

June 19, 2001

Test Scores Rise After Texas District Severs For-Profit Contract

SHERMAN, Texas - A Texas school formerly run by controversial, for-profit Edison Schools improved its test scores after Edison departed and the district regained management of the school.

Washington Elementary School in Sherman, Texas, was the first public school in the nation to be privatized by New York-based Edison Schools. The Sherman district severed ties with Edison after five years of complaints about soaring costs and low achievement, with Edison leaving when its contract expired at the end of the 1999-2000 school year. The school reverted to management by the Sherman Independent School District for the 2000-2001 school year.

After a year of district management, scores on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test improved over the previous year under Edison's management. Scores under Edison management had received a "low-performing" designation under Texas' statewide assessment system, while the 2001 scores have reportedly raised the school out of the low-performing category, according to Texas education sources. (Official lists of schools designated low-performing will be available in August.)

Tracking one group of children, third-graders who averaged a 61 percent pass rate in the TAAS test under Edison management in spring 2000 achieved a 73 percent pass rate as fourth-graders in spring 2001, after a year under Sherman district management. The same group achieved a 65 percent pass rate in math in spring 2000, as third-graders under Edison management, and soared to a 79 percent pass rate in spring 2001, as fourth-graders in the district-run school.

Most scores increased after Edison left, interpreted either way – both for the same group of children, following them up a grade from spring 2000 to spring 2001, and for the same grade in both years.

Philip Garrett, Sherman's former assistant superintendent, told the Dallas Observer in January 2000 that "hidden costs" of dealing with Edison drained \$1 million a year from the tiny school district, forcing it to cut supply budgets. During Edison's five years in Sherman, complaints abounded about low performance, untrained teachers, management chaos and poor services for special-education students.

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Below are the Washington Elementary School TAAS "percent passing" scores for spring 2000 and spring 2001, with comments. Note: Washington is a kindergarten-fourth-grade school, and TAAS tests are given to third graders and up.

All Tests, Grade 3:

Spring 2000 61 (Edison management)

Spring 2001 61 (District management)

All Tests, Grade 4:

Spring 2000 49 (Edison management)

Spring 2001 73 (District management)

(Note: As mentioned above, these fourth-graders passed at a 61% rate in spring 2000, as third-graders, and jumped to a 73% pass rate in spring 2001.)

Reading, Grade 3:

Spring 2000 80 (Edison management)

Spring 2001 79 (District management)

Reading, Grade 4:

Spring 2000 76 (Edison management)

Spring 2001 84 (District management)

(Note: These fourth-graders passed at 80% in 2000, as third-graders, and increased to 84% in 2001.)

Math, Grade 3:

Spring 2000 65 (Edison management)

Spring 2001 74 (District management)

Math, Grade 4:

Spring 2000 70 (Edison management)

Spring 2001 79 (District management)

(Note: These fourth-graders passed at 65% in spring 2000, as third-graders, and increased to 79% in 2001.)

Writing, Grade 4:

Spring 2000 60 (Edison management)

Spring 2001 83 (District management)

These scores were obtained from a Texas source and can be verified through the Sherman Independent School District. The state will release official information in August as to which schools are classified as “low performing,” but Sherman sources say that no Sherman schools will fall into that category based on 2001 test scores.

Further background:

Dallas Observer article on Edison in Sherman, Texas Jan. 27, 2000 <http://www.dallasobserver.com/issues/2000-01-27/feature.html/index.html?q=1>

Upside Magazine article addressing Edison in Sherman, Texas Nov. 27, 2000

<http://www.upside.com/texas/mvm/story?id=3a0316431>