

State highlights area schools in new rating system

Eileen FitzGerald Updated 11:35 p.m., Friday, November 30, 2012

DANBURY -- Schools in Newtown, Ridgefield and Redding were among 46 named for highest overall performance in Connecticut using a new rating system, state Education Commissioner [Stefan Pryor](#) announced Friday.

The state education department released a new round of the scores it uses to rate how well school districts are doing, with a maximum 100 points.

The department has SPIs -- school performance indexes -- that separate the very good schools from those that need to improve.

The new classifications were based on scores from the 2011-12 Connecticut Mastery Test for elementary and middle schools and the Connecticut Academic Performance Test given in high school.

The "highest overall performance schools," which are among top 10 percent of schools across the state include Newtown's Middle Gate, Newtown Middle and Reed Intermediate schools; Ridgefield's Branchville, East Ridge Middle, Scotland, Scotts Ridge Middle, and Ridgefield High schools; and Region 12's [Booth Free School](#) in Roxbury.

"This is an acknowledgement," Newtown Superintendent [Janet Robinson](#) said. "So much of what No Child Left Behind (law) did was punitive and only focused on failure to achieve. This is the first time they are acknowledging schools that are excelling."

Within schools of distinction are schools noted for the scores of certain subgroups of students: Black, Hispanic, students with disabilities, the poor and English language learners.

[Bethel High School](#), [Newtown High School](#) and [Newtown Middle School](#) were recognized for the scores of their Hispanic students.

Redding's [John Read Middle School](#) was recognized for how its students with disabilities scored, and Ridgefield High made the list for the scores of its poor students.

Robinson said she is proud that there is really no difference now in how her sub groups and the other students perform.

"That's the way it should be," she said.

Bethel Superintendent [Kevin Smith](#) was pleased Bethel High School's Hispanic students were recognized.

"It's a big deal," he said, because Bethel has worked hard to close its achievement gap. "It's important for the community of Bethel to see that we are having some success."

Schools with a performance index less than 88 recognized for making the most progress include New Milford's Northville and Hill and Plain elementary schools. Among recognized schools with an index greater than 88 are Newtown's Middle Gate and Ridgefield's Ridgebury.

[Danbury High School](#) and the [Alternative Center for Excellence](#) were on the list of 84 [Review Schools](#), which are the lowest performing schools based on criteria that include graduation rates and the three-year school performance index.

These schools will remain Review Schools for three years unless they exceed their test participation rate, graduation rate and performance targets for two consecutive years.

Another 55 schools are called [Focus Schools](#). They have the lowest-performing student subgroups in the state, which to this point may have been masked by overall student performance.

Ridgefield's [Veteran Park School](#) was designated a Focus School based on the scores of its high needs subgroups -- students with disabilities, English language learners and poor students.

Danbury Deputy Superintendent [William Glass](#) said he was glad for the schools that were acknowledged for their success, but he doesn't want the classifications to distract his educators from their work.

"I have told our administrators to focus on three things," Glass said Friday. "Deepen and extend learning for all students. Then the test scores will improve as a result of that," he said.

"Enhance teachers' professional practices so they can improve their delivery of the material, and enhance the adult leadership skills so they can help their staffs."

He said the Danbury school district has shown growth and improvement at the high school level and that work must continue.

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