**70 Districts identified Statewide as Focus Districts, with 496 schools identified as Focus Schools, 221 schools identified as Priority Schools, and 249 schools identified as Reward Schools under ESEA Flexibility Waiver for 2012-13 School Year**

New York State Commissioner John B. King, Jr. today identified 70 districts as Focus Districts that must develop comprehensive plans to support improvement efforts in identified Focus and Priority Schools. The Commissioner also identified 249 high achieving and high progress schools as Reward Schools. The Commissioner’s action was taken in accordance with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) waiver that New York received from the United States Department of Education in May.

Focus Districts were identified as a result of their low performance and lack of progress in ELA and math combined or graduation rates for one of more accountability groups (racial/ethnic groups, low-income students, English language learners, and students with disabilities). Districts could also be identified as Focus if one or more Priority Schools were identified within the district. Statewide, within the identified Focus Districts, 221 schools were identified as Priority Schools because of being among the lowest performance schools in the state and failing to demonstrate progress in ELA or math combined or because of their persistently low graduation rates. Within these districts, 496 schools were identified as Focus Schools based on a requirement that a Focus District identify a minimum number of schools upon which the district would focus its intervention and supports in order to improve student performance in a district’s area(s) of identification. Eight charter schools were also identified as Focus Charter Schools, two charter schools were identified as Priority Charter Schools and two were identified as Reward Charter Schools. For the complete list of Focus Districts and Schools, and Priority Schools, please visit the following website: <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/accountability/ESEADesignations.html>

On May 29, 2012, the United States Department of Education (USDE) approved New York’s ESEA Flexibility Request. The approved flexibility request can be found at <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/accountability/ESEAFlexibilityWaiver.html>. New York’s approved waiver called for the previous school and district accountability designations (i.e., improvement, corrective action, and restructuring) to sunset at the end of the 2011-12 school year. Beginning with the 2012-13 school year, new designations have been implemented that include the identification of Focus Districts, and Priority and Focus Schools, and Reward Schools. As a result of this change, fewer schools will be in accountability status compared to the 2011-12 school year, but interventions and supports will be more intensive and extensive.

These designations were based on the percentage of students who demonstrated college- and career- readiness performance in ELA and math. In addition, in Grades 4-8 measures of student growth in ELA and math were also taken into account in determining the accountability status of schools and districts.

Focus Districts and Focus Schools

In order to receive approval for an ESEA Flexibility Waiver, states were required to identify Priority Schools and Focus Schools. Priority Schools are among the lowest five percent in the State in terms of combined English language arts and mathematics performance that are not making progress, as well as those schools that have graduation rates below 60% for the last several years. Schools that were previously identified as Persistently Lowest Achieving and received School Improvement Grants in the 2011-12 school year were also identified as Priority Schools.

Under New York’s waiver, the State Education Department first identifies Focus Districts and these districts, in turn, work with the State Education Department to identify their Focus Schools. Focus Districts are those in which the performance of an accountability group (i.e., racial/ ethnic groups, low-income students, English language learners, and students with disabilities) is among the lowest performing in the State for English language arts or mathematics combined and in which the accountability group is not making progress. A district may also be identified if an accountability group is among the lowest performing in the State for graduation rate.

In order to guide districts in their designation of Focus Schools, the New York State Education Department (SED or “the Department”) provided each identified district with four options when creating their lists:

* Option 1: Select the minimum number of schools from SED list, ranked ordered based on the count of non-proficient and non-graduate results (List A).
* Option 2: Select the minimum number of schools based on SED list, ranked ordered based on the percentage of non-proficient and non-graduate results (List B).
* Option 3: Select the minimum number of schools from a combination of schools on List A and B; OR minimum number of schools from List A and/or B plus district-selected schools; OR select more than the minimum number of schools from List A and/or List B and/or district-selected schools.
* Option 4: Select all schools in district.

Sixteen districts chose to identify all of their schools as Focus Schools; 16 chose Option 1; 15 chose Option 2; and 20 districts chose Option 3 and sent in a list comprised of schools they recommended for Focus School identification. Two districts were provided with schools that were below the cut points to serve as their Focus Schools. One Special Act District will not be required to serve any Focus School, but will serve one Priority School.

Focus Districts must create and implement District Comprehensive Improvement Plans (DCIP) that outline how the district will use Federal ESEA as well as other funds to promote the academic achievement of the accountability groups identified within the district. Focus Districts will have new funding options as a result of the waiver, as there is no longer a requirement to offer Supplemental Educational Services (SES) to students who attend Title I identified schools. Focus Districts will now use a 5 to 15 percent set-aside to fund district and school level activities described within the District Comprehensive Improvement Plan targeted towards increasing the academic achievement of the identified subgroups. Each Focus District will be visited by a State Education Department Integrated Intervention Team that will use a Diagnostic Tool for District and School Effectiveness to assist the district and its schools in developing and implementing improvement plans based on six tenets of educational effectiveness.

Priority Schools

Priority Schools are among the lowest performing 5 percent of schools in the state and will be identified once during the three year period of the waiver. Priority Schools are required to develop and implement, no later than the 2014-15 school year, whole school reform models that address the USDE’s Turnaround Principles. Districts with Priority Schools have several funding resources to support implementation of whole school reform plans. First, if districts can demonstrate the capacity to implement one of four federal intervention models (turnaround, transformation, closure, or restart), districts can receive 1003(g) School Improvement Grant funds of up to $2 million per school, per year, for three years. Second, through Race to the Top (RTTT) funds, districts can apply for and receive funds to increase district capacity through the District Systems Supports grant. The RTTT School Innovation Fund provides districts with Priority Schools with grants to implement innovative whole school reform models in the schools that need them most. Finally, districts may use their ESEA set-aside funds to support implementation of whole school reform models.

Reward and Recognition Schools

The Department identified 249 schools in 163 districts as Reward Schools. Reward Schools are either schools that have made the most progress or schools that have the highest achievement in the state and do not have significant gaps in student achievement that are not being closed. Five (5) schools will each be awarded up to a maximum of $150,000 each year for two years and up to $300,000 for the entire grant period. Additionally, after consultation with representatives of Reward Schools, Department staff will present to the Board of Regents options for consideration by which Reward Schools may seek expanded and/or expedited variances from certain provisions of the Commissioner’s Regulations beginning in the 2013-14 school year. In the fall of 2012, SED will also identify Recognition Schools. These are schools that meet most, but not all, of the Reward School criteria.

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| 2012-13 School Accountability Summary (Excluding Charters) | | |
| **ESEA Waiver Category** | **Statewide, including NYC** | **NYC Only** |
| Focus Districts | 70 | 31\* |
| Focus Schools\*\* | 496 | 232 |
| Priority Schools\*\* | 221 | 122 |
| Total Focus and Priority Schools | 717 | 354 |
| Reward Schools\*\* | 249 | 55 |

* \* The New York City School District is one of the 70 that has been identified as a Focus District. Under the ESEA waiver, each of the 32 community school districts is then analyzed to determine if it will be subject to the Focus District requirements. All community school districts, except for Community School District 31 (Staten Island) were determined to be subject to Focus District requirements.
* \*\* Excludes two charter Priority Schools, eight charter Focus Schools, and two Charter Reward Schools.

Additional Information:

For more information on the methodology used to identify Focus Districts, Focus Schools, Priority Schools, and Reward Schools, please visit: <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/accountability/ESEAMaterials.html>

For more information on the requirements for Focus Districts, Focus Schools, Priority Schools and the resources available to them, please visit: <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/accountability/ESEAFlexibilityWaiver.html>.

For more information on the District Comprehensive Improvement Plan or the Comprehensive Education Plan please visit: <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/accountability/ESEAFlexibilityWaiver.html>.

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