

June 14, 2002
San Francisco
Parents Advocating School Accountability
www.pasasf.org

RAND Denies Link with Questionable Edison Success Claim

Spokespeople for the RAND Corp. say the respected research organization has no connection with an Edison Schools claim about the company's purported success, despite widespread insistence by Edison representatives and supporters that RAND has confirmed the claim.

The controversial, for-profit school management company contends that 84 percent of its schools made "positive gains" in the 2000-01 school year. The figures Edison gives for that claim do not work out to 84 percent, and the assertion fails to hold up under scrutiny in other aspects. But Edison spokespeople and supporters have continued to repeat the figure and have frequently attributed it to RAND.

The inaccurate RAND attribution has appeared, uncorrected, on the Wall Street Journal op-ed page and has been cited by Edison representatives at community meetings in Philadelphia, where Edison is set to take over 20 schools in the fall. It has also reportedly been used by Daniel J. Whelan, a member of Philadelphia's School Reform Commission.

RAND's website explains that the organization does not yet have results to report on its study of Edison. "In the summer of 2000, RAND began a three-year, independent evaluation of Edison Schools, which will examine student achievement outcomes as well as the implementation of Edison's academic program ..." the website explains. "When that evaluation is complete, RAND will release public reports indicating our findings, whether favorable or unfavorable to Edison.

"We do not yet have results to report from our ongoing study," the website adds.

David Tillipman of RAND confirmed that statement in a May 22, 2002, e-mail to Keith Newman of Philadelphians United To Support Public Schools. "We have not completed our evaluation project," Tillipman said. "We are not able to offer any opinions on Edison's success until we complete our effort."

Edison Schools elaborates on its "84 percent success" claim in its 2000-2001 Annual Report on School Performance ("Exhibit 5: Average Achievement Gains Since Year School Opened," page 18, available on Edison's website). The company lists 62 schools that purportedly showed "positive achievement gains." But Edison says it ran 113 schools that year. Sixty-two of 113 schools would be 54.86 percent, not 84 percent. Edison has never explained the discrepancy.

The "Exhibit 5" page lists a number of schools exempted from the calculation, but the list leaves 23 of Edison's 113 schools unmentioned and unaccounted for.

Claims of success at the 62 listed schools are also highly questionable. The "positive" list includes

at least 12 schools for which contracts with Edison have been or are being severed. Many more are struggling or plagued with low performance. One example is Henry E.S. Reeves in Dade County, Fla., which has just received a “D” rating on Florida’s A-F school assessment system for the fourth year in a row, barely escaping an “F.”

Among other examples, the “positive” list also includes Feitshans-Edison in Springfield, Ill., and Northmoor-Edison in Peoria, Ill., though test scores at both schools have dropped since Edison took them over.

The list displays further inconsistent methodology. For example, it specifically excludes eight schools because they were in their first year of Edison operation (“the following schools have only baseline scores”). Yet the “positive” list includes 17 schools that were also in their first year of Edison operation. Edison has reportedly not responded to media inquiries about the discrepancies and inconsistencies.

Edison Schools, which runs more than 100 schools nationwide, 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 Schools’ stock has recently plummeted, losing more than 90 percent of its value.

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.

##

Edison schools on “positive gains” list for which contracts have been or are being severed:

- Edison-Ingalls Partnership School, Wichita, Kan. (severed as of end of 2001-02 school year)
- Granville Charter School, Trenton, N.J. (severed as of end of 2001-02 school year)
- Boston Renaissance Charter School, Boston (severed as of end of 2001-02 school year)
- Wintergreen Interdistrict Magnet School, Hamden, Conn. (to be severed at end of 2002-03 school year)
- Edison/PPL School, Minneapolis (severed as of end of 2001-02 school year)
- Mid-Michigan Public School Academy, Lansing, Mich. (severed at end of 2000-01 school year)
- Edison-Isley Partnership School, Wichita, Kan. (severed as of end of 2001-02 school year)
- Timberview-Edison Junior Academy, Colorado Springs, Colo. (severed at end of 2000-01 school year)
- Elm Creek Elementary School, San Antonio/Atascosa, Texas (severed as of end of 2001-02 school year)
- Kriewald Road Elementary School, San Antonio/Atascosa, Texas (severed as of end of 2001-02 school year)
- McNair-Edison Junior Academy, San Antonio/Atascosa, Texas (severed at end of 2000-01 school year)
- Edison Charter Academy, San Francisco (contract with school district severed at end of 2000-01 school year; Edison received a charter from the California state Board of Education and now operates the school under the state charter)

The contention that RAND is behind the Edison Schools 84 percent success claim appeared in the Wall Street Journal op-ed page in a column by Pete du Pont, "Bureaucrats First, Kids Second: That's the Ethos of America's Public School Establishment" (April 18, 2001). The column is available online on the Center for Education Reform Website:

Brotherly Love, Bad Schools: The battle to improve Philadelphia's education system.

Tuesday, November 6, 2001

<http://edreform.com/forum/2001/brotherly.htm>

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.