

Part VIII:

Conclusion

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Beginning in 1995, the Board of Regents raised curriculum and graduation standards for students in New York State. In 1996, the Regents replaced the minimum competency graduation requirements with the requirement that all students pass five core Regents examinations to demonstrate proficiency in English, mathematics, social studies, and science. In 1996, they adopted standards that define what students at all grade levels should know and be able to do in seven curriculum areas. In 1997, they increased the credit requirements for graduation. While these requirements will not be fully implemented until 2009, the higher standards have already led to improved performance.

A significant effect, directly attributable to the higher standards, is increased participation in Regents examinations. Changes in participation on the Regents examinations required for graduation are striking and illustrate the progress being made toward an all Regents-level curriculum in these subjects. In 2002–03, 183,000 students took the Regents English examination; 157,000 scored 55 or higher. In 1995–96, only 114,000 students took this examination. Regents mathematics examinations have traditionally been taken by more students than any other Regents examination and have also had the lowest passing rate. Between 1996–97 and 2002–03, the number of students taking a first-level Regents mathematics examination increased from 158,000 to 212,000. The percentage of tested students scoring 55 or higher in sequential mathematics, course I, in 1996–97 (76 percent) was similar to that of students scoring 55 or higher in mathematics A in 2002–03 (75 percent).

The number of students tested on the Regents global history and geography examination in 2002–03 increased to 206,000 compared with 122,000 in 1995–96; 81 percent of tested students scored 55 or higher in 2002–03. The most dramatic increase in 2002–03 was in the number of students taking the Regents living environment examination, which satisfies the assessment requirement in science. General-education students who first entered grade 9 in 1999 are the first who must meet this requirement. The number of students tested increased from

129,000 in 2000 to 188,000 in 2003; 89 percent of tested students scored 55 or higher in 2003.

The State administered assessments measuring elementary- and middle-level learning standards in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics for the fifth year in 2003. Sixty-four percent of fourth-graders and 46 percent of eighth-graders in 2003, compared with 49 percent of fourth- and eighth-graders in 1999, demonstrated proficiency in the ELA standards for their grade level by scoring at Level 3 or above. Among the four assessments, the highest levels of proficiency were demonstrated by fourth-graders on the mathematics assessment for elementary-level students. Seventy-nine percent of fourth-graders demonstrated proficiency in elementary-level mathematics in 2003 compared with 67 percent in 1999. Fifty-two percent of eighth-graders demonstrated proficiency in middle-level mathematics in 2003, compared with 38 percent in 1999. Though the percentage of eighth-graders scoring at Level 1 in mathematics has decreased by 12 percentage points since 1999, 17 percent of students are still scoring at Level 1 in 2003, compared with only five percent of students at the elementary level. The assessments revealed that the greatest need for improved curriculum in 2003 is in middle-level ELA. Only 46 percent of eighth-graders, compared with 49 percent in 1999, met or exceeded the standards in ELA. Clearly, schools must review their curriculum and instruction to ensure that they are successful in enabling all students to reach the standards.

The statistics cited above include both general-education students and students with disabilities. Participation by students with disabilities in the Regents examinations also increased. More students with disabilities took Regents examinations in English, global history and geography, U.S. history and government, and biology (or living environment) in 2002–03 than in 2000–01. A greater percentage of tested students with disabilities scored 55 or above in Regents U.S. history and government and mathematics A or sequential mathematics, course I, in 2002–03 than in 2000–01. A majority of students

with disabilities in the 1999 cohort scored 55–100 in three of the five required Regents examination subjects (global history and geography, U.S. history and government, and science) after four years; 49 percent did so in English and 39 percent in mathematics. Students with disabilities’ performance on fourth and eighth grade mathematics assessments improved between 2002 and 2003.

For the fourth year, New York State placed a larger percentage of students with disabilities in general-education classes than the national average. Minority students, however, continued to be disproportionately placed in special education.

As participation in Regents courses and examinations has increased, so has the performance of New York State students on national programs of student achievement. The average composite SAT I score for the graduating class of 2003 (1006) was 18 points higher than the average for the class of 1993.

The results of New York State’s students on the Advanced Placement (AP) examinations deserve special mention. Comparing 2003 with 1990, the number of candidates participating has more than doubled. There were about twice as many Black, Asian, and Hispanic candidates in 2003 as in 1992. Sixty-four percent of tests written by State students received a score of three or more, qualifying for college credit.

Not all students shared in these successes. Underachievement is still a concern in many schools — both those with high poverty and those with greater wealth. Even in many high-performing schools, there is room for improvement. While 82 percent of high school completers in public schools planned to enroll in postsecondary education, only 56 percent earned Regents diplomas. Statewide, 87 percent of general-education students in the 1999 school accountability cohort scored 55 or higher on the Regents comprehensive English examination by the end of their fourth year in high school. In the Big 5 districts, the percentages reaching this milestone were much smaller: 76 percent in New York City and 80 percent in the Large City Districts. Many students who had not achieved this milestone had been held back in ninth

or tenth grade and had not completed the curriculum necessary to take the examination. We know from the example set by certain schools — including some with diverse student enrollments — that more students, with proper preparation and instruction, could pass this Regents examination.

Similarly, smaller percentages of students in the Big 5 districts than in other districts met or exceeded the standards for elementary- and middle-level ELA and mathematics. For example, only 52 percent of New York City fourth-graders — and 45 percent of fourth-graders in the Large City Districts — succeeded in meeting or exceeding the elementary-level ELA standards in 2003 by scoring at Level 3 or above.

In too many schools with large numbers of minority students and concentrated poverty, many students left school without diplomas, and many who graduated were not prepared for a complex and changing society. Too many fourth- and eighth-graders had not acquired the skills and knowledge in English language arts and mathematics required to succeed in higher grades and thus, without dramatic changes in the educational system, are destined to follow their brothers and sisters into lives of poverty.

Why are many of our students not performing at the level we need? Large numbers of children placed at risk by poverty, the inability to speak English well, and recent immigration increasingly challenge public schools. In 1988–89, 19 percent of students attended schools with concentrated poverty; by 2002–03 this percentage had grown to 27.3. In 2002–03, the number of limited English proficient students was 19.3 percentage points higher than in 1990–91. Since 1991, the number of immigrant students has fluctuated. These students present challenges that are beyond the training and experience of many educators, and meeting the needs of these students requires greater resources than the schools they attend have available.

State revenues to schools have increased substantially in recent years. Between 1997–98 and 2001–02, State aid increased by \$6.1 billion, a 41.5 percent increase after inflation. Over the same

five-year period, expenditures per pupil increased by 38.1 percent after inflation. In 2001–02, the State share of district revenues was 48.8 percent, compared with 40.2 percent in 1997–98. Because local ability to raise funds is such an important factor in determining the financial resources available to school districts, State aid cannot equalize resources among districts: statewide expenditures per pupil range from \$10,000 to \$20,800, even excluding districts at the extremes.

Moreover, as data in this report demonstrate, resources are not aligned with need. Those schools with the greatest need frequently have the fewest fiscal resources and teachers with the weakest credentials. The situation in New York City public schools illustrates this point.

On average, New York City served much larger percentages of students placed at risk by poverty, limited English skills, and recent immigration than districts outside the Big 5. Nevertheless, the City had more students per teacher, higher rates of teacher turnover, and less experienced teachers. To a lesser extent, the Large City Districts — Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and Yonkers — struggled with these same challenges.

This pattern of high student needs, limited resources, and poor performance is not limited to the Big 5. It is observed in districts outside the Big 5 with high rates of student poverty and low income and property wealth — Urban-Suburban and Rural High Need/Resource Capacity (N/RC) Districts. Compared with other districts outside the Big 5, urban and suburban High N/RC Districts had the largest percentages of students in poverty, roughly comparable resources per pupil, the highest dropout and suspension rates, the highest rates of transfer to high school equivalency programs, the largest percentage of students retained in grade 9, and the lowest attendance rates.

Rural High N/RC Districts, on average, had the lowest-salaried teachers and the fewest teachers with substantial credentials beyond the master's degree of any school category. They also had the lowest average expenditure per pupil. In contrast, districts that had low rates of poverty relative to their wealth (Low N/RC Districts) had the greatest resources on almost every measure.

We know that children from even the worst circumstances, if given appropriate instruction and support, can succeed in school. We have daily evidence that this is so, demonstrated by caring, effective teachers and children in pockets of excellence obscured by the statewide averages. Clearly, there is a compelling need to raise standards for all students: to ensure that all students meet the standards, that all students enter high school with the skills to participate successfully in Regents courses, and that all students graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge to find employment or pursue higher education. The State has a three-part strategy for school reform: raise academic standards, increase the capacity of schools to achieve excellence, and measure results and make schools accountable.

Raise Academic Standards

Through a public process, we have set higher learning standards to make all our students competitive in the global marketplace. In July 1996, after extensive review by State and national experts and necessary revisions, the Board of Regents approved standards in seven disciplines: mathematics, science, and technology; English language arts; the arts; languages other than English; career development and occupational studies; health, physical education, and family and consumer sciences; and social studies. New assessments have been developed and administered in elementary- and middle-level English language arts and mathematics, grade 4 science, grade 5 social studies, grade 8 science and social studies, and intermediate-level technology. New Regents examinations have been developed in English, mathematics, global history and geography, U.S. history and government, chemistry, physics, biology (living environment), and Earth science. The last examination based on an old syllabus (with the exception of sequential mathematics and foreign language examinations) was administered in January 2002.

To raise learning standards for all students, the Board of Regents is phasing out the Regents competency tests (RCTs) for students with disabilities, beginning with students who enter grade 9 in September 2010, and requiring all students to demon-

strate competency for graduation using Regents examinations. Phasing out the RCTs ensures that all students are being prepared for the higher learning standards measured by the Regents examinations. This action was the first step in raising graduation requirements. All general-education students who entered ninth grade in Fall 1996 were required to score 65 or higher (55 at local board option) on the Regents examination in English to earn a local diploma. The graduation requirements are increasing incrementally. Beginning with students who first entered grade 9 in 2001, students must score 65 or higher (55 at local board option) on five Regents examinations and earn 22 credits to earn a Regents diploma. Beginning with this group, higher requirements have also been established for an advanced designation on the Regents diploma. (See *Part I: Overview* for a description of graduation requirements.)

The Department has approved a career and technical education path to the standards. Students who complete this program will have achieved the same academic standards as all other students. In addition, they will have met industry-approved standards in their career field. Key elements of the program include criteria for certifying and recertifying career and technical education programs; flexibility in core academic courses; technical assessments based on industry standards; a technical endorsement on a Regents diploma; and a work skills certification and employability profile for students successfully completing a technical assessment. As of June 2004, 15 local education agencies and all 38 BOCES have submitted certification forms to the Department requesting approval for career and technical education programs. Over 775 program proposals have been received and over 625 approved in the areas of arts/humanities, business/information systems, health services, engineering/technologies, human and public services, and natural and agricultural sciences.

Increase the Capacity of Schools to Achieve Excellence

We cannot expect all students to meet higher standards unless we improve the educational system. Students need safe learning environments,

qualified teachers employing a range of instructional techniques suited to diverse learning styles, contemporary technology and other instructional materials, and social, psychological, and health support systems.

Under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, all school districts, BOCES, charter schools, the State schools at Batavia and Rome, and Special Act School Districts defined in Section 4001 of the Education Law must ensure that all teachers in core academic subjects meet the federal definition of highly qualified by the end of the 2005–06 school year or by a later deadline established by the U.S. Secretary of Education for rural areas. NCLB core academic subjects are English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography. To be “highly qualified,” a teacher must have a bachelor’s degree and be fully certified by the State of New York. The teacher must also pass State tests or meet comparable requirements for the grades and the subjects they are teaching. Under NCLB, schools that receive Title I federal funds may only hire new teachers if they are highly qualified. All teachers of core subjects, even experienced teachers, may participate in professional development to meet the highly qualified standard set by NCLB. School districts must offer professional development to enable teachers to become highly qualified and effective teachers by the 2005–06 school year.

The Regents 2004 State Aid proposal recommended an increase of \$880 million, a 6 percent increase over the 2001–02 school year. The proposal recommended a new foundation formula to target school aid to close the gap between actual student achievement and that needed to meet State learning standards. Recommendations were to:

- consolidate many aids into a foundation program for operating general-education programs that meet student needs;
- adjust Foundation Aid to reflect regional variations in cost and provide districts with limited protection against losses from year to year;
- focus resources on those districts with high concentrations of students needing extra time

and extra help and with limited fiscal capacity to raise resources locally;

- provide aid for career and technical education programs in the Big 5 City School Districts comparable to BOCES Aid received by other districts;
- adjust formulas to provide a greater incentive to districts to place students with disabilities in integrated settings with their non-disabled peers; and
- expect a local contribution to the foundation program based on property value in the district and the income of its residents.

The Regents proposal recommended that 84 percent of the increase in State aid be allocated for high need school districts, those districts that have high student need and limited ability to raise revenues locally.

In Spring 1996, the Chancellor of the Board of Regents charged the Regents Task Force on Teaching with determining how the Department can assure that all teachers are prepared to assist all students in meeting the new academic standards and achieving learning outcomes. Since July 1998, when the Regents adopted "*Teaching to Higher Standards: New York's Commitment*," a great deal has been accomplished to implement and sustain this policy:

- The requirements for professional development plans were implemented in Fall 2000. Districts have formed professional development teams and statewide training was completed.
- The annual professional performance review requirements were established and implemented in the school districts in the fall of 2000. They continue to be reviewed and revised as necessary to ensure that they are effective.
- In 1999, the Regents adopted new, more rigorous standards for teacher education programs to ensure their preparation of teachers who would be effective in assisting all their students in meeting the State learning standards.

Between April 2000 and September 2001, Department staff reviewed approximately 3,000 teacher education programs that 108 colleges had modified to meet the new standards. Those programs meeting the standards admitted the first freshmen to their improved programs in September 2000. The first graduates of these more rigorous programs will begin their teaching careers in September 2004.

- The State Education Department continues to measure the success rate of students in teacher education programs on the New York State Teacher Certification Examinations and report the results to the institutions. Technical assistance is being provided to institutions that do not have the required 80 percent passing rate.

High student performance and capable leadership are inextricably linked. It is estimated that, in the next five years, nearly half of school leaders in New York State will be eligible to leave their positions. A systematic and statewide strategy for recruiting and supporting the next generation of school leaders needs to be established. In November 1998, the Chancellor of the Board of Regents established a Task Force on School Leadership. To assist the Regents with their deliberations, the Commissioner appointed the Blue Ribbon Panel on School Leadership, representing a wide range of education and community leaders.

In March 1999, the Board approved the Blue Ribbon Panel's Statement on School Leadership. The charge to the Panel was to identify strategies to prepare, recruit, place, and keep a sufficient number of administrators with the knowledge and skills to lead New York schools. The Panel identified three goals: create an environment where leaders succeed in improving student achievement; provide quality preparation for school leaders; and expand the scope and incentives for recruiting, developing, and retaining effective school leaders.

To address the Blue Ribbon Panel's goal of providing quality preparation for school leaders, Commissioner Mills developed a list of guiding questions on preparing leaders. After much discussion with and response from the field and Re-

gional Leadership Forums, the Board of Regents in July 2003 approved final regulations, guiding school leadership preparation programs. The regulations center on four components of leadership preparation: having a standard so that all candidates prepared in New York State are competent in a basic set of knowledge and skills, requiring evidence of successful leadership experience as part of the requirements for admission to a preparation program, focusing on competency-based preparation that requires meaningful field experiences and mentoring, and ensuring program quality through a national accreditation and graduate pass rates on State assessments.

Other initiatives have been underway to address the Blue Ribbon Panel's recommendations to improve the environment and increase incentives for school leaders. In 2001, a statewide "Leaders Count!" campaign was launched to educate the public about school leadership and improve relations between communities and the school district. The New York State Center for School Leadership has also partnered with the New York State School Boards Association and the New York State Council of School Superintendents to develop training that focuses on the relationship between the board and the superintendent. Finally, the Department is supporting legislation to increase the incentives for teacher leaders to take on the job of administration by ensuring that administrators' pension benefits reflect the 12-month calendar.

The Department will measure success in addressing the goals of the Blue Ribbon Panel by having effective school leaders for all of New York State's schools who, in the judgment of those who employ them, possess the essential knowledge and skills to improve student achievement.

In 2002, the Department began a series of Call to Teaching forums to address the recruitment and retention of quality teachers. Teams from school districts and higher education institutions participated in the forums. Some of the themes for future actions that emerged at these forums include investment in mentoring; developing a timeline for acquiring a master's degree; encouraging peer tutoring, internships, and shadowing experiences for middle and high school students; using experienced

classroom teachers to model good practice and attitude; ensuring a school climate that supports quality teaching and learning; offering financial incentives to attract teachers to the lowest performing schools; and developing stronger partnerships between higher education institutions and school districts to recruit and retain teachers.

Closing the gaps in student achievement is one of the highest priorities for the Regents, one that touches on more Regents initiatives than any other. Topics such as leadership, teaching, libraries, and State aid are connected to the campaign to raise student achievement and close the gaps. In November 1998, the Chancellor of the Board of Regents established a Task Force on Closing the Performance Gap. The advisory panel on closing the gap and the Regents Task Force on Closing the Performance Gap have examined the data, listened to national experts, and honed the strategies to close the large gap that exists in many high-need schools between current performance and the new higher standards for graduation.

The Department convened two subcommittees of the Statewide Gap Advisory Committee to advise on implementation of the recommended strategies. The subcommittees addressed 1) communication, advocacy, and support, and 2) improving classroom instruction.

The greatest challenge to meeting the Regents standards is in five large city school districts that educate 42 percent of New York State's children. Recently, the Department built on years of joint work with the superintendents of the Big 5 City school districts to implement an Urban Initiative to support these large city districts. The strategy includes:

- In New York City, District Comprehensive Education Plans (DCEPs), a performance-based planning process designed to assist superintendents in identifying areas of educational or organizational need within their district and to promote performance-based planning and accountability;
- In the Big 4 Districts, Partnership Agreements with the New York State Education Department, which are based on the priority areas

contained in each district's strategic plan and which indicate expected outcomes, performance indicators, district responsibilities, and services and support to be provided by the Department and its networks; and

- Urban Forums that examine data and best practices in technology planning and management, fiscal planning, curriculum and instruction, attendance improvement and dropout prevention, professional development and mentoring, and other strategic topics.

To help school districts provide students with access to the instructional support necessary to meet the higher standards, the Department continues to focus statewide professional development efforts on the new standards and assessments. To ensure quality programs and collaboration among the network of providers, the Department has created a regional network that is strategically aligned, tactically focused, and competitively funded on a multi-year basis. This regional network will focus local, regional, and statewide activities on "closing the gap" in student performance across New York State by providing accountability for program performance and supporting periodic program renewal.

The New York State Education Department has also developed the New York State Virtual Learning System (VLS), a web-based source of information for administrators, teachers, teacher candidates, parents, students, and the public. VLS was designed to encourage the use of the Internet as a tool for teaching and learning and to provide help to classroom teachers in locating and using Internet resources for instruction. The vision is to create a comprehensive education portal, which offers electronic tools to help all learners achieve higher learning and more importantly, integrates a range of standards-based resources keyed to the New York State Learning Standards.

The VLS presents the New York State Learning Standards, including the full text of the 28 standards and their respective key ideas and performance indicators, as well as the alternate performance indicators for students with severe disabilities. It offers resources that classroom teachers can use to support preK-12 standards-based in-

struction, such as sample tasks and learning experiences.

The Department recognizes that teachers can search the Internet for thousands of educational lessons and classroom resources. The value added through VLS is that it operates from a content management system designed to assure that all resources are keyed to the student performance levels of the New York State Learning Standards. Other teaching resources available on VLS include those from the New York State Library, public broadcasting services, and archives.

The Regents have focused special attention to make sure that students with disabilities are educated to their fullest potential in the least restrictive environment possible. The recommended reform of special education funding encourages schools to place children in the setting that best meets their needs and discourages unnecessary referrals to special education. The goal is to obviate the need for referrals by enhancing early childhood programs and providing supportive general classroom environments. Staff development and parent education will enhance the capacity of teachers and parents to help students with disabilities meet the new standards. Particular initiatives have been directed to improve the reading and mathematics achievement of students with disabilities in low-performing schools. The Department provides technical assistance so that students are appropriately identified for special education and when they no longer require services.

In December 1999, the Commissioner announced a school attendance initiative linked to the State's goal of increasing academic standards and performance. State rules and guidance for keeping attendance have not changed in more than 40 years; but student behavior, academic expectations, family patterns, and technology have changed. The issues addressed included:

- Setting consistent attendance policies and ensuring consistent interpretation of attendance rules across schools and school districts;
- Using technology to encourage efficient, consistent, cost-effective ways to fold local data into statewide data; and

- Identifying family concerns that reflect new patterns and require review of rules for excused and unexcused absences.

The Department has already taken significant steps in examining these issues. These steps include reviewing State and federal laws and regulations, conducting regional workshops on attendance, convening a Commissioner’s Statewide Attendance Advisory Council, forming an attendance workgroup to assemble all relevant information on attendance, and adjusting audit plans to increase audits of school district attendance systems as part of an overall effort to improve the reliability of school district data.

As a result of over two years of policy discussion and development, which was enriched by dialogue at the State, regional, and local levels, the Board of Regents in October 2001 amended the Regulations of the Commissioner concerning student attendance. The major features of the new regulations are:

- Clarification concerning the content of and responsibilities for maintaining the record of student attendance;
- Periodic review of attendance data by school building administrators for the purpose of identifying problems and developing actions to improve student attendance; and
- Development by each school district of a Comprehensive Attendance Policy that ensures the maintenance of accurate student attendance records and the use of attendance data to improve attendance within the context of local needs and expectations.

School districts, BOCES, charter schools, county vocational education and extension boards, and nonpublic schools were required to adopt a comprehensive attendance policy on or before June 30, 2002 and to develop and implement attendance recordkeeping systems consistent with their locally-developed policy by July 1, 2003.

The Regents recognize that unsafe and unhealthy schools do not support higher education standards. Through the efforts of the Regents in working with the Governor and Legislature in 1997, the following school facility improvement initiatives were funded: an increase in building aid equal to 10 percent of the approved project cost; regional cost factors applied to the State building aid formula to assist school districts in regions with high labor costs; and a total of \$200 million for minor maintenance and repair of school buildings over four years beginning in 1998–99. Recently enacted changes will spread building aid over the probable useful life of capital improvement. State building aid reached \$1.14 billion for the 2002–03 school year. The Regents recommend that the Governor and Legislature enact changes to make sure that school facilities are maintained as adequate places for learning and that resources are targeted to fix those buildings most in need of repair first.

In 2003, the federal government awarded New York State approximately \$146.3 million to begin implementation of Reading First, a six-year program designed to help low-performing, high-poverty schools to teach all students to read at grade level by the end of grade 3. In 2003–04, more than \$70 million in funding were awarded to 48 school districts and charter schools across New York State under this plan. The Reading First grants will be used to:

- Provide professional development targeted to implement instructional practices that are based on scientifically based reading research;
- Support the purchase and implementation of scientific research-based reading programs and teaching strategies, including frequent assessment for the purpose of monitoring student progress in each of the components of reading mastery;
- Provide intensive instruction for students who are below benchmark in the acquisition of reading skills and abilities; and

- Support all students, including students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient, in learning to read at grade level by the end of grade 3.

To ensure effective statewide implementation of the Reading First initiative, the Department is creating an infrastructure to build capacity for reading instruction based on scientifically-based reading research. Seven Regional School Support Centers (RSSCs) have been established and funded to provide comprehensive and intensive technical assistance and professional development to participating Reading First districts. The Department will fund a New York State Reading Resource Center (NYSRRC) to ensure the statewide dissemination of scientifically-based reading research and to support the work of RSSCs. In addition, the Department will offer State-level professional development for K-3 classroom teachers in Reading First schools through the New York State Reading Academy, a web-based program in research-based reading instruction.

To improve student achievement in middle-level schools, the Department developed a middle-level education reform agenda called *A Blueprint for Change*. The agenda is designed to help middle schools raise student achievement and to ensure all middle grade students meet the intermediate-level learning standards and develop as individuals. The *Blueprint* promotes the use of a strategy previously published by the Department called *Essential Elements of Standards — Focused Middle Level Schools and Programs*. *Essential Elements* is based on the review of literature and research done on middle-level learning and details the key components of an effective middle-level school and/or program.

In July 2003, after several years of study and deliberation, the Board of Regents adopted the Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education as part of an effort to strengthen and improve education in the middle grades. The statement focuses on ensuring that all middle-level students are provided with an educational setting that is safe and supportive and that values continuous improvement and ongoing professional learning; a challenging, standards-based course of study; an organized and structured school; an educational system that promotes academic achievement and personal development; and skilled, caring, knowledgeable, and effective

teachers and leaders. The Policy Statement is fully aligned with the Department's *Essential Elements* document.

The Board of Regents is studying and discussing alternative approaches for ensuring that schools with middle-level grades accurately and comprehensively implement both the Regents Policy and the *Essential Elements*.

Coordinated school health programs support both the academic and the health goals established for school-age children. Eight regional Student Support Services Centers (formerly called the Coordinated School Health Network) and three statewide centers — Statewide School Health Services Center, New York State Center for Healthy Schools, and the New York State Center for School Safety — have been established. Under the direction of the State Education Department, this network identifies research and best practices, provides technical assistance and training, and conducts assessments.

Coordinated school health programs support the Department's strategic goals by raising standards for health, physical education, and family and consumer sciences; promoting health and academic success; supporting school-based community services; providing professional development; instituting regulations that promote an environment free from tobacco, drugs, weapons, and violence; and encouraging respect for individual differences and involvement of families.

The centers will focus on improving academic performance, attendance, school completion, and/or school safety through the development of safe and supportive learning environments, including the promotion of youth development and community-school collaboration.

In addition, the Student Support Services Team (formerly the Comprehensive Health and Pupil Services Team) collaborates with other State agencies that provide educational services for youth — the Office of Mental Health, the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services, the Office of Children and Family Services, and the Department of Correctional Services — to provide drug and vio-

lence prevention education. The Team collaborates with the Department of Health to build and sustain an infrastructure that supports a coordinated approach to providing health services to schools and skills-based health education.

To meet the needs and goals of adult learners and to enable them to achieve economic self-sufficiency, the Department supports a number of adult education programs, including adult basic literacy and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). These programs served 176,239 adults in 2000–01. Of these adult learners, 6,714 obtained a High School Equivalency Diploma; 6,447 entered other academic or vocational training; 15,520 gained employment or are being retained or advanced in their employment; and 2,054 either left public assistance or had their grants adjusted due to employment earnings.

To raise standards and build capacity, parents, other community members, and teachers must be actively involved in children's education. Commissioner's Regulations require that school districts involve teachers and parents in school planning and decisionmaking. In many schools, teachers and parents are already participating fully in such matters as scheduling, staffing, goal-setting, and allocating available resources. To support this involvement, we will provide information about the new standards to educators, parents, and other community members through teleconferences, the Internet, and materials designed for parents.

The State is linking educational institutions — schools, colleges, libraries, and museums — through telecommunication networks. For every student, working with the resources of these institutions will become a daily part of the curriculum, transcending the boundaries of the classroom.

Measure Results and Make Schools Accountable

The new standards form the basis of New York's assessment system. We have strengthened our Regents examinations, the foundation of the assessment system, to reflect higher academic standards and to give more emphasis to students'

ability to express their knowledge in writing, to conduct empirical research, and to apply mathematical skills to real-life situations. The Department has conducted pilot assessments to identify valid and reliable techniques for measuring the higher standards.

New York State's plan for meeting the accountability requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was approved by the U.S. Department of Education in January 2003. President George W. Bush recognized New York State in a White House ceremony on January 8, 2003 among only five states that had approved school accountability plans consistent with NCLB. Commissioner's Regulations continue to be amended to align the regulations with NCLB. Amendments to the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education relating to school/district accountability and data and reporting requirements under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act were approved by the Regents in July 2003. Key elements in the proposal include:

- establishing criteria for determining if schools/districts have made adequate yearly progress;
- determining consequences for schools/districts that do not make adequate yearly progress;
- establishing criteria by which schools/districts are identified as "high performing;" and
- establishing rules for school/district reporting of data to the State and the subsequent public reporting of these data by the State.

These revised regulations represent a significant milestone in the evolution of the school accountability program in New York State. The accountability program supports the efforts of the Regents to both improve student results and close the gap in student performance. Implicit in the regulations adopted are a number of policy goals:

- measure school performance in terms of students' achieving proficiency rather than minimum competency;
- develop a multi-year plan to raise the bar for school performance;

- establish standards for all schools, not just those that are low performing;
- give schools the opportunity to “compete against themselves” to demonstrate that they are making adequate progress toward closing the gap between their performance and the State accountability standards; and
- recognize schools that are demonstrating rapid improvement.

The Department has taken steps to force failing schools to reform, reorganize, or close. Regulations that govern registration review were amended to improve our capacity to identify and remedy low performance in schools. Through the 2002–03 school year, 251 schools had been identified for registration review. One hundred eighty-four of these schools, including 24 during the 2002–03 school year, have been removed from registration review. Twenty of these 24 were removed because they achieved the student performance standards established by the Commissioner and the other four ceased operation in June 2003 pursuant to closure plans developed by their district and approved by the Commissioner. Nine schools were identified for registration review in the 2002–03 school year, including one school that had previously been removed from registration review.

Statewide, 527 schools were designated as in need of improvement under Title I for the 2003–04 school year. A total of 188 schools that did not receive Title I funds were listed under State rules as requiring academic progress. Depending on the school’s improvement status, among other requirements, it may have had to develop a school improvement plan, provide public school choice, provide Supplemental Education Services (SES), or take actions that may include replacing school staff, instituting a new curriculum, or restructuring the internal organization of the school.

The community has a vital role in building successful schools. The citizens elect school board members and legislators and, outside the Big 5, vote on school budgets. Reporting results in ways that the public can understand is a critical part of the school reform strategy. In December 1996, a

revised system of school reports designed to inform the public about student performance, student demographics, and other conditions of the school was implemented. In March 2004, we issued the eighth annual school report cards. As planned, the report cards have engaged the wider school community in a conversation about public school performance to build a climate that supports high performance and continuous improvement.

Since 2002, the School Report Card has included student performance data disaggregated by gender, racial/ethnic group, English proficiency status, migrant status, disability status, and income level for examinations in English language arts and mathematics. The significant gaps in performance among ethnic groups documented in this report are shown at the school level on report cards. The public reporting of these data will motivate changes in curriculum and instruction that will close these gaps.

In December 1997, the Board of Regents expanded the public reporting of the performance of the educational system by adopting regulations requiring the preparation and distribution of a Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) report card. The BOCES are a vital part of the educational system in New York State and must be included in the reporting system. The seventh report was issued in April 2004. We envision that the BOCES report card will be used as a tool to continuously improve the BOCES programs and services and provide information to parents, teachers, administrators, and communities.

After several years of strong economic growth, New York State is in an economic decline with a significant reduction in revenues. Nonetheless, we must continue our efforts to improve the educational system for all students and to move the education reform agenda forward. We have an opportunity to move New York State toward a system that links investment in education to demonstrable results. We have an obligation to examine every expenditure to maximize the benefit it yields, to re-examine and revise fundamentally the ways in which schools are organized and operated in New York State, and to devise new modes that will produce more satisfactory results. The data make a compelling case for change.