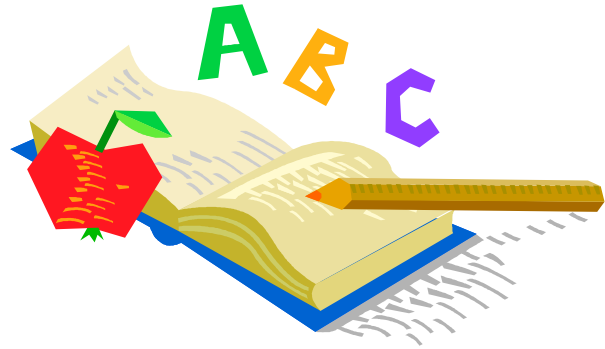




Philadelphia's School Privatization Produces Student Achievement Gains

In August 2004, the state of Pennsylvania released the first substantial evidence that Philadelphia's public-private school management experiment to turn around the district's lowest-performing schools has produced achievement gains for students in both the contracted "partner" schools and the traditional public schools.



In 2002, the state of Pennsylvania took over the school district of Philadelphia and appointed a School Reform Commission, led by Chairman James Nevels, who hired Paul Vallas as the district's CEO. The School Reform Commission's most controversial reform targeted 64 of Philadelphia's lowest-performing schools for special intervention. Forty-five of those schools were partnered with a for-profit or nonprofit education provider. Edison was assigned 20 of those 45 schools, making it the district's single largest partner with more than 12,000 students. The other 19 schools were partnered with the school district and received extra resources and special interventions.

Pennsylvania's annual Adequate Yearly Progress report (AYP) showed that 160 of Philadelphia's 265 schools met AYP standards in 2003-2004 school year, up from 58 schools the previous year. Outside management partners managed 23 of the city schools making the AYP list.

Philadelphia's school district CEO, Paul Vallas, gave considerable credit to Philadelphia's "partners," including Edison Schools, Foundations, Victory Schools, Universal Companies and Temple and Pennsylvania Universities, and called the partners "a key part of the school district's dramatic turnaround."

More specifically, the case of Edison schools demonstrates the usefulness of analyzing the gains made by low-performing students rather than just absolute student proficiency rates. Edison schools had 12 of its 20 schools make AYP, up from just one school last year. Edison's Philadelphia schools posted an average annual gain of approximately 10.2 percentage points in 5th and 8th grade students scoring at "proficient" or above on the 2004 Pennsylvania System of Schools Assessment in reading, and approximately 9.6 percentage points in math on the 2004 PSSA. In the years prior to the Edison-district partnership, those same 20 schools had averaged annual gains of less than one-half of 1 percentage point.

Edison also had the largest increase in the percentage of students scoring "proficient" or above, and the largest decrease in the percentage of students scoring "below basic." In addition, the state Department of Education data also shows that:



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- Edison was a district standout in helping schools to make adequate yearly progress, or AYP, under the No Child Left Behind Act. Of the 64 schools targeted by the district for extensive reforms, 21 made AYP for the first time in 2004. Edison produced more than half those 21 schools (11 of 21), even though it operates less than a third of the targeted reform schools (20 of 64).
- In reading, the Edison-district partnership schools reduced the percentage of students at the below-basic level at four and a half times the state rate.
- In math, Edison-district partnership schools reduced the percentage of students at the below-basic level at four and a half times the state rate.

In addition, Edison also helped raise student achievement for the entire district of Philadelphia by modeling the benefits of a comprehensive benchmarking system to increase student achievement. Edison's benchmark testing program, which is aligned with the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA), has an instant feedback loop that allows teachers to immediately know their students' academic weaknesses and tailor their lesson plans to meet student needs.

The district of Philadelphia adopted a similar benchmarking program that was provided through a contract with Princeton Review and SchoolNet to assess students every six weeks for their progress toward state grade-level standards.

Competition between public and privately managed schools in Philadelphia has allowed all public school students to benefit from best practices and has led to overall achievement gains for Philadelphia students that are dramatically above the state average. The average test score gain in Pennsylvania in 2004, according to the Department of Education, was five points in reading and six points in math. The school district of Philadelphia exceeded those rates, posting average gains of 10 in reading and 10 in math.