



August 12, 2010

More Connecticut schools meet No Child Left Behind standard (</story/7251/more-state-schools-meet-no-child-left-behind-standard>)

By [Robert A. Frahm](#) ([source/robert-frahm](/source/robert-frahm))

They will be celebrating this year at Middletown's Woodrow Wilson Middle School, once considered a prime example of why Middletown only two years ago was designated one of the state's most troubled school districts.

For the first time, Wilson met federal school improvement standards, joining a growing list of Connecticut schools cited Wednesday for making adequate yearly progress under the nation's 2002 education reform law, the No Child Left Behind Act.

Nearly three quarters of the state's public schools, or 72 percent, met the NCLB standard, up from 60 percent in 2008 and 2009, according to the State Department of Education.

"Clearly, we see progress in these results," said Education Commissioner Mark McQuillan.

Still, 281 schools and 37 school districts failed to meet the federal standard, based on the results of the Connecticut Mastery Test for grades three through eight and the Connecticut Academic Performance Test for 10th-graders. About eight of ten students must score at the proficient level or higher in reading and mathematics to meet NCLB requirements.

Elementary and middle schools removed from "In Need of Improvement" list

Bloomfield School District	Carmen Arace Middle School
Bridgeport School District	Winthrop School
Bridgeport School District	Hall School
Danbury School District	Rogers Park Middle School
Enfield School District	John F. Kennedy Middle School
Hamden School District	Hamden Middle School
Hamden School District	Ridge Hill School
Milford School District	East Shore Middle School
Montville School District	Leonard J. Tyl Middle School
Naugatuck School District	Andrew Avenue School
New Haven School District	Ross/Woodward School
New London School District	Nathan Hale School
Newtown School District	Reed Intermediate School
Norwalk School District	Cranbury Elementary School
Norwalk School District	Roton Middle School
Thomaston School District	Thomaston Center School
Waterbury School District	F. J. Kingsbury School

Source: State Department of Education

Officials were particularly encouraged by progress made in several of the state's largest and poorest cities, where school districts were singled out two years ago by state education officials for intervention.

Among those districts was Middletown, where schools saw large gains in test results this year among low-income and minority students, groups that traditionally have lagged far behind white and more affluent students.

No Child Left Behind is designed to address that achievement gap by requiring schools to assess progress among groups such as racial and ethnic minorities, low-income children, special

</image/nclb-8-12-10>

education students and children who are learning to speak English.

In Middletown, both of the district's middle schools - along with three elementary schools that are designated in need of improvement - met the standard for yearly progress. If those schools make adequate progress again next year, they will be removed from the "needs improvement" list. It was an encouraging turnaround for a district that state officials identified in 2008 as one of 12 urban districts needing intervention.

"In a way, getting to be one of the dirty dozen was one of the best things that ever happened to us," said Assistant Superintendent Barbara Senges.

The State Department of Education later added three more districts to the list and provided assistance as districts developed improvement strategies. That included consultants who helped

revamp curriculum, intensify instruction in reading and mathematics, and zero in more closely on individual student progress.

"If you look at . . . these 15 districts, they are making, for the most part, faster progress than the rest of the state," said Deborah Richards, head of the education department's Bureau of Accountability and Improvement.

Middletown schools established data teams to review student performance, create new tests to measure progress and revise classroom lessons and strategy - all part of the Connecticut Accountability for Learning Initiative, a state-developed model requiring schools to make better use of student performance data.

"We had pre-testing, post-testing," Senges said. "For the first time, [teachers] were all teaching the same thing at the same time."

The biggest gains occurred among low-income and minority students. Among Middletown's black students, 74 percent met the proficiency standard in mathematics on the Connecticut Mastery Test, up from 64 percent a year earlier. In reading, 62 percent of black and low-income children and 63 percent of Hispanic children scored at proficient levels, gains of nine percentage points over last year's results.

"There was a huge closing of the achievement gap that occurred in grades six, seven and eight," Senges said.

Part of the reason, according to Senges, was the introduction of small intervention classes in math and reading for the lowest-performing students.

No one could predict exactly what effect all of the changes would have, but the results are encouraging.

"I was kind of like a doubting Thomas," said Gene Nocera, who retired this year as principal at Woodrow Wilson Middle School. "Of course, I was elated."

Nocera placed much of the credit on the collaboration among teachers. "We completely re-did the teachers' schedules so the teams could meet almost on a daily basis," he said.

Lisa Sherman, an eighth-grade language arts teacher at Wilson, said the increasing focus on data, including frequent testing of student progress, was a key factor in the turnaround.

"We were able to immediately see the results of what we were doing, so we were not going on for two weeks or two months doing something that wasn't working," she said.

Christine Salamone, who teaches seventh-grade language arts at Wilson, said she was relieved when she saw the latest test results.

"Sometimes you work really hard at something, and the numbers don't always reflect it," said Salamone, who is starting her 34th year of teaching. "I was proud of my colleagues and myself to be part of something like this."

Reading "No Child Left Behind" charts

The state Department of Education has released a series of tables showing schools and school districts in Connecticut that have failed to meet federal standards under the No Child Left Behind law. Because the law is complex, the charts themselves can be difficult to decipher. Here is a guide to some of the key entries on the charts:

- **In need of improvement:** Schools that don't meet federal standards for two years in a row are deemed to be in need of improvement.
- **Title I:** Title I is a program aimed at helping troubled schools increase their performance. Schools receiving Title I funding that don't make adequate progress for two or more years in a row can face steps such as a forced reorganization.
- **Subgroup academic achievement:** A school or district can be cited if even one group of students - such as minority students, special education students, low-income children or children learning to speak English -- fails to meet standards in reading or mathematics.
- **Years of improvement and hold:** Schools or districts can be removed from the "needs improvement" list if they make adequate progress two years in a row. The charts show the number of consecutive years a school has been on the list. However, some schools or districts that have made one year of progress can be placed on "hold" if they make a minimum level of progress even though they still fall short of the federal benchmarks. If those schools make similar gains next year, they will be removed from the list.

(<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=322606>)