

PERSPECTIVES ON URBAN SCHOOL REFORM IN PHILADELPHIA

The School District of Philadelphia is engaged in what many observers term the "largest experiment" with privatization in school reform in America today (*New York Times*, 9/12/2002). Although the scale and subtext of the reform in Philadelphia make it unique, many other urban school districts are undertaking similar reforms. Across the country, issues of privatization and school reform are complex and in a near constant state of flux. An electronic journal like *Penn GSE Perspectives on Urban Education* has a unique role in promoting discussion on these issues because of its interactive nature and the ability to constantly update information. To that end, we have compiled a list (by no means exhaustive) of some resources and information about privatization, and specifically, about the context of Philadelphia's reform. We encourage you to visit these sites, gather information, and share your perspectives with others on our Discussion Boards. In addition, if you know of an organization, link, or resource that you believe should be featured in this discussion, please email the editors at urbaned@gse.upenn.edu or post your suggestion on the Discussion Boards. We hope to create a resource that reflects the needs of people who are interested in, involved with, or affected by these "experiments".

<http://saa.phila.k12.pa.us/communications/inthenews.taf>

The newsroom section of the School District of Philadelphia website provides a surprising array of information related to the state takeover and involvement of for-profit companies in the district. For example, recent articles include a feature on the scores of schools in the Chester-Upland School District that are run by Edison, Inc. and the federal government's probe of the deal between Edison and the state of Pennsylvania.

<http://www.whyy.org/91FM/philaschools.html>

Beginning their coverage in late October of 2001, WHYY's website explores the state takeover of Philadelphia Public Schools through interviews, reporting, and commentary. Listen to the local Philadelphia National Public Radio station's coverage of the situation, including the formation of the School Reform Commission, the involvement of Edison Schools, Inc., and student protests.

<http://www.phillyneighborhoods.org/>

Neighborhoods Online was created in 1995 as an online resource center for Philadelphia's neighborhood builders. This site has links to a variety of Philadelphia newspapers and neighborhood organizations that are discussing the state takeover. There is also an interactive section that allows site visitors to communicate with state and local politicians about the takeover or Philadelphia schools.

<http://www.nytimes.com>

A quick search of this site provides many links to the ongoing state takeover situation and Edison Schools' financial situation. Specifically, two articles from April 18th and 19th cover the School Reform Commission's decision to privatize an unprecedented number of schools: <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/04/18/education/18EDIS.html>. Many articles are either only available for a small fee or in abstracted form after 30 days.

<http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/edison/edison.html>

This site provides a 2000 review of student performance at ten schools operated by Edison Schools Inc., Each of the schools chosen for this study has been operated by Edison Schools for at least four years. This study by Western Michigan University researchers is notable because of the comparison of data presented by Edison Schools in annual reports with the independent researcher's findings.

<http://www.aft.org/research/edisonproject/>

The American Federation of Teachers website includes a discussion of this union's contact and discussions with Edison Schools, and aims to provide an independent review of student achievement and performance data. The project also aims to provide frameworks for future evaluation of the claims made by Edison Schools.

<http://www.pdenewsroom.state.pa.us/newsroom/cwp/view.asp?a=6&Q=75911&PM=1>

The website of the Pennsylvania State Department of Education offers relatively little information about the state takeover of the School District of Philadelphia. However, the above link does take you to Governor Mark Schweiker's proposal for improving Philadelphia schools and does include links to Edison Schools, Inc. review of the School District of Philadelphia.

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/newstory.cfm?slug=43philly.h21&keywords=Philadelphia%20Schools>

EdWeek has a number of articles devoted to the state takeover, including an August 7, 2002 feature on the outside groups slated to run nearly 45 schools. This article also has links to background stories and features an interview with the new Superintendent of the School District of Philadelphia, Paul Vallas.

<http://www.edisonschools.com/>

This site, home of Edison Schools, Inc. offers the opportunity to take "day in the life" tours at Edison schools across the country, see performance reports based on in-house assessments, and read articles related to Edison schools across the country.

<http://www.sas.upenn.edu/urban/schoolreform.html>

In an effort to stimulate a vibrant and constructive public conversation among community members, policy makers, educators, students and scholars, the Urban Studies program at the University of Pennsylvania is offering a series of seminars, lectures, tours, and public forums to examine the implications of the current changes in our school system and explore opportunities for a brighter future for public education in our city and region.

A schedule of events as well as other resources can be found on their web site.

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