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NEWS RELEASE

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Education Department Releases High-School, District Classifications Nearly 80 percent of Schools Met Annual NCLB Targets

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) released today (January 3, 2008) the 2007 high-school and school-district classifications, based on tests administered during the 2006-07 school year.

Among all school levels, 79 percent of all schools (248 schools) met all of the annual targets for 2007 set by the No Child Left Behind Act (known in federal law as making Adequate Yearly Progress, or AYP). In 2006, 68 percent of all schools (216 schools) made AYP.

The high-school results, based on the final administration of the New Standards Reference Exam (March 2007) and on the 2007 graduation rates, showed that half of the high schools (29 schools) made AYP. The previous year, 54 percent of the high schools (31 schools) met all annual targets.

The statewide graduation rate was 89.2 percent, and only three high schools missed the graduation-rate target, which was 75.3 percent. (The state is transitioning to a new method of calculation of the graduation rate, which will go into effect for the Class of 2008.)

Classifications of elementary and middle schools, which were based on the October 2006 NECAP assessments, were released last May.

“I am pleased to see that 80 percent of our public schools met all of their annual targets, though it concerns me that only half of our high schools met their targets,” said Governor Donald L. Carcieri. “Adopting standard educational goals for all grade levels, strengthening the graduation requirements, and choosing a corresponding assessment tool will provide an essential point of reference for our educational efforts. As these new education standards give us a clearer view of our students' achievement levels, our education-reform efforts must be redoubled to ensure that all Rhode Island children receive the instruction they need and deserve.”

“The results released today show that we must remain aggressive in our school-reform efforts, particularly in regard to our urban schools and our high schools,” said Robert G. Flanders, Jr., Esq., the Chairman of the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education. “As we implement our new Diploma System with its proficiency-based graduation requirements, we expect to see steady increases in student achievement and improved graduation rates.”

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To make AYP, schools must meet up to 37 annual targets based on state assessments in mathematics and reading, as well as the attendance or graduation rates. Schools must meet schoolwide targets, and each of eight student groups (Asian, Black, Hispanic, Native American, White, English-Language Learners, Students in Poverty, Students with Disabilities) must meet the targets as well.

“Though today’s results show that 29 high schools missed annual targets, it is important to note that 15 of these schools missed only one of the 37 potential targets that they faced,” said Peter McWalters, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. “Because of the inflexibility of the No Child Left Behind Act, many schools in Rhode Island and throughout the nation are being identified for improvement when they have missed only one target. Other schools that have missed multiple targets will require more support from the state, and that is where we will focus our efforts going forward.”

At the district level, 10 school districts have missed annual targets for consecutive years and are in intervention status, up from six last year. Two of the districts in intervention status (South Kingstown and West Warwick), however, did make AYP – though they must do so for two years to be removed from intervention status.

Among high schools, 24 schools have missed AYP for consecutive years and are “identified for school improvement” under terms of NCLB. Four of the high schools identified for improvement (Cranston East High School, Feinstein High School-Providence, Middletown High School, and Ponagansett High School-Foster-Glocester), however, did make AYP. Like the districts, they must make AYP for two years to be removed from school-improvement status.

Districts in intervention status and schools identified for improvement may be subject to sanctions, such as having to offer supplementary educational services, mandated by NCLB. They also may fall under the state law on Progressive Support and Intervention, under which RIDE offers assistance and, if necessary, increasing control over school personnel, budgets, and programs.

The four districts entering intervention status this year are: Cranston, Middletown, Newport, and North Providence.

This year, RIDE did not classify high schools as high or moderately performing. The classifications for high schools note only whether the schools made AYP for 2006-07. Later in the school year (spring 2008), RIDE will classify all schools, including high schools, based on the NECAP tests administered in October 2007.

With the transition to October testing, school classifications will be released annually in the spring.

Several reports with further information about the status of each high school and district will be posted today (Jan. 3) the RIDE Web site, www.ride.ri.gov

The site also contains a brochure that explains how RIDE determines whether schools and districts have met their targets. See under: “School Report Cards – 2007 Report Cards – The R.I. Accountability System.”