

Nov. 18, 2001 San Francisco  
Parents Advocating School Accountability

Note: This press release contains new information throughout, as well as restating past information about Edison Schools' "positive gains" list for readers' convenience.

### **Low Performance at More Edison Schools Further Discredits Company's "Gains" Boast**

Four Illinois schools run by controversial, for-profit Edison Schools Inc. have been placed on the state's first-ever Academic Warning List, meaning that more than half the schools' students' test scores fell below state standards two years in a row.

Two of the Edison schools that made the Illinois Academic Warning List have been hailed by the New York-based company as purportedly making "positive" gains. The schools' inclusion on the new list further discredits Edison Schools' widely touted boast that 84 percent of its schools showed "positive" achievement last school year.

Feitshans-Edison in Springfield and Franklin-Edison School in Peoria both landed on the Illinois Academic Warning List yet also made Edison's list of supposed "positive" performers.

Meanwhile, another of Edison's so-called "positive" schools has earned a low rating from its state. Edison's Henry E.S. Reeves Elementary School in Miami - the company's only Florida school - scored a "D" on an A-F scale from Florida's education department. "D" meant a school fell below minimum criteria in reading or writing or math.

At least 10 schools described by Edison Schools Inc. as "positive" have now been cited by their states' education departments as failing to improve.

The Edison list of "positive" schools also includes at least seven schools for which districts have severed contracts with Edison. The company's list further includes other schools that are floundering badly.

Edison Schools Inc. released its list, "Average Achievement Gains Since Year School Opened," in its annual School Performance Report in October 2001. Edison cited 62 schools in the "positive" column, touting that number as 84 percent of Edison's schools.

Yet even had all 62 schools genuinely shown positive improvement, Edison operated 113 schools during the

period in question (the 2000-2001 school year). Edison used a base of 74 schools, and explanatory notes give reasons for excluding several schools, but the report leaves 23 schools unmentioned and unaccounted for. With a base of 113 schools, 62 would be 54.8 percent, not 84 percent - even if the "positive" claims for all 62 were credible.

And of the 62 allegedly "positive" schools, at least 21 are known to be severely troubled based on inclusion on state lists of failing schools, severing of Edison contracts or significant community concern about low performance. Removing those 21 schools from Edison's "positive" list leaves 41. Of the 113 schools Edison operated during the year in question, that would mean just 36.3 percent of schools showed positive gains - with the caveat that because of varying reporting in different states, full information is not necessarily available even for those 41 to confirm Edison's claims of improved achievement.

The spurious 84 percent figure has been widely cited in news reports about Pennsylvania Gov. Mark Schweiker's move to disband the Philadelphia school board and turn the district over to Edison to manage.

In addition, Edison CEO Chris Whittle has repeatedly mentioned the 84 percent "positive" claim while noting that Edison this year runs 136 schools, implying that the figure means 84 percent of the 136 schools and thus implicitly exaggerating the "positive" number still further. The actual number of schools touted as "positive," 62, is not mentioned in Whittle's claims.

To dissect the repeated implication that 84 percent of 136 schools have made "positive" gains, restating with real numbers, 41 of 136 schools would be 30.1 percent. Use of that figure would be misleading, because the base was last year's 113 schools, not this year's 136. But that would be no more misleading than is the repeated implication that 84 percent of Edison's current 136 schools showed "positive" gains.

In one Philadelphia appearance, Whittle acknowledged that Edison Schools Inc. had failed in Lansing, Mich., a school district that has severed its contract for the one school formerly run by Edison. Yet in the same appearance, Whittle touted the purported 84 percent "positive" list - which includes the very same Lansing school, Mid-Michigan Public School Academy, that he was

almost simultaneously acknowledging as an Edison failure.

At least six other schools whose districts have severed contracts with Edison showed up on Edison's "positive" list. Along with the Lansing school, McNair-Edison Junior Academy in Southwest Independent School District, San Antonio and Atascosa, Texas, is no longer run by Edison because of problems including low performance. Edison has also parted ways with Timberview-Edison Junior Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo., though information on the reason was not available.

Edison will no longer run the Edison/PPL School in Minneapolis after the current school year because of low achievement and other problems. Similarly, Edison will exit Kriewald Road Elementary School and Elm Creek Elementary School, both in Texas' Southwest Independent School District, at the end of this school year.

And in San Francisco, Edison's contract with the school district to run Edison Charter Academy was severed in a June 2001 agreement that allowed Edison to secure a charter from the California state Department of Education.

Along with the two Illinois schools and the Miami school, seven other schools defined by Edison as "positive" have been cited by their states' education departments as failing to improve.

Edison-Henderson Academy in Dallas was rated "acceptable" by the Texas Education Agency the year before Edison took it over, but dropped to "low-performing" in Edison's first year of management, 2000-2001. Edison still rated it "positive."

Other schools rated sub-par in improvement by their states but "positive" by Edison were: Boston Renaissance Charter School in Boston; Edison Charter Academy in San Francisco; Edison-Bethune Charter Academy in Fresno, Calif.; Edison-McNair Academy in Ravenswood School District, East Palo Alto, Calif.; Phillips-Edison Partnership School in Napa, Calif.; and Seven Hills Charter School in Worcester, Mass.

Edison Charter Academy, subject of nationwide news coverage last spring after the San Francisco Unified School District moved to revoke its charter, ranked last

among all San Francisco elementary schools in spring 2001 test scores. Edison Schools Inc. has signed the school up for a voluntary state remedial program that provides funding and support designed to salvage failing schools. Edison's request that the school join the Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program, which admits only the state's lowest-performing schools, openly acknowledges the school's failure. Yet Edison Schools Inc. still cited Edison Charter Academy on the "positive" list.

In Illinois, two additional Edison schools that were not on Edison's "positive" list landed on the state's Academic Warning List. With the inclusion of those two, Chicago International Charter School in Chicago and Loucks Edison Junior Academy in Peoria, on the Academic Warning List, only one existing Illinois Edison school escaped the list. (An additional Illinois Edison school opened this fall.) Schools making the list face sanctions and possible closure by the state if performance fails to improve.

Among other troubled schools touted as "positive" by Edison, Edison-Ingalls Partnership School and Edison-Isley Partnership School in Wichita, Kan., have consistently ranked at the bottom among district schools since Edison took them over in 1997, touching off calls for ending Edison's contract.

Edison's "Average Achievement Gains" list was scrutinized against district and state achievement data as well as news archives. More information may become available as more 2001 test scores are reported. For unclear reasons, Edison compiles its list every year at a time when achievement test scores are not yet available for many districts.

Research cast doubt on Edison's effusive description of its schools' broad achievement in "every tested grade level, every tested subject, and (by) every tested student" in the School Performance Report.

A number of schools' results showed drops in many subjects and grade levels, offset by just enough of a gain in a few areas to eke out a "positive" average.

At Schomburg Charter School in Jersey City, N.J., scores declined in six of nine categories for grades 2-4; one was unchanged; and two rose. Better fifth-grade scores allowed Edison to deem the school "positive," but the erratic results call into question any claims of gains across the board.

And sometimes Edison apparently relied on its own

interpretation of varying or incomplete data. When students at Edison's Granville Charter School in Trenton, N.J. took the Elementary School Proficiency Test, declines averaged 51.8 percent, while gains averaged 37.6 percent. Students did better on another test, the MAT-7, but 8 of the test's 24 data points were unavailable - a percentage any statistician would view as insufficient data. Edison still listed the school as "positive."

Edison Schools is a nationwide school management firm with stock publicly traded on the NASDAQ, though the 9-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.

##

Here is a summary of schools with a questionable "positive" rating by Edison Schools Inc.:

- Boston-Renaissance Charter School, Boston - State rankings put this school in the "failed to improve" category.

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/ata/ratings00/SPRPStateSumm00.pdf>

- Edison Charter Academy, San Francisco - This school ranked last among all San Francisco elementary schools in spring 2001 test scores and landed on the California Department of Education's low performers list. San Francisco Unified School District has severed its ties with Edison Schools Inc., and the school is now chartered by the California state Board of Education.
- Edison-Bethune Charter Academy, Fresno, Calif. - This school landed on the California Department of Education's low performers list.
- Edison-Henderson Academy, Dallas - This school fell from the Texas Education Agency's "acceptable" rating before Edison arrived to a "low performing" rating after Edison took it over.
- Edison-Ingalls Partnership School, Wichita, Kan. - This school has consistently ranked at the bottom among district schools since Edison took it over in 1997. The July 15, 2001, Wichita Eagle reported, "Edison Schools Inc. has not lived up to its promise at two Wichita elementary schools, district leaders say, and it may be time to consider taking those schools back from Edison." The article referred to Edison-Ingalls and nearby Edison-Isely. Edison-Ingalls also reported a bad year for violence, according to a state database - defined as "malicious acts

against students/staff which result in the student receiving an out-of-school suspension or expulsion.” The 1999 rate was 19 times higher than the statewide average and also more than 19 times higher than the school’s rates in 1997, 1998 and 2000.

<http://www.ksbe.state.ks.us/rcard/html/D02591692.html>

- Edison-Isely Partnership School, Wichita, Kan. - This school has consistently ranked at the bottom among district schools since Edison took it over in 1997. The July 15, 2001, Wichita Eagle reported, “Edison Schools Inc. has not lived up to its promise at two Wichita elementary schools, district leaders say, and it may be time to consider taking those schools back from Edison.” The article referred to Edison-Isely and nearby Edison-Ingalls. Edison-Isely also reported two years of surging violence, defined as “malicious acts against students/staff which result in the student receiving an out-of-school suspension or expulsion.” The 1999 and 2000 rates were both 40 times higher than the statewide average and also 40 times higher than the school’s 1998 rate.

<http://www.ksbe.state.ks.us/rcard/html/D02591696.html>

- Edison-McNair Academy, East Palo Alto, Calif. (Ravenswood School District, San Mateo County) - This school landed on the California Department of Education’s low performers list. In addition, its state achievement rating, the Academic Performance Index (API), is delayed because the district “is correcting ... demographic information for this school,” according to the California Department of Education website. Most California schools’ API scores were released in mid-October. Edison-McNair tested fewer than 50 percent of its students in reading in spring 2000.

- Edison-Perdue Academy, Pontiac, Mich. - This school’s low performance has prompted district officials to consider ending Edison’s contract. “Edison-Perdue students have performed at or near the bottom on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program test,” the April 20, 2001, Detroit Free Press reported.

- Edison/PPL School, Minneapolis, Minn. - This school will no longer be run by Edison after the 2000-2001 school year. The district is severing its contract with Edison because of low achievement and other problems.

- Elm Creek Elementary School, Southwest Independent School District, Atascosa, Texas - This school will no longer be run by Edison after the 2000-2001 school year. The district is severing its contract with Edison because of dissatisfaction and high costs.

- Feitshans-Edison, Springfield, Ill. - This school landed on the Illinois Academic Warning list.

- Franklin-Edison, Peoria, Ill. - This school landed on the

Illinois Academic Warning list.

- 
- Granville Charter School, Trenton, N.J. - Scrutiny casts doubt on claims of improvement at this school. Declines on the Elementary School Proficiency Test averaged 51.8 percent, while gains averaged 37.6 percent. Claims of gains were apparently based on a different test, the MAT-7, but 8 of the MAT-7's 24 data points were unavailable, which should be viewed as incomplete data.

Granville Charter School is part of a complex that includes Granville Charter Middle School (on Edison's negative list) and Granville Charter High School (not on the list because it had "only baseline scores).

The middle-high school made news in January 2001 for its discipline problems, with the Associated Press reporting on a mass 10-day suspension of 45 students. "The school has been losing staff members and pupils because of the unruly students, but Granville declined to give a figure," the Jan. 13, 2001, AP report said. It was not known whether the students returned to the school.

- Henry E.S. Reeves Elementary School, Miami, Fla. - This school was given a "D" on Florida's state schools assessment scale.
- Inkster High School, Inkster, Mich. - This school set an example of scores falling in many areas slightly offset by gains in a few. Twelfth-grade scores from fall 2000 to spring 2001 declined in every area except science, where they remained unchanged. Other grades showed mixed results.  
  
Meanwhile, the Inkster school district, which hired Edison to run every school in the small district, aired a list of complaints and discussed severing its contract with Edison in February, according to the Feb. 16, 2001, Detroit Free Press.
- Kriewald Road Elementary School, Southwest Independent School District, San Antonio, Texas - This school will no longer be run by Edison after the 2000-2001 school year. The district is severing its contract with Edison because of dissatisfaction and high costs.
- McNair-Edison Junior Academy, Southwest Independent School District, San Antonio/Atascosa, Texas - This is no longer an Edison school. The district is severing its contract with Edison because of dissatisfaction and high costs, and McNair-Edison is one of two schools (along with Scobee-Edison) that Edison has already relinquished.
- Mid-Michigan Public School Academy, Lansing, Mich. -

This is no longer an Edison school. The district ended its contract with Edison after the 2000-2001 school year because of low performance and other problems.

- Phillips-Edison Partnership School, Napa, Calif. - This school landed on the California Department of Education's low performers list.
- Seven Hills Charter School, Worcester, Mass. - State rankings put this school in the "failed to improve" category. Seven Hills has "lagged behind the academic performance of the Worcester public schools," the Aug. 19, 2001, Worcester Telegram & Gazette reported. <http://www.doe.mass.edu/ata/ratings00/SPRPStateSumm00.pdf>
- Timberview-Edison Junior Academy, Colorado Springs, Colo. - This is no longer an Edison school. Information on the reason was unavailable.

Note: At least two of schools listed as "lack(ing) complete data" have since been moved to the "negative" column -- Carver Heights-Edison Elementary in Goldsboro, N.C., (no longer an Edison school) and Lincoln-Edison Charter School in York, Pa. Chicago International Charter School should presumably be added to the negatives as well, based on its including on the Illinois Academic Warning List.

\*\*

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.