Schools from 12 local districts cited as underperforming

Schools in a dozen Monroe County districts are among more than 800 schools statewide newly flagged as underperforming under the federal No Child Left Behind Act standards, the state Education Department announced Thursday.

In all, nearly 850 schools — 350 of which are in New York City — and 89 districts were newly identified as needing improvement this year. Just 102 schools and four districts were added to the list in the 2010-11 school year, for a total of 567.

In Monroe County, schools from the Brockport, Churchville-Chili, East Irondequoit, Fairport, Gates Chili, Greece, Hilton, Rush-Henrietta, Spencerport, Webster and West Irondequoit districts made the list for the first time, as did 12 schools in the Rochester district. Districts newly identified here as being in need of improvement are Brockport, Churchville-Chili, Fairport, Gates Chili and Spencerport.

The reasons for the large spike include higher state standards for achieving mastery on grades 3-8 English and math assessments and changes to make the tests less predictable. Other changes included the end of a statistical adjustment for students with disabilities and an increase in the high school graduation-rate goal, state education officials said.

The state revised the scoring system for the English and math tests last year, which bumped a lot of students out of the acceptable-score range.

The New York Board of Regents' goal is to make sure all students graduate from high school prepared for college and careers, Board of Regents Chancellor Merryl Tisch said in a statement.

"These numbers show that too many schools are moving in the opposite direction. The Regents have adopted strong new reforms to improve student performance and increase accountability," she
said. "If student performance doesn't improve, schools must be held accountable. We are watching."

Her comments raised the ire of West Irondequoit Central School District Superintendent Jeff Crane, who said the number of schools on the improvement list is an inevitable result of NCLB.
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The law requires all children to be proficient in math and English by the 2012-14 school year, a goal many have deemed unrealistic.

Dozens of states — including New York — are seeking a waiver of NCLB requirements under an initiative President Barack Obama recently announced.

"I reject the Chancellor's commentary on these scores," said Crane. "These numbers don't show 'too many schools moving in the wrong direction.' They prove what we've predicted about NCLB is true: that eventually every public school will be in need of improvement by the way NCLB is organized."

He also pointed out that Dake Junior High School, now on the state's list of schools in need of improvement, was named in June by Buffalo Business First as the fifth best out of 90 area middle schools.

An NCLB waiver would enable New York to reduce or eliminate mandates that haven't been effective in improving student performance and establish a better accountability formula that incorporates student growth from year to year, according to state Education Commissioner John King.

"But we cannot and should not accept disappointing proficiency rates at the school or sub-group level. While the NCLB deadline for proficiency for all may not be achieved, it's the right goal and it should be our goal," King said in a statement.

"Our students are not graduating with the skills they need to succeed in college and careers. That has to change, and change now," he said.

King said in a presentation to the Council of School Superintendents in September that the waiver would allow the state to "roll back the 'tsunami' of identified schools and districts."