-evaluated the schools on the takeover list and sixteen were removed.

During meetings in April, 2002, the SRC announced the schools on the takeover list that would be paired with specific partners or EMO's. The providers were three private, for-profit companies (Edison, Victory, and Chancellor Beacon), two private, not-for-profit companies (Foundations and Universal), and two universities (the University of Pennsylvania and Temple University); each of these were identified for "partnerships" with schools in the district. Edison was paired with 20 schools (much lower than the number it initially was angling for, but more than four times as many as any other provider). Other providers, including the universities, were assigned between 3 and 5 schools each

In addition to schools partnered with providers, three schools on the takeover list were made into "transitional" charter schools, and the district announced that 21 of the 70-lowest performing schools would be "reconstituted" under district management. These schools were later named Restructured Schools, when the SRC realized that formally reconstituting schools would create huge turnovers in school staff at a time when the district already faced critical teacher shortages. The District's Office of Restructured Schools' (ORS) approach was characterized as an alternative to the other providers' approaches, and was seen by many as in competition with other models.

As it turned out, the pairing of schools with providers was not entirely random. Temple, Penn and the not-for-profit private companies were given schools with which they either had relationships before the takeover and/or were located in the same part of the city. The ORS appeared to be responsible for some of the highest performing of the low- performing schools spread across the city. Edison got a majority of K-8 and middle schools among the 20 schools it was assigned in all parts of the city.

Each of the providers' approaches included proposed changes in many or all of the following areas: curricula, professional development, scheduling, class size reduction, after school programming, assessments, behavior management programs, and academic coaches. In addition, several of the providers proposed their own monthly testing program that would provide teachers timely feedback on an individual student's performance; the standardized tests, especially the PSSA, could not provide this kind of feedback since scores were not reported until the summer. The approaches varied in terms of their underlying philosophy and the types of curriculum and instruction they proposed. For instance, in literacy, the approaches varied from direct instruction and an emphasis on reading skills and phonics used by Victory, to the partially scripted approach of Success for All used by Edison, to a balanced literacy approach with an emphasis on guided reading as emphasized by the University of Pennsylvania.

Teachers in all of the 70 low-performing schools under new management, including the ORS schools, were given the option of transferring to another school in the district. In schools slated to be taken over by private for-profit firms or to become transitional charter schools, large numbers of faculty exercised the transfer option or left the district altogether. Schools taken over by Edison experienced the most teacher turnover. No school had a choice about the manager with which it would be paired and the critical element of teacher "buy in" to the manager's approach was adhered to in the breach. Teachers were able to opt out of a model they did not think they would like and, if they had sufficient seniority, could transfer to a higher performing school or a school with an approach they thought they would prefer.

The public and the SRC perceived the various approaches as competing with each other to see which would succeed in improving the low-performing schools, and especially student test scores in those schools. The scene was set for a diverse group of providers to show what they could do to improve the city's lowest-performing elementary and middle schools.

Summer 2002: The arrival of Paul Vallas

Until mid summer of 2002, the SRC was the main actor in the takeover of the Philadelphia School District. The SRC's role seemed to change, however, with the arrival of Paul Vallas as CEO. The SRC had been given the authority to choose a CEO for the School District. After an intensive search they hired Vallas who was CEO of the Chicago public schools for seven years before coming to Philadelphia; during that time, he developed a reputation for his hard-hitting but efficient management approach. Under his administration, the Chicago system achieved peace between the school district and the teachers union and balanced the school budget for the first time in several years. Vallas also implemented a strong accountability system in Chicago, based on high stakes testing, required summer school for large numbers of failing students, and ending the practice of social promotion. Initially these accountability measures resulted in improved test scores for Chicago students, but when the test score gains plateaued in Chicago, Vallas resigned.

When Vallas arrived in Philadelphia, he brought with him several high level administrators from Chicago. He quickly took charge

and made it clear that he intended to try many of the same strategies that he had implemented successfully in Chicago. He accepted the diverse provider model that the SRC had already put in place and negotiated contracts with the providers that included substantial extra per pupil dollars from state funds. The amounts granted to the providers ranged from \$881 per pupil for Edison, to \$450 per pupil for the University of Pennsylvania and Temple. (The universities got the least, because they were given fewer management responsibilities in their "memos of understanding" than the other providers who had detailed formal contracts. For-profit private providers got on average about \$200 more per pupil than not-for-profit private providers, and the ORS schools got \$550 per pupil extra.) However, Vallas made it clear that he would not hesitate to cancel contracts of providers that did not perform adequately. At the same time, he cancelled the proposed contracts with outside providers to manage aspects of district administration, including an \$18 million contract with Edison, which the SRC had named the "lead provider," announcing that oversight of central administration is what the SRC had hired him to do.

In addition, Vallas announced almost immediately several district-wide initiatives that he felt were critical for educational improvement and would put his stamp on the School District of Philadelphia. These included: a strict zero tolerance discipline policy and the establishment of new alternative schools for students who violated the code of conduct; the transition to K-8 schools and the elimination of middle schools; and facilities improvements, including the financing and construction of nine new smaller high schools. He also announced plans for a reinvigorated focus on academic standards and accountability, utilizing extended day programs and summer school for students scoring "below basic" on standardized tests. Finally, he proposed a five-year financial plan to support these initiatives, coupled with a rigorous search for unused and mismanaged funds, which he anticipated would save the District several million dollars a years.

In 2003-2004, Vallas plans further initiatives to improve the quality of instruction. All elementary and middle school students will be required to have 120 minutes of literacy and 90 minutes of math daily, using district-wide curricula in literacy and math. Academic Coaches in literacy and math assigned to each school will support these efforts. New Teacher Coaches, a newly created full-time position, will each work with ten beginning teachers throughout the academic year, as well as provide extensive professional development for teachers. Students will be released early for two hours a week twice a month so that teachers can attend professional development sessions during the school day. While Vallas is especially concerned with the 70 lowest-performing schools, he is aware that over 180 schools in the district have been designated by the state as "in need of improvement" under the mandate of NCLB. As CEO of the whole district, Vallas cannot just focus on the lowest performing schools in the District.

Conflicting Theories of Action Underlying The Reforms

Many observers of Vallas, including those in his own administration, have characterized him as "wanting 20 things done all at once and yesterday. If you hear him say something three times, you need to follow up on it." Despite this outward coherence of message, underlying the many initiatives to reform the Philadelphia education system are several theories of action concerning governance, pedagogy and finances, some of which decidedly conflict with others.

Governance

On the one hand, the district is committed to implementing the diverse provider model, and in fact Vallas said this spring that he wants to expand to more providers (mostly university and non profit) in the future. Each of the EMO's has a contract with the district to provide its model of education. This theory of action puts faith in a decentralized and privatized approach to improving education. At the same time, Vallas' district-wide initiatives in areas such as curriculum, professional development, discipline, and facilities put stock in the power of a heavily centralized approach to school reform.

Teaching and Learning

Similarly in the area of teaching and learning, there are two somewhat contradictory approaches on how to grow the academic capacity of the children. On the one hand, there is an emphasis on teacher development and the belief that teacher coaches and the selection of common curricula - a balanced literacy curriculum in reading, language arts, and writing and a problem solving, applied curriculum in mathematics - is the way to improve the quality of instruction and the learning process of students. In many respects, this theory of action conflicts with the notion that a heavy emphasis on accountability and test preparation using "drill and kill" approaches, especially during the extended day programs, and the unquestioned reliance on standardized tests to measure student learning will improve the academic outcomes of students.

School Finance

Finally, there are competing theories of action related to the financing of education in the district. On the one hand, there is the theory that money is not the problem and that the district should be able to use its existing funding more efficiently. In fact many of the private providers initially advertised that they could use the same per pupil dollars and produce better academic results. They believed they could also make a profit by using money more efficiently. (Indeed, Vallas has found millions of dollars that were being misused or underutilized in the Philadelphia school budget.) On the other hand, there is the theory that poorly performing schools in urban areas are failing because they don't have adequate funding necessary to deal with the many extra

expenses associated with English Language Learners, special education students, the effects of poverty, etc. In the past, the state has been unwilling to give extra funding to Philadelphia to compensate for the money lost since the 1993 legislation. However, in order to support the diverse provider model, the state legislature has given substantial extra dollars to the EMO schools, the ORS schools, and the schools with university partnerships. This spring, when Vallas tried to level the playing field and give each of these entities the same \$450 per pupil extra for the 2003-2004 school year, several of the EMO's, particularly Edison, argued that they needed all the extra funding they had this year to continue their model. The state then overrode Vallas' decision and kept the distribution of extra state funds to the different managers at levels similar to this year, although the for-profit private providers' fees were reduced to \$750 per pupil. At the same time, Vallas cancelled the contract of one of the private for-profit providers, Chancellor Beacon, on grounds that it had not used its money well and did not have a significant presence in its schools.

Tentative Conclusions about the First Year under Diverse Providers

The multiple layers of reform in Philadelphia are complicated. The results of the varied interventions will emerge gradually. This year I, along with a team of researchers at Research for Action, have been collaborating in an examination of the ways in which the diverse provider model has been implemented in the lowest performing schools. Our research has involved a series of interviews with principals in twenty of the lowest performing elementary and middle schools that are being managed by the range of for-profit and not-for-profit companies, university partners, as well as ORS and charter schools. We have also participated in a series of day-long intensive site visits to schools as participants in the School Works evaluation process mandated by the state.

Over the four years of the study in which Research for Action plans to follow developments in the district, we believe it will be possible to begin to say what has succeeded or not made much difference in the areas of student performance and school improvement. The public and legislators, however, are primed to know answers much more quickly. They want to see, for example, which of the school managers' approaches can produce results, especially in student learning, right away. They are inclined to use test scores after one or two years of reform as evidence of what works. Wisely, Vallas has said that it is too soon to know which models are working and in what levels of schools. Other than Chancellor Beacon, Vallas has said that he will wait until next year to make decisions with the SRC about which of the providers to keep. Meanwhile, he seems to be leaning toward the ORS model. Next year all of the regular schools in the district will be implementing several features of the ORS model, such as 120 minutes for literacy and 90 minutes for math in elementary and middle grades, coaches in math and literacy, and professional development twice monthly for two hours during the school day.

While most of the public and legislators are interested in learning which providers' approaches or models are most successful, especially in improving student test scores, our initial research has found that no one approach has been uniformly successful or unsuccessful at every school in which it has operated. Rather, there is probably as much or more variance within the schools under a given manager as across them. Every manager has some schools which are working well and some that are not-some schools in which the teachers and the principal have worked together to make learning central and some schools where this is less the case. The middle school grades are, in general, less successful than the elementary ones, although there is some variation here as well. Rather than the model itself being critical to what occurs in a school, we have found that it is the existing capacity, especially principal leadership, at even the lowest performing schools that has been key in determining how well the school is doing.

While a manager's approach is assumed, in theory, to be implemented systematically across all of its schools, in many cases, the critical factor has been a principal who has pushed back and adapted the model to his or her school. The working hypothesis underlying the diverse provider model is that it is largely the manager's model that will make the difference in student outcomes. However, we have tentatively concluded that top down, command and control model of school improvement by managers has not been the key factor in many of the most successful schools in each model. Rather it seems that individual schools are successful when principals rely on their professional judgment and adapt the manager's approach to build a professional learning community, even to the point of being subversive of the manager's directives in some instances.

In our interviews with principals in the takeover schools this year, we found that many felt that they were serving two masters - the EMO and the Central Office, which retained control over testing, budgets, and compliance with special education requirements. This created both confusion and distress, but also the opportunity for creative problem solving on the principals' parts. We also found that principals in most schools felt that their performance and the performance of the school would be judged largely on test score results, which for some was an overly narrow conception of what the principals believed they had achieved in their schools. In fact, a few said that the need to give students grade level tests, when many students were well below grade level, was highly problematic, since the tests were not sensitive enough to show improvement in student achievement, when in fact there might have been some.

In subsequent years Research for Action, with lead funding from the William Penn Foundation, will continue to follow the dynamic trajectories of the schools under diverse providers. In addition, RFA plans to use both quantitative and qualitative research methods over the life of the study to examine issues such as: the effects of the reforms on teacher quality, including new initiatives in the areas of teacher recruitment, hiring and retention; the effects on student achievement using approaches which show the value added to the performance of individual students by school and which examine the impact of the way extra funds are allocated in different school models; the effects of the reforms on individual schools, using case studies to document successful practices which include not only within schools factors but also the role of community and parents in creating greater school capacity; and, the potential of the reforms to spur increased civic capacity to support public education in Philadelphia and conversely the influence of civic engagement on the shape of the reform itself.²

Notes

1 Research for Action (RFA) is a Philadelphia-based non profit organization engaged in educational research and evaluation. Founded in 1992, RFA works with public school districts, educational institutions and community organization to improve the educational opportunities and outcomes for those traditionally disadvantaged by race/ethnicity, class, gender, language/cultural difference and ability/disability. From 1995-2000, RFA, in partnership with the Consortium for Policy Research in Education, conducted a five-year evaluation of the Children Achieving reforms. [back](#)

2 Research for Action is leading a collaboration of researchers including scholars from the Philadelphia Education Fund, the University of Pennsylvania, Rutgers University and Swarthmore and Ursinus Colleges and the Consortium on Chicago School Research in its study of Philadelphia reform, *Learning from Philadelphia School Reform: A Research and Public Awareness Initiative*. Lead funding for this project comes from the William Penn Foundation with additional support from the Samuel S. Fels Fund and The Pew Charitable Trusts. [back](#)

Eva Travers

Eva Foldes Travers is a Professor in the Department of Educational Studies at Swarthmore College, where she has taught since 1975. During that time she was Chair of the Program in Education for more than twenty years. Her specialized teaching areas are Urban Education and Educational Policy. In addition, she teaches sections of the Introduction to Education (a course that over 1/3 of all Swarthmore undergraduates take), Social Studies Methods workshops, and supervises student teachers. Her research and scholarly writing has included work on teacher quality and teacher education in liberal arts colleges, a longitudinal study of women's personal and political development, and changes in the teaching of history and civic education in Hungary since the democratic transition in 1989. Recently, as part of a team of scholars working with Research for Action, her research has focused on aspects of the reorganization and reforms occurring in the School District of Philadelphia under state takeover.

[Report accessibility issues and request help](#)

Copyright 2025 The University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education's Online Urban Education Journal

Source URL:<https://urbanedjournal.gse.upenn.edu/archive/volume-2-issue-2-fall-2003/philadelphia-school-reform-historical-roots-and-reflections-2002->