

Fewer kids opt out of NY tests; scores rise

Tests

Rochester again lowest among big-city districts

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ALBANY - Test scores for students in grades 3-8 rose in New York this year after the state cut back the number of testing days, leading to fewer students opting out of the exams.

In English tests, 45.2 percent of students in New York were deemed proficient, while 44.5 percent were proficient in math, according to results released Wednesday by the state Education Department.

The figures are up from 2017 results, but the state cautioned against comparing the two years, saying changes to the tests — as well as going from six to four days of exams — make them hard to compare.

“To close the gaps in student achievement, we need information that identifies where those gaps exist,” state Education Commissioner Mary-Ellen Elia said in a statement.

“The state assessments help establish a foundation to identify the grades, schools, and groups of students that need more support.”

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In Monroe County, Pittsford had the highest total proficiency rate, combining all grade levels and both subjects, at 73 percent. Penfield, Brighton and Honeoye Falls-Lima were all above 60 percent.

The Rochester City School District was at 11 percent, while Monroe County charter schools were at 33 percent.

A lower percentage of students opted out of the exams, which has been a significant issue for the state to gauge the performance of students and teachers and has threatened school aid.

In the tests given last spring, 18 percent of students opted out of the exams, with the majority of the opt-outs on Long Island.

That’s down from 21 percent who opted out in 2016 and 19 percent who did so in 2017.

More than 950,000 students took the tests this year.

“Statewide, the vast majority of students who refused the tests were from average or low-need school districts,” the Education Department said.

“Long Island remains the geographic area with the highest percentage of test refusals in both mathematics and ELA. Charter schools and schools in the Big 5 city school districts had the lowest refusal rates in the state.”

Ian Rosenblum, executive director of Education Trust New York, said in a statement: “It is now time to stop giving disproportionate political sway to the small, and shrinking, segment of parents who opt out, and instead focus our urgency, attention, and resources on *all* students, including the vast majority of students — many from historically under-served groups — who are taking assessments and depending on our public education system to deliver the quality education they deserve.”

Greece had the most children opt out of the tests in Monroe County, at 39 percent. Fairport and Spencerport were the next highest, while Brighton (13 percent) and Rochester (6 percent) were the lowest.

As for the state’s largest cities, New York City continues to produce the strongest results, followed by Yonkers with 29.6 percent proficient in English and 28.3 percent in math.

Rochester still ranked at the bottom of the largest school districts in New York, with just 11.4 percent of students deemed proficient in English and 10.7 percent in math.

Buffalo fared better at 23.4 percent proficient in English and 21 percent in math.

The gap in the results between black students and their white peers narrowed by 0.8 percentage points from 2017 to this year; the gap between Hispanic and white students narrowed by 1.2 percent.

New York State United Teachers criticized the testing, saying it is based on “badly flawed standardized tests.”

The state does not use the results to evaluate the performance of students and teachers.

“It is better that scores are up, but it doesn’t change the fact that the state’s standardized testing program — and the way it determines student proficiency — is badly broken,” NYSUT President Andy Pallotta said in a statement.

“The tests remain too long and frustrating for our students and don’t provide meaningful information to parents and educators.”

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