

City grad rate remains worst among peers

Justin Murphy

Staff writer

Just 48.1 percent of Rochester students who entered school in 2009 graduated by August 2013, according to data released Monday by the New York State Education Department, once again marking the lowest rate among the state's big cities and a marginal drop from the previous year's rate of 48.6 percent.

By comparison, the statewide rate for August graduation, which includes summer school credits, was 77.8 percent. In Buffalo, it was 56 percent, and in Syracuse it was 51.9 percent.

School of the Arts (89.5 percent graduation rate) and School Without Walls (85.3 percent) stood out among Rochester schools. Charlotte High

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School was the worst performer (36.1 percent); East High School was slightly better (40.1 percent).

"For us, this is painful," Rochester Superintendent Bolgen Vargas said. "Nonetheless I remain hopeful we will be able to change the trajectory of this district."

For Monroe County as a whole, the August graduation rate was 79.8 percent. With the City School District subtracted from that number, the rate was 91 percent.

Most suburban districts also stayed about the same as last year. Brighton's graduation rate fell 4.9 percent to 89.3 percent, and Wheatland-Chili's rose 3.9 percent to 96.7 percent, placing it with Honeoye Falls-Lima and Pittsford as the top three rates in Monroe County.

Besides Rochester, the bottom rates belonged to Gates Chili (85.2 percent) and Greece (86.4 percent).

Statewide, only 4 percent of the 2009 cohort of students earned a local diploma, as that option is being phased out. Those students also were among the first to be exposed to Common Core standards, implementation and testing.

"Raising standards and moving away from the local diploma was the right thing to do," Board of Regents Chancellor Merrill H. Tisch said in a statement.

"Thousands of our teachers and students rose to the challenge, and now in classrooms all across the state, they're rising to meet the new challenges set by the Common Core standards. The full impact of the reforms will take time, but we're moving forward," Tisch said.

State Education Commissioner John King noted the persistence of an achievement gap across racial and economic lines — white students were nearly five times more likely than black students to earn advanced Regents diplomas, and the graduation rate for "low-needs" students was 94.1 percent, compared to 56.6 percent in Rochester, Syracuse, Buffalo and Yonkers combined.

Statewide, charter schools had a June graduation rate of 70.1 percent for students who enrolled in 2009, part of a steady incline since the 47.2 graduation rate of those who enrolled in 2005. In that time, the number of charter school students has risen sharply.

The state also calculates an "Aspirational Performance Measure" to determine how many students are ready for college or a career. Those students graduated with at least a 75 on their English Language Arts Regents exam and an 80 on their math Regents exam.

In Rochester, 5.1 percent of students met that mark, the worst among the state's big cities and down from 5.8 percent last year. Statewide, the percentage was 37.2 percent, up from 35.3 percent last year. Students with disabilities in Rochester had an August graduation rate of 23.5

percent, compared to 67.8 percent in suburban districts.

JMURPHY7@DemocratandChronicle.com [Twitter.com/CitizenMurphy](https://twitter.com/CitizenMurphy)

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BOLGEN VARGAS,

Superintendent of Rochester School District, on data released Monday regarding the district's graduation rates.

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