

April 29, 2002 San Francisco
Parents Advocating School Accountability
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Peoria Kids Pay Price of Costly Edison Schools

A financial crisis in the Peoria, Ill., school district is being exacerbated by the extra cost of four privatized schools run by controversial, for-profit Edison Schools Inc., according to the Peoria Journal Star. The Edison schools are costing the district a total of \$2 million more than other district schools.

Children at all other Peoria schools will bear the burden of the higher costs of the Edison schools as District 150 proposes increasing student-teacher ratios, cutting 50 teachers and scrapping “a long list of other positions and programs,” the April 28 Journal Star reported.

With the district planning to trim \$3 million in expenditures, “none of the cuts can come from the district’s Edison schools,” the Journal Star said. “Those are pretty much untouchable, because according to its contract with District 150, Edison decides staffing and material needs for its schools.”

District administrators may ask Edison if the company is willing to rework its contract to shorten the school days and/or year, the article continued. “Edison students currently attend classes one hour more daily and 20 more days each school year [than students at Peoria’s other schools]. Cutting back would save the district about \$500,000.”

For the extra money, the district is getting poor results. Test scores have dropped at two of the schools, Franklin-Edison and Northmoor-Edison, since Edison took over. Loucks-Edison made a minor gain on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) in Edison’s first year, but had shown a far greater increase in the two years before Edison took over. In the other Peoria school, Rolling Hills Junior Academy, Edison took over in the current school year, 2001-’02, so no results are available yet.

Edison Schools made news last week after its stock tumbled 24.74 percent on April 25 to close at a new low of \$8. It fell another 75 cents, to \$7.25, on April 26.

Edison Schools Inc. has raised questions with its reporting of both student achievement and company finances. The company claims that 84 percent of its schools made “positive gains” in the 2000-2001 school year. But Edison’s School Performance Report lists 62 schools that it claims made “positive gains,” for a year when the company says it ran 113 schools. Sixty-two of 113 schools would be 54.8 percent, not 84 percent.

And scrutiny debunks the claim that the 62 “positive gains” schools are successful. At least 10 of the schools on the “positive” list have had contracts with Edison severed – Edison had already been terminated from several of the schools at the time it released the list touting them as

successes. More than 10 of the “positive” schools appear on their states’ lists of failing schools.

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 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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Peoria Journal Star article:

District 150 Cuts Would Increase Size of Classes, 4/28/02

<http://pjstar.com/news/topnews/g81180a.html>

Below are ISAT results for Edison’s Illinois schools. The percentage refers to students who met or exceeded state standards on the test:

-- Franklin-Edison School, Peoria:

Spring 1999 (before Edison): 48.2 percent

Spring 2000 (Edison’s first year): 23.5 percent

Spring 2001: 32 percent

-- Northmoor-Edison School, Peoria:

Spring 1999 (before Edison): 80.1 percent

Spring 2000 (Edison’s first year): 60.9 percent

Spring 2001: 71.2 percent

-- Loucks-Edison School, Peoria:

Spring 1999 (before Edison): 21.9 percent

Spring 2000 (before Edison): 34.4 percent

Spring 2001 (Edison’s first year): 35.9 percent

-- Rolling Hills Junior Academy, Peoria:

Edison’s first year at this school was 2001-2002, so no achievement results are available yet.

Illinois Standards Achievement Test scores:

<http://www.pjstar.com/news/Testscores/ISATIZScores.html>

For more information on Edison Schools, go to www.pasaf.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.