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San Francisco

Parents Advocating School Accountability

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## Once-hailed privatized school posts mediocre test scores

### **San Francisco Edison school falls from grace along with parent company**

San Francisco -- A San Francisco for-profit charter school that at one time made national news has posted another round of mediocre scores on California's newly released 2004 standardized test results.

Edison Charter Academy has consistently landed in the bottom quartile ranked against San Francisco public schools, with a demographic profile similar to many other schools in the district. The new results are raw scores; 2004 rankings are not yet available.

The school, run by the struggling New York school management firm Edison Schools Inc., opened in 1998 as a San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) school, but now operates under the auspices of the California State Board of Education.

In 2004 testing, Edison Charter Academy (ECA) third-graders fared disastrously. On the California Standards Test, measuring the percentage scoring proficient or advanced, third-grade results fell 12 percentage points in English language arts and 15 percentage points in math. On the CAT/6 score (national percentile ranking for average student score), third-grade results fell 10 points in reading and 19 points in math. Gains in other grades and subjects did not come close to offsetting the third-grade plunge. Complete results are shown below.

ECA made national news in early 2001 when the SFUSD Board of Education moved to sever its charter, citing higher costs than other schools, poor academic performance, removal of special-needs and other challenging children, failure to comply with contract disclosure requirements, and other problems.

Edison Schools – viewed as a beacon by privatization advocates and publicly traded on the NASDAQ – was at the time attempting to take over several New York City schools. In response to the San Francisco controversy, the company, headed by flamboyant entrepreneur Chris Whittle, aggressively courted the local, national and international media. The resulting favorable coverage included a Page 1 New York Times article as well as editorials in the Wall Street Journal, the Economist and elsewhere assailing SFUSD. The Wall Street Journal and the Economist editorials used inaccurate test-score figures provided by Edison.

Bay Area and national media hailed Edison's supposedly "soaring" achievement. In a year when ECA actually stood at 62<sup>nd</sup> of 75 SFUSD schools on the state's achievement ranking system, an Edison Schools press release called the school "a successful school in a failing district," a line that was repeated in the press locally and elsewhere.

The San Francisco controversy was resolved when the state Board of Education took over the school. Meanwhile, Edison failed to win the schools it sought in the New York bid. It acquired one New York City school by purchasing a smaller private management firm.

Edison Schools has lost its luster in the three years since, with all its earliest school-district clients and many others severing their contracts, its stock price plummeting, and its former supporters lapsing into an embarrassed silence. The stock was taken private in a 2002 buyout. In San Francisco, ECA has fallen off the radar. The school that was the big education story of 2001 is now all but forgotten by the public and the press

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### **California Standards Test (% scoring proficient or advanced)**

#### **English language arts:**

2nd grade 2003: 30%

2nd grade 2004: 30%

no change

3rd grade 2003: 28%

3rd grade 2004: 16%

down 12 points

4th grade 2003: 30%

4th grade 2004: 33%

up 3 points

5th grade 2003: 21%

5th grade 2004: 27%

up 6 points

**Math**

2nd grade 2003: 52%

2nd grade 2004: 48%

down 4 points

3rd grade 2003: 40%

3rd grade 2004: 25%

down 15 points

4th grade 2003: 21%

4th grade 2004: 29%

up 8 points

5th grade 2003: 24%

5th grade 2004: 21%

down 3 points

CAT/6 (NPR for "average" student score)

**Reading**

2nd grade 2003: 32

2nd grade 2004: 40

up 8 points

3rd grade 2003: 37

3rd grade 2004: 27

down 10 points

4th grade 2003: 26

4th grade 2004: 33

up 7 points

5th grade 2003: 35

5th grade 2004: 33

down 2 points

**Math**

2nd grade 2003: 52

2nd grade 2004: 43

down 9 points

3rd grade 2003: 55

3rd grade 2004: 36

down 19 points

4th grade 2003: 29

4th grade 2004: 40

up 11 points

5th grade 2003: 34

5th grade 2004: 36

up 2 points