

This analysis explores changes in school climate after a school turnaround effort at School District of Philadelphia (SDP) Promise Academies and Renaissance Charter schools. Specifically, it looks at whether Promise Academies and Renaissance Charter schools have demonstrated a change in the rate of serious incidents, and a reduction in the percentage of students who have committed a serious incident.

Background

The School District of Philadelphia's Renaissance Schools Initiative was first implemented in 2010-2011. The initiative intended to spur dramatic improvements in student performance over a short period of time by providing additional resources, increased attention and other strategies to improve persistently low-performing schools. The initiative consists of two turnaround models:

Promise Academies, which remain District managed, but undergo changes in leadership and teaching staff, as well as receive additional funding and support; and

Renaissance Charter Schools, which remain neighborhood schools but are managed by charter providers, with relative autonomy from the District.

Since 2010-2011, twenty schools have been converted to Renaissance Charters, and fifteen schools have become Promise Academies (three of the fifteen have since closed).

School climate can be defined as the value and temperament of school life for a student. It can include daily activities and academics for pupils, but also refers to the safety of a school for its students. Positive school climate is associated with positive academic and student achievement (Kelley, Thornton, & Daugherty, 2005). Research suggests that "school climate may be one of the most important ingredients of a successful instructional program," and "without a climate that creates a harmonious and well functioning school, a high degree of academic achievement is difficult, if not downright impossible to obtain" (Hoyle, English, and Steffi as quoted in Kelley, Thornton, and Daugherty, 2005). Research also has shown that, especially for African American children, positive school climate is directly related to positive academic achievement as well as higher attendance rates (Haynes, Emmons, and Ben-Avie, 1997).

Methods

Data for this report were collected from the Pennsylvania Department of Education's (PDE) Safe Schools Reports. As defined by PDE, an incident refers to a specific act or offense involving one or more victims and one or more offenders. A reportable incident includes one or more acts of misconduct, involving one or more offenders violating criteria defined under Pennsylvania's Act 26 of 1995. These include, but are not limited to, any behavior that violates a school's educational mission or climate of respect or jeopardizes the intent of the school to be free of aggression against persons or property, drugs, weapons, disruptions, and disorder. For the purpose of this report, the serious incident rate refers to the number of incidents per 100 students, calculated using the enrollment number reported in the PDE Safe Schools Reports. The offender rate refers to the percentage of students who have committed an incident, calculated as the number of offenders divided by the number of enrolled students, as reported in the PDE Safe Schools Reports.

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Key Findings

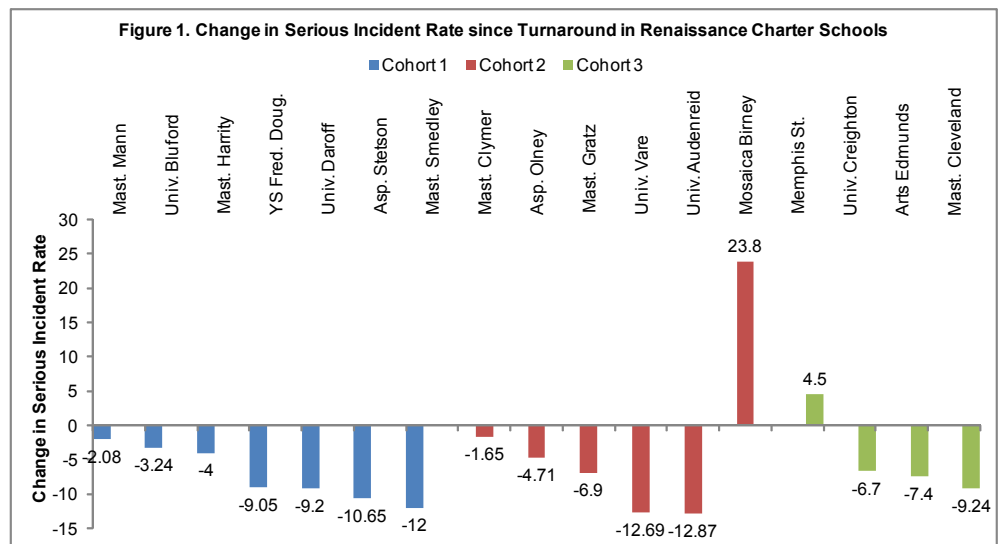
- Nearly all Renaissance Charter schools have shown a decrease in the serious incident and offender rates since turnaround.
- One Promise Academy has shown a decrease in the serious incident rate since turnaround. The remaining five Promise Academies are at pre-turnaround serious incident levels or higher. The rate of offenders has declined at Promise Academy elementary and middle schools, and increased at Promise Academy high schools.
- Changes in school climate appear to be correlated with changes in student achievement in Renaissance Charters and Promise Academies.

Renaissance Schools Initiative

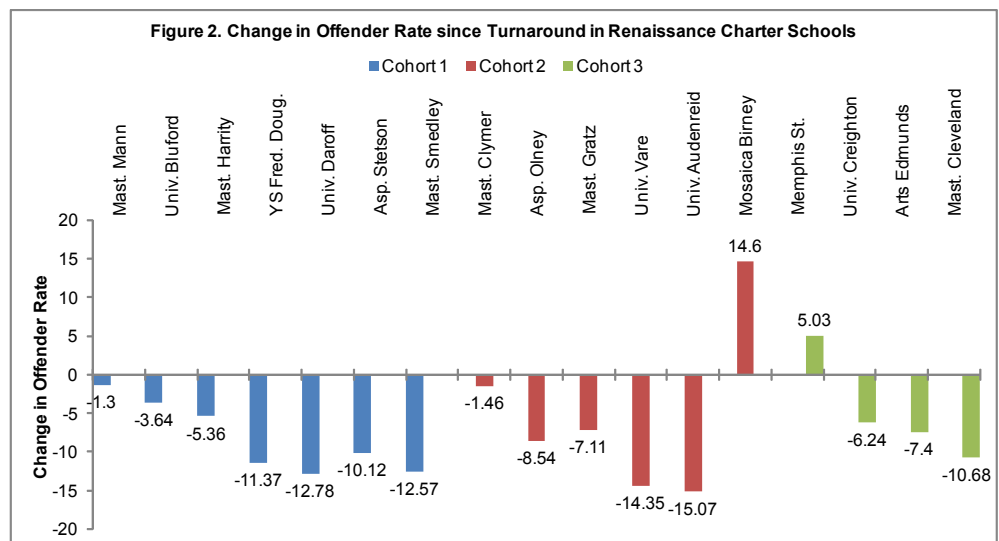
A look at school climate in Renaissance Initiative Schools

Findings

Fifteen of the seventeen Cohort 1, 2, and 3 Renaissance Charter schools have experienced a decrease in the rate of serious incidents since turnaround (see Figure 1). The only Renaissance Charter schools that did not show a decrease in the rate of serious incidents, and in fact showed increases, were Memphis Street Charter School @ Jones, operated by American Paradigm and Mosaica Charter School @ Birney. Memphis Street Charter was one of only two Renaissance Charter Schools that did not show an increase in student PSSA achievement in either reading or math since turnaround. Conversely, Mosaica Birney saw an increase in student PSSA achievement in both reading and math since turnaround, despite the substantial increase in serious incidents. (See Renaissance Initiative Research Brief: Student Achievement)



The same patterns emerge when looking at changes in the offender rate at Renaissance Charter schools since turnaround (see Figure 2). Memphis Street and Mosaica Birney were again the only schools that did not decrease their percentages of students who had committed a serious incident. For the most part, the change in percentage of offenders at each Renaissance Charter school corresponds with the change in serious incident rate.



Renaissance Schools Initiative

A look at school climate in Renaissance Initiative Schools

Comparatively, Promise Academy schools did not appear to have had much success in decreasing the rate of serious incidents since turnaround, with the exception of Dunbar School, which saw a decrease in the rate of serious incidents by 12.66 percentage points since turnaround (see Figure 3).

Moreover, Dunbar was the only Promise Academy that saw an improvement in PSSA student achievement in both reading and math since turnaround. The remaining five Promise Academies saw an increase in the serious incident rate since turnaround, as well as a decrease in the percentage of students scoring advanced or proficient on either the reading or math PSSA, or both.

Similar patterns emerge when looking at changes in the offender rate at Promise Academy schools since turnaround (see Figure 4).

It is interesting that all of the elementary/middle school Promise Academies, with the exception of Dunbar, saw an increase in the serious incident rate since turnaround, but a decrease in the percentage of enrolled students who have committed a serious incident. This could suggest that since turnaround, there has been a smaller percentage of the student body that is causing a disproportionately higher amount

of the disruption. Additional research is needed to identify the specific factors that may have contributed to these changes.

References

Haynes, N. M., Emmons, C., & Ben-Avie, M. (1997). School climate as a factor in student adjustment and achievement. *Journal of educational and psychological consultation*, 8(3), 321-329.

Kelley, R. C., Thornton, B., & Daugherty, R. (2005). Relationships between measures of leadership and school climate. *Education-Indianapolis then Chula Vista-*, 126(1), 17.

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