

Graduation rate in city up, still lags

Graduate

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Although there was slight improvement last year in the Rochester City School District's graduation rate, the district still lags far behind the state average.

Overall, according to data released Friday by the state Education Department, New York's high school graduation rate continued its slight upward trend last June, marking the fourth consecutive year it has inched up.

About 79.4 percent of students who entered ninth grade in 2012 graduated by June 2016.

That was up from the 78.1 percent of students who graduated within four years in June 2015.

State Education Commissioner

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MaryEllen Elia pointed to the upward trend, noting the graduation rate 10 years ago was 67.2 percent.

But she said there are areas ripe for improvement, particularly when it comes to a continuing, large gap between white students and black and Hispanic students. "While the upward trend in New York state's graduation rates continues, there is still much work to do," Elia said in a statement.

» In Rochester, where 47.5 percent of students graduated on time last June, there was a 2-percentage-point jump in graduates as compared to the previous year. Rochester has the lowest graduation rate among the state's so-called "big five" large-city districts.

» Next lowest is Syracuse, where 61 percent of students graduated on time last year.

» In New York City, 69.4 percent graduated last June, up from 67.2 percent in 2015.

» In Buffalo, 61.7 percent graduated on time, up 3.3 percentage points.

» Yonkers is nearing the statewide average. Last June, 77.5 percent of Yonkers students graduated within four years. That was a jump of 3.3 percentage points from the previous year. “These modest increases offer signs of encouragement, but we cannot hide the fact that too few of our children are crossing the stage, and Rochester graduation rates have remained unacceptably low for entirely too long,” said Rochester Superintendent Barbara Deane-Williams in a written statement. “Equity demands that we take immediate action to provide our schools the necessary resources to accelerate progress until we achieve a 100 percent graduation rate.” In other Monroe County districts, some school systems saw significant fluctuation. In East Irondequoit, the rate dropped from 90 percent to 85 percent, while the rate increased in Hilton from 92 percent to 96 percent and in East Rochester from 77 percent to 83 percent.

There was a significant drop in the Wheatland-Chili Central School District, where the graduation rate dropped to 81 percent from 95 percent the previous year. Superintendent Deborah Leh noted the small size of the student cohort — only 63 students. With so few students in the overall cohort, the needs of just a few students can have a significant impact on the graduation rate, she said. “It really is depending on the needs of the children, and a function of this being a small school. We have great work going on here supporting children.”

The state’s overall graduation rate has ticked up in each of the past four years, steadily increasing from 74.9 percent in 2013 after remaining flat at 74 percent in 2011 and 2012.

A major gap remains, however, among racial and ethnic groups.

Last June, 88.3 percent of white students graduated on time, according to the data. That compared to 67.7 percent of black and 67.6 percent of Hispanic students. The state School Boards Association issued a statement calling the increase in the overall rate is “encouraging.”

But the group, which represents local school boards across the state, said it remains “deeply concerned” about the gap along racial and ethnic lines.

“These gaps lend support to our belief that the state needs to provide adequate state aid, especially to those districts that are less wealthy and have greater numbers of students for whom English is not their primary language,” the group said.

In written remarks, Karen Magee, president of New York State United Teachers, credited increased investments by the state and local school districts and the skilled educators who work there for the rising rates.

“The message here is simple: When you invest more in student learning, students achieve at higher rates,” Magee said. “Hard work by students and highly skilled educators in classrooms across the state, supported by parents and caring communities, is moving the needle in the right direction.”

Rochester has the lowest on-time graduation rate (47.5 percent) among the state’s so-called “big five” large-city districts.
