



# ***UNDERSTANDING YOUR SCHOOL/DISTRICT REPORT CARD FEBRUARY 2005***

## ***Guide to Secondary School Assessments***

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## ***Introduction***

The *New York State School/District Report Card* is an important part of the Board of Regents effort to raise learning standards (see definition of learning standards in the Q & A) for all students. It is designed to provide information to the public on student performance on State tests and other measures of school and district performance. Knowledge gained from the report card on a school/district's strengths and weaknesses can be used to plan professional development, improve curriculum, and allocate resources.

While the report card can assist in performing these important functions, misuse of the information on the report card can result in harmful programmatic decisions. When reviewing school/district performance, consider that student academic readiness, motivation, and family and community support vary among schools/districts and significantly affect performance. Though the report card can indicate how well students performed against measured standards (e.g., State tests), it does not provide information about student performance on other measures valued by the community. As such, decisions about school/district programs are better made by combining information about performance with information gained by visiting the school. Reviewers of the report card should also note that small differences among schools/districts and small year-to-year changes are not meaningful.

This year's report card is composed of complementary parts:

- ◆ an ***Overview of School/District Performance in English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science and Analysis of Student Subgroup Performance*** (*Overview and Analysis*);
- ◆ a school/district ***Accountability Status Report***;
- ◆ a school/district ***Comprehensive Information Report (CIR)***; and
- ◆ a district ***Fiscal Accountability Supplement***.

The ***Overview*** reports the performance of students in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics, school enrollments, and school demographic data. It also reports the performance of students in science at the elementary and middle levels. The *Overview* includes graduation rates for groups of students who first entered grade 9 in the same school year (cohorts). In addition, the *Overview* includes the percentage of core classes taught by highly qualified teachers and the percentage of teachers with no valid teaching certificate. School data and district data are provided in separate reports: the *School Report Card* and the *District Report Card*. The school report compares the school's results with those of similar schools (see definition of similar schools in the Q & A), and the companion district report compares school district results with statewide results. The ***Analysis*** reports English, mathematics, and elementary- and middle-level science performance data and graduation-rate data for students grouped by race/ethnicity, disability status, gender, English proficiency status, income level, and migrant status.

The ***Accountability Status Report*** indicates whether a school/district made adequate yearly progress (AYP) in 2003–04. It also identifies schools/districts in need of improvement and subject to interventions under the federal No Child Left Behind Act and schools/districts requiring academic progress and subject to interventions under Commissioner's Regulations for the 2004–05 school year.

The ***Comprehensive Information Report (CIR)*** reports three years of results on all State tests not included in the *Overview and Analysis*, including second language proficiency examinations, Regents competency tests, Regents examinations, the introduction to occupations examination, elementary- and middle-level social studies tests, and New York State Alternate Assessments for students with severe disabilities. The *CIR* also provides information on career development and occupational studies; high school completers; attendance, suspension, and dropout rates; student enrollments and demographics; and professional staff.

The *Fiscal Accountability Supplement* reports district-wide expenditures per pupil compared to similar districts and district-wide percentages of students with disabilities receiving services outside of general classroom settings compared to statewide percentages.

## ***Questions & Answers***

**Q.** *What are the learning standards?*

**A.** The learning standards are descriptions of broad expectations of what students should know, understand, and be able to do at each grade level in seven subject areas as they progress through grades K-12 in New York State Schools. The Board of Regents established these standards in collaboration with teachers, administrators, and other professionals in the field.

**Q.** *What is the relationship between the district/school report card and the learning standards?*

**A.** Both are part of the statewide strategy for raising the level of student achievement. The strategy includes:

- ◆ establishing standards in seven subject areas;
- ◆ changing the State tests to assess student progress toward achieving these higher standards;
- ◆ raising high school graduation requirements;
- ◆ building the capacity of schools to help students achieve the standards;
- ◆ ensuring high standards and support for teachers and administrators;
- ◆ building partnerships to improve student achievement; and
- ◆ increasing school and district accountability through public reporting of student performance.

**Q.** *What is No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?*

**A.** NCLB is federal legislation that is designed to ensure that all students are proficient in ELA and mathematics by 2013–14. District and school performance on State tests in the 2003–04 school year were evaluated using accountability criteria based on NCLB legislation. (Further information on NCLB is available on the web: [www.emsc.nysed.gov](http://www.emsc.nysed.gov).)

**Q.** *What is Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)?*

**A.** Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) indicates acceptable progress by a district/school toward the goal of proficiency for all students. To make AYP, districts/schools must test 95 percent of students identified as seniors in the reporting year in each accountability group with 40 or more students. In addition, the Performance Index (PI) of each accountability group with 30 or more students in a district/school must equal or exceed its Effective Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) or the group must make Safe Harbor.

**Q.** *What is the Performance Index (PI)?*

**A.** Schools are assigned Performance Indices (PIs) ranging from 0 to 200, based on the performance of cohort members on State tests. Student scores on the tests are converted to four achievement levels, from Level 1 (indicating no proficiency) to Level 4 (indicating advanced proficiency). Schools are given partial credit for students scoring at Level 2 and full credit for students scoring at Level 3 or Level 4. They receive no credit for students scoring at Level 1. Schools improve their PI by decreasing the percentage of students scoring at Level 1 and increasing the percentages scoring at Levels 3 and 4.

**Q.** *What is the Effective Annual Measurable Objective (AMO)?*

A. The Effective Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) is the PI value that each accountability group within a school or district is expected to achieve to make AYP. The Effective AMO will be increased in regular increments beginning in 2004–05.

Q. *What is Safe Harbor?*

A. Safe Harbor provides an alternative means to demonstrate AYP for accountability groups that do not achieve their Effective AMOs. The safe harbor target is the PI value that represents the required level of improvement over the previous year's performance. To make safe harbor, the accountability group must also make acceptable progress in science at the elementary or middle levels or graduation rate at the secondary level.

Q. *What happens to districts/schools that do not make AYP?*

A. Schools that fail to make AYP for two consecutive years in the same grade and subject are placed in improvement status. Depending on the number of years the school has failed to make AYP, among other requirements, it may have 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. Districts that fail to make AYP at every relevant grade level in a subject or fail to make AYP on graduation rate for two consecutive years are placed in improvement status. Districts in improvement status must develop an improvement plan and are ineligible to provide SES for their students. More information is available on the following Web site: <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/deputy/Documents/sch-acct-categories.htm>.

Q. *What are the accountability groups?*

A. The accountability groups are all students and students grouped by race/ethnicity, disability status, English proficiency status, and income level. Gender and migrant status are disaggregated to report results but are not used for accountability purposes.

Q. *What are similar schools?*

A. Similar schools are schools throughout the State that serve similar students and have similar resources. Each school report card compares the school's performance with that of similar schools. The following factors are considered in grouping schools: a) the grade levels served by the school, b) rates of student poverty and limited English proficiency, and c) the income and property wealth of district residents. Student poverty levels are indicated by determining the percentage of children in the school who participate in the free-lunch program.

Q. *What information is provided about students with disabilities?*

A. Results for students with disabilities are shown for all State tests and for diplomas earned. Students with disabilities may use accommodations when taking State tests, if these accommodations are specifically written in their individualized education program. The performance of students with severe disabilities administered the New York State Alternate Assessment (NYSAA) is also reported.

Q. *How is the performance of limited English proficient (LEP) students assessed and reported?*

A. All general-education students, including LEP students, who first entered grade 9 in 1996–97 or later, will be required to score 55 or higher on the Regents English examination. Alternative-language editions of all required Regents examinations except English and of all Regents compe-

tency tests are available. The New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) is also available at the secondary level to monitor the achievement of LEP students.

**Q.** *What are the State's minimum requirements for earning a **high school diploma**?*

**A.** To earn a high school diploma, students who entered grade 9 in September 1999 must complete 20.5 units of study (one unit of study equals 180 minutes of instruction per week for one academic year). These units must include four in English, two in mathematics, four in social studies, two in science, one in the arts, one-half in health education, and two in physical education. The remaining five units of study may be in an elective of the student's choice or, for a diploma with Regents endorsement, courses that are part of the student's required "sequences." A "sequence" is a series of units of study in a particular subject that generally includes one unit of study beyond the core requirement. (For example, students who take living environment and Earth science to fulfill their core requirement of two units of study in science may take chemistry to complete a science sequence.) To receive a Regents diploma, students must complete two sequences in their subjects of choice and pass all Regents examinations relevant to those sequences. (See the *School Administrator's Manual* at [www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/assess.html](http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/assess.html) for more information.)

To earn a local diploma, general-education students who entered grade 9 in 1999 must also score 65 or higher on Regents examinations in five areas: English, mathematics, global history and geography, U.S. history and government, and a science. The State offers districts the option to award local diplomas to students scoring 55–64 on required Regents examinations. To earn a diploma with a Regents endorsement, students must have completed three units in a language other than English and passed a minimum of eight Regents examinations.

The Board of Regents also established safety net provisions for students with disabilities, allowing these students to earn a local diploma by passing Regents competency tests in the required subject areas.

Beginning with students who entered ninth grade in 2001, the requirements for earning a Regents diploma have changed. Students will be required to pass at least five Regents examinations and earn at least 22 units of credit, including four units in English, three in mathematics, four in social studies, three in science, one in the arts, one in a language other than English, one-half in health, and two in physical education. Higher requirements have been established for an advanced designation on the Regents diploma.

## ***The State Testing Program at the Secondary Level***

The report card shows three years of results for all State tests at the secondary (high school) level. Regents examinations assess the achievement of students based on classes generally taken in grades 9 through 12. A review of the results of these tests helps schools to determine the quality of instruction they are providing to their students and helps students to make educational and career decisions. The Regents competency tests allow students with disabilities to show that they have the knowledge and skills required for graduation under the safety net. Second language proficiency examinations measure the performance of eighth- and ninth-graders in learning a second language. The introduction to occupations examination measures skills acquired in preparation for careers.

**Attendance rate** is the average daily attendance divided by the possible daily attendance. Schools with higher attendance rates generally perform better on State tests. **Suspension rate** measures the rate of school suspensions, which are the temporary exclusions of a student from school for disciplinary reasons for a full school day or longer. **Dropout rate** measures the rate of dropouts, which refers to any

student, regardless of age, who left school prior to graduation for any reason except death and did not enter another school or high school equivalency preparation program or other diploma program.

For *more information*, call the Department at (518) 474-7965 or e-mail us at: [rptcard@mail.nysed.gov](mailto:rptcard@mail.nysed.gov). Copies of report cards for all public schools and districts and information on the standards and new State assessments, and other information can be found at: <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/irts>.

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