



Early Evaluations of the RSF Portfolio Show New Schools Are On Track

Chicago, IL – To get early visibility on our schools’ progress and maximize their long-term success, The Renaissance Schools Fund (RSF) contracted with SRI International to assess schools in their first or second years, and we conducted a subsequent portfolio analysis with three years of data in 2008. The research found that new schools are on track for growth in line with historical charter school trends. While new schools take a few years to fully establish their models, over time they outpace district performance and serve students comparable to those served by traditional district schools.

The SRI report showed that the RSF schools evaluated start on par with district schools in their first two years. Subsequent analysis shows that by 2008 most RSF schools outperform neighborhood schools, and by year three, RSF schools have made greater average annual gains than the district.

SRI Analysis Finds Subset of Year 1 and Year 2 Schools on Par & Making Gains with Similar Students

The SRI analysis examined a subset of 15 schools in either their first or second year of operation. Only 8 of these schools offered two years of data, seven had one year of test data, and only one of the schools contained its full complement of students. Despite research that suggests it’s uncommon for new schools to show major gains in their early years, the analysis found that on average RSF schools performed on par with the district including gains in their second year.

The SRI analysis used ISAT scores to compare RSF schools against the district average and against students with similar characteristics. The comparison against the district found that the first cohort of RSF schools performed statistically on par with the district in reading their first year and 5% better than the district by their second year. The average percentage of students meeting or exceeding standards in reading increased from 58% to 66%, or 8%, among the first year schools, compared to a 2% change, from 59% to 61% for the district. The math trajectory was similar. RSF schools performed the same as the district in their first year and 4% better by their second year. The average percentage of students meeting or exceeding standards in math among the first year schools increased from 64% to 73%, or 9%, compared to a 5% change from 64% to 69% district-wide.

Using a match comparison analysis, in which students are compared with district students with similar characteristics, the report found that RSF schools performed behind the comparison group in their first year (5% in reading and 6% in math), but statistically on par after their second year of operation.

Notably, the SRI report found RSF schools are serving the same percentage of low-income students (88% RSF vs. 86% district) and a higher percentage of minority students as the district (98% RSF vs. 88% district).

In spite of the challenges of start-up, new schools have created high quality learning environments with engaged teachers, students and parents, more instructional time, smaller classes, data-driven instruction, innovative university and corporate partnerships, and are proving to help students succeed against the odds. Schools in the RSF portfolio show higher attendance (91% RSF high schools vs 83% CPS high schools) and strong demand (150% subscription). As a result of longer school days and/or years, students

attending RSF-supported schools from kindergarten through 12th grade on average receive four more years of instruction in core subject areas.

Year 3 Assessment Shows Significant Momentum

A more recent assessment of the RSF portfolio in 2008 shows continued growth. Overall, nearly 70% of RSF-supported schools are outperforming their neighborhood counterparts. On average, RSF-supported schools are outperforming district comparison schools by 4% in reading and 1.5% in math. Over three years, the first cohort of RSF-supported schools is outpacing the district (including selective enrollment schools) in average annual growth (4.0% vs. 2.9%).

Results: Consistent with Historic Charter School Growth

The growth trajectory of RSF-supported new schools is in line with that of Chicago's charter schools historically. Further analysis showed that Chicago charter elementary schools in operation between 1 and 4 years outperform CPS comparison schools by 7% on average, but those schools open five years or more outperform CPS comparison schools by 17%. Similarly, charter high schools in operation between 1 and 4 years outperform CPS comparison schools by 9%, while those open five years or more outperform by 13%.

The positive impact of charter schools on traditionally underserved student populations is even more pronounced. For example, low-income African-American boys in Chicago charter schools are performing 16% higher than the district on the 3rd grade reading ISAT and 19% higher than the district in 3rd grade math.

RSF Portfolio on Track for Strong Student Achievement & Thoughts for the Future

Despite being in the early stages of new school development, research shows RSF-supported schools are on track for strong and increasing student achievement. Consistent assessment has assisted RSF in helping to identify and support the growth of high-performing school models. In those instances where schools are not meeting expectations, RSF supports the district in taking steps to ensure accountability and quality.

The study and our experience over the last four years have confirmed that new schools:

- Require at least nine months to incubate
- Require leadership with both strong instructional and entrepreneurial capacity
- Require autonomy to structure longer school days and/or years to offer students time for remediation, teachers more professional development, and allow for the use data to inform instruction.

RSF has been fortunate to support schools that are preparing Chicago's young people to beat the odds and succeed in college and beyond. We will continue to work to ensure that every child across the city has access to a high quality public education. ###