



# STAR-GAZETTE

The first Gannett newspaper

FRIDAY, May 8, 2009 | Elmira, N.Y.

stargazette.com

Penn — New York Edition | 75 CENT

## English scores rise for grades 3-8 in Tier

### Elmira district removed from needs improvement list

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Southern Tier third- through eighth-graders performed well on this year's English language arts tests, and strong

results pulled at least one area school district from a list of districts that need improvement, officials announced Thursday.

Statewide, 77 percent of students achieved standards for achievement, compared with 68 percent in 2008. About

1.2 million students were tested.

"We have improved in every grade level, 3 through 8," said Ralph Marino, Horseheads school district superintendent. "We are absolutely thrilled. Our students, teachers and parents have been working very hard, and it shows in the

#### ON THE WEB

► To see a record of test scores from 2006 to 2009 in every school district in the state, go to: [stargazette.com/schooltestscores](http://stargazette.com/schooltestscores)

numbers."

Students in the Elmira school district showed so much improvement, the district was removed from the needs im-

provement list, said Pam Hawthorne, district spokeswoman.

"This is an exciting day," Joseph F. Hochreiter, acting superintendent of the Elmira district, said at a press conference Thursday afternoon. "It's the fourth consecutive year our student performance improved."

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## TESTS

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"We weren't doing it wrong, but we were doing it at the wrong time," Hochreiter said about lower scores in prior years.

In Elmira, teachers have focused on students' ability to read.

"If students can read well at their grade level, they will do well in other areas," Hochreiter said.

He and officials in the Corning-Painted Post and Horseheads districts cited curriculum alignment and a shared vision as components that contributed to student success.

"We as a district can be proud that the work done over the past several years of aligning curriculum and raising expectations has paid off in gains in student success," Ann Collins, Hugh Gregg Elementary School principal in Corning, said in a prepared statement.

"I'm proud to say our results over five years have steadily increased," Richard Kimble, Corning Free Academy principal, said in prepared remarks. "Obviously, our teaching staff has done an amazing job as well."

New York used to give statewide standardized English and math tests to stu-

dents in grades 4 and 8. That changed in 2006, when all children in grades 3 through 8 began taking the tests and the state Board of Regents put a new grade-by-grade curriculum in place.

The federal No Child Left Behind Act prompted the changes, explained state Education Commissioner Richard Mills.

Younger children who are in the third grade are starting off from a higher point academically than students did in the past, "which suggests that we haven't seen anything yet," Mills said.

"In other words, youngsters who are just coming into this have an even better chance to perform."

Other trends in the test scores include:

► Fewer students with disabilities and students whose first language is not English are scoring at the lowest level, which indicates serious academic difficulties.

► Overall, black, Hispanic and American Indian students had the most growth in meeting state standards.

► The percentage of children in the Big 5 city school districts — Rochester, Yonkers, Buffalo, Syracuse and New York City — who are scoring at levels three and four increased signif-

icantly in the past four years. Student performance is rated on a scale from one to four — one and two are below the state standard, and three and four are at or above it.

The state Education Department attributes some of the gains to more schools offering pre-kindergarten programs, more professional development for educators and a larger state investment in schools.

New York has greatly increased funding for pre-kindergarten education, and nearly 500 of the roughly 700 school districts in the state now offer pre-kindergarten.

Albany Bureau reporter Cara Matthews contributed to this report.