



*Data-based targeted supports and monitoring of identified schools and districts over time will close the performance gap in English language arts and mathematics across student subgroups, and, if not, will lead to school or district reorganization.*

N.B. Data collection for this SEA took place between July 2007 and April 2008.

### CONTEXT

New York State has more than 7,000 urban, suburban, and rural schools serving 2.9 million students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000). The largest five districts—New York City, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and Yonkers—make up 42% of the New York public school population. The New York State Education Department (NYSED) is unusual in that it is part of the University of the State of New York (USNY), a licensing and accreditation body that not only sets standards for schools from pre-kindergarten through professional and graduate school but also all libraries, 750 museums, 25 public broadcasting facilities, and all certified employees in public schools. The Board of Regents governs and sets policy for USNY and appoints a Commissioner of Education who heads the NYSED and serves as President of the USNY. Under a reorganization in 2007, a new Senior Deputy Commissioner oversees the Office of P–16 Education, which is responsible for both the Elementary, Middle, Secondary and Continuing Education (EMSC) office, and the Office of Higher Education (NYSED, 2003).

NYSED initiated a school accountability plan in 1989 with the introduction of the School Under Registration Review (SURR) process (Brady, 2003). This process used state examinations to identify schools that were performing furthest from state standards. Each SURR school must develop a comprehensive improvement plan, and the district must develop a corrective action plan, both of which are monitored closely. This process has led to the closing of schools, most of which have been in New York City. “Most, but not all, SURR schools are also low performing according to NCLB [No Child Left Behind],” said a state official (interview, November 1, 2007).

In 2003, EMSC established the Office of School Improvement and Community Services (OSICS), which is responsible for designing and implementing the state’s system of support for low-performing schools. OSICS and the Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID) are primary partners in providing interventions for low-performing districts. VESID is proactively implementing the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Action (IDEA), which calls for a state performance plan that articulates measurable and rigorous targets for improvement to meet performance indicators for student with disabilities. VESID supports an extensive statewide school improvement network of specialists to assist

districts in improving the quality of instructional program for students with disabilities and in dealing with other state performance plan indicators. VESID has crafted a series of criteria used to identify districts that are the lowest performing and that require “mandated technical assistance” (NYSED, n.d.). There is substantial overlap in the districts that are low performing according to VESID’s criteria and districts and schools that are low performing according to NCLB. According to a department administrator, approximately 75% of schools in accountability status have identified students with disabilities as a subgroup not making adequate yearly progress (AYP) (interview, November 1, 2007). NCLB and VESID use different criteria to identify districts but overlapping indicators to identify schools.

In 2003, seven Regional School Support Centers (RSSCs) were developed, one of which is dedicated to New York City. RSSCs are charged to provide technical assistance and support to schools and priority districts, support implementation of the state’s Reading First initiative and the reauthorization of IDEA, and provide additional professional development and technical assistance based on the needs of individual schools/priority districts. RSSCs are also charged to work with districts identified by VESID and with other districts and schools identified by the state accountability systems, as their capacity and that of their network partners allow. RSSCs coordinate with four other NYSED-supported Regional Network Partners (RNPs) to support the alignment and coordination of service delivery to schools and priority districts.

The 2007 passage of Chapter 57 of the New York State laws had a great impact on state interventions (NYSED, 2007). This law provides more equitable state funding statewide and makes specific provisions for low-performing schools. It specifies that all school districts that receive a supplemental educational improvement plan grant or significantly increased financial support under the new Foundation Aid formula will be required to submit a Contract for Excellence. These districts (55 in 2007–08) specify how additional funds will improve student achievement, and they select from the contract’s menu of research-based program options, including class size reduction, increased student time on task, teacher/principal quality initiatives, middle and high school restructuring, full-day pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, and other program or initiatives that are strategic in light of school needs and characteristics. Schools in accountability status are expected to align their Contract for Excellence with other school improvement efforts and to use this extra funding to help students most in need.

## **Selection Criteria**

New York’s state accountability plan outlining how the state holds schools and districts accountable was most recently updated with the U.S. Department of Education in March 2006 (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Table NY-1 outlines the ways in which the state’s plan addresses the 10 principles required by NCLB.

**Table NY-1. New York AYP Measures**

NCLB AYP Determination Requirement	New York's Approach
<b>Assessment</b>	New York State Testing Program/New York State Regents Examination
<b>Proficiency Target</b>	Index
<b>Starting Point</b>	20th Percentile
<b>Participation</b>	95%
<b>Additional Measure</b>	Science/Graduation Rate
<b>Additional Provisions</b>	No
<b>Minimum Number for Subgroups</b>	
Accountability/Performance	30
Participation	40
<b>Confidence Intervals</b>	Yes (90%)
<b>Other</b>	Yes: Science assessment

**Source:** U.S. Department of Education, 2007.

The science assessment is also used to determine AYP in the elementary/middle grades. The participation rate in New York is averaged over 2 years if a school or district fails to meet the 95% target in 1 year. The graduation rate target for a cohort of students is 55%.

Table NY-2 outlines the number and percentage of low-performing schools—schools that are in need of improvement (INI)—in New York, as well as the number of years they have been designated as such. Table NY-3 provides the same data for New York districts.

**Table NY-2. New York Low-Performing Schools, Academic Year 2007–2008**

No. of Schools in State	No. (%) of Schools Designated as Low-Performing	Number of Years Designated								
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Exiting
<b>4,061</b>	744 (18%)	208	121	94	83	90	44	62	42	115

**Note:** Years Designated corresponds to previously noted NCLB designations accordingly: Year 1 = INI (year 1), Year 2 = INI (year 2), Year 3 = Corrective Action, Year 4 = Restructuring (year 1), Year 5 =

Restructuring (year 2), Year 6 = Restructuring (year 3), Year 7 = Restructuring (year 4), Year 8 = Restructuring (year 5).

**Sources:** New York State Board of Regents, 2007; New York State Board of Regents, 2008.

**Table NY-3. New York Low-Performing Districts, Academic Year 2007–2008**

No. of Districts in State	No. (%) of Districts Designated as Low-Performing	Number of Years Designated								
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Exiting
853	69 (8%)	18	12	11	14	11	3	0	0	2

**Note:** Years Designated corresponds to previously noted NCLB designations accordingly: Year 1 = INI (year 1), Year 2 = INI (year 2), Year 3 = Corrective Action, Year 4 = Restructuring (year 1), Year 5 = Restructuring (year 2), Year 6 = Restructuring (year 3), Year 7 = Restructuring (year 4), Year 8 = Restructuring (year 5).

**Source:** New York State Board of Regents, 2008.

Note: The following sections of this profile are grounded in data gathered from interviews and a focus group conducted between July and November 2007. The state education agency (SEA) website, official SEA policies and administrative policies, legislation, court cases, and other official documents supplement the interviews and focus groups.

## Interventions with Low-Performing Schools and Districts

OSICS sets criteria for determining which schools will receive services. The RSSC Executive Committee proposes a list of schools in need of services, generally those determined to be furthest from meeting the standards. This list is reviewed annually by OSICS and prioritized based on the schools' level of need. Districts receiving interventions are those with a critical mass of schools that are low performing.

Partner agencies in the department also identify low-performing schools using their own indicators; there is often overlap across groups. The Special Education Training and Resource Center (SETRC) has Key Performance Indicators (interview, November 1, 2007). The Bilingual Education/ESL Technical Assistance Centers (BETACs) are expected to serve all schools and districts with English language learners (ELLs), regardless of accountability status (NYSED, n.d.). The limitations of available data have made it difficult to target schools with the lowest performing ELL students. The Student Support Services Network (SSSN) has no single set of criteria. See Table NY-4 for a description of NYSED's interventions.

**Table NY-4. New York Interventions with Low-Performing Schools and Districts**

<b>Policies</b>	Chapter 57 of the laws of 2007 dramatically increases available resources, provides for more equitable funding, and increases requirements and accountability connected to funding. (See Monitoring.) Requirements of low-performing schools are spelled out in the Contract for Excellence.
<b>Primary Focus of Intervention</b>	Low-performing schools, New York City, the Big Four urban districts (Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and Yonkers), and three additional priority districts (Roosevelt, Hempstead, and Wyandanch).
<b>Services</b>	
Site-Specific	<p>NYSED supports districts and individual schools through seven RSSCs. They provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding of how NCLB planning aligns and must connect with requirements of numerous other plans.</li> <li>• Facilitation of causal data analysis and strategic service provision.</li> <li>• Support for implementation of <i>NYSED-District Partnership Agreements</i> in the Big Four districts.</li> <li>• Technical assistance in NCLB implementation and connection with other required plans.</li> </ul>
Planning Assistance	RSSCs help schools and districts with their improvement planning. One key component of this work is helping align and coordinate the various plans that a school or district may be required to complete for other departments and partners.
Work with Data	Data analysis is expected to be the basis for school improvement planning, is part of an RSSC's charge, and must include "causal analysis and implementation of services to address these root causes." Approaches to using data vary by region.
Professional Development	<p>Professional development opportunities for schools and districts vary by region, as offered by the regional support networks. RSSCs must provide professional development in the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School and district leadership to improve student performance in English language arts and mathematics;</li> <li>• Improvement of middle-level education;</li> <li>• Reading and mathematics initiatives, both state and federal; and</li> <li>• Effective school community use of the SED virtual learning space (VLS).</li> </ul> <p>Support networks for ELL programs, special education programs, and student support each provide their own professional development for schools/districts. During 2004–05 and 2005–06, OSICS conducted the NYSED Regional Professional Development Initiative. In this initiative, quarterly professional development meetings with all the regional network partners and related department staff helped promote a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities and supported staff in coordinating strategies for serving low-performing schools. Beginning with the 2006–07 year, this coordination responsibility has been assigned to department liaisons who oversee the networks.</p>
Convening Schools/Districts	Opportunities for schools and districts to connect with one another vary by region and are organized by RSSCs. New York City and the Big Four urban districts convene on topics of common interest through the Urban Forums.

<b>Sanctions</b>	The state has taken over districts with extended low performance.
<b>Monitoring</b>	<p>Under Chapter 57, every school in improvement status undergoes a school quality review (SQR), a basic review of plans and documentation related to low performance and related planning and progress. If this document review proves insufficient, there is an “advanced SQR model” that consists of a 2–3 day site visit by a team, with subsequent recommendations.</p> <p>For schools in progressed accountability status (top two levels—starting in 2008–09) that do not meet targets, the Commissioner may assign a joint school intervention team or a Distinguished Educator to make recommendations.</p> <p>Department field personnel visit more progressed accountability status schools to monitor implementation of their plans. RSSC status reports on targeted schools and districts are submitted to the department three times yearly. Field personnel also act as critical friends to RSSCs.</p>

## Rationale for Intervention

The rationale that undergirds New York’s approach is that data-based, targeted support and monitoring consistently provided over time will close the performance gap in English language arts and mathematics across student subgroups. Consistent failure to meet achievement targets leads to increasing levels of review and intervention, and ultimately to school or district reorganization. RSSCs are given specific protocols for when and how often to engage schools and the freedom to customize supports according to school/district needs. They and other regional network partners who provide specialized services provide a range of supports to help schools and districts build local capacity. NYSED regional administrators, in turn, have the job of monitoring schools and districts, along with supervision of RSSCs and other networks.

### Preconditions

The NYSED does not articulate any preconditions for intervening with low-performing schools or districts.

### Strategies

Seven RSSCs, one of which is dedicated to New York City, receive grants through a competitive process and are charged to provide technical assistance and support to low-performing Title I schools, including those in eight high-priority districts. Each RSSC is responsible for working with an identified number of schools, and if they are part of the region, identified districts. RSSCs specifically work on:

- helping schools/districts understand how NCLB planning aligns and must be connected to requirements of numerous other plans required by different entities within the state;
- facilitating causal data analysis and strategic service provision;
- supporting schools and districts with their improvement planning;

- in the Big Four urban districts (Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and Yonkers), supporting implementation of *New York State Education Department District Partnership Agreements*;
- offering and brokering professional development on issues related to school needs; and
- providing technical assistance in NCLB implementation, and implementation of plans.

The state has developed a set of protocols for RSSCs to utilize for the following aspects of their work: (a) engagement and relationship building, (b) needs assessment, (c) planning, (d) implementation, and (e) evaluation. Beyond these guidelines and the types of services articulated in their contracts, RSSCs are charged to customize the design and delivery of their services so that they best serve the individual needs of schools and districts. The thinking is that causal analysis, planning, and professional development are essential and that each RSSC will know best how to work with the schools and districts in their region and to determine additional professional development that will be needed.

The RSSCs provide the core, required interventions under NCLB. At the same time, on a collegial basis, RSSCs support the coordination and collaboration of four RNPs as they relate to the low-performing schools and districts under NCLB. The RNPs provide specialized services to low-performing schools and districts. They are:

- Bilingual Education Technical Assistance Centers (BETAC)
- Special Education Training and Resource Centers (SETRC)
- Student Support Services (SSSN)
- Regional Adult Education Network (RAEN)

Each RNP follows NYSED guidelines for work with schools and has its geographic region's and its own requirements for working with certain schools/districts across the state. RSSCs also partner with and convene other resources, such as the Staff and Curriculum Development Network (SCDN) Teacher Centers and Institutes of Higher Education, which are not department-funded.

Other partners include:

- NYSED School Improvement Team Regional Liaison, the key NYSED staff person responsible for monitoring RSSC and individual school/district performance.
- NYSED Special Education Quality Assurance, regional state officials responsible for oversight and monitoring of special education programs and services.
- Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), regional support networks that may provide student supports, professional development, technical assistance, technology supports, and other resources that individual districts cannot provide.

BOCES are funded by the state and districts whose superintendents govern and determine services.

- District superintendents and their school boards, who are responsible for monitoring and supervision of schools.
- Additional partners, which vary by region.

The specific work of the RNPs and other partners is not documented in this profile.

The RSSCs' district strategy is heavily focused on eight high-priority districts, including New York City and the Big Four urban districts, which have partnership agreements that articulate specific responsibilities and supports and address systemic issues that cannot be attended to through work with individual schools. Through this initiative in Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and Yonkers, NYSED works with school district officials to review each district's strategic plan and identify strategies and services that may be implemented or supported by the department or its networks to support successful implementation. For example, the district may receive access to department service experts.

There are three additional high-priority districts. Hempstead and Wyandanch have been persistently low-performing, and Roosevelt is the one district under state takeover. The state's interventions with these districts fall along a continuum, from providing additional technical assistance and support to having a monitoring and oversight focus, with additional high-level NYSED staff involved. For example, Roosevelt is the highest priority district, with direct involvement by the Senior Deputy Commissioner for P-16 Education. The superintendent communicates with the Senior Deputy Commissioner on a daily basis, and monthly progress reports and next steps are made in public forums to the State Board of Regents. A new superintendent and school board were appointed by the state, and elected school board members are being reintroduced over time. Hempstead and Wyandanch each have semester-long performance plans. The Executive Director of the Regional School Services for OSICS meets with the superintendents and their staff at the end of each semester to discuss the districts' progress. He then reports on their progress to the local school board and presents the district plan for the next semester. The Executive Director also presents information regarding the progress and performance of the district to the Board of Education and community at public board meetings. These are considered very high-stakes interventions.

### Intended Outcomes

The mission of the RSSCs, the primary groups charged to work with low-performing schools and priority districts, is to close the performance gap in English language arts and mathematics for all students and subgroups specified in NCLB.

## Lead SEA Contact(s)

Lead SEA Contact at time of Data Collection:

Jim Viola, Executive Director, Regional School Services, Office of School Improvement and Community Services, New York State Education Department

Current Lead SEA Contact:

Jean Stevens, Associate Commissioner, Office of Instructional Support and Development, New York State Education Department

## Challenges and Future Plans

The Executive Director of the Regional School Services for OSICS summarized, “In terms of our state system of support, we have had varying levels of success in supporting schools to increase their capacity, achieve the AYP targets, and become schools that are in good standing. We are right now looking to try to identify what makes some regions more successful than others, so we can build those considerations into the next Request for Proposals (RFP) for providing support to schools and districts” (interview, November 1, 2007). The RSSC contract will also be up for renewal in June 2009, and NYSED planned that a new RFP would be issued in the fall of 2008. Department staff are also meeting with leaders of the Big Four to rethink their partnership agreements, in order to improve the state-district relationship and the effectiveness of the agreements.

Another challenge is to continue aligning the various services offered and approaches taken by different departments working with districts and schools, particularly with a growing number of schools and districts being designated low performing over time. RSSCs services are not compulsory. “We can offer supports but we can’t insist,” said one RSSC staff person (interview with RSSC administrator, November 1, 2007). This is why at least some of the RSSCs focus on building trusting relationships as a central strategy, so that schools will be more likely to engage in professional development and other services. Other interventions, for example, the implementation of IDEA, focus on compliance, which leads to a more directive approach. Each of the numerous partners, with its distinct mission, has an approach and organization of regions that is somewhat different, and that makes coordination of services to schools and districts challenging and the writing of many plans difficult and time consuming for districts and schools.

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