

10 RCSD schools added to receivership list

Ten schools in the Rochester City School District have been added to the receivership list and suburban and charter schools came under sanction for the first time, the state Education Department announced Thursday.

Those changes are part of the profuse new accountability framework the state has adopted to align with the federal Every ery Student Succeeds Act.

Gone are the old categories of “focus” (bad) and “priority” (worse) schools. The categories are now “targeted support and improvement” (TSI; bad) and “comprehensive support and improve- improvement” (CSI; worse). RCSD has 21 of the latter and 13 of the former, as well as 14 schools considered in good standing.

That is a total of 34 out of 48 schools under some form of sanction in 2018-19 compared to 38 in 2017-18 under the old system. Still, RCSD had a greater percentage of schools in the most dire category than any other district in the state. Longridge School in Greece and two charter schools, Renaissance Academy and Urban Choice, were also

named CSI schools. The district, along with Greece and Wheatland-Chili, are among 106 “target districts” in the state. Those districts, as well as the



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individual schools, will be eligible for additional Title I money.

Those accountability designations are separate from receivership. In Rochester, five schools, notably Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. School 9 and also schools 3, 8, 17 and 45, were removed from receivership.

At the same time, 10 schools that were priority schools last year are now listed as CSI: schools 10, 16, 19, 28, 33, Wilson Foundation, Vanguard, Integrated Arts and Technology, Leadership Academy and Edison Career and Technology High School. Those are in addition to East Upper and Lower schools and Northeast College Preparatory and James Monroe high schools.

“Clearly in Rochester, when you’re talking about 21 schools are CSI, 14 of those are receivership schools and 10 of those receivership schools are newly identified ... that is a high percentage of those schools moving into receivership,” state Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia said Thursday.

The school began a pilot site for an education leadership model, increased a curricular emphasis on writing and strengthened its community partnerships, particularly with Baden Street Settlement, in part through hiring a community site coordinator. Its resultant progress on standardized test scores was impressive, if incomplete: from 0 percent proficiency for third-graders in both math and English in 2013 to 9 percent and 12 percent, respectively, in 2018.

It met nine of its 10 performance indicators and was one of only two schools in the state to go from persistently struggling to good standing.

Principal Sharon Jackson said last month that receivership has been “a blessing,” because writing the school improvement plan was a beneficial process and also because of the additional state funding it triggered. The question is how a school can sustain those signs of improvement after that money goes away.

School Board President Van White said the district’s pitch to Albany for increased funding should be

Receivership is a great responsibility for a district superintendent, and having 14 such schools will be a major undertaking — in particular for a district with no permanent superintendent on hand.

Elia said those circumstances were not taken into account.

“We don’t make determinations on how well schools are doing based on ... the fact that Rochester’s leadership has changed or whatever scenario is going on in Rochester,” she said.

Outgoing Superintendent Barbara Deane-Williams said in a statement: “Rochester is on the move, building momentum and excitement as we accelerate the agenda to lift our schools and make a collective impact on every child.”

The new lists were as much a reflection of changes at the state Education Department as different practices or results in Rochester classrooms.

The blizzard of new and remaining categories, Elia said, create “a community engagement process ... to develop and implement evidence-based strategies to increase student achievement in our neediest schools.” At the same time, she conceded her department has “a lot of work to do” in explaining them to the public.

School 9 on North Clinton Avenue, the district’s great success of the day, has among the highest proportion of English language learners in the city. Only 20 of its 762 students were not considered economically disadvantaged in 2017-18.

It has been a priority school, the state’s most critical designation, for several years, earning the further label of “persistently struggling.” In return it received extra funding that allowed it to hire an additional 1.5 social workers — previously it had only a single part-time social worker for the entire school.

targeted on schools such as School 9 that have demonstrated success with more money. The state should consider that a wise investment and keep the money in place, White said.

That doesn’t help the wide swath of schools whose inconspicuous inadequacy hasn’t yet brought more aid. And while RCSD touted School 9’s success as proof it has a winning strategy, two other schools — Virgil Grissom School 7 and Lincoln Park School 44 — slipped out of “good standing” for the first time.

The new categories are a result of changing priorities under ESSA. They take non-academic factors into account, including absenteeism, among other things, and attempt to balance academic achievement with evidence of progress.

In the past, schools given accountability status were almost exclusively located in poor urban districts. While that is still mostly true, 11 percent of the new CSI schools are in high-need rural districts and 20 percent are in “average need” districts, mainly suburbs. Wheatland-Chili and Greece were both included for the first time.

“At Wheatland-Chili, our schools continue to be in good standing,” said Deborah Leh, in a district statement. “The designation identifies an opportunity for improvement for a small group of struggling learners. We will continue to promote the growth and learning of all students.”

Greece spokeswoman Laurel Heiden wrote in an email: “This designation provides focus and supports to maximize growth. We will be working with staff, parents, and students to create a plan for targeted improvement.”