

Few parents seek evaluation scores

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ASSOCIATED PRESS

BUFFALO — After battles in Albany over who should have access to results of state-mandated teacher evaluations, the group given the right to see them — parents — appears to be showing little interest. Associated Press queries to districts around the state revealed that few, if any, parents have asked for their child's teacher's rating since New York began requiring teachers to be classified every year as "highly effective," "effective," "developing" or "ineffective."

"Here in Syracuse we did not have a single request from a parent for this information," district spokesman Michael Henesey said. The same was true to the west in Rochester, Batavia and Amherst and east in Hudson Falls, and Amagansett on Long Island. The Albany and Binghamton districts each have received one request since the rankings began with the 2012-13 school year. The evaluation statute requires scoring each teacher and principal from 1-100 on an Annual Professional Performance Review based on a formula that considers student performance on statewide standardized tests, classroom observation and factors negotiated locally between districts and their teachers.

Amid privacy concerns from teachers, lawmakers agreed to limit disclosure of a teacher's score only to parents and guardians of students in his or her class. The evaluation system is likely to again be debated and revised in the new legislative session. Gov. Andrew Cuomo and state education officials are among those questioning how virtually all teachers have received passing scores while only about a third of students are proficient in English and math, based on statewide tests. Buffalo parent Samuel Radford said that disparity has likely deterred parents from expending the time and effort to request the rankings from their districts. In Buffalo, where just 11 of 53 schools are meeting the state's expectations, 48 percent of teachers were rated "highly effective" during the last school year. Just 2 percent were considered "ineffective." "The credibility of the evaluation system leaves a lot to be desired," Radford said. "It's not something that's useful to parents as it's currently constructed."

Statewide, 41.9 percent of teachers were rated as highly effective, 53.7 percent were effective, 3.7 percent were rated as developing and 0.7 percent ineffective in 2013-14, according to the state Education Department, which declined to discuss the lack of parent requests for individual results. Of New York City teachers, who were included for the first time last year, 9.2 percent were rated highly effective, 82.5 percent were rated effective, 7 percent were rated as developing and 1.2 percent were ineffective. District officials did not respond to requests for the number of parent queries.

Rochester parent Rhonda Olyer said she didn't know she could request evaluation results for her 5- and 11-year-old daughters' teachers, but probably wouldn't unless she became concerned by their grades or behavior.

She said face-to-face dealings with the teachers through the years have told her what she needs to know. The state's largest teacher's union offered a similar explanation for the lack of parental interest in the scores.

"Parents put much more faith in what they see teachers doing with their children than with a number," said Carl Korn of the New York State United Teachers.

Radford said a score could be a helpful starting point for parents whose children are assigned to an unfamiliar teacher and who want more to go on than other parents' opinions.

But Syracuse parent Michelle Hendricks said that until she was convinced the evaluations were a true measure of a teacher's work in the classroom, she'd pass on requesting her daughter's 5th-grade teacher's score.

Assistant Binghamton Superintendent Tonia Thompson said she was not surprised that parents were not actively seeking teachers' APPR results because they have to wait until after the start of the school year in September, once their child has been placed in a classroom, to request them.

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