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Parents Advocating School Accountability
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5 of 8 Edison Schools Drop on California's Similar Schools Index

Results raise further questions about company's "positive" achievement claims

Five of the eight California schools run by controversial, for-profit Edison Schools Inc. dropped between 2000 and 2001 on the state's "similar schools" gauge, which compares every school's achievement to schools with similar demographic profiles.

One of those schools, Starr King-Edison Academy in Long Beach, was in its first year of Edison management in 2001 – and plunged significantly after Edison took over. The school dropped from 9 of a possible 10 on the similar schools scale in both 2000 and 1999, before Edison took over, to a 5 in 2001, Edison's first year.

The California Department of Education (CDE) released the similar schools scores, based on spring 2001 testing, on Jan 16. The similar schools rating "enables a school to compare its performance to schools facing similar demographic challenges," according to the CDE's Academic Performance Index (API) website.

Edison hailed four of its schools whose similar schools scores fell from 2000 to 2001 as showing "positive gains," according to the company's 2001 School Performance Report.

Besides the Long Beach school, Edison schools that fell on the state scale were: Edison Charter Academy in San Francisco, which plunged from a 5 to a 1; McNair-Edison Junior Academy in East Palo Alto, which fell from a 4 to a 1; Edison-Brentwood Academy in East Palo Alto, which slid from a 10 to a 6; and San Jose Edison Academy in West Covina, which slipped from an 8 to a 7.

Edison-Bethune Charter Academy in Fresno was a 1 in 2000 and remained a 1 in 2001. The school was also included on the Edison Schools Inc. "positive gains" list.

Edison's other two California schools rose on the similar schools scale – Phillips-Edison Partnership School in Napa from 2 to 4 and Feaster-Edison Charter School from 1 to 3.

Edison Schools Inc., a New York-based school management firm, boasts that its schools can outperform traditional public schools. The company's assertions have been controversial. Edison claimed that 84 percent of its schools achieved "positive gains" in 2001, but its School Performance Report listed 62 schools as "positive" in a year when the company ran 113 schools. The correct percentage for 62 out of 113 would be 54.86.

In addition, many of the 62 schools Edison labeled "positive" are in reality badly troubled. The "positive" list includes at least eight schools for which contracts with Edison have been or are

being severed and more than 10 schools that have landed on their states' lists of lowest-performing schools.

The CDE released the similar schools rankings in conjunction with updated API scores, known as the "base" API, for every state school. Base API scores include a broader range of information than earlier, or "growth," API scores released in October.

The base API for Edison's highest-profile California school, Edison Charter Academy (ECA) in San Francisco, continued to rank ECA dead last among San Francisco elementary schools.

Edison Schools is a nationwide school management firm with stock publicly traded on the NASDAQ, though the 10-year-old company has never made a profit. Edison has attracted ideological support from backers of privatization and school vouchers, and from such powerful conservative bastions as the Wall Street Journal editorial board and the Hoover Institution.
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<http://api.cde.ca.gov/>

California Edison Schools' scores in state rankings (first figure) and similar schools rankings (second figure).

State rankings are in deciles based on the Academic Performance Index figure, calculated based on actual test scores. 10 is highest; 1 is lowest. Note that it is possible for a school to rise in state ranking but fall in similar schools ranking, or vice versa, because of changes in student demographics.

Edison-Bethune Charter Academy, Fresno (Fresno County Office of Education)

2000: 1 and 1

2001: 1 and 1

Cited as making "positive gains" in Edison Schools Inc.'s 2001 School Performance Report

Edison-Brentwood Academy, East Palo Alto (Ravenswood District, San Mateo County)

2000: 3 and 10

2001: 4 and 6

Cited as making "positive gains" in Edison Schools Inc.'s 2001 School Performance Report

Edison Charter Academy, San Francisco (San Francisco Unified School District in 2001; now chartered by the California state Board of Education)

2000: 3 and 5

2001: 1 and 1

Cited as making “positive gains” in Edison Schools Inc.’s 2001 School Performance Report

Feaster-Edison Charter School, Chula Vista

2000: 1 and 1

2001: 2 and 3

Cited as making “positive gains” in Edison Schools Inc.’s 2001 School Performance Report

McNair-Edison Junior Academy, East Palo Alto
(Ravenswood District, San Mateo County)

2000: 1 and 4

2001: 1 and 1

Cited as making “positive gains” in Edison Schools Inc.’s 2001 School Performance Report

Phillips-Edison Partnership School, Napa

2000: 4 and 2

2001: 3 and 4

Cited as making “positive gains” in Edison Schools Inc.’s 2001 School Performance Report

San Jose-Edison Academy, West Covina

2000: 7 and 8

2001: 7 and 7

Cited as making “positive gains” in Edison Schools Inc.’s 2001 School Performance Report

Starr King-Edison Academy, Long Beach

2000: 3 and 9*

2001: 1 and 5

*2000 scores were from before Edison Schools Inc. took over the then-Starr King School. Note that the school is shown on lists of district schools simply as King School. Another Long Beach school called Edison is not managed by Edison Schools Inc.

For more information on Edison Schools, go to www.pasasf.org. PASA is an advocacy organization and our press releases reflect our point of view. Our material is reported and written in accordance with professional standards for accuracy. Any problems called to our attention will be corrected or responded to publicly as appropriate.