



## **Philadelphia: Private Partners in Public Education**

Allan Joseph Medwick &  
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### **ABSTRACT**

After completing its first year under the guidance of the School Reform Commission and CEO Paul Vallas, the School District of Philadelphia is proud to share its success in this introductory paper for the Innovations in Education Conference. The School District has a long history of reform, building from David Hornbeck’s 1994 “Children Achieving” initiative to the 2000 Philadelphia School District Improvement Plan. Following the state takeover of the District in late 2001, the District commenced its most progressive era of reform to date; newly appointed CEO Paul Vallas implemented the “diverse provider” model and began systematically contracting with for-profit education companies, businesses, foundations, cultural institutions, and local institutions of higher education. What resulted was a vast array of public/private partnerships designed to deliver a wealth of resources to Philadelphia schools at minimal cost to the District. This paper highlights the formation and purpose of these partnerships and presents some recommendations and lessons learned, in order to facilitate the replication of the “diverse provider” model in other large, urban school districts across the nation.

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**Philadelphia: Private Partners in Public Education**

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*Innovations in Education Conference:  
Building a Public/Private Partnership Model for K-12 Reform  
Sponsored by the School District of Philadelphia*

Drexel University Campus  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
October 7-8, 2004

This paper was commissioned by the School District of Philadelphia’s Office of Development.  
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## **Acknowledgements**

The authors would like to thank everyone involved in partnerships with the School District of Philadelphia, with special thanks to the following people for their help in the preparation of this paper:

### **State Government**

Governor Mark Schweiker (R)  
Former Governor of Pennsylvania  
President and CEO, Greater Philadelphia  
Chamber of Commerce

Senator Anthony Williams (D)  
PA State Senator, District 8

### **State Department of Education**

Charles Zogby  
Former Secretary of Education

### **School District of Philadelphia**

James Nevels  
Chairman, School Reform Commission

Paul Vallas  
Chief Executive Officer

Ellen Savitz  
Chief Development Officer

Sheila Royal-Moses  
Director, University Partnerships

### **Victory Schools**

Erik Heyer  
Executive Vice President

Dr. Margaret Harrington  
Chief Operating Officer

### **Edison Schools**

Richard Barth  
Senior Vice President

### **Foundations, Inc.**

Dr. Philip Esbrandt  
Executive Director

### **Universal Companies**

Abdur-Rahim Islam  
President & Chief Executive Officer

### **Drexel University**

Ilene Appel Marker  
Associate Dean for School Partnerships

### **Temple University**

John DiPaolo  
Executive Director of Partnership Schools

### **University of Pennsylvania**

Dr. Nancy Streim  
Associate Dean for Graduate and Professional  
Education

Dr. Jeanne Vissa  
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### Introduction

*“The good Education of Youth has been esteemed by wise Men in all Ages, as the surest Foundation of the Happiness both of private Families and of Common-wealths. Almost all Governments have therefore made it a principal Object of their Attention, to establish and endow with proper Revenues, such Seminaries of Learning, as might supply the succeeding Age with Men qualified to serve the Publick with Honour to themselves, and to their Country.”*<sup>1</sup>

In 1749, Benjamin Franklin penned the above words in *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania*. Franklin hoped that these proposals would foster a spirit of intellectual inquiry and joy in learning throughout his Commonwealth. He recognized the importance of education in training future leaders, building a healthy economy, and generally securing a strong and sustainable democracy. In September 1776, just two months after the signing of the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia, the people of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania concurred: “Grateful...for the blessings of religious and civil liberty,” they provided in their Constitution “for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of public education to serve the needs of the Commonwealth.”<sup>2</sup> Historically, Pennsylvania has believed in the importance of an effective, egalitarian public education system. It is no accident, then, that the Commonwealth and its largest city currently stand at the forefront of education reform.

Since Franklin’s time, the opportunity to attend public schools has been extended to youth regardless of race, religion, gender, national origin, or disability. Yet Philadelphia, like other large, urban school districts, has had difficulty providing a thorough and efficient public education system for its residents. Material shortages, discipline problems, outdated curricula, and widespread apathy increasingly undermined the efforts of students and educators to learn and teach. In 2002, years of decline finally resulted in the largest state takeover of a school district in the nation and the adoption of the “diverse provider” model for the district’s poorly performing schools. Today, students in the School District of Philadelphia reap the rewards of Public/Private Partnerships. Their classrooms are well-supplied through the generosity of businesses and foundations; their teachers are enriched by university professional development courses and aided by classroom coaches and tutors. They are invited to participate in both

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<sup>1</sup> Franklin, Benjamin. “Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania” (October, 1749). *Writings*. Ed. J. A. Leo Lemay. New York, N.Y.: Literary Classics of the United States, 1987, p. 324.

<sup>2</sup> *Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*. Available: [http://sites.state.pa.us/PA\\_Constitution.html](http://sites.state.pa.us/PA_Constitution.html).

academic and non-academic programs run by local non-profit organizations and their schools are managed according to the fresh, innovative methodologies of for-profit education management organizations, community development groups, and institutions of higher learning. After just one year, Philadelphia's "diverse provider" model has already proven successful. Students at the 45 partnership schools performing at or above the national average on the *TerraNova* assessment increased by 1.2 percentage points to 21.1 percent in reading, by 1.8 percentage points to 21.6 percent in language arts, and by 2.3 percentage points to 21.8 percent in math. In addition, the percentage of partnership school students performing at the lowest levels, as measured by the bottom quartile, decreased by 2.2 percentage points to 48.5 percent in reading, by 2.5 percentage points to 47.8 percent in language arts, and by 3.1 percentage points to 49.7 percent in math.<sup>3</sup>

This paper will focus on the philosophical, procedural, social, and economic aspects of instituting partnerships. After examining the recent history of school reform in Philadelphia, it will describe the current partnerships between the School District of Philadelphia and six Educational Management Organizations (EMOs). It will also describe three of the many non-management partnerships in which the School District participates.<sup>4</sup> Finally, it will provide suggestions for leaders in education, government, and potential partnership organizations based on the experience of individuals involved in the Philadelphia partnerships. The authors hope that all attendees of the Innovations in Education Conference will value this paper as a thorough introduction to public/private partnerships and a blueprint for the proliferation of the "diverse provider" model in large, urban school districts across the nation.

### **The School District of Philadelphia**

*"The mission of the School District of Philadelphia is to provide a high quality education that prepares, ensures, and empowers all students to achieve their full intellectual and social potential in order to become lifelong learners and productive members of society."*

<sup>5</sup>

The fifth largest school district in the United States and the largest in Pennsylvania, the School District of Philadelphia operates 276 schools, employs over 11,000 teachers, and serves 210,000 students. Eighty percent of its students are eligible for free or reduced lunch and almost twelve percent are enrolled in special education programs. In 2001-2002, the School District of Philadelphia's operating budget was \$1.749 billion.<sup>6</sup>

The School District of Philadelphia is governed by the School Reform Commission (SRC), which is comprised of five members—3 appointed by the Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and 2 appointed by the Mayor of the City of Philadelphia. The School Reform Commission has no direct taxing authority and must submit a "lump sum" budget request to the

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<sup>3</sup> Lyons, Joe. Philadelphia Public Schools Show Continued Progress on Terranova Standardized Test. June 09, 2004. Available: [http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/communications/press\\_releases/2004/060904/terranova.html](http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/communications/press_releases/2004/060904/terranova.html).

<sup>4</sup> The School District of Philadelphia is grateful to all of its partners. For the purposes of this paper, "partnership" is defined as a very formal relationship, set out in a memorandum of understanding, and approved through the School Reform Commission resolution process. It does not include vendor relationships or sponsorships.

<sup>5</sup> School District of Philadelphia. School District Home Page. Available: <http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

City Council for its approval. A new management structure was approved in 2000, which replaced the position of District Superintendent with that of Chief Executive Officer.

### **A Brief History of School Reform in Philadelphia (1994 - 2001)**

*“[In] a bureaucratic system . . . **increase in expenditure** will be matched by **fall in production** . . . . Such systems will act rather like ‘black holes’ in the economic universe, simultaneously sucking in resources, and shrinking in terms of ‘emitted’ production.”<sup>7</sup>*

Between 1994 and 2001, the School District of Philadelphia embarked on two significant reform efforts. The first was Superintendent David Hornbeck’s plan for revitalizing the district entitled “Children Achieving.” The second was created under the auspices of the commonwealth’s Education Empowerment Act (Act 16) of 2000, which required districts with over 50% of students scoring in the bottom quartile of the Pennsylvania State Standards Assessment (PSSA) in two consecutive years to submit improvement plans aimed at raising test scores. Following arguments over funding, both reform efforts elicited vociferous debate and legal and political interventions.

#### ***Children Achieving: 1994-2000***

*“American public education is possibly the single most important institutional ingredient in maintaining a semblance of democracy.”<sup>8</sup>*

After serving as state superintendent in Maryland and authoring a sweeping overhaul of Kentucky’s public education system, David Hornbeck, an Oxford-educated theologian with a law degree from the University of Pennsylvania, became superintendent of the Philadelphia School District in 1994. With evangelical zeal, Hornbeck issued a challenge to Philadelphia’s citizens to get involved and help make Philadelphia the first major American city to succeed in having *all* of its children achieve at high levels. Hornbeck’s 10-point plan focused on standards, accountability, and decentralization.

Hornbeck’s ambitious vision and charismatic style initially gained him support from the business community, parents, teachers, and the mayor. Unfortunately, comprehensive change required substantial financial investment; Hornbeck began battling with the state legislature for funding. These disputes escalated in 1998 when Hornbeck threatened to submit an unbalanced budget if the commonwealth did not adjust its aid formula. Legislators defused his threat by passing Act 46, which authorized the commonwealth to take over the district if it fell into financial or academic distress. After this, the battle for funding moved to the courts. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled in 1999 that the state legislature must develop an equitable funding formula, but legislators continued to stall on the issue. At the same time, the district filed a federal civil-rights suit against the commonwealth alleging that the funding formula discriminated against schools with a high number of nonwhite students.

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<sup>7</sup> Friedman, Milton, and Rose D. Friedman. Free to Choose: A Personal Statement. 1st ed. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980, p. 155.

<sup>8</sup> The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. Commitment to Public Education Imperative for “Economic, Civic, and Moral Reasons”. March 19, 2002. Available: [http://www.ltsps.edu/news\\_events/2001-2002/0203\\_hornbeck.html](http://www.ltsps.edu/news_events/2001-2002/0203_hornbeck.html).

In 2000, John D. Street, the newly elected mayor of Philadelphia, began negotiating with Governor Tom Ridge to allocate an additional \$45 million to the district to avoid the state takeover. In exchange, Street promised to drop the federal lawsuit and cut school operating expenses significantly. Hornbeck, whose disputes with the commonwealth had reached a moral level, was unable to accept these terms and resigned in July 2000 without having realized his vision.

***Philadelphia School District Improvement Plan: 2000-2001***

*“This legislation frees school districts from mandates that have protected the status quo at the expense of children. We’re telling the education establishment that ‘business as usual’ is not acceptable, and we’re giving them the means to be innovative.”<sup>9</sup>*

After David Hornbeck’s resignation, the Pennsylvania Department of Education declared Philadelphia an “Empowerment District” under the authority of the Education Empowerment Act, which required school districts with a combined average of 50% or more of its students scoring in the bottom quartile of the PSSA in two consecutive academic years to submit an improvement plan to the commonwealth. The local Board of Education appointed an 11-member Education Empowerment Team, with statutorily-mandated representation from parents, principals, teachers, administrators, business owners, and citizens. In November 2000, the Team submitted its plan to the Board of Education. The four cornerstones of the plan included: high standards and expectations; accountability and assessment; intensive interventions for students not meeting high standards; and enhancing organization, order, and efficiency.<sup>10</sup>

Mayor Street appointed Philip Goldsmith, a successful businessman, as interim CEO of the School District. Goldsmith reversed many of the structural changes and cut many of the programs implemented under Children Achieving to reduce expenses. Despite Goldsmith’s efforts to implement the School District Improvement Plan, the district still faced an operating deficit of \$200 million in summer 2001.

Governor Tom Ridge awarded a \$2.7 million no-bid consulting contract to Edison Schools, a for-profit educational management organization. The contract was for an evaluation of the district and recommended improvements in the event of a state takeover district under Act 46.<sup>11</sup>

Three months later, Edison reported its findings, which included the recommendation that the state hire Edison to run 45 low-performing schools and manage the district’s central administration. Under this proposal, the Board of Education would play a less significant role and Edison employees would hold senior leadership positions and report to the commonwealth. Unwilling to relinquish control of the district to Edison Schools, Goldsmith resigned from the interim superintendency in December 2001.

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<sup>9</sup> Berlin, Alan. Legislature Approves Education Empowerment Act. 2000. Available: <http://www.halmowery.com/Releases/2000/sb652.html>.

<sup>10</sup> School District of Philadelphia. The School District Improvement Plan. Available: <http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/executiveoffices/pps/edemp1116.htm>.

<sup>11</sup> Lieutenant Governor Mark Schweiker succeeded Ridge as governor when President George W. Bush appointed Ridge as Director of the Office of Homeland Security

### **The School Reform Commission in Philadelphia (2001 - Present)**

*“The reformation of the Philadelphia public schools serves as a model for the entire nation. As the Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce touts the advantages of this region to the world, our rapidly improving public school system is an example that Greater Philadelphia is a progressive place to live and raise a family.”*<sup>12</sup>

On November 20, 2001, Democratic Philadelphia Mayor John Street and Republican Pennsylvania Governor Mark Schweiker reached an agreement that transferred control of Philadelphia’s public schools to the commonwealth. Under the revised terms, Edison Schools would serve as a consultant but would not manage the School District. The five-member School Reform Commission replaced the nine-member Board of Education appointed by Mayor Street in March 2000. Instead of the statutorily-mandated division of the appointments to the new School Reform Commission (four by the governor and one by the mayor), a compromise was reached allowing Street to appoint one additional commissioner. The term of office for the commissioners was set at four years and commissioners could only be removed from office by the governor for reasons of malfeasance or misfeasance in office.<sup>13</sup> Pursuant to Act 46 and consistent with the agreement between the Governor and the Mayor, the School Reform Commission took over operations of the School District of Philadelphia on Saturday, December 22, 2001.

For the first thirty days, the School Reform Commission consisted of James E. Nevels. Nevels is the founder and chairman of The Swarthmore Group, an independent minority-owned registered investment advisor headquartered in West Chester, Pennsylvania. Nevels’s experience extends beyond finance and law to include educational reform, having recently served as a member of the three-person Board of Control for the troubled Chester-Upland School District. The full School Reform Commission—Chairman James E. Nevels and commissioners James P. Gallagher, Sandra Dungee Glenn, Michael Masch, and Daniel J. Whelan—were officially sworn-in by Commonwealth Secretary Kim Pizzigrilli on January 18, 2002.<sup>14</sup>

On July 10, 2002, the School Reform Commission announced the selection of Paul G. Vallas as the School District’s chief executive officer. Vallas earned a national reputation for transforming Chicago’s school system from being branded “the worst in the country” to becoming “a model for the nation.”<sup>15</sup> As the former CEO of Chicago Public Schools, Vallas is credited with balancing the Chicago school district’s budget, eliminating waste, streamlining operations, building 76 new school buildings, renovating 500 existing school buildings, privatizing certain non-instructional services, and ending social promotion.

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<sup>12</sup> Schweiker, Mark. Declaration of Education. Available: <http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/declaration/page2.html>.

<sup>13</sup> The initial terms varied from three years to seven years to ensure that only a maximum of two members would be replaced in any given year. Gubernatorial appointments had to be ratified by the State Senate.

<sup>14</sup> Martin G. Bednarek replaced Michael Masch after Masch was appointed Secretary of the Budget by Pennsylvania Governor Edward G. Rendell on Jan. 21, 2003.

<sup>15</sup> School District of Philadelphia, SRC Selects Paul G. Vallas as Chief Executive Officer of the Philadelphia School District. July 10, 2002. Available at: [http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/src/press\\_releases/ceo\\_release.pdf](http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/src/press_releases/ceo_release.pdf)

## The Diverse Provider Model: A Key Component of Reform

*“As Adam Smith pointed out, when there are several butcher shops in a community, any butcher who is rude or tries to sell inferior meat at unreasonable prices soon loses business and income to other butcher shops.”*<sup>16</sup>

Around the year 1800, the word *entrepreneur* was coined by the French economist Jean-Baptiste Say. Say defined an entrepreneur as a person who “shifts economic resources out of an area of lower and into an area of higher productivity and greater yield.” Say critiqued government intervention into the economy by stating that consumer demand is best satisfied by the entrepreneur—whose success is not only valuable to the individual, but also essential to the society as a whole—and labeling government spending as “unproductive consumption.” Economic theory has evolved since Say’s time. Today, all economists recognize the failure of the market to provide socially desirable amounts of certain goods, referred to as public goods; but they disagree on how to provide these goods.<sup>17</sup> Since Horace Mann, the method of providing public education in the United States has been for government to both *provision* for public education and *produce* it in public schools.<sup>18</sup>

Many historians, sociologists, economists, political scientists, and educational theorists have written about the disadvantages—and sometimes, though rarely, the benefits—of the increasing bureaucratization of public education arising from its monopolistic organization. In fact, Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, has criticized schools as being the only institutions in which “If you do something good, nothing happens, and if you do something bad, nothing happens.”<sup>19</sup> The problems plaguing urban education are not a problem of having bad students, bad teachers, bad principals, or bad administrators—although in some instances they may be the cause of a particular problem—but rather of good people trapped in a bad system.

Philadelphia’s diverse provider model attempts to create a more adaptive system by giving parents greater choices and greater input related to their children’s education while maintaining strict accountability to the School District for standards and progress. Education management organizations (EMOs) innovate by tailoring important decisions that directly impact student achievement *to a particular academic and social environment* without suffering the consequences of mandating those decisions across a large school district. Adopting the diverse provider model is not a sign of weakness or failure; it is an acknowledgement that each school is unique within the system, important to both the students and the surrounding community, and capable of helping its students achieve their full potential. In this system, educational management organizations—whether for-profit, non-profit, or university—serve three major roles: the creation of economies of scale (since it is wasteful for individual schools not to share certain resources); the provision of additional resources (e.g., pedagogical innovations, expert

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<sup>16</sup> Watts, Michael. What Is a Market Economy? September 1998. Available: <http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/market/>.

<sup>17</sup> A public good is a commodity whose benefits are indivisibly spread among the entire community, whether or not particular individuals desire to consume the public good. The classical examples are national defense and lighthouses.

<sup>18</sup> Horace Mann became Massachusetts’s first Secretary of Education in 1837. His lifelong effort was to establish free, public, non-sectarian education for every man and woman.

<sup>19</sup> Hill, Paul Thomas, et al. Reinventing Public Education: How Contracting Can Transform America’s Schools. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997, p. 74.

trainers, and technology); and the monitoring of the contract with the School District. The individual success of an educational management organization *is* the success of the School District. They are equal partners in helping all Philadelphia students achieve.

### ***For-Profit Education Management Organizations***

#### *Edison Schools*

*“A world-class education must also be taught to clear and demanding standards. Accordingly, each field of Edison’s curriculum is guided by student academic standards that specify what students must know and be able to do to satisfy the expectations of each academy.”*<sup>20</sup>

Thomas Alva Edison was undoubtedly one of the most talented and productive inventors of his generation. In spite of receiving only three months of formal education, Edison invented the light bulb as a result of his desire not to build a better candle but to devise a new means of producing light. Similarly, Edison Schools was founded by Chris Whittle with the hope—not of improving the current educational system—but of devising a new system for educating students reflective of our nation’s democratic and capitalist tradition.

Founded in 1992, Edison Schools is the largest and most well-known of the for-profit school companies. Now a privately-held company, it was formerly a public company traded on the NASDAQ stock exchange. Edison Schools focuses on raising student achievement through its research-based school design, uniquely aligned assessment systems, interactive professional development, integrated use of technology, and other proven program features.

Edison is the School District’s largest partner, operating 20 Philadelphia schools with more than 12,000 students. Since the fall of 2002, Edison has managed 12 elementary (six K-5’s and six K-8’s) and 8 middle schools in Philadelphia. Edison’s Philadelphia partnership schools have implemented a comprehensive set of reforms designed to raise student achievement. The academic improvement initiatives include:

- Edison’s proprietary electronic assessment system aligned to state standards
- Unparalleled data analysis training and support
- Expert achievement advising
- Successful school organization
- Comprehensive new curriculum
- Extensive staff training with ongoing professional development for teachers
- Innovative leadership development
- Meaningful engagement of families and communities

These initiatives have succeeded. Data from the 2004 Pennsylvania System of Schools Assessment (PSSA) shows that Edison’s 20 Philadelphia partnership schools posted an average annual gain of approximately 10.2 percentage points in 5th and 8th grade students scoring at “proficient” or above in reading and approximately 9.6 percentage points in math. Across the board, the scores represent a profound departure from recent history. In the years prior to the

<sup>20</sup> Edison Schools. Curriculum. Available: [http://www.edisonschools.com/design/curriculum/d\\_cu0.html](http://www.edisonschools.com/design/curriculum/d_cu0.html).

Edison-District partnership, those same 20 schools had averaged annual gains of less than 1/2 of 1 percentage point.

Chris Whittle, Edison Schools Founder and CEO, has commented, “Edison is extremely proud to have contributed so positively to Philadelphia’s remarkable academic achievements. We salute CEO Paul Vallas, the School Reform Commission and its Chairman, Jim Nevels, and state education-reform leaders in Harrisburg for their bold leadership. They literally are making history and demonstrating to all of America that public-private partnerships can be a key component in unlocking the full potential of our nation’s schools and closing the achievement gap.”<sup>21</sup>

Edison’s performance in helping schools realize “Adequate Yearly Progress” (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind Act is impressive. Of the 64 schools targeted by the District for extensive reforms, 21 made AYP for the first time in 2004. Edison produced more than half of those 21 schools (11 of 21), even though it operates less than a third of the targeted reform schools (20 of 64).

School District CEO Paul Vallas is positive about the partnership with Edison: “Two years ago, Edison was assigned 20 of the most challenged schools in our District—far more than any other provider. They have clearly demonstrated their ability to take on this challenge and make a critical contribution throughout a period of transformation. They’ve operated as a true partner, consistently demonstrating leadership and integrity.”

“At its outset our partnership was a source of controversy—but neither the District nor Edison had time for controversy. Instead, we rolled up our sleeves and worked cooperatively, learning from each other and staying focused on our accountabilities to our students and their families. And the results are impressive. We still have much work to do—but this is a very heartening step. Our partners at Edison have been a critical part of our success.”<sup>22</sup>

### *Victory Schools*

*“Victory’s mission is to create exceptional schools for America’s children by combining the best elements of the public and private sectors.”*<sup>23</sup>

Victory began as the first manager of charter schools in New York State. In 1999, Victory opened New York State’s first charter public school, the Sisulu Children’s Academy in Harlem; it was followed by the Roosevelt Children’s Academy in Long Island and then the Merrick Academy in Queens. Victory was selected by the Baltimore City Public School System and the Baltimore Teachers Union to reform and manage a troubled elementary and middle school in 2001. After a successful public/private partnership in Baltimore, Victory entered into a partnership with the School District of Philadelphia to assist in the redesign and management of five underperforming Philadelphia public schools. Victory’s partnership spans grades K-8 and includes three elementary and two middle schools. At the Thomas FitzSimons Middle School, Victory has implemented a highly innovative plan to divide the school into two gender separate

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<sup>21</sup> Schools, Edison. Edison Schools Applauds Philadelphia School District’s Historic Leap in Student Achievement. August 24, 2004. Available: <http://www.edisonschools.com/news/news.cfm?ID=173>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Victory Schools, Inc. About Victory Schools. Available at: <http://www.victoryschools.com/new/about/index.asp>.

academies—FitzSimons Young Women’s Leadership Academy and FitzSimons Young Men’s Leadership Academy.

Victory’s mission is to create exceptional schools by combining the best elements of the public and private sectors. Victory is unique in its consultative approach to assisting public school districts; its strong emphasis on partnerships with all public education stakeholders; and its desire to provide the highest quality, most personalized service to the schools it serves. Victory has received many accolades from local Philadelphia organizations. For example, Dr. Marcienne S. Mattleman, Director of Literacy Initiatives, and Joseph Tierney, Vice President, of Public/Private Ventures, an action-based research, public policy, and program development organization, have commended Victory’s work in Philadelphia: “We have come to recognize the wealth of experience that Victory’s personnel can bring to the challenge at hand. We believe Victory Schools is an organization of exceptional quality that will operate effectively in the best interest of our public school children.”<sup>24</sup>

In 2003, Victory expanded its relationship with the School District of Philadelphia by assisting with the redesign and management of one additional middle school, as well as with the creation of two new small high schools in Northern Philadelphia. Victory is one of only two EMOs to receive an additional school in the second year of the program.<sup>25</sup>

Victory Schools is founded on the philosophy that all children can learn. In comparison to traditional public schools, Victory schools offer an extended school day, smaller class sizes, and more textbook spending per child. Students are required to wear student uniforms and adhere to a behavior management plan that fosters social development and maturity at the earliest ages. Victory provides its schools higher levels of personal attention and supervision from senior education professionals than regular public schools receive, and increases parental involvement in their child’s learning and school governance.

Victory’s curriculum model and school design is generating improvements. Students at the 5 partnership schools performing at or above the national average increased by 2.2 percentage points to 24.5 percent in reading, by 0.8 percentage points to 24.3 percent in language arts, and by 0.6 percentage points to 21.1 percent in math. In addition, the percentage of partnership school students performing at the lowest levels, as measured by the bottom quartile, decreased by 2.9 percentage points to 44.4 percent in reading, by 0.8 percentage points to 43.8 percent in language arts, and by 2.8 percentage points to 48.2 percent in math.<sup>26</sup>

A key element of Victory’s school design is a strong emphasis on community partnerships. Victory maintains high expectations for parents, as well as students. Its schools feature strong parent-teacher programs and an active role in school governance for parents. Parents are brought into the school through volunteer programs, open houses, and frequent communications with school faculty. Victory seeks school partnerships with outstanding local community leaders who care about the public schools, with businesses that are committed to investing in the future, and with local vendors to best employ community resources. This integration of school and community provides the support and services necessary to create high performing schools.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Victory Schools, Inc. What People Are Saying. Available at: <http://www.victoryschools.com/new/whatpeoplearesaying/about/index.asp>.

<sup>25</sup> The other EMO to receive an additional school in year two is Temple University.

<sup>26</sup> Office of Accountability, Assessment, and Intervention. Terranova Results by Management Type (Preliminary Results). School District of Philadelphia, June 9, 2004.

<sup>27</sup> Victory Schools, Inc. About Victory Schools. Available at: <http://www.victoryschools.com/new/about/index.asp>.

### ***Non-Profit Education Management Organizations***

#### *Foundations, Inc.*

*“Foundations is committed to improving the quality of educational opportunities for children and families by creating and providing products and services to schools and communities.”<sup>28</sup>*

Foundations has operated extended-day enrichment programs and provided technical assistance to schools, school districts and other education and community organizations since 1992. It has successfully participated in the reorganization of underperforming schools and the creation of new school designs in Philadelphia while working extensively in the growing charter school movement. In 2002, Foundations entered into a five-year educational services contract with the School District of Philadelphia to operate five schools located in the Germantown and Mt. Airy sections of Philadelphia: Robert Fulton Elementary, John L. Kinsey Elementary, Francis D. Pastorius Elementary, Clarence E. Pickett Middle and Ada H. H. Lewis Middle. One hundred and sixty-six faculty members staff these schools which serve over 3,000 children.

When she accepted the contract with the School District of Philadelphia, Foundations Chief Executive Officer Rhonda Lauer affirmed that the entire Foundations team was looking forward to collaborating with the reorganized School District. “While it is not easy, simple or inexpensive to turn around schools that have underperformed for an extended period,” she commented, “we are confident that with adequate resources and committed staff we can produce demonstrable, quantifiable results.”<sup>29</sup>

Dr. Margaret Briggs-Kenney coordinates the work of the five school principals. Foundations has purchased appliances and other amenities for faculty rooms at each school to show appreciation for future hard work and perseverance. Before the schools opened in September 2002, approximately 60 percent of the employees had already voluntarily hit the books for over 30 hours of staff development. They learned about the Foundations Academic Model for Excellence (FAME), whose theme is Where Success is Our Only Option. Written evaluations completed by staff members at the end of the training indicated a high degree of satisfaction with the FAME concept.<sup>30</sup>

Ongoing professional development is a hallmark of the FAME design. The staff was trained to serve as student advocates and interventionists beyond the classroom. They also learned computer software applications that promote student achievement and track performance. The model focused on two major goal areas during its first year—enhancing family and community involvement in the classroom and using individualized plans to set goals for students using a timeline to track improvement. Unfortunately, like the other private providers in Philadelphia, Foundations has not received all the money it says it needs to implement its full program in the five schools it is managing. Dr. Philip Esbrandt, Executive Director, commented, “We think

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<sup>28</sup> Foundations, Inc. Mission Statement. Available: <http://www.foundationsinc.org/AboutFolder/mission.asp>.

<sup>29</sup> Foundations, Inc. “Foundations, Inc. Eager to Apply Proven Educational Program in Four Philadelphia “Partnership” Public Schools after Receiving Approval from School Reform Commission.” August 9, 2002. Available at: <http://www.foundationsinc.org/NewsFolder/news-detail.asp?newsid=24>.

<sup>30</sup> Foundations, Inc. “FAME Staff Committed to Student Success.” September 12, 2002. Available at: <http://www.foundationsinc.org/NewsFolder/news-detail.asp?newsid=27>.

we've designed a good model for urban education. But these dollars don't permit this model to be comprehensively funded."<sup>31</sup>

In September 2003, Foundations added Martin Luther King High School to the portfolio of schools it manages for the School District. Students in the high school are now divided into four "houses," smaller educational units based on grade level that offer more personalized attention and instruction. The reorganization was the first of several initiatives designed to achieve Foundations' three major objectives for the year: a safe and positive school climate, a clean and inviting school building, and meaningful instruction in the classroom.

With school climate, safety, and facilities continuing to improve, Foundations has begun to focus on increasing the students' academic performance. To accomplish this, Foundations implemented a core curriculum for the 9th grade, started new after-school homework and tutoring programs, and developed a variety of professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators. Foundations plans to introduce additional new programs soon, including Junior ROTC and the International Baccalaureate program.

With the continued support of its partners—including the School District of Philadelphia, school community members, and local partners—Foundations is confident that it can achieve its goals.

### *Universal Schools*

*"Universal designs and implements high-quality community partnership programs, and parent-engagement initiatives to link student strengths and academic needs with meaningful, real-world learning experiences."*<sup>32</sup>

Kenneth Gamble is a Philadelphia success story. He rose from humble beginnings in South Philadelphia to achieve international fame in the music and recording industries. In 1980, Gamble became interested in low-income housing development. He assembled a team of fellow believers in urban rebirth and invested more than \$7 million of his own money to buy and renovate 120 vacant properties. After a career of touching people's lives through music, Gable launched Universal Companies in 1993. Philadelphia's largest place-based community development initiative, Universal is as much focused on the rebuilding of people as it is on houses. Gamble repeats the overarching refrain of Universal Companies' program, "Let's Rebuild the Ghetto." Gamble's view is that stable communities cannot survive unless residents of the redeveloped neighborhoods can prosper economically, nor can houses be sold at market rates unless the families that buy them have confidence in the quality of the schools and the safety of the surrounding streets. Human services are as important as bricks and mortar in the Universal plan.

Universal Companies is comprised of six divisions: Real Estate Development, Commerce and Economic Development; Business Support Center; Social & Youth Services; Workforce Development Center; and an Education Management Organization. The Universal Education Management Organization's goal is to create "School-to-Career" academic programs by supporting the student's academic, social and cultural growth by ensuring that young people

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<sup>31</sup> Mezzacappa, Dale. "The Philadelphia Experiment: Inside the schools targeted for change." The Philadelphia Inquirer, December 5, 2002. Available at:

<http://wwwFOUNDATIONSINC.org/NewsFolder/news-detail.asp?newsid=32>

<sup>32</sup> Universal Companies. Education Overview. Available: <http://universalcompanies.org/>.

receive a sound and comprehensive educational program, enhanced opportunities to continue their education, and enhanced support for their families. The partnership with the School District includes Vare Charter School, Pierce Middle School, and Stanton Elementary School.

The mission and focus of the Universal Education Company is the pursuit of academic excellence for all students, with an emphasis on significant and substantive partnerships between schools and community stakeholders. Universal's programs help to meet student strengths and academic needs and to provide meaningful, real-world learning experiences. This approach is driven by the shared belief in the need for continuous improvement and a hands-on approach to comprehensive school reform that is driven by assessment and focused on results.

There are many exciting initiatives in the Universal Education Management Organization. Through the Lightspan Network, teachers and students have access to a set of standards-based lessons, curricula, enrichment activities, family resources, professional development offerings, and teaching resources. This is enhanced by the Talent Development Middle School Model—a research based program facilitated by Johns Hopkins University—that features the Student Literature Program for language arts education, Hands-On Learning Modules in science education and the Everyday Math curriculum. An African and Afro-American Studies After-School Program combines academic tutoring and the promotion of positive self-identity, self-esteem, and an appreciation of the historical heritage of the African-American experience. The Automotive Academy Curriculum features coursework in surface finishing, basic assembling, and certificate-level training in dent and panel repair.

Universal has implemented a multi-faceted, systematic approach to teacher support based on National Staff Development Standards featuring monthly and weekend programs, content forums, summer institutes, and academic retreats. It has also designed protocols and procedures for educators and staff that support a student code of conduct focused on the development of positive school environments. It is complemented by its "Psychomotricity Initiative," an anger and emotional management program for primary-grade students emphasizing a "students at play" approach to conflict resolution.

Moreover, Universal places a concerted effort on connecting students and families to services provided by Universal Companies divisional programs, which include:

- Career readiness and workforce training
- Family-related health services, including drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs
- Financial literacy workshops
- Technology training
- Homebuyer education and home ownership/long-term rental opportunities
- Consultative services and funding for small business development

Near-term projects include expansion to other South Philadelphia public schools, the takeover and complete rebuilding of Audenreid High School, and development of a completely new secondary school.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Universal Companies. Education Overview. Available: <http://universalcompanies.org/>.

## ***University Management Organizations***

### *Temple University*

*“The mission of the Temple University Partnership Schools is to build a network of academically rigorous public schools in North Philadelphia where all teachers are knowledgeable about instruction, their students and the culture of the community, and where school staffs work together to share best practices, pursuing a vision of excellent instruction and achieving challenging student performance goals.”<sup>34</sup>*

Temple University President David Adamany is committed to improving the educational opportunities for students in the neighborhoods surrounding his university. To achieve his goal, Adamany has committed the entire university to providing leadership and support to a group of six public schools in its surrounding neighborhoods. The six “Partnership Schools” are in one of the poorest regions of Philadelphia and have very low student achievement.<sup>35</sup> The Temple Partnership includes four elementary schools—Duckrey, Dunbar, Ferguson and Meade—and two middle schools—Elverson and Wanamaker. The four elementary schools are becoming K-8 schools. The two middle schools have been slated for closure by the School District at the end of the 2004-2005 school year. The partnership is led by Executive Director John K. DiPaolo, a graduate of Yale Law School who has led significant efforts in public school reform.

The partnership seeks to improve instruction and student learning by leveraging the resources of Temple, the schools, and the School District. The School District provides an annual allocation of \$450 per pupil, for a total budget of approximately \$1 million. Temple contributes in-kind support for basic administration of the Partnership and access to many other University resources. Temple has also raised over \$500,000 from individuals and organizations to enhance programs in the schools. Over \$200,000 has come from federal grants, and \$215,000 is coming from a Temple alumna. These generous contributions allow all of the annual allocation from the School District to flow directly into the classroom.

Literacy is the top priority of the Temple Partnership. To lead its literacy initiative, Temple has brought literacy expert Professor Tom Gill to Temple as a special appointment professor to work with the partnership schools’ teachers and staff. Professor Gill has designed and led successful interventions in Philadelphia schools and elsewhere. Additionally, the partnership has hired five full-time “literacy coaches,” veteran teachers with strong backgrounds of success in teaching literacy. The literacy coaches work with the teachers as they learn and practice powerful pedagogical techniques. Coaches also lead professional development, and lead workshops on training days. Teachers have taken free graduate courses in elementary and middle school literacy over the last three semesters. During summer 2003, principals and lead teachers from all six schools participated in a ten-day “literacy institute”, providing them with a pedagogical foundation to bring back to their colleagues during the school year. Temple has also spent approximately \$500,000 in reading materials at all levels so students can substantially increase the amounts they read.

Temple’s second area of instructional focus is math. As its teachers implement *Everyday Mathematics*® and *Mathematics in Context*®, the partnership is supplementing the District

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<sup>34</sup> DiPaolo, John. [Temple University EMO Press Release](http://www.philsch.k12.pa.us/offices/communications/press_releases/2004/082404/emo_temple.html). August 24, 2004. Available: [http://www.philsch.k12.pa.us/offices/communications/press\\_releases/2004/082404/emo\\_temple.html](http://www.philsch.k12.pa.us/offices/communications/press_releases/2004/082404/emo_temple.html).

<sup>35</sup> Fewer than 20% of the approximately 2,300 students in the neighborhood schools read at grade level.

program with an innovative array of in-person and on-line training and tutoring opportunities for teachers and students.<sup>36</sup>

Temple's involvement with the Partnership Schools does not stop with literacy and math. For example, Temple is planning a "Surroundcare" initiative which will bring services from Temple and other sources to support the physical, psychological, and social health of students. Aspects of this initiative under discussion include health education by Temple medical students and clinical psychological services from Temple's psychology department, and a campaign to enroll all eligible students in public insurance programs managed by the University hospital system.

Temple students are also an important resource for the partnership schools. Last year, 110 Temple undergraduate students contributed 3,617 hours of volunteer tutoring in the partnership schools. Temple graduate students in education served as certified substitute teachers in the schools, giving them a positive first exposure to neighborhood schools and freeing classroom teachers to take part in important professional development opportunities provided by Temple. Several student organizations are proposing new initiatives to support the schools.

The Temple approach is paying off for partnership students. Last year, students scoring in the Below Basic category—the lowest on the PSSA—decreased by 9.1% in reading and 7.4% in math. Meanwhile, one school made adequate yearly progress for the second year in a row, removing it from the commonwealth's list of schools needing improvement; another school made adequate yearly progress for the first time.<sup>37</sup>

#### *University of Pennsylvania*

*"The [partnership] is dedicated to providing high-quality, enriching public education to children in West Philadelphia, through a child-centered, research-based instructional program that nurtures life-long learners and productive citizens."*<sup>38</sup>

The University of Pennsylvania (Penn) embarked on a three-year partnership with the Henry Lea School, William Bryant School, and Alexander Wilson School—three elementary schools in the West Philadelphia community—in July 2002. The Penn partnership is different from the other educational management organization relationships because it does not seek to manage all aspects of the schools. Penn agreed to a limited partnership that would focus exclusively on the five key areas that impact student achievement: curriculum, professional development, leadership, student assessment, and school climate. The goal was to create capacity through technical assistance and professional development within the framework of existing School District of Philadelphia structures and curricula. Since professional development is the main focus of the Penn partnership, the only condition that it imposed on the schools was an obligation

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<sup>36</sup> *Everyday Mathematics*® was developed by the University of Chicago Mathematics. *Mathematics in Context*® was developed by the Wisconsin Center for Education Research at the School of Education, University of Wisconsin–Madison and the Freudenthal Institute of the University of Utrecht, The Netherlands, with partial funding from the National Science Foundation.

<sup>37</sup> DiPaolo, John, [Temple University Partnership Schools](#). Temple University Office of Partnership Schools, July 2004.

<sup>38</sup> University of Pennsylvania Partnership. [About Us](#). Available: <http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/schools/pennalexander/aboutus.htm>.

for all teachers to commit themselves to 120 hours per year of professional development focused on the school's instructional priorities.

The Penn partnership seeks to establish a culture of shared accountability for improving student learning. Teachers, administrators, Penn partners, parents, and the students themselves working together and the presence of reciprocal responsibilities for student learning are hallmarks of the shared accountability model. Nancy Streim and Jeanne Vissa, the team leaders of the Penn Partnership Schools, comment:

Shared accountability demands that the entire school community know the learning standards; that teachers have the skills, strategies and attitudes to teach to the standards; that there is a regular discussion in the school about the quality of student work as demonstrated in ongoing assessments; and, that teaching and non-teaching staff accept collective responsibility for student success.<sup>39</sup>

The goal of the Penn Partnership model is “to build a community within the schools where examination of teaching practice is the norm, where there are regular and ongoing opportunities for school staff to enhance content knowledge, work together to expand their range of instructional strategies, and examine student data.”<sup>40</sup>

The Penn team sees its role as one of assisting schools: it aims to build academic environment conducive to achieving improvement, but the School District calls upon the Penn team leaders to act on all manner of budget, facilities, staffing, compliance, and other management issues. Most of these the team has deferred to the school principals. However, Penn team members often helped out by handling budget, ordering, and compliance tasks for schools, especially when principals had inadequate administrative support in their buildings.

The spring 2003 *TerraNova* assessments evidenced the partnership's positive impact. As a group, students in the Penn Partnership Schools made the largest improvements in reading and language skills in the School District of Philadelphia, achieving gains of 2.9% in reading and 7.5% in language over baseline scores from fall 2002. However, despite these promising achievements, approximately 40% of students still perform in the bottom quartile of the national percentile rankings. Rather than teaching to the tests, the Penn team is “attempting to bring the internal and external learning standards closer together through ongoing reflections of a professional community that works to develop more intentional teaching approaches and regular data monitoring.”<sup>41</sup>

One challenge of the partnership has been overcoming the impression of some staff and parents that Penn is only involved in the schools to conduct research. Another challenge has been trying to carry out its own vision in a “big city school system that moves forward with its own initiatives, policies, contractual agreements, and normal operating procedures and sweeps [the Penn Partnership Schools] along in its wake.”<sup>42</sup> The Penn team is greatly aided by the capable leadership and staff at the Office of Partnerships in the School District, but it still must

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<sup>39</sup> Streim, Nancy, and Jeanne Vissa. "Do Universities Have a Role in Managing Public Schools: Lessons from the Penn Partnership Schools." *Penn GSE: Perspectives on Urban Education*, Volume 2 Issue 2 (Fall 2003).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

spend time ensuring that the partnership schools are not penalized for their affiliation with an outside provider.

The School Reform Commission endorsed the Philadelphia experiment in school privatization as a three to five year initiative. The Penn Partnership has already begun to anticipate a day when Penn's relationship with the schools may change from managerial to advisory. The Penn team—by focusing on generating commitment to continuous improvement rather than a particular reform initiative—hopes that it has increased the schools' capacity to accelerate gains in student academic proficiency far into the future.<sup>43</sup>

### **Non-Management Partnerships**

*“The beauty of Philadelphia is that there are partnerships you can form all the time.”*<sup>44</sup>

The School District has engaged in a number of partnerships with local companies, universities, institutions, and organizations to enhance the educational opportunities available to students. Entrepreneurial school leaders have always searched for organizations willing to “adopt a school.” The difference is that the School District has created an office that specifically focuses on partnerships to ensure they are working with the schools in very strategic ways. By strategically engaging multiple and diverse partners, the School District has managed to enhance educational programs far beyond what would be possible with existing budget dollars.

The School District has deliberately cultivated partners for specific projects that support its strategic plans for improving teaching and learning in Philadelphia public schools. It has been creative, and perhaps even bold, in cultivating partnerships that have generated millions of dollars in services and resources for its schools, students and teachers. Partnerships have been created with various local and national corporations and institutions, such as The Academy of Natural Sciences, Apple, Comcast, The History Channel, The Franklin Institute, IBM, K-12 Inc., The Knight Foundation, Microsoft Corporation, National Constitution Center, Vanguard, Wachovia Foundation, and the William Penn Foundation. By doing its homework, and by taking a thoughtful approach to developing these partnerships, the School District and its partners have creatively leveraged resources that provide teachers and students with the tools they need to succeed.

Located in a region rich with institutions of higher learning, the School District has spent the past two years aggressively seeking support from colleges and universities to assist with very specific initiatives and goals. The response was overwhelming. The School District has enlisted several of Philadelphia's most respected teacher training institutions to provide teachers with graduate and certification coursework in their own school buildings. Partnerships have been created with many renowned colleges and universities, including:

Arcadia University	Lincoln University	West Chester University
Drexel University	Lock Haven University	University of the Arts
Eastern University	PA State System of Higher Ed.	University of the Sciences
Holy Family College	Rosemont College	
La Salle University	Saint Joseph's University	

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Vallas, Paul. Personal Interview with Erica Greenberg. Philadelphia, PA; 2004.

These partnerships help to create a well-educated team of District teachers, who are essential to the success of its students.

While all of the partnerships deserve to be highlighted, this paper will focus on the School District's partnerships with Rosemont College, Drexel University, and Microsoft Corporation. These partnerships represent only three examples of the very diverse group of partners. Participants in the Innovations in Education Conference will be able to speak with and learn about each of the School District's unique partners.

### ***Rosemont College***

*“Rosemont College is a community of learners dedicated to excellence and joy in the pursuit of knowledge. Rosemont College seeks to develop in all members of the community open and critical minds and the ability to make reasoned moral decisions.”*<sup>45</sup>

Rosemont College has partnered with the School District to expand and enhance the Rosemont Initiatives in Student Education (RISE) program. The principal objective of RISE is to foster college readiness and academic success among low-income, minority young women attending Philadelphia public schools. Founded in 1997 by Rosemont College, RISE has supported the college aspirations of more than 150 young women attending Bartram, Overbrook and University City High Schools. The RISE program is a three year program with two major components for students: a school year academic enrichment and mentoring program, and a residential summer session consisting of intense preparation in English, Mathematics, Visual Literacy and Technology.

This project boasts an impressive track record that clearly demonstrates its impact on critical areas including academic performance, SAT preparation, college acceptance and college completion. For the past two years, 100% of RISE students (40 students) have successfully completed high school. In 2003, 100% of RISE graduates attended post-secondary institutions; 85% attended four-year colleges. In terms of overall effectiveness, the attrition rate is impressively low, with an average of three dismissals per year throughout the program's seven-year history and nearly 90% of all entering students being retained for all three years of the program. Eighteen RISE graduates are currently enrolled in bachelor's degree programs at Rosemont College. Rosemont has made an generous and compelling financial commitment to annually award four full-tuition scholarships that include room and board. Since the founding of RISE, Rosemont College has provided total in-kind contributions of \$290,200 annually.

By continuing to encourage young women to reach their full academic and leadership potential and by helping teachers become better equipped to assist students in their academic and personal development, Rosemont College and the School District achieve their common goals of making quality education accessible to all students regardless of race or economic status. The RISE program offers a rare opportunity to strategically and successfully assist minority students in their academic and personal development.

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<sup>45</sup> Rosemont College. Mission Statement. Available: <http://www.rosemont.edu/root/main/about/index.html>.

### ***Drexel University***

*“To serve its students and society through comprehensive, integrated academic offerings enhanced by technology, cooperative education and clinical practice in an urban setting.”*<sup>46</sup>

Inspired by the success of previous joint initiatives, Drexel University and the School District of Philadelphia launched a formal partnership in August 2003. Funded by the School District, the partnership has brought a wide spectrum of Drexel resources into University City High School and seven of its feeder schools (Blankenburg, Drew, Leidy, Powel, Rhoads, and Martha Washington Elementary Schools, and the Middle Years Alternative School for the Humanities). The program is coordinated through the Pennoni Honors College’s Center for Civic Engagement and directed by Associate Dean for School Partnerships, Ilene Appel Marker.

The partnership aims to bring Drexel’s vast resources into the eight partnership schools. The Drexel team works closely with principals, administrators, staff, teachers, students, and parents to assess needs. The director then coordinates appropriate Drexel faculty, staff, and students who can meet these identified needs. The School District’s funds are used to compensate Drexel personnel for their services and to cover operational expenses of the school-based programs.

During its first year, the partnership initiated an array of programs. Over one hundred Drexel students, faculty, and staff provided the eight schools with services that included:

- Classroom and extended day coaching and tutoring
- IT infrastructure assessment, support and training
- Development and staffing of co-curricular activities
- Assistance for non-native English speaking students (and their teachers)
- Needs assessments in teacher professional development and health / lifestyle issues
- Business practices assistance
- Space for special events
- Assessment of the partnership itself

Armed with assessment information gleaned during the first year and strengthened by deepening relationships with teachers, school administrators, West Region officials, and the Drexel community, the partnership is looking forward to an exciting second year. They expect the second year to include: additional training to help integrate technology more fully into the curricula; continued classroom assistance; a pilot mentoring program focusing on academic achievement and goal-setting; a lecture series to expose University City High School Health Academy students to a wide variety of health sciences careers; new and expanded after-school programs; and many more projects.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Drexel University. University Mission Statement. Available: <http://www.drexel.edu/univrel/new/mission.asp>.

<sup>47</sup> Greenberg, Erica. Drexel University / School District of Philadelphia Partnership Summary. Available: <http://www.drexel.edu/cce/partnership/Publications/Drexel%20-%20School%20District%20Partnership%20Summary%20072204.pdf>.

***Microsoft Corporation and the “School of the Future”***

*“There are great schools, and we’ve found that they have three things in common. I’m sure you all remember the 3 R’s from your school days. We think that great schools all incorporate a new version of the three R’s: rigor, relationships, and relevance. Courses that challenge children, not bore them. One-on-one relationships with caring teachers who have a stake in their students’ success. Motivating curricula that relate to students’ lives and aspirations.”*<sup>48</sup>

The School District of Philadelphia and Microsoft Corporation are now collaborating on an ambitious task: to imagine and construct the “School of the Future,” a high school for 700-800 students in grades 9-12. Combining the best of what Philadelphia, industry, and education have to offer, this partnership aims to create a living blueprint for learning environments in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Microsoft had made known its interest in assisting the national school reform movement, specifically by establishing small schools that could improve student achievement by infusing technology across the entire curriculum and throughout the facility’s infrastructure. CEO Paul Vallas requested that Microsoft consider Philadelphia as the site of a prototype for the “school of the future.”

The school will mainly serve students from the West Philadelphia area as a neighborhood high school, but will provide opportunities for a percentage of students from the city at large. To be located in Fairmount Park—the largest landscaped park in the United States—the School of the Future will both take advantage of the tremendous resources that the city has to offer and become a valuable resource integral to the life of the community. The practices, processes, and learning generated in the school will be shared throughout the district so that all Philadelphia students may benefit from this undertaking. Designed to be replicable, the School District’s hope is to create “schools of the future” in other areas of the city.

The 160,000 square foot School of the Future will include twenty general classrooms, five science rooms, an art room, instrumental and voice music rooms, weight and fitness center, two gymnasiums (main and auxiliary), Interactive Learning Center (Media Center), food court, Performing Art Center (auditorium), and Special Education spaces. The curriculum is designed and technologically optimized to help teachers better establish the pace of instruction and evaluate student progress. The project will infuse technology into every aspect of the anytime, anywhere learning environment. Its end result will be a state-of-the-art educational institution that will advance students’ academic possibilities, prepare students for the future workforce, and optimize entry into the college, university, or technical school of their choice.

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<sup>48</sup> Gates, Melinda. Remarks by Melinda French Gates at the National School Boards Association Conference (Orlando, FL). March 29, 2004. Available: <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/MediaCenter/Speeches/MelindaSpeeches/MFGSpeechNationalSchoolBoard-040329.htm>.

## Best Practices: Recommendations For Creating Strong, Viable, Sustainable Partnerships

*“Whether a cat is black or white makes no difference.  
As long as it catches mice, it is a good cat.”<sup>49</sup>*

The following recommendations were compiled from interviews with various stakeholders in the Philadelphia partnerships. They are intended as general “words of wisdom,” suggestions from top School District and other officials on how to best implement their brand of reform—and how to avoid the pitfalls they suffered during the early stages of the “diverse provider” model. They are offered in the hopes that willing partners in Philadelphia and across the nation will embrace this model guided by the collective experience of its creators. Conference participants will have the opportunity to gain further knowledge and insights from current partners.

**THINK HOLISTICALLY:** The “diverse provider” model was developed to reform troubled urban schools and school districts comprehensively. School District CEO Paul Vallas offers indispensable advice on the precise value of systematic partnerships: “What we’re trying to do is institutionalize excellence, create choice, and do it in a way that’s financially affordable in a school system with 300 schools. When I talk about expanding choice, I’m talking about expanding opportunities for enrichment, expanding diversity in program offerings, expanding opportunities across the spectrum; I’m talking about choice in every category. If we’re going to transform this system into the type of school district that is going to deliver quality instruction—and deliver quality instruction that can evolve over time—then we have to invest in research and development. [Partners can help us pioneer] development in curriculum, technology, and the ability to train students for a new economy.”<sup>50</sup>

**PLAN STRATEGICALLY:** School District Chief Development Officer Ellen Savitz sets forth the “diverse provider” model’s best-case implementation: “[An ideal partner needs] something to bring to the table in terms of education and instructional theory and instructional delivery that forces us to look carefully at what we’re doing. We’re talking about best practices in the classroom. [Partners] have got to have a strategic plan; they have to know exactly what they’re trying to affect—the teachers’ behavior, the kids’ behavior, the climate in the classroom, the materials that they’re using. And we want them to focus...so that we can look at that and say ‘well there’s a best practice. They changed the nature of the materials and things really changed, or they changed the teachers’ behavior.”<sup>51</sup>

**ESTABLISH FORMAL PROCESSES FOR ENACTING PARTNERSHIPS:** Before the School Reform Commission, partnerships with the School District of Philadelphia were made with a handshake and a press release. Today, potential partners are directed to a single point-of-entry. The School District is able to work strategically with potential partners to find ways they can contribute that are meaningful for both the partner and the School District. The result of these discussions is the

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<sup>49</sup> Winters, Rebecca. “Grading the Philadelphia Experiment.” Time Magazine June 23, 2003 (Quoting Paul Vallas). The above is the common translation of the original statement by 邓小平 (Dèng Xiǎoping) about the adoption of capitalistic practices in communist China: “不论白猫黑猫, 能抓老鼠就是好猫.”

<sup>50</sup> Vallas, Paul. Personal Interview with Erica Greenberg. Philadelphia, PA; 2004.

<sup>51</sup> Savitz, Ellen. Personal Interview with Erica Greenberg. Philadelphia, PA; 2004.

drafting of a memorandum of understanding, which clarifies and articulates scope, structure, finances, evaluation, and other aspects of the partnership. The agreement is then signed by the chief executives of the two organizations. The result has been better planned partnerships that generate even larger benefits for all parties involved.<sup>52</sup>

**INVEST:** In speaking about her first encounters with the “diverse provider model,” Savitz recounts her feelings of liberation and delight: “‘Use this money carefully to make real change,’ [Paul Vallas told me], which is something that is fabulous for a person to hear. ‘Take this little bit of money, stretch it as far as you can, do things that clearly impact the kids in their daily lives.’ That is real power.”<sup>53</sup> In order to supplement that “little bit of money,” the School District procured “seed” funding to help defer the start-up costs of partnerships with non-profit organizations, especially institutions of higher education.<sup>54</sup> The partnership model is ultimately cost-effective—indeed, affordability is one of its primary assets—but its initial implementation occurs most smoothly when partners have some financial leeway. By investing in the partnership model from the outset, its long-term success is ensured.

**COMMIT TO QUALITY IMPROVEMENT:** The role of evaluation in education has come a long way from the basic “pop quiz,” but the rationale for it has not changed. The partnership organization without data is just another group with an opinion. Frequent evaluation allows those involved in the partnership and other interested stakeholders the opportunity to see how effectively the money allocated to the program has been used. Potential partners must be willing to adopt a model of continuous quality improvement. They must be held accountable (and hold themselves accountable) for measurable results and for developing plans to improve measures if they are not making adequate progress.

**KEEP AN OPEN MIND:** The “diverse provider” model is, in some regards, revolutionary. But it has yielded exceptional results. Savitz describes one of the greatest challenges she experienced during the model’s initial implementation: “We had a huge learning curve with the private managers. We didn’t know what they were about, they didn’t know what they were about, and on some levels, they felt like the enemy. It was very difficult for them and for us. That was, I think, one of the pitfalls that could’ve made the whole piece a big failure. But after a month or two, we began to really sit down with these people and work like partners and talk about the issues, and provide them support where they needed it. It has produced definitely better relationships among all the people that work for our organization and theirs, and it has definitely produced some dreams.”<sup>55</sup>

**COMMUNICATE THE PARTNERSHIPS:** An effective partnership communicates its intentions *internally* to all of its members. Through newsletters and press releases, information about the partnership, its framework, and its commitments must be shared throughout the organization, whether it be a business or the School District. It is sometimes difficult “getting people in the school (principal, teachers, advocates) to buy in,” cautioned Savitz. “That was a learning

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<sup>52</sup> Royal-Moses, Sheila and Ilene Marker. Personal Interview with Erica Greenberg. Philadelphia, PA; 2004.

<sup>53</sup> Savitz, Ellen. Personal Interview with Erica Greenberg. Philadelphia, PA; 2004.

<sup>54</sup> Royal-Moses, Sheila via email.

<sup>55</sup> Savitz, Ellen. Personal Interview with Erica Greenberg. Philadelphia, PA; 2004.

experience, as well. We now ask the partners to go to the school in their area (they've usually done something there before) and talk them about everything they need."<sup>56</sup> To the extent possible, it is extremely beneficial for potential partners to have positive relationships with administrators, teachers, parents, and students before it enters into a contract to provide school management. Once partners have successfully managed a small component of the school, for example, by running a portfolio of after-school programs, the school community is more willing to entrust a greater responsibility to them. Potential school-management partners should continually strive to earn the community's approval and support.

**MAINTAIN FLEXIBILITY:** Developing relationships and maintaining partnerships pose significant challenges. In their interviews, both CEO Paul Vallas and Ellen Savitz described the partnerships in terms of a "marriage." Savitz commented: "The main thing is establishing and maintaining really collegial relationships—really flexible relationships. Developing those relationships and maintaining these partnerships is a big, big challenge. People who are looking for a way to do this successfully have to think about maintenance as well as establishing (because you can establish great stuff and then it falls by the wayside, two personalities conflict in the school and then you're done). Then it's just sustainability. Sustainability never works easily. You have to work at it—once a week you have to go back and check, or once a month, and see if it's still working. It's very fluid, and the kids make everything complicated."<sup>57</sup> As in a marriage, one of the biggest tradeoffs partners must make is determining when to be "correct." The general rule is that partnering organizations should provide as much flexibility as possible, without encouraging anything detrimental to the overall progress of the District.

**BE MINDFUL OF ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIORS:** A school district is very different from all of the types of organizations with which it will seek to partner. Furthermore, organizations in the same classification will vary greatly from each other. School districts (1) do not exist for the private benefit of its members, (2) do not allocate the factors of production in accordance with the preferences of the organization's administrators, and (3) must serve goals not of the organization's own choosing. Control over revenues, production factors, and goals are all determined by entities outside of the organization—legislatures, courts, politicians, and interest groups.<sup>58</sup> School districts tend to be driven by the *constraints* on the organization and not the *tasks* of the organization. Partners need to be able to recognize, understand, and work within this framework for the partnership to be successful. Organizations whose core mission and philosophy combine well with that of the school district will have a much more successful partnership.

**CONSIDER POLITICS:** It almost seems too obvious to mention, but any potential partner will find itself, like it or not, engaged in politics. Peter Szanton mentions in *Not Well Advised*, "there are few findings and no recommendations which do not tend to advance the interests of some person or group or to jeopardize the interests of others."<sup>59</sup> A potential partner must understand that

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Wilson, James Q. *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It*. New York: Basic Books, 1989. p. 115.

<sup>59</sup> Szanton, Peter. *Not Well Advised*. New York: Russel Sage Foundation and the Ford Foundation, 1981. p. 133.

however innocent its intentions, its work will cause shifts in power, responsibility, role, and resources. The partner can expect to find its results attacked (and misrepresented), its motives questioned, its costs scrutinized, and its methods decried. It can also expect blame if its program tries and fails and little praise if they do work.<sup>60</sup> In a more general sense, undertakings like the one seen in Philadelphia require a large amount of political willpower. The partnerships that we see today would not exist if it was not for the perseverance of many politicians in Harrisburg and Philadelphia.

**WILLINGLY INSTITUTIONALIZE PARTNERSHIP:** It may not always be the right time for two organizations to enter into a partnership. There are many reasons for unsuitability, but the most common reason is actual or anticipated changes in leadership in either organization. Two other reasons include unfavorable political and economic circumstances. In the past, the responsibilities for a partnership might have been tacked on to a particular individual or group. When there were personnel changes, the partnership would suffer or end. Today, the School District is looking for partners willing to institutionalize the partnership. There must be support from the leadership of the partner organization, reflected by the designation of personnel to develop, implement, and manage its partnership. Institutionalization includes increasing awareness about the partnership and providing for its long-term planning and implementation.

## **Conclusion**

We hope that you have found this paper both informative and constructive. Lessons are learned everyday in the Philadelphia partnerships, and we urge you to follow them. Finally, we trust that the School District's continuing partnerships will generate a body of research that can be used to evaluate approaches for improving achievement in large, urban school districts.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 134.

## Appendix A: Recommend Resources

### *Books*

#### *Economics, Markets, & Public Policy*

Hazlitt, Henry. *Economics in One Lesson*. New York: Arlington House Publishers, 1979.

Lindblom, Charles Edward. *The Market System: What It Is, How It Works, and What to Make of It*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.

Rhoads, Steven E. *The Economist's View of the World: Government, Markets, and Public Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Savas, Emanuel S. *Privatization: The Key to Better Government*. Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House Publishers, 1987.

Savas, Emanuel S. *Privatization and Public-Private Partnerships*. New York: Chatham House, 2000.

Wheelan, Charles J. *Naked Economics: Undressing the Dismal Science*. New York: Norton, 2002.

Wolf, Charles. *Markets or Governments: Choosing between Imperfect Alternatives*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988.

#### *Education Reform & The Diverse Provider Model*

Hill, Paul Thomas, Lawrence C. Pierce, and James W. Guthrie. *Reinventing Public Education: How Contracting Can Transform America's Schools*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Hill, Paul Thomas, and Mary Beth Celio. *Fixing Urban Schools*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1998.

Hill, Paul Thomas, Christine Campbell, and James Harvey. *It Takes a City: Getting Serious About Urban School Reform*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000.

#### *Public Administration & Political Science*

Oakerson, Ronald J. *Governing Local Public Economies: Creating the Civic Metropolis*. Oakland, CA: ICS Press, 1999.

Osborne, David, and Ted Gaebler. *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit Is Transforming the Public Sector*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1992.

Wilson, James Q. *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It*. New York: Basic Books, 1989.

***Journals & Periodicals***

*Education Week* — <http://www.edweek.org/>

*Penn GSE Perspectives on Urban Education* — <http://www.urbanedjournal.org/>

*Philadelphia Public School Notebook* — <http://www.thenotebook.org/>

*The Economist* — <http://www.economist.com/>

*The New York Times* — <http://www.nytimes.com/>

*The Philadelphia Inquirer* — <http://www.philly.com/mld/inquirer/>

***Websites***

School District of Philadelphia — <http://www.philsch.k12.pa.us/>

Edison Schools — <http://www.edisonschools.com/>

Foundations, Inc. — <http://www.foundationsinc.org/>

Penn Graduate School of Education — <http://www.gse.upenn.edu/>

Temple University — <http://www.temple.edu>

Universal — <http://universalcompanies.org/>

Victory Schools — <http://www.victoryschools.com/>