Students from both First Philadelphia Charter and Tacony Academy participated in an international celebration of creating Dream Flags. Students put their dreams for the future into poems and attached them to cloth. These special cloth representations were decorated and joined together in a culminating celebration at the Kimmel Center on Saturday, May 7.
In the beginning of the year, we were all excited to start 8th grade. We were going to be the third graduating class from First Philly, the first to go from Kindergarten to 8th grade. It would be an amazing year. But, our social studies teacher, Mrs. Clapper, wanted us to do something to set us apart even more from the past two graduating classes. She wanted us to start something that each new graduating class would have to live up to. That is how we got the idea of community service/service-learning.

The entire 8th grade took the Market-Frankford El to Center City to attend a Community Service Expo run by the City of Philadelphia. It had information about organizations we could help. After brainstorming, we decided to begin by organizing a Holiday Gift Drive to help children in a treatment center for addicted mothers have a Happy Holiday by giving presents donated by our school community. We only had two weeks to do it, and that meant we had to work hard to get signs up, set out boxes for donated gifts, and motivate the school to take part in the project. Getting the community to donate gifts was the easy part—the students and staff of our school came through for us. At first, there were a few students who doubted, including me, that we would even be able to make a difference. We did not see any gifts at first, but the drive eventually started to gain momentum. The Holiday Gift Drive was a success, and we donated 221 gifts and $300 to Gaudenzia House. We were now determined even more to help and give back.

The next service project we took on was for a nonprofit organization we first learned about at the Expo. Habitat for Humanity builds houses for people in need. At first, we wanted to actually go out to a site and help build a house but were disappointed to find out that you had to be 16 years old to build houses. That did not stop us. We figured that if we could not build a house, we could at least raise money to help Habitat buy the materials needed for more houses. We decided to put on a Talent Show, the first annual First Philly Has Talent benefit for Habitat for Humanity. We were all excited, as this would be the first true talent show at our school in years. We had a month this time, which meant more time for planning and ensuring success. It was not easy, especially since the adults at our school gave us the freedom to make our own decisions throughout the process. There came times during the project that I felt like banging my head on a table in frustration. Even after all the initial doubts, complications, and frustrations, we had ticket sales that filled the auditorium, and after selling all of the DVDs, we managed to raise a whopping $3,367 for Habitat for Humanity. I think I can speak for the entire grade in saying that I was shocked we managed to raise that much money. It made me feel proud. I am part of a group of students making a difference and little by little helping to change the world.
Our last two service projects were the Japan Relief Coin Drive, and the reading program at SPIN (Special People in Northeast). We wanted to help Japan recover from the devastating earthquake and tsunami they faced in March, and we figured out the best way was to organize a coin drive. In one week, we raised $804 thanks to students in our school bringing in their change. We are reading to young children at SPIN because we were not old enough to read to hospital patients, which was our plan at first. Luckily, SPIN had no concerns about our age. It is very rewarding for the students who go, and makes me feel like we are part of making the lives of children just a little bit better.

These projects have made us closer as a family. We put aside our differences to work together towards one common goal; helping those in need. I think these Service Projects have helped us see that there are people worse off than us, no matter how bad our lives might be. This realization, I think, has changed most of the grade. As we are in 8th grade, the majority of us are just 13 and 14 years old. Our age was a huge obstacle, as many nonprofit organizations refuse volunteers as young as us. We found unique ways to help our community, and still managed to accomplish our goals. Our dedication to service changed us. In the future, many of us will continue this First Philly Legacy and go on to become community leaders, helping to make the world a better place for all. Some of us may even go back to Habitat when we get old enough and actually help build a house for a family who needs one. As graduation inches closer and closer, I think these projects will be a powerful memory that we all will share forever.

The National Association of University Women Suburban Philadelphia Branch (NAUW) held an oratorical contest for students in Philadelphia Schools. Dr. Rebecca Mitchell, the president of the Board of Trustees at Tacony Academy Charter School was the Program Chair.

Jessica Leon, 9th grader—3rd Place Winner
FRIDAY APRIL 15TH WAS A DRESS DOWN DAY AT Tacony Academy Charter School

Friday, April 15th was a dress down day at Tacony Academy Charter School. Dress down days are fundraising dates to raise funds for enrichment activities at Paradigm Schools. There were 3 exciting events happening at Tacony Academy on Friday, April 15, 2011.

BIG JUMP WITH THE FRANKLIN INSTITUTE AND THE PHILADELPHIA SCIENCE FESTIVAL

The Big Jump provided an opportunity to learn about local seismic activity at a time when the world’s attention has been drawn to the real and tragic consequences of our planet’s geologic forces.

What was the Big Jump?
The Big Jump was a mass-participation scientific experiment open to everyone. The Franklin Institute invite all Philadelphians to participate and work together to see if they had the energy to trigger a seismic event. Schoolyards, playgrounds, and parking lots throughout the region became earth science laboratories.

What is a seismic event?
A seismic event occurs when seismic waves are detectable.

What are seismic waves?
Seismic waves are waves of energy that travel through the earth, for example as a result of an earthquake, explosion, or some other geologic process.

What is a Seismometer?
A seismometer is an instrument used to measure motions of the ground, including those of seismic waves generated by earthquakes.

PRESENTED FREE EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH PERFORMANCES AT THREE CHARTER SCHOOLS TO CELEBRATE APRIL AS MUSIC IN THE SCHOOLS MONTH

On Friday, April 15, M.I.C.S presented a free educational outreach performance with Stanford Thompson and members of Opus Nine.

The mission of M.I.C.S. (Music In Charter Schools) is to make music and quality music education accessible to all charter school students. Free educational outreach will be extended to Global Leadership Academy Charter (West Philadelphia Campus) and to the Paradigm Schools, First Philadelphia Charter and Tacony Academy Charter. On Friday, over 1,800 charter school students will interact with professional musicians.
SCHOOL-WIDE BUDDY READ
Every April, our Paradigm students participate in School-Wide Buddy Reading. At each of our schools, students line the hallways, tucked in corners draped over well-worn and beloved books. It is a wonder to witness as both older students and younger students, share their love of reading and celebrate being a community of readers and learners. Students read to one another, discuss text, and just enjoy the language of literature. In celebration of Families and Reading Month, this Paradigm event takes place each April. Our students look forward to it as they are nurtured to become lifelong readers and learners in our Paradigm learning community.

Junior Varsity Boys Basketball
Tacony Academy Charter versus First Philadelphia
The Bring Someone You Love Dance is held each year around Valentine’s Day at both of our schools. Each Paradigm student may bring someone of great importance in his or her life as a guest to this event. Students and their loved ones come dressed in their best for an evening of dancing and fun. Festive decorations and popular music transform our school gyms. Students and their families look forward to this annual occasion. Each student and his or her guest can pose for a photograph to mark the event. Special memories are created and cherished always.
Tacony Academy Charter School
STUDENT WINS ARTWORK COMPETITION

In March, all TACS art students were invited to participate in the first annual “A Home of My Own!” public awareness art contest. The purpose of this contest was to raise awareness about the prevalence of students experiencing homelessness in Philadelphia and the support that is available to them through the Homeless Children’s Initiative program.

There were only 6 money prizes distributed to each grade group out of the entire school district. Congratulations to the amazingly talented Aerin McKenzie from Ms. Griffin’s 3rd grade class. Aerin placed 3rd in the K-3 category and will be awarded $125. She is also invited to attend an awards ceremony in the Education Center on Broad St. on May 5th! Her design will be used on informational posters and materials about services available to help homeless students stay engaged in school.

RIF (Reading is Fundamental) is a federally funded program that schools can apply to in order receive free books for students. Mrs. Arcaro applied earlier in the year and we were granted the funding. The program allows for each student in the school to receive three (3) free books over the course of a year. Our year will go from February to February. The federal funds pay for the majority of the costs and the school chips in a minimal amount, in our case, about $1,200 towards a total of almost $6,000.00 worth of books.

Three times a year a day is set aside for the “pull”. Each class comes down to the multipurpose room and looks over 4 tables filled with brand new books from which each student may choose one to keep. The books are stamped with the RIF logo and their names are put inside.

We already did this for the first time in April and will do it again in September and the last time will be in December. The same thing will happen each year that we get funding.
BEFORE & AFTER SCHOOL TUTORING
AT FIRST PHILADELPHIA CHARTER SCHOOL, BOTH LOWER SCHOOL AND UPPER SCHOOL

Enter into several classrooms throughout the school building before or after school and you are likely to see a teacher working with a small group of students. Students who attend the tutoring find that the extra help boosts their academic confidence throughout the school day. The tutoring takes on many forms. Whether it’s a drop-in style of tutoring like what takes place mornings in Ms. O’Mara’s room or prearranged tutoring like what takes place when Ms. Schultes builds students’ mental math through the game 24, one thing is for sure—students and teachers are grateful for the chance to increase learning!

VARSITY BOYS BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP GAME
First Philadelphia Charter Versus Northwood Academy

PARENT READ
First Grade Author Celebration

On Friday, April 8th, the first graders in Room 121 at First Philadelphia Charter School held an author celebration. They didn’t need to invite famous authors like Laura Numeroff or Kevin Henkes to come and share their work. The children had “published” their own writing pieces and wanted to share them publicly for the first time with their families. The children read one of their pieces aloud to the entire audience and then sat hip to hip with their families in the audience to share their other stories. Afterward they shared some snacks, provided by the families, in the multipurpose room. Parents commented on how much they appreciated having this opportunity. The children were so proud!
The fifth “What It Takes” symposium of personal improvement was hosted by the Franklin Institute on February 28. Over 25 boys from both Tacony Academy Charter and First Philadelphia Charter were there to listen to the teachers, mentors and celebrities offer words of guidance.

“What It Takes” is a collective of diverse parents, clergy, concerned corporate citizens, celebrities, educators and government officials. Their mission is to ‘inspire the young men in our communities to focus on education so they can create meaningful goals for success.’

On April 14th, kindergarten through second grade students from Tacony Academy Charter as well as First Philadelphia Charter dressed to impress in the “Spring into Fashion” primary school event. Wearing designer clothes from GoodLad, these fashionable students had the opportunity to experience the other side of fashion, other than runway modeling, picture modeling. Posing this way and that, the students made sure that the photographer got their “good side”! After they got their picture taken they moved into a wonderful party which included dancing, ice cream, and swag bags. The students from both schools enjoyed the event and said they couldn’t wait to show off their fashion sense next year at this annual event.

SCHOOL FUND COMPETITION
Two Tacony Academy Students Present at University of Pennsylvania

In early April, our school was selected to be part of a unique opportunity affiliated with the University of Pennsylvania undergraduate students. This opportunity dealt directly with a student led organization called The School Fund, which specializes in improving education in African countries, specifically Tanzania.

This opportunity involved a high school student based solution to an ongoing problem regarding low quality education in Tanzania.

Two students from Tacony were chosen: James Cutillo and Deanna Torres. They were given one week to create a solution to Tanzania’s educational problem and present their findings at the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania on Saturday April 8, 2011.

In one of the most prestigious and highly respected educational institutions in the country, James and Deanna thoroughly impressed a panel of highly educated and successful judges with their proposal. As freshmen in a majority upperclassmen setting, James and Deanna’s confidence in their “5 Step Program” was evident and captivating.

Although they did not win first place, James and Deanna demonstrated their ability to articulate their education initiative and prove their capacity to problem solve and think critically. They both made our Tacony family very proud!
“Education is my civil right! I have a right to be Educated!”
Tacony Academy Freshman Kuan Young; a finalist in the WORD JAM competition took the stage to give a powerful spoken word poem on the eve of April 9, 2011. He was one of over 70 student registrants who participated in WORD JAM from various Philadelphia City Charter Schools. With a day full of expressive metaphors, similes and lyrics, only one word comes to mind about WORD JAM 2011; Inspiration!!

Webster’s dictionary defines INSPIRATION as a divine influence, action or power of moving the intellect or emotions; the act of influencing or suggesting opinions.

My definition of INSPIRATION… WORD JAM 2011.

On Saturday, April 9th, 2011, First Philadelphia Charter School hosted over 7 different charter schools from across the city of Philadelphia. Creative minds were buzzing, while imagery, prose and performance were highlighted in workshops led by some of Philadelphia’s most known Spoken Word artists, educators and performers. Powered by First Philadelphia Paradigm and New Born Productions, the evening’s highlight was the Poetry competition and showcase; judged by famous radio and talk show host, deejays and authors; where heart wrenching words from students in grades 7 thru 11, explained in some of the most creative ways, the theme for this years event; “Education is my civil right.” The 11 Semi Finalists were scored by celebrity judges, Tiffany Bacon of 107.9 WRNB, Solomon Jones; author, Gregory “Just Greg” Corbin; founder of the Philadelphia Youth Poetry Movement and Philadelphia HBO Brave New Voices coach, and Dr. Kimmeka Witherspoon; Professor and author from Temple University. The competitors graced the microphone to share their gift and showcase the art form of Spoken Word in a powerful way. First Place winner, Koran Oliver of Freire Charter School received a gift card, leather bound journal and two radio spots to showcase his winning poem on segments of WURD and WRNB.

When words are written on paper, in format and rhyme, when sung to the tune of a thousand chimes, there is power that lies on lines when the ink dries… magic is created the sun shines and peeks through the bend of a clouds smile. A verse forms a poet manifest and a poem is born…

…until next “Rhyme”!!!! BE INSPIRED
The main event, hosted by 900AM WURD radio host Al Butler, left audience members speechless. Butler’s transition from announcing one student poet to the next was always followed with a call & response statement “Say...WORD?“; as each finalist gave their rendition of the importance of Education. The old expression... “From the mouths of babes...” rang true after hearing the spoken poetic cries of our youth’s challenges and passion about the state of Education.

One student, Stephanie Culver, 2nd place winner from Friere Charter School, started her poem belting out, “They told me I had freedom. The freedom to learn.” It was riveting, relevant and needed! And all the young poets took the opportunity to let us know that education is indeed important to them! It’s not a privilege based on race, economic status, or ability, but it is their civil right! This type of inspiration gives credence to why the work of the Paradigm in providing and replicating exemplary schools is not just a mission, it’s a movement. Our young students poetically charged every individual within ear shot to make a difference!
CENTER CITY OPERA THEATER
PERFORMED A DRESS REHEARSAL PERFORMANCE OF
COSI FAN TUTTE AT FIRST PHILADELPHIA CHARTER SCHOOL

On Tuesday, March 15, at 6:00PM, there was a dress rehearsal performance of the opera Cosi Fan Tutte (In English) by the composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and it was open to the public for a minimal donation of $3.00 per ticket. Cosi Fan Tutte, roughly translated means, “All women are alike”.

Think you know what your ‘sweetie’ is up to? Think again… The setting for this production of this opera was the spring of 2011 and Drexel University campus was just beginning to bloom. The audience joined two restless seniors as they concocted the ultimate fidelity test for their allegedly devoted girlfriends.

The Center City Opera Theater strives to: (1) Present opera productions of the highest professional quality, specially conceived for an intimate setting, and featuring newly commissioned works, as well as more traditional operas; (2) Recruit new audiences for opera through the immediacy of these intimate performances, as well as through affordable ticket prices; (3) Provide opportunities for emerging opera professionals (singers, directors & designers) who are becoming known nationally for their excellence; (4) Fill a large and growing void in arts education in the region with comprehensive, on-site educational programs and a wide array of internships.

8th Grade Dance at First Philly
After School Care Production of
The annual Expressive Arts Fair was held Wednesday, April 27 from 6:00 to 7:30. Many students participated by entertaining the audience with their musical abilities and reading their creative stories and poems. Student artwork was displayed in the lobby of the school building for visitors to admire.