

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

Rich, poor schools alike fail to meet guidelines

By Linda Connor Lambeck
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HARTFORD — In Fairfield, it was Riverfield School, where fewer than nine out of 10 students in a special needs subgroup in 2011 achieved proficiency in reading and math.

In Westport, it was math among a subgroup of sophomores at Staples High School.

In Trumbull, it was a subgroup at Madison Middle School, tripped up by reading.

The net that captured schools "failing" to keep pace with the ever-increasing demands of the federal No Child Left Behind law has reached beyond poor urban schools to include programs in highly regarded schools across the state. It has widened to include 373 elementary schools — out of 786 statewide

and 86 of 193 high schools.

"The federal law is a strict, across-the-board, absolute bar of 100 percent proficiency by 2014, so there are increasing demands," said Mark Linabury, a spokesman for the state Department of Education.

The goal of the decade-old law, approved with bipartisan support during the George W. Bush administration, is

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to have all students proficient in math and reading in 12 years. School districts now have less than three years to go.

In Connecticut, the percentage of students who need to be proficient to avoid the label of "not making adequate yearly progress" grows every three years. Last year in reading, schools were safe if 79 percent of students achieved proficiency on the Connecticut Mastery Test, given in grades three through eight, and on the Connecticut Academic Performance Test, given in grade 10. This year, the percentage is 89 percent. In math, the bar is at 91 percent.

The higher standard must be met by the student body as a whole, as well as students in several categories or subgroups — race, ethnicity, English language learners, special needs and economically disadvantaged. If any group fails, so does the school.

In 2011, about 53 percent of schools statewide met the performance standard.

Even so, Connecticut has not yet followed the lead of other states in seeking a federal waiver of the No Child Left Behind Law. Linabury said the state is seeking guidance about what a waiver would mean.

The law, which is in the process of being reauthorized, has grown increasingly unpopular. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has indicated he's inclined to give public schools some sort of relief from the

federal mandates if Congress can't move quickly to overhaul the law. President Barack Obama may be spelling out relief guidelines this week.

Under the law, parents whose children are in chronically "failing" schools can ask for tutoring or a transfer to another school.

Acting Commissioner of Education George A. Coleman said despite the rising tide of schools unable to keep pace, he sees progress in the number of schools — 36 — removed from "In Need of Improvement" status, including Monroe's Chalk Hill and Jockey Hollow schools.

In Monroe, interim Assistant Schools Superintendent John Battista said extra supports put in place to help special education students make the grade ended up helping all students.

In other districts, the list of schools not making adequate yearly progress is growing. Bridgeport and New Haven both have 25 schools not making adequate progress in reading and math. Hartford had 32 schools on that list. Bassick High School in Bridgeport, meanwhile, managed to escape the list this year because it improved 10 percent in a single year, giving it "safe harbor" status.

Other area districts with schools not making adequate yearly progress in some area include Ansonia, Derby, Milford, Seymour, Shelton and Stratford.

In Trumbull, Assistant Schools Superintendent Gary Cialfi said the district is pleased that all of

Schools left behind

Schools failing to meet the demands of the federal No Child Left Behind Act, which aims for 100 percent proficiency in math and reading by 2014. Schools listed do not have 90 percent of its students at the proficient level in math, reading or both:

WHOLE SCHOOL MATH AND READING

Ansonia: Mead School, Pendergast School, Ansonia Middle School, Ansonia High School

Bridgeport: Barnum School, Beardsley School, Black Rock School, Bryant School, Columbus School, Marin School, Hall School, Hooker School, Batalla School, Park City Magnet School, Longfellow School, Madison School, Classical Studies Academy, Tisdale School, Read School, Roosevelt School, Waltersville School, Johnson School, Winthrop School, Cross School, Blackham School, Dunbar School, Curiale School, Central High School, Harding High School

Derby: Irving School, Bradley School, Derby High School

Milford: Law High School, Foran High School

WHOLE SCHOOL, READING ONLY

Milford: Meadowside School, Pumpkin Delight School, Orchard Hill School

Seymour: Bungay School, Seymour Middle School

Shelton: Sunnyside School, Mohegan School, Shelton High School

Stratford: Chapel School, Stratford High School, Bunnell High School

WHOLE SCHOOL, MATH ONLY

Bridgeport: Bridge Academy Charter School, New Beginnings Charter School, Bridgeport Achievement First Charter School, Bullard-Havens Technical High School

Derby: Derby High School

Seymour: Seymour High School

Stratford: Flood Middle School

SUBGROUP MATH AND READING

Fairfield: Riverfield School

Milford: West Shore Middle School

Shelton: Perry Hill Elementary School, Shelton Intermediate School

Stratford: Wilcoxson School, Stratford Academy Johnson House, Wooster Middle School

SUBGROUP, READING

Bridgeport: Bridge Academy Charter High School

Milford: Calf Pen Meadow School

Shelton: Elizabeth Shelton School, Long Hill School

Trumbull: Madison Middle School

SUBGROUP, MATH

Westport: Staples High School

its schools improved, and the special needs reading subgroup at Madison School went from 79 percent making proficiency to 85 percent.

"The issue is a very small one at Madison. We have shown growth," said Cialfi, who insists the school made safe harbor. Cialfi also wonders if the 100 percent threshold will stick. "It's a great goal, but realistically, how many schools are going to be able to say that," he said.

In Fairfield, Gary Rosato, curriculum director, said special education students at Riverfield missed proficiency by 2 points.

"They just missed. It was heartbreaking," said Rosato. He said the law may have an unattainable target, but it has had the positive effect of increasing concentration on subgroups like special needs

students.

"We've taken a hard look to make sure we are teaching them all in ways they can be successful," he said.

In Stratford, where several schools made the list, some for the first time, Schools Superintendent Irene Cornish is not ready to repeal the law. "Wilcoxson almost made it. They were like tenths of a point from making it," she said.

Cornish also chose to focus not on the schools that made the list, but the ones that escaped it, like Franklin School, where 57 percent of students are minority and 70 percent low-income.

"They are really focused there and believe all kids can learn," Cornish said.

Coleman said the state is working with 18 of the state's largest districts to help turn around schools

that have been struggling for years. "It is very difficult to overcome the effects of poverty with limited school resources, but our work to employ effective strategies that help close the gaps in student performance is beginning to show results," Coleman said.

In 69 districts, the performance of one or more subgroups were to blame for schools making the list. That was the case in Bullard-Havens Technical High School in Bridgeport and several charter schools, including Bridge Academy, New Beginnings and Achievement First in Bridgeport.

In 2011, there were 330 schools statewide that failed to make adequate progress for two consecutive years. Another 227 schools that have been on the list three or more years. They face "corrective action."