

Mr. Buggé is currently the Director of Security & School Safety for Edison Schools, Inc.

Whether it's helping to re-engineer the delivery of police services throughout the country, or helping to implement cutting edge solutions to our problems in K-12 public education, Brian has always been at the forefront of these provocative ideas.

## Edison's Discovery

**B**ack in the early 1990s when entrepreneur Chris Whittle launched Edison Schools, his aim was simple: a new model of public education that would be as superior to traditional public schools as the light bulb was to the candle. Yesterday's dramatic news out of Philadelphia—where one of America's most troubled urban public school districts has just posted historic proficiency gains—should bring us closer to that goal. And Edison Schools deserve a fair chunk of the credit.

The School District of Philadelphia announced the results yesterday, in what is the first real report card on the state takeover of the city schools two years ago. The scores are remarkable: double-digit gains in reading and math proficiency, a tripling of the number of schools meeting federal No Child Left Behind standards; gains for Philadelphia that are nearly double those posted by the state in one of the Pennsylvania's better years.

Within these results, those posted by the newer models of schools—for-profits, non-profits, university-run, and so on—are particularly impressive. Though the traditional public schools outperformed Edison in some specific areas, of those institutions running six or more schools, Edison boasted the biggest increase in the percentage of students scoring proficient or above and the biggest decrease in the percentage scoring "below basic." As the district's reformist CEO, Paul Vallas, points out, these gains come from students in 20 schools that were among the worst in Philadelphia when they were turned over to Edison.

"I've been in politics for 24 years and have never seen a system that has been remade as this one has," says Dwight Evans, a Democratic state representative from Philly's north-west side who backed the bipartisan reform—and never flinched. "What we've done here is

force people to rethink the model for how public education is delivered."

Mr. Vallas deserves the kudos here, not only for the overall performance improvements but

*Progress at a profit  
in Philadelphia schools.*

for his guts in opting for boldness and giving providers such as Edison the freedom to succeed. If we dwell on

Edison here, it's only because when these reforms were launched, Edison was the lightning rod for the opposition. Apparently many in the city's teachers unions and activist groups could live with a school system in which one in two Philadelphia schoolchildren would never see a high school diploma. What they couldn't abide was someone offering to do a much better job for—gasp!—profit.

Their displeasure was both vehement and public. Thugs from the district's unionized employees broke up a city Christmas-tree lighting concert. Mayor John Street moved into the district's central office in a bizarre effort to derail the plan before it could get started. Advocacy groups sued. The teachers union ran a primary opponent against Mr. Evans.

"The profiteers want to make money off the backs of our children; we say no—hell, no," the head of the local NAACP told the Philadelphia Inquirer. In short, it helps to remember that the results we saw yesterday were earned in a bitter political battle fought like Guadalcanal, inch by bloody inch.

As we've stated from the beginning, Edison is not *the* answer to public education. The answers are competition and accountability—both of which Edison and the others helped introduce to Philadelphia. If nothing else, what Edison and Paul Vallas proved this week in the City of Brotherly Love is that America's inner-city kids should not be written off—that they can, do and will learn if given the proper opportunity. It doesn't get more revolutionary than that.

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