

012: Renaissance Schools Initiative Policy

1. Purpose:

The Renaissance Schools initiative is articulated in the School District of Philadelphia's "**Imagine 2014**" strategic plan and is predicated on the belief that the School District has chronically underperforming schools that are not serving the needs of students and families and have not made adequate yearly progress as defined by state and federal laws, and that these schools need fundamental change to facilitate a transformation of the learning environment. With an urgency to dramatically improve the learning environment in these underperforming schools, the School District is seeking innovative ways to transform low-performing schools through new school models that include: in-district restructuring (Innovation Schools) and external partnerships (Contract Schools and Charter Schools).

This policy will set forth the manner in which the School District will implement and administer the Renaissance Schools Initiative.

2. Definitions:

- a. **Renaissance School:** A Renaissance School is a School District public school that serves the students in the surrounding neighborhood or catchment area. There are three forms of Renaissance Schools: Innovation, Contract, and Charter. Each of these models has unique features, but all forms of Renaissance Schools will be granted greater autonomy in exchange for increased accountability.
- b. **Innovation School:** Innovation Schools are School District-managed schools with autonomy over aspects of school operations in exchange for greater accountability for school performance. Schools will use the increased autonomy to create a school culture and academic program that supports high expectations and achievement. School autonomies and accountability standards will be defined as part of a Performance Agreement that is established at the inception of a new Innovation School. All Innovation School staff will be School District employees and will remain members of their applicable collective bargaining units. Promise Academy Schools fall under this category.
- c. **Contract School:** A Contract School is a School District school that is managed and staffed by an external organization. The external organization (whether a for-profit or anon-profit entity) is responsible for managing all aspects of the school, including the employment of school staff under a reconstituted design and program. The School District will enter into a contract with the organization that specifies the responsibilities of both parties and establishes accountability for Contract School performance. The contract will include provisions outlining requirements for student enrollment, student achievement, data reporting, grade configuration, facilities, and inclusion in the School Annual Report and other District accountability systems. The external organization will have autonomy over the school's allocated budget and staffing.
- d. **Charter School:** A Charter School is an independent Local Education Agency with a charter school board of trustees to oversee all elements of school curriculum and operations. The relationship between charter schools and the School District shall be accordance with the Pennsylvania Charter School Law and with the charter agreement between the School District and the charter school's board of directors. In order to adhere to the mission of the Renaissance Schools initiative and to maintain high levels of accountability, Renaissance charter agreements will include provisions outlining requirements for student enrollment, student achievement, data reporting, grade configuration, facilities, and inclusion of the Renaissance Schools charter school in the School Annual Report and other School District accountability systems. The provisions will include stringent academic requirements for turnaround school success that may exceed performance targets for non-Renaissance Schools charter schools. These provisions will also be used as a basis for a decision to renew, not renew or revoke a Renaissance Schools charter at the end of its term.
- e. **Turnaround Team:** An individual or organization selected to turnaround and manage a Renaissance School.
- f. **Performance Agreement:** Agreement to be signed by the leadership team of an Innovation School and the School District of Philadelphia that will stipulate performance measures by which the school will be evaluated.

3. Renaissance Schools Policy

a. Identification of Eligible Renaissance Schools: Renaissance Schools will be selected using multiple criteria, including:

- i. Designation as a Corrective Action II school as defined by the No Child Left Behind Law.
- ii. Comprehensive student performance data which may include: standardized test results, retention rates, and graduation rates.
- iii. Opportunity to identify clusters of low-performing schools that would include a low-performing high school and a low-performing feeder elementary/middle school.
- iv. Targeted to most academically at-risk and previously underserved students.
- v. Results of school audits conducted to assess the school's capacity to achieve dramatic improvements in student learning without the need for transformative Renaissance School intervention.
- vi. Other measures as determined by the Superintendent.

b. Soliciting Renaissance Turnaround Teams

- i. The School District shall issue a public solicitation for proposals from individuals or organizations interested in the conversion, management, and support of Renaissance Schools.
- ii. Through the public solicitation process, individuals or organizations interested in an Innovation School, a Contract School, or a Charter School may respond.
- iii. The proposals submitted will form the basis of any performance agreement, contract or charter agreement entered into with the School District. The resulting performance agreements, contracts, and charter agreements may contain provisions for academic student growth, student enrollment, grade configuration and data reporting. Adherence to these provisions will be used to determine compliance with the terms of the Performance Agreement, contract, or charter agreement.
- iv. The District shall have additional requirements for the solicitation of proposals for charter schools:
 - (a) Charter school proposals submitted must address all required elements of a Renaissance School as set forth in the solicitation. For the charter school model, a formal charter school application will be required to be submitted in a form and manner to be determined by the School District, and said application must contain all of the information required by the School District in the solicitation for proposals or it will not be considered.
 - (b) Charter school applications will be solicited by the School District pursuant to this Policy in order to convert eligible Renaissance Schools into charter schools. Applications voluntarily submitted as part of the Renaissance Schools initiative in response to the School District's solicitation for proposals will be governed and processed in accordance with this Policy and the solicitation for proposals developed by the School District, and will not be governed and processed in accordance with the School District's Charter School Policy.
- v. The Superintendent reserves the right to establish Innovation Schools outside of the public solicitation process. These schools will otherwise be established as Innovation Schools with performance agreements that stipulate performance measures by which the school will be evaluated.

c. Renaissance School Advisory Councils (RSACs)

A representative council of community members and stakeholders will be formed at each Renaissance School. The RSACs will review finalists' proposals from the public solicitation process and solicit broader community feedback in order to make a recommendation to the Superintendent on Turnaround Team-school matches. RSAC members will continue to be engaged with the Renaissance Schools after the matches are made and will play a role in the transition, monitoring and ongoing support of Renaissance Schools.

If the Superintendent elects to establish Innovation Schools outside of the public solicitation process (3.b.v), the Superintendent may establish RSACs to play a role in the transition, monitoring and ongoing support of Renaissance Schools.

d. Matching Process for School Communities and Turnaround Teams

Renaissance Turnaround Teams and Renaissance Schools shall be matched based upon how well the proposed school design meets the needs of the respective schools. The matching process will solicit community input through the RSACs. The Superintendent will make the final recommendation on Renaissance Turnaround Team and Renaissance School matches to the School Reform Commission ("SRC"). The Superintendent reserves the right to recommend Innovation School matches with schools and Superintendent-identified Turnaround Teams that are established outside of the public solicitation process (3.b.v). The SRC will then vote to authorize Performance Agreements and/or contracts and to grant charters.

e. Governance

The governance structure of Renaissance Schools shall be determined based on the form of school.

- i. Innovation Schools: An Innovation School is a School District school and shall be governed by the School District following the established School District reporting structure.
- ii. Contract Schools: A Contract School will be managed and staffed by an external organization under contract with the School District, and shall be governed by the School District following the established School District reporting structure.
- iii. Charter Schools: A Charter School shall be governed by an independent board of trustees pursuant to the Pennsylvania Charter School Law.

f. Applicability of SRC Policies and Other Laws

Where appropriate and in accordance with Pennsylvania law, the School District may waive or offer exemptions to certain policies or laws when those policies, regulations or laws may inhibit the implementation of the Renaissance Schools initiative. Exemptions to or waivers from any applicable law or policy shall be identified in each school's Performance Agreement, contract, or charter.

g. Accountability

- i. Innovation Schools: A Performance Agreement for an Innovation School will set out the accountability requirements for the school and may be for a term of up to five years. The Superintendent or her designee shall evaluate the Innovation School annually for compliance with the accountability requirements set forth in the Performance Agreement. Further, Innovation Schools shall be evaluated by the Superintendent or her designee on a cumulative and comprehensive basis at the end of the term of the Performance Agreement. Following such cumulative evaluation, the School District has the discretion to renew, terminate, or modify the Performance Agreement.
- ii. Contract Schools: The contract for a Contract School will set out the accountability requirements for the school and may be for a term of up to five years. The Superintendent or her designee shall evaluate the school annually to assess compliance with the accountability requirements and procedures set forth in the contract. During the final year of the term of the contract, the management organization may submit an application for a renewal of the contract. At that time, a cumulative and comprehensive evaluation shall be conducted by the Superintendent or her designee. Following such cumulative evaluation, the School District has the discretion to renew, terminate, or modify the contract.
- iii. Charter Schools: Charter Schools shall be governed by the terms of the charter agreement between the School District and the board of trustees of the charter school. The initial term of the charter agreement shall be for a term of up to five years. The Superintendent or her designee shall evaluate Renaissance charter schools annually to monitor the progress and performance at the school and compliance with the goals and targets listed in the charter agreement. During the term of the charter, the School District may revoke the charter in accordance with the Pennsylvania Charter School Law. In the final year of the term the charter agreement, the charter operator may submit an application for renewal of the charter. At that time a cumulative and comprehensive evaluation shall be conducted by the Superintendent or her designee. Following such cumulative evaluation, the School District has the discretion to renew or non-renew the charter.
- iv. Intervention: Nothing in this Policy or any performance agreement, contract, or charter agreement shall prevent the School District from intervening in a Renaissance School where warranted to protect students' academic interests, to ensure the health or safety of students or staff, or to protect the fiscal interests of the School District or the SRC. Such intervention may include revocation of a Renaissance Charter School's charter, termination of a Contract School's Contract, or rescission of an Innovation School's Performance Agreement. Each Renaissance School's Charter Agreement, Contract, or Performance Agreement shall specify the criteria and processes for such intervention, including charter revocation, contract termination, and Performance Agreement rescission.

h. Student Assignment

Renaissance Schools shall not exercise selective testing or erect other barriers to admission. All Renaissance Schools must enroll and serve all grade appropriate students that were enrolled at the school at the time of Renaissance School designation. Students who attend or through feeder patterns are slated to attend a school that is designated a Renaissance School shall be guaranteed a seat in the new school, subject to space limitations of the school. The SRC reserves the right to establish other student assignment processes, including but not limited to, establishing a school without attendance boundaries and providing for open, city-wide enrollment either by lottery or

other criteria.

4. Implementation of this Policy

Subject to the direction and approval of the Superintendent, the Office of Charter, Partnership and New Schools, or an office designated by the Superintendent, is responsible for the implementation of this Policy and the procedures set forth herein, in accordance with applicable law including but not limited to the Pennsylvania Public School Code.

References:

All actions taken by the School Reform Commission shall be consistent with all applicable provisions of the Pennsylvania Public School Code.

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