

West Contra Costa Unified School District
Office of the Superintendent

Friday Memo
September 14, 2018

Upcoming Events – Matthew Duffy

September 16: El Sobrante Stroll and Festival, 11:00 – 4:00
September 17: Bayside Council of PTAs, Korematsu MS, 6:30 PM
September 18: School Board Candidate Forum, Helms MS, 6:00 PM
September 19: Agenda Setting, Superintendents' Office, 5:00 PM
September 20: California Coalition of Early and Middle College Programs, Middle College, 9:30 AM
September 20: MDAC, Helms, 6:30 PM
September 21: MDAC, Kennedy, 9:00 AM
September 26: Board of Education Meeting, DeJean, 6:30 PM
September 27: Back to School Night, High Schools
September 27: Contra Costa County Teacher of the Year Gala Dinner, Hilton Concord, 6:00 PM
September 29: Special Education Conference Parents & Caregivers, Pupil Service Center, 8:30 AM
October 2: School Board Candidate Forum, DeJean MS, 6:00 PM

Easement to EBMUD at the Kensington Hilltop – Lisa LeBlanc

At the Board Meeting on September 5, 2018, the Board approved Resolution No. 24-1819 Declaring Its Intention to Grant an Easement to the East Bay Municipal Utility District at the Kensington Hilltop Elementary School. During the Board discussion, questions regarding the original easement were raised. We would like to confirm that in connection with this transaction, the District and EBMUD have negotiated an Exchange Agreement whereby the parties have agreed that concurrent with execution of the new easement deed, EBMUD will execute a Quit Claim deed to the District. The terms of the Quit Claim deed provide that all rights, title and interest of EBMUD in and to the Original Easement will be released and revert back to the District.

Maintenance Expertise to Repair District Playgrounds - Lisa LeBlanc

The repairs of playgrounds in the District have been a challenge for our Maintenance Department due to a lack of extensive knowledge on our team to work on the various structures, as well as the playground flooring. Through a position opening, we recently hired an employee with extensive experience in repairing Playgrounds. This will be a great asset for our team to work on safety issues at school sites, provide hands on training for our General Maintenance team in this area, as well as reduce costs by not contracting out this work. Currently we are working on a priority list for these repairs based off site assessments and safety related work orders. This work will be ongoing throughout the year and into the summer months.

Public Records Log – Marcus Walton

Included in this week's memo is the log of public records requests received by the district. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Media Articles - Marcus Walton

The attached news articles may be of interest.

Public Records Request Log 2018 - 2019
Week Ending September 7, 2018

	Date of Receipt	Requestor	Requested Records/Information	Current Status
56	3/22/18	Scott Rafferty	Communications regarding CVRA allegations	3/26/18 Email sent with DOCs & Links 3/27/18 Email sent with DOCs & Links Gathering/Reviewing Documents
65	4/27/18	J. Paul Fanning Lankford, Crawford, Moreno & Ostertag LLP	Richmond High School / Asbestos Records	6/8/18 Email sent requesting clarification in order to narrow search, per our Facilities Department 6/11/18 Updated/Revised PRR received by Requester Gathering Documents
67	5/9/18	David Stephan	Roster of all WCCUSD High School Faculty	5/15/18 Acknowledgement email sent
1819-04	8/1/2018	Scott Rafferty	Communications, social media regarding trustee elections	8/6/2018 - Acknowledgement letter sent Gathering Documents
1819-06	8/6/2018	Partida - Berkes Crane Robinson & Seal	Documents regarding the presence of asbestos at De Anza HS	8/10/2018 - Acknowledgement letter sent Gathering Documents
1819-07	8/15/2018	Ann Swinburn – CTA	Notices of Violation and/or Notices of Concern for Amethod Public Schools, Benito Juarez, John Henry High School, or Richmond Charter Academy	8/24/2018 – Acknowledgement letter sent Documents ready by Sept. 14, 2018
1819-08	8/30/2018	Nicole Bates – LSC	Referral, Suspension, Expulsion, Transfer, Arrest data	8/30/2018 – Acknowledgement email sent

BREAKING NEWS The Latest: Feds suspend immigration arrests in hurricane

News

Richmond: High schoolers treated, released after edibles scare



FILE/KRISTOPHER SKINNER

The courtyard beyond the fence on the campus of Richmond High School in Richmond, Calif.

By **GEORGE KELLY** | gkelly@bayareanewsgroup.com | Bay Area News Group
PUBLISHED: September 10, 2018 at 6:21 pm | UPDATED: September 11, 2018 at 4:33 am

RICHMOND — Four Richmond High School students have been released to their parents after reportedly suffering symptoms related to eating marijuana edibles, authorities said Monday.

Around 2:35 p.m., one student reported to an office at the campus, 1250 23rd St., with nausea, and administrators' questions led to the disclosure that five students had eaten the marshmallow-style edibles earlier, West Contra Costa Unified School District spokesman Marcus Walton said.

One student had already left campus for the day after feeling ill, but campus staff called paramedics to assess and treat students, and immediately notified parents, Walton said. After assessment, staff released the students' to their parents' custody.

"Once the administrators make sure students were OK and healthy, then the disciplinary conversations will begin," Walton said. "We're glad they came to the office and let us know."

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Tags: [K 12 Education](#), [West Contra Costa Unified School District](#), [West County](#)

George Kelly George Kelly is a breaking news reporter for the Bay Area News Group. He has worked as an online coordinator and, before that, a copy editor and page designer for Bay Area-based newspapers and magazines. Off work, he enjoys playing in bands, busking and karaoke. His first newspaper job was as a Washington Post paperboy.

[Follow George Kelly @allaboutgeorge](#)

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Teachers getting help to buy homes in California's hot housing market

Bay Area teacher gets down payment help to buy her first home in Richmond

SEPTEMBER 12, 2018 | THERESA HARRINGTON



THERESA HARRINGTON/EDSOURCE TODAY

Kennedy High School digital arts teacher Mitzi Perez, right, stands with her fiancé Anthony Caro in front of the new Richmond home they purchased through community partnerships with the West Contra Costa school district and the state's CalHFA School Teacher and Employee Assistance Program.

The school year has gotten off to an exciting start for Kennedy High Digital Arts teacher Mitzi Perez, who with her fiancé recently moved into their first home in the district where she teaches, during the same week she welcomed new students into her classroom.

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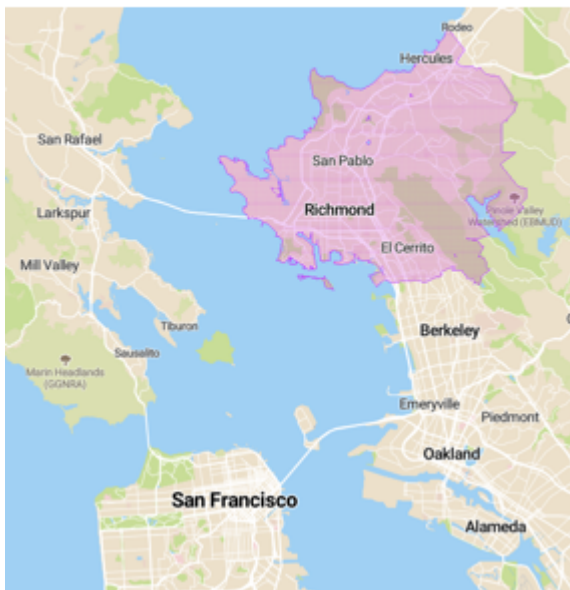
They bought the \$510,000 house in Richmond in the East Bay with down payment money lent to them through a state program for school employees. They also got a small grant toward closing costs and counseling from local programs.

Perez is one of about 2,400 school employees statewide over the past 17 years who got down payment loans through a state program for teachers and other K-12 school employees.

In addition to the \$17,850 down payment loan, Perez and her fiancé Anthony Caro obtained a 30-year **CalPLUS** conventional mortgage for \$492,150 at about 4.6 percent interest through the same state agency. They also got a smaller Zero Interest Program loan, known as a ZIP loan, for about \$20,000 that helped pay for closing costs. All told, the assistance totaled about \$530,000, including the mortgage.

“I’m a little speechless,” said Perez, 23, after signing the final loan documents late last month. “I feel very fortunate — super fortunate. I couldn’t be any more happy!”

The down payment loan was provided by the California Housing Finance Agency’s School Teacher and Employee Assistance Program, known as the “**CalHFA School Program**.”



Perez is starting her second year as a teacher in the **West Contra Costa Unified** district that includes Richmond and surrounding communities. She and Caro would have had to rent for several more years to save up for the down payment and closing costs if they hadn't qualified for the state loans, she said.

Districts across California are struggling to cope with the impact of the state's hot housing market on their employees. West Contra Costa Unified is like many school districts across the state hoping to improve teacher recruitment and retention by exploring options or partnerships that could help teachers find homes within the districts where they work. Some are building housing — an idea that West Contra Costa is also exploring. Others are making employees aware of regional down payment and closing cost assistance **programs** that could benefit them.

Although housing in Richmond is less expensive than in nearby communities such as Berkeley and San Francisco, Perez and Caro also needed to have her parents co-sign for the mortgage. Perez, who makes about \$50,000 a year, and Caro, founder and CEO of a local nonprofit called the Citizen's Power Network, which educates students on the importance of voting and civic engagement, would not have had enough money to purchase their first home without the assistance.

The house was built as part of a **Richmond Community Foundation** home renovation program, which aims to help first-time homebuyers such as teachers to live in the city where they work. Jim Becker, executive director of the foundation, said his organization is especially interested in bringing teachers and other school employees into the program.

The foundation's program includes a first-time homebuyer orientation through the nonprofit **SparkPoint** Center, created by the United Way of the Bay Area as one of several regional financial education centers that help local residents set up budgets.

“Part of the challenge that we have as a community is finding housing for people who actually work here, and teachers are a big part of that workforce,” Becker said.



Jim Becker, left, executive director of the Richmond Community Foundation, speaks to West Contra Costa Unified teacher Mitzi Perez and her fiancé Anthony Caro inside their new home, which was built through a program funded by the foundation.

Statewide, the housing program is helping teachers in communities such as West Contra Costa, where it is still possible to buy a single family home costing less than \$710,000 — the maximum loan amount.

Marcus Walton, spokesman for West Contra Costa Unified, said the high cost of housing is “one of the biggest barriers to our ability to recruit and retain teachers.” The district’s school board recently approved salary raises amounting to 17 percent through 2020 — which include a 5 percent raise that began in March — putting West Contra Costa teachers among the highest paid in Contra Costa County. Even so, Walton said “the cost of housing continues to rise.” And even the pay hikes may not cover the housing costs teachers face.

“This is not something the district can solve alone,” Walton said. “We need the help of our partners to ensure that West Contra Costa Unified is considered a desirable place to work and live.”

To help employees understand their options, the district held a housing fair last spring and partnered with the startup **Landed**, which lends funds for a down payment that is repaid when the home sells including a percentage of profit or loss.

Ensuring that the district's employees have information about the state and local programs "is an important component of our ability to attract and retain teachers and a high-quality workforce," Walton said. The state program can be used with other local programs to help school staff afford a home, he added.

CALIFORNIA HOUSING FINANCE AGENCY'S SCHOOL PROGRAM LOANS IN PAST FOUR YEARS

2015: 51

2016: 31

2017: 142

2018 (through June): 46 in Riverside, Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego, Los Angeles, Alameda, Santa Barbara, Contra Costa, Orange, Tulare and Ventura counties.

Although the state's housing finance agency has offered school employee loans since 2001, many people still don't know about them, said Eric Johnson, the agency's spokesman. The School Program, which until recently was known as the "**Extra Credit Teacher Home Purchase Program**," provides low-interest deferred loans to first-time home buyers with combined household incomes of \$118,000 to \$228,300 — depending on the county in which they live. As deferred loans, they are repaid when the buyer sells or refinances the home.

The state program assistance has been concentrated in the Central Valley of the state, as well as the Sacramento area and Riverside county in Southern California, where housing costs are generally lower than in the Bay Area, Johnson said. Statewide, the number of School Program loans disbursed dropped to none during the 2008 recession, but then began picking up steam in 2015, he added.



THERESA HARRINGTON/EDSOURCE TODAY

West Contra Costa school district employees discuss housing assistance with a representative from the California Housing Finance Agency at a district housing fair on April 16, 2018.

“Mitzi and Anthony were in desperate need of down payment assistance,” said Nicki Beasely, executive director of the nonprofit **Richmond Neighborhood Housing Services**, adding that her organization wants to work with school employees in Contra Costa and Alameda counties.

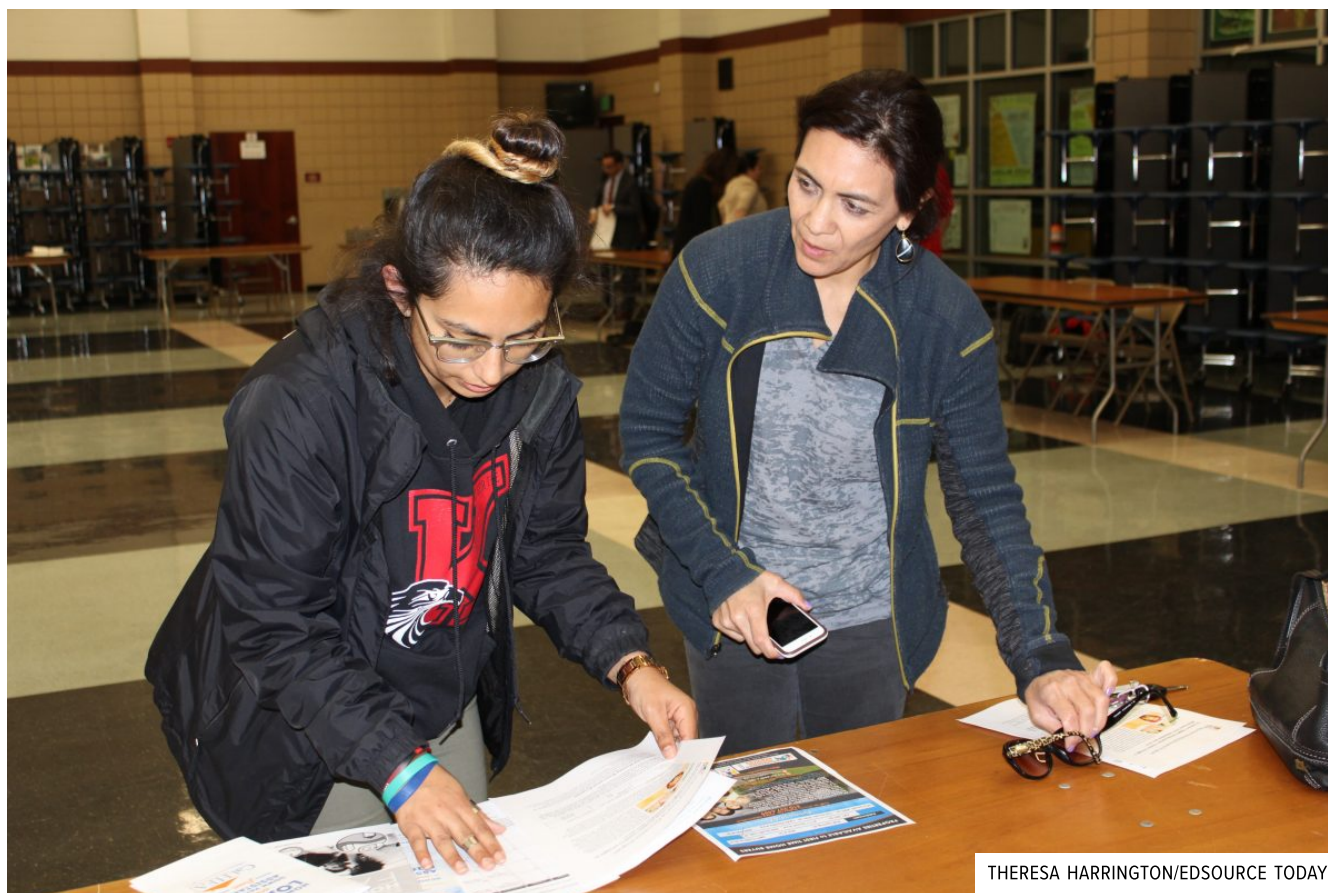
“We have a pipeline of teachers that we’ve been engaged with,” she said. “But Mitzi will be the one teacher we’ve helped get approved this year.”

Nikki Lowy, spokesperson for Landed, the start-up that offers down payment assistance, said her organization has provided 10 percent down payment loans to about 100 school employees, including about 95 in California and five in Colorado.

Of those in California, about 80 are in northern California and the rest are in Los Angeles, Orange or San Diego counties.

Landed recently announced it is **teaming up** with the College Football Playoff Foundation and the Bay Area Host Committee to offer teachers and other school employees financial coaching

and down payment assistance.



Kennedy High School teacher Mitzi Perez, left, reviews information from the West Contra Costa Unified housing fair with Downer Elementary teacher Diana Ortega, right. Perez, who recently purchased a home through the CalHFA School Program, has been sharing details about how she qualified to buy her house with other interested teachers.

Perez said she is also spreading the word about housing resources to her fellow teachers, who have been congratulating her on her new home and asking, “Hey, how’d you do it?”

“I try to help as many teachers as I can who come by and ask about it,” she said. “I’m very humbled by this experience.”

Editor’s Note: As a special project, EdSource is tracking developments this year in the Oakland Unified and West Contra Costa Unified School Districts as a way to illustrate some of the most urgent challenges facing many urban districts in California. West Contra Costa Unified includes Richmond, El Cerrito and several other East Bay communities.

Comments

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Brady Bernhart

22 hours ago



Depending on taxes and insurance and mortgage insurance this loan will be between \$3,500 and \$3,800 a month! Please write an article explaining how a teacher can make these kind of payments? Does her spouse make enough to support this?

California State Board of Education denies Rocketship charter school expansion bid

Twenty-five speakers, including member of anti-charter school group, urged board to reject Rocketship's appeal.

SEPTEMBER 7, 2018 | THERESA HARRINGTON



JOHN FENSTERWALD FOR EDSOURCE TODAY

Rocketship Mosaic English teacher Judy Lavi discusses a reading passage with several dozen students in one corner of the former learning lab.

After an emotional two-hour public hearing, the California State Board of Education on Friday denied a bid by the **Rocketship Public Schools** to open a new Bay Area school at a time of heightened debate over the role of charter schools in the state.

In a 9-1 vote, the board agreed with the California Department of Education's recommendation to deny the charter organization's petition to establish a new school in San

Pablo near Richmond, which the West Contra Costa Unified school board and Contra Costa County board of education had also denied. Citing concerns about the charter school's financial and educational plans, some board members said Rocketship — which operates 10 schools in San Jose, one in Antioch, one in Concord and one in Redwood City where the company is headquartered — may be trying to expand beyond its capacity. Board President Michael Kirst voted against denying the appeal.

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Board members said they were especially concerned about problems associated with the **Rocketship** Futuro Academy charter school, which opened in Concord two years ago, with the State Board's approval. The California Department of Education has sent six letters of concern to the school, which is located in the Mt. Diablo district, related to finances and other issues. Rocketship said they expected new philanthropic support which would improve the school's finances.

Chief Deputy Superintendent Glen Price, who was sitting in for State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson, said the California Department of Education was concerned about the lack of students with disabilities in Rocketship schools, lack of information about its English learner program, high suspension rates among some student groups and its governance model, which includes charter school board meetings held in San Jose. Price, who lives in Contra Costa County, said meetings that far away were “counter to all of our objectives for parent and stakeholder engagement.”

State Board members also expressed concerns about achievement gaps among students from different ethnic groups at current Rocketship schools.

Board member Feliza Ortiz-Licon urged Rocketship to focus on its existing schools. “Instead of petitioning for another school, why not focus on internal achievement gaps?” she said. “That is the nature of growing too fast, too soon.”

Although Rocketship officials acknowledged some internal achievement gaps, they said their students outperformed students in neighboring district schools, as well as in West Contra Costa Unified. Rocketship said 84 percent of its students are poor. Its schools are located in predominately Hispanic communities.

Marie Gil, Rocketship's Bay Area Regional Director, said after the vote that 500 San Pablo students whose families had signed intent to enroll forms will now miss out on the ability to choose the Rocketship alternative for their children.

"Families in San Pablo deserve a high-quality public elementary school," she said. "By voting against our petition, the state board silenced the voices of over 500 families who simply want the opportunity to choose a public school that will help their children realize their amazing potential."

But several West Contra Costa teachers, principals, parents and district officials said they are working to improve the education of students in San Pablo and the rest of the district. In 2017 state standardized tests, 34 percent of students in grades 3-8 and 11 met or exceeded English language arts standards and 24 percent met math standards.

"I'm hoping we can continue with this energy and we can increase the academic achievement in our own schools so charters become completely unnecessary for us," said Demetrio Gonzalez, president of the United Teachers of Richmond union, after the vote.



Demetrio Gonzalez, president of the United Teachers of Richmond teachers union, speaks against the Rocketship charter school planned in San Pablo in West Contra Costa Unified at the Sept. 7, 2018 State Board of Education meeting.

Expansion of charter schools has become one of the top issues in the race for State Superintendent of Public Instruction, with both candidates saying they support charters but also agreeing that the state's 26-year-old charter school law must be changed. The candidates, who will face each other on Nov. 6, disagree on how best to handle the impact of charter school growth on the financial health of school districts.

Tony Thurmond, who has the support of charter school opponents including the California Teachers Association, says he would consider a pause on new charter schools while Marshall Tuck, who has the support of charter school advocates, says he rejects the idea of stopping all new charter schools from opening.

In response to growing statewide concerns about charter school growth, Torlakson recently created an **“Action Team on Charter Schools”** to review current charter laws and make

recommendations for changes to the next State Superintendent of Public Instruction, governor, State Board of Education and state legislature.

Drawn to Sacramento by the charter votes at the state board meeting, several charter opponents in a group called #WeChoose Bay Area rallied outside the state capitol to advocate for eliminating the charter appeal process to the state board and some spoke against the Rocketship appeal. Mike Hutchinson, one of the group's organizers and a leader of the Oakland Public Education Network, a parent group that opposes charters, said in a news release they wanted to "make sure our elected officials know that public education is an issue that we will be voting on in this year's election."

Before the state board vote, Steve Zeltzer, a member of an anti-charter group called **Defend Public Education Now**, accused board members of having "a vested interest" in charter schools.

"It is right that education is the civil rights issue of our day and maybe we're seeing it here because tempers are flaring," said Ortiz-Licon, who defended her independent decision-making and shot back that she didn't appreciate someone making incorrect assumptions about her role on the board.

State board member Patricia Rucker said she has become accustomed to charter appeal discussions where "passions are high, issues are personal and there is often hyperbole attached to the presentations made." Despite claims that parents in San Pablo want the school, Rucker noted that she heard substantial opposition. Twenty-five people spoke against it and 15 spoke in favor.

State board member Trish Williams said she has supported charter petitions in the past "that do really great things for kids that need those opportunities and I won't be put down for doing it." She praised Rocketship's educational programs and said she wasn't worried about its finances, but she was concerned about the timing of the appeal, given the current controversy over charters in the state.

"I think this is an unfortunate time because the tensions around charter and district issues are at a fever pitch and will certainly remain that way at least through November and maybe later,"

she said. “It affects all of us. People are speaking up more about charters than they would a year ago, even.”

Adding that she was in an “awkward position of feeling this is an outstanding charter management organization that does great things for students,” she said she was concerned about how fast it was growing.

“And it’s coming about in a time where the political environment makes it more difficult for you to do that,” she said, adding that the state’s concerns about Rocketship’s Concord school compounded the difficulty of approving the new school.

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Comments

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Jeff Camp 

3 days ago



Theresa, you might want to edit this sentence for clarity: “while Marshall Tuck who has the support of charter school advocates, says he rejects the idea of stopping any new charter schools from opening. “ The confusing word is “any” which could be misread to mean Tuck wants to approve all charters. My impression is that neither candidate is so extreme on this question.

CarolineSF

6 days ago



Addendum: Here’s one thorough look at Rocketship. I think all media that have done the glowing PR-ish coverage should do the follow-ups, though. Otherwise they mislead the public.

<https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2016/06/24/477345746/high-test-scores-at-a-nationally-lauded-charter-network-but-at-what-cost>

▶ **CarolineSF**

6 days ago



When Rocketship started, it got a huge amount of glowing coverage for its model of putting a large number of kids in rooms with computers and a low-cost paraprofessional overseeing them. And its founder got a huge amount of glowing coverage as a disruptive innovator in education. Several years ago, without warning to those following news coverage about it, Rocketship suddenly dropped that model and shifted to more traditional classrooms, and the much-hailed disruptive innovator ... [Read More](#)