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Education Department Releases 2003 School-Performance Classifications
Nearly 2/3rds of Schools Meet All 21 of Their Annual Targets

WARWICK – Joined by Governor Donald L. Carcieri and by members of the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education, Education Commissioner Peter McWalters has released the state's third annual list of school-performance classifications.

The release, which took place today (October 9th) at the Oakland Beach Elementary School, showed that nearly 2/3rds of the schools in the state (62 percent) met all 21 of the targets set by the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Any school that missed any of its targets was classified as "in need of improvement."

A total of 88 schools (28.1 percent) were classified as high performing. There were 106 schools (33.9 percent) classified as moderately performing, 21 schools (6.7 percent) classified as "in need of improvement/making progress," and 98 schools (31.3 percent) are "in need of improvement/insufficient progress."

"With the Department of Education's release of the school-performance classifications today, we know exactly how our schools measure up. We know where we are, where we're seeing success, and where we have work to do," said Governor Carcieri.

 This marks the first year that schools have been classified under the provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act. That law requires that the state set annual targets for each school and district. Schools are considered to be "in need of improvement" if they miss any of the targets – for the school as a whole and for each of 8 groups of students: Asian, Black, Hispanic, Native American, White, students in poverty, students with disabilities, and English-language learners. Schools must also meet targets for attendance or graduation rates and for participation rates on the state tests.

"This new system, which requires schools to meet 21 targets, was created by federal law, but we embrace this system," McWalters said. "It focuses on equity, and it gives us information that we never had before. It enables us to see more clearly where we need to focus our efforts."

Under the state's previous system, in effect for the two previous school years, schools were classified based only on the performance of the school as a whole. The new system bases classifications on "disaggregated" data. Every group of students, plus the school as a whole, must meet all targets. For the first time, McWalters noted, the classification system identifies for improvement schools that may be doing well on average but may not be meeting the needs of some groups of students within the school.

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"This highlights that it is not good enough to meet the needs of most of the kids. In order for our system to be fair, we must meet the learning needs of all kids," McWalters said.

Statewide, 24 of the 36 school districts had at least one school classified as "in need of improvement/insufficient progress." Almost exactly 2/3rds of those schools (67 of 98) are from the seven urban districts.

"This confirms that we can't meet statewide goals until we move the scores in the urban districts," McWalters said.

Rhode Island's new classification system is based on a score that the R.I. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) calculated based upon the last three years of results from the state assessments. It is difficult to compare this year's classifications with those of previous years. Last year, for example 61 percent of the schools were classified as "improving." This year, about 23 percent (72 schools) are classified as improving or making progress. Schools must hit targets in both ELA and mathematics, however, to be considered improving or making progress; last year, they qualified if they hit the target in either subject.

As required by federal law, RIDE established annual goals or targets for each school level, out to the year 2014. Schools were classified as high performing if they have already met the targets for the year 2011. Schools are moderately performing if they have met all of their current-year targets. Schools are "in need of improvement" if they missed any of the 21 targets.

Schools are "improving" if they have met all targets and improved their scores for the school as a whole by two points in both ELA and mathematics.

Schools are "making progress" if they have missed some targets but are making significant progress toward meeting any and all of the targets that they missed. This progress, called "safe harbor," is determined by a formula set by federal law.

(Five schools were classified as "moderately performing with caution," which means that they met all academic targets but missed one nonacademic target – attendance, graduation, or participation rate.)

The state also released single-year results from the 2003 state assessments. Those results showed that, statewide, 42.6 percent of 4th graders were proficient in mathematics and 62.8 percent were proficient in English language arts (ELA); 35.2 percent of the 8th graders were proficient in mathematics and 42.3 percent were proficient in ELA; 35 percent of the 10th graders were proficient in mathematics and 43.7 percent were proficient in ELA. The only significant change (greater than 3 percent) was in 10th-grade mathematics – up 3.3 percent from the 2002 scores.

"The continuing improvement in secondary mathematics is mirrored by our SAT scores, which last year reached a 10-year high," said McWalters.

(Results by school and by district are to be posted on line today at www.ridoe.net)

The Oakland Beach Elementary School, where the classifications were released, improved significantly from last year and is classified as a moderately performing and improving school.

The classifications released today will be subject to further analysis, and they will be the basis for the state's process of "progressive support and intervention." Through that process, RIDE has established teams to work with each district that has schools in need of improvement, helping them to achieve their goals.

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"We're armed with the pertinent information," Governor Carcieri said. "Now we have to take the necessary measures to ensure that all students are receiving a quality education. This is about lifting schools up."

Note: Statewide summaries and a complete list of the school-performance classifications are to be posted today (Thursday) on the RIDE Web site, www.ridoe.net
A brochure and a "technical-assistance bulletin," which explain the process and formulas behind the classification system, will also be posted.

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