

## FACTS: Who We Are

The Folk Arts–Cultural Treasures Charter School comes out of a history of struggle:

- for equity and justice for Asian American students and immigrant and refugee students of all races in the public schools;
- for public investment and public space in the under-served Chinatown community;
- & for public schooling that engages children as active participants in working for a just society.

After a decade and a half of public school advocacy and organizing, Asian Americans United decided to start a school that would address the particular needs of Asian American immigrant and refugee students, with an emphasis on the Chinatown community, and create the kinds of changes we had been advocating.

FACTS is designed to provide expertise and knowledge regarding the needs of Asian American and immigrant students; to bridge the gulf of isolation, unfamiliarity with institutions, and language barriers that prevent parents and community members from playing active roles in the education of their children; and to provide our students with the character, skills, and sense-of-self they need to thrive in this world.

FACTS has a special commitment and responsibility to Chinatown. We located FACTS in Chinatown because there was a lack of public investment and a lack of public space in Chinatown. Chinatown also serves as a social and spiritual hub for many Chinese immigrants and Asian Americans of all ethnicities. AAU's history of parent and youth education organizing in Chinatown also created a special commitment to this neighborhood.

FACTS teaches Mandarin Chinese because it is the language of the neighborhood where FACTS is located. We want to teach students how to engage in a respectful way, how to be responsible for, how to contribute to, and how to learn from the community of which we are a part. In addition, FACTS students – whether heritage speakers who are afforded an opportunity to retain and strengthen their bilingual skills, or non-heritage speakers who are introduced to an important world language – benefit from understanding the value of language diversity.

Although FACTS is designed to address the needs of Asian American and Asian immigrant students, FACTS' founders sought to create a deliberately multi-racial/ multi-ethnic school. Such a school best embodies a model of anti-racist education that not only values diversity but also addresses inequalities and promotes justice. FACTS is committed to helping children work cooperatively in a diverse, multicultural society.

Folk arts are the unifying thread across this diverse school body, and AAU partnered with the Philadelphia Folklore Project in the creation and ongoing nurturing of the school. Folk arts teach students and adults to value knowledge that resides in the school community and in the families and communities of our students; to recognize the contributions of ordinary people as artistic beings and culture makers; to understand and embrace their own cultural identities; and to respect and appreciate the cultures of others. Folk arts strengthen children's spirits and their communities.

Goals for the school are to provide students with an educational experience that:

- Raises their academic achievement and ability to think critically and creatively;
- Affirms language, traditional arts, and culture;
- Nurtures values of compassion and kindness;
- Instills a commitment to taking responsibility for themselves and their communities;
- Recognizes parents, elders, and community members as a constant presence in the lives of students; and
- Inspires a vision of justice and fairness and the courage to pursue them.