
San Francisco Examiner, San Francisco, CA
Union Says Edison Teachers Underpaid

December 1, 1998

Julian Guthrie

<<<>>>

This document is available on the Education Policy Studies Laboratory website at
<http://www.asu.edu/educ/epsl/CERU/Articles/CERU-9812-104-OWI.doc>

SAN FRANCISCO -- The City's teachers union is taking its battle against charter schools to the state, accusing the San Francisco school district of underpaying teachers at the for-profit Edison Charter Academy.

The union filed a grievance against the school district Monday, alleging it violated the collective bargaining process by changing Edison's teachers' salaries, hours and working conditions without union representation.

The union also filed a charge with the state Public Employment Relations Board (PERB), asserting the district violated the Educational Employment Relations Act. The two actions are supplemental: To file a charge, it is necessary to file a grievance.

"If the contract were followed, the teachers at Edison would be paid more," said Kent Mitchell, president of United Educators of San Francisco. "They spend 30 percent more time on-site, but are paid 10 to 15 percent more than teachers outside of Edison."

The union's actions are the latest in a simmering dispute with the district over whether a private company should be allowed to run a public school. Despite the union's vehement opposition, the San Francisco Board of Education approved the Edison contract in June, and the school opened as a charter site this fall on the site of the former Thomas Edison Elementary.

The school district contends California's charter-school law exempts charter schools from the collective bargaining process in the same way it frees such schools from the state education code.

"I think PERB and the courts will give school districts the same exemption in collective bargaining that they've given in regard to the education code," said Bruce Julian, San Francisco Unified's chief union negotiator.

"But I welcome a definitive answer from the courts on this whole thing."

When Gov. Wilson signed California's charter-school law in 1992, he specifically declined to sign a bill that would have mandated collective bargaining with teachers unions. Instead, he signed a law that did not require such bargaining, saying, "The essential elements of the charter school concept are freedom from state regulation and employee organizational control . . ."

Edison's executive vice president and general counsel, Chris Cerf, said the company had forged smooth and successful working relationships with unions across the country.

"The situation in San Francisco is unique," Cerf said.

"I've reached out to Kent (Mitchell) and United Educators repeatedly. I've been rebuffed every time."

Edison operates 51 public schools serving more than 24,000 students in 26 communities nationwide.

"Through all of this opposition from the union, is anyone pointing out that every teacher is at Edison by choice?" Cerf asked, noting that there were more than 80 applicants for the 36 full-time positions. "In absolute terms, we are paying our teachers more than they would be making in another school in the district."

Edison teachers work an eight-hour day and 190-day school year. District teachers work a seven-hour day and 181-day school year. Beginning teachers at Edison make \$33,972, compared with a beginning district teacher salary of \$31,172. Edison's veteran teachers make \$3,600 more than district teachers with a similar experience level.

"Yes, we work more hours," said Yvette Fagan, a veteran teacher at Edison, "but I feel I'm on the ground floor of something that has the potential to impact what education will look like in the 21st century."

Edison teachers have another financial incentive. In the next three to four months, the San Francisco Edison staff will be offered stock options in the Edison Project. When the New York-based firm goes public sometime in the next two to three years, employees would reap the benefits of any stock price gain.