

## The Rensselaerville Institute at 60: It's our anniversary!

Today I am writing to celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of The Rensselaerville Institute.

Back in 1963, our institute was founded in Rensselaerville, New York, as the Institute on Man and Science. Our lofty purpose was to help local residents stay informed so they could better evaluate what scientists, technologists, politicians, soldiers, educators, and clergy were doing to Man.

Now 60 years later, our mission is to increase life chances for young people through education and community. Our world looks different from the past. But TRI's focus on achieving results for humankind has never wavered.

Today at 60, I am thrilled to report our impact:

- **First, we have worked collaboratively with local people on the issues they care about most. Since 1963, we have facilitated improvement projects in 830+ communities in 32 states.** In addition to leading these projects, 50% of our Community Sparkplug volunteers went on to “re-spark” on a future project, spreading their energy and impact even further.
- **Just as importantly, since 2000 we have dramatically improved learning achievement in 260 schools in 70 districts around the country.** 100% of our School Turnaround partner schools met their targets within two years or less. Students improve an average of 10.2 percent in reading and math in one year. Even during covid, the schools we supported all improved their performance. The ripple effect is real! Many teachers and principals we've coached now lead their districts as superintendents.

### It's a whole new world

At this juncture we are holding internal discussions on how The Rensselaerville Institute's work has changed. We realize we can't operate **School Turnaround** exactly the way we did pre-pandemic because schools face new, acute realities. They are grappling with new technology, spiking principal and teacher vacancies, mental health demands, and disruptions from school shootings and lockdowns.

In our **Community Sparkplugs** program, volunteers are leading projects to fulfill the most basic needs. This past year a Community Sparkplug, Sherry Bradley, led some truly inspiring work in unincorporated Lowndes County, Ala. Some children in the county lived at homes with raw sewage in their front yards. Ms. Bradley, a local resident, finally decided “I don't want kids growing up thinking this is normal.”

With some funding and technical support from The Rensselaerville Institute, she taught 5<sup>th</sup> graders in two schools how their neighbors could become sick from the waste. Ms. Bradley helped students recognize how unusual the situation was and challenged them to come up with solutions to solve the problem. At the wrap of the program she took the students on a field trip to



witness a septic system being replaced at a home, and students talked with the laborers doing the installation. Now Ms. Bradley is also helping parents find affordable ways to get septic tanks installed.

### **We have so much to celebrate**

Our work in schools and communities has far-reaching impact, and we are going to honor our 60<sup>th</sup> milestone with enthusiasm! Over the next 12 months:

- You can expect to hear 60 stories of impact. Watch soon for an invitation by us to share your stories with us.
- We're leading a year-end fundraising appeal where you can donate to honor a community member or staff member at TRI.
- We'll reminisce and look ahead with our board and guests in New York City on March 14, 2024.
- And finally, we're hosting a 60<sup>th</sup> Reunion for School Turnaround alumni and educators at our annual Assessment & Learning conference next June.

The Rensselaerville Institute has encountered so many talented, energetic and creative people over our lifetime, and we've experienced twists and turns. Through it all we've always adapted to serve young people and communities, while staying committed to getting results. I'm so proud of who we are. We will do even more, looking ahead.