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Parents Advocating School Accountability
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Edison Schools Underreports Severed Contracts

Fuzzy math discredits company's boasts

A widely repeated claim by controversial, for-profit Edison Schools Inc. that the company has lost only three contracts for managing schools misrepresents Edison's record.

The Philadelphia Inquirer on Feb. 1 quoted Edison spokesman Adam Tucker as saying that 62 of the 65 contracts Edison has entered remain intact, a claim that Edison has previously made to other media. The Inquirer noted, "Many of those pacts are new and have yet to come up for renewal."

Edison has been ousted from school districts in Sherman, Texas; Goldsboro, N.C.; and Lansing, Mich. But the "62 of 65" figure does not include finalized agreements that banish Edison from districts at the end of the current (2001-2002) school year, in both Minneapolis and the Southwest Independent School District in San Antonio and Atascosa, Texas.

It also ignores the December 2001 severing of Edison's contract to run Granville Charter School in Trenton, N.J. The original contract was not with the local school district but with the school's founder, former Mobil executive Bill Granville. (Edison counted the K-12 school as three separate schools.) The ouster ends Edison's Trenton presence.

And in San Francisco, Edison Schools' contract is similarly not "intact."

After San Francisco's school board moved in early 2001 to revoke Edison's charter for its one San Francisco school, Edison waged a costly, bloody legal, public-relations and political-lobbying battle. Faced with the expenses of fighting Edison's continuing court maneuvers, the San Francisco district severed Edison's contract in June 2001 but agreed to allow the company to seek a new charter, on entirely different terms, from the California state Board of Education.

Edison Charter Academy ranks dead last in test scores among San Francisco schools, and the California Board of Education has put it on notice that it must improve to survive.

The Wichita, Kan., school district voted in January to toss Edison out of two troubled schools, leaving two more Edison schools in Wichita. Edison has also left the Timberview-Edison Junior Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo., leaving three Edison schools there.

New York-based Edison Schools Inc. claims to run 136 schools nationwide, though its method of counting schools has raised eyebrows. The company counts each portion of a K-5, 6-8 or 9-12 school as a separate school, so that a school comprising grades 4 through 9 would be reported as three schools. Edison's website actually lists 111 schools.

In another example of fuzzy Edison Schools math, the company has widely claimed that 84 percent of its schools made “positive gains” in the 2000-2001 school year. Edison CEO Chris Whittle has repeatedly made that claim in conjunction with the figure 136 schools, inaccurately implying that 84 percent of 136 schools made gains.

Actually, Edison lists in its October 2001 annual School Performance Report 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. Applied to Whittle’s repeated implication that the 84 percent figure uses a base of 136 schools, 62 schools would be 45.6 percent.

And scrutiny debunks the claim that the 62 “positive gains” schools are successful. At least 10 of the schools on the list have had contracts with Edison severed, counting the San Francisco school now chartered by the state. More than 10 appear on their states’ lists of failing schools. Edison has reportedly not responded to media requests for explanations of the fuzzy figures.

Edison Schools 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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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.

Edison schools claimed by Edison Schools Inc. to show “positive gains” but for which contracts have been or are being severed*:

Edison Charter Academy, San Francisco, Calif.**
Edison-Ingalls Partnership School, Wichita, Kan.
Edison-Isley Partnership School, Wichita, Kan.
Edison-PPL School, Minneapolis, Minn.
Elm Creek Elementary School, Southwest Independent School District,
Atascosa, Texas
Granville Charter School, Trenton, N.J.
Kreiwald Road Elementary School, Southwest Independent School District,
San Antonio, Texas
McNair-Edison Junior Academy, Southwest Independent School District, San
Antonio/Atascosa, Texas
Mid-Michigan Public School Academy, Lansing, Mich.
Timberview-Edison Junior Academy, Colorado Springs, Colo.

*Note: This list includes only schools with severed contracts that appear on Edison’s list of schools purportedly showing “positive gains.” Edison has also lost contracts in Goldsboro, N.C.,

and Sherman, Texas, and has been removed from an additional school in Southwest Independent School District, San Antonio/Atascosa, Texas, that did not appear on the “positive” list.

**Note: The San Francisco Unified School District severed its contract with Edison Schools Inc. for Edison Charter Academy, but Edison sought and received a charter for Edison Charter Academy from the California state Board of Education. The state Board of Education has put the company on notice that the charter is in jeopardy if performance doesn’t improve.

Edison schools claimed by Edison Schools Inc. to show “positive gains” but that appear on their states’ lists of lowest-performing schools*:

Boston-Renaissance Charter School, Boston, Mass.
Edison Charter Academy, San Francisco, Calif.
Edison-Bethune Charter Academy, Fresno, Calif.
Edison-Henderson Academy, Dallas, Texas
Edison-McNair Academy, East Palo Alto, Calif.
Feitshans-Edison School, Springfield, Ill.
Franklin-Edison School, Peoria, Ill.
Henry E.S. Reeves Elementary School, Miami, Fla.
Phillips-Edison Charter School, Napa, Calif.
Seven Hills Charter School, Worcester, Mass.

*Note: This list includes only schools that appear on Edison’s list of schools purportedly showing “positive gains” and that researchers have located on various states’ lists of lowest-performing schools. It does not include schools that appear on state low-performing lists but that do not appear on Edison’s “positive gains” list. In addition, the list may not include all such schools because information is not equally accessible for every state.