

## School test results released

### Test

### Ed chief cautions against comparisons

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The New York State Education Department released test results for students in grades 3-8, showing some apparent statewide improvements on the English language arts exam.

Across the state, 38 percent of students were judged proficient in English, up from 31 percent in 2015. For math, it was 39 percent proficient this year, up from 38 percent last year.

While the state released the 2016 results alongside the 2015 results, though, Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia repeatedly cautioned against comparing them year-to-year because of some significant differences. This

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year's tests were shorter, for instance, students were allowed more time to take them, and the questions underwent a more rigorous review process.

At the same time, a second year of widespread test refusal put the statistical conclusion further in question. This year as last year, about one in five students did not take the test, a protest against the state's perceived emphasis on standardized testing and accountability.

In Monroe County, the refusal rates were higher, at 29 percent for math and 26 percent for English. Some schools had fewer than half their students take the tests.

Elia said she nonetheless has confidence in the validity of the results and said it is mostly a communication issue that's keeping many parents from having their children take the tests.

"We aren't going to be able to do everything that needs to be shifted and improved overnight, and even after we've done a lot of improvements we're still going to have more work to do," she said Friday. "This is a process. We'll get information out as we make shifts and make sure that everybody gets the truth about exactly what's changed." In Rochester, 7.2 percent of students were judged proficient in math and 6.7 percent were judged proficient in English, both the lowest marks among the Big Five. The Rochester City School District released a statement that read in part: "We have increased investments in prekindergarten, special education, a new K-2 English curriculum developed by District teachers and many other services to help close that gap. Commissioner Elia noted in announcing the results that the Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative can play a positive role. Working together with our families and the community, the district is committed to accelerating achievement for Rochester students." Suburban districts fared better, ranging from

28 percent combined math and English proficiency in East Irondequoit to 73 percent in Pittsford.

Like previous years, scores varied widely by school district, gender, race, ethnicity and the wealth of the district's region.

Among the five largest school districts, New York City saw the biggest increase, jumping from 30.4 percent proficient last year to 38 percent this year in English language arts, and 35.2 percent to 36.4 percent proficient in math. While the test scores will not be used to assess students or teachers this year, they can still have an impact on schools under receivership, including School 9 and Monroe High School in Rochester. Both were under one-year receivership in 2015-16, meaning Elia could mandate drastic change depending on her judgment of their progress this year.

Neither school showed serious improvement on the math and English tests, but Elia seemed to indicate in a conference call with reporters on Friday, that other less tangible changes she has seen there, along with the installation of new superintendent Barbara Deane-Williams, will keep the schools from descending further into receivership.

"I definitely saw some very good things that were going on there, so I don't know that you can automatically anticipate that since Rochester's scores weren't better this year, (they will be judged to have failed)," she said. "We're going to be very, very supportive of ... these partnerships in those schools and the whole city of Rochester."

Elia was also asked about Mayor Lovely Warren's request for a "receivership district," to be led by Warren. She palmed off the question, noting such a change would require state legislative action. "There is at this time no capacity under the law to have a school district go into receivership, so anything like that would have to move through the legislative agenda," she. "We (NYSED) are not in a position to ever make that decision."

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