

Who Profits?

by Robert Crysler

I am an expatriate Canadian teaching at an Edison school. These schools, of which there are currently 79 in the US, are for-profit schools. To learn more about Edison, visit www.edisonschools.com.

The critics of for-profit schools like to warn of rapacious business tycoons who heartlessly extract every possible penny and condemn innocent children to shiver in run-down drill-halls. These detractors seem to believe that not-for-profit private schools, while still not as desirable as public schools, are at least morally superior to for-profit schools since less motivation exists for their administrators to cut corners.

This entire line of line of reasoning is really ironic, given the shortage of textbooks and other teaching supplies in most public schools these days.

In fact, Edison schools are well stocked with computers, classroom supplies, and so forth. Because we don't have a guaranteed enrollment — unlike regular public schools — our continued existence is contingent upon pleasing our customers. We know that our school won't last long if we shortchange our students. And we don't see too many parents who want to send their kids to cash-starved, Spartan schools.

Edison offers a rich and stimulating environment. Our school is very attractive, with bright colours, closed circuit TV, math manipulatives, Internet connections and so forth. While music and physical education specialists take over the classes, regular classroom teachers get common planning times. In short, no corners are cut when it comes to student welfare.

In most cases, Edison schools are charter schools and so receive the same funding as the other public schools. In order to generate a profit, we have to find savings in areas that don't affect the classroom.

One obvious economy is that we don't have to contribute to heavy central administration costs. And, because we are essentially free of head office edicts and spending formulas, we can save money by spending our budget in ways that are most beneficial given our local circumstances. As well, Edison spends less on salaries. My salary is approximately \$5000 less than my public school counterparts.

There are, however, compensations that outweigh my salary shortfall. For one thing, my students' parents are very supportive and involved. For another, Edison provides ample teaching materials that have been proven effective. I work very hard (55-60 hours a week) and I like my work.

In my opinion, the issue of profitability is a non-issue. In truth, everyone at the school profits.

(Mr. Crysler teaches grade 2 in Detroit, MI.)

Organization for Quality Education, March 2000