



Group says Regents requirement will hurt Buffalo's graduation rate

By PETER SIMON, News Staff Reporter

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An advocacy group opposed to the state's Regents graduation requirements estimated Monday that 32 percent of Buffalo students who began high school in 2000 will not graduate next June because of their failure to pass required Regents exams.

Buffalo's projected failure rate is considerably lower than those in the state's other large cities, but it still projects a worrisome outcome for the Class of 2004.

Is the estimate on target?

"I can't answer that," Buffalo School Superintendent Marion Canedo said after the group - called Time Out From Testing - released its projections at a news conference in New York City. "We didn't give them that information. I don't know where they got it."

The news conference was held the day before the start of a series of state legislative hearings on controversial requirements that students - with the exception of some special-education students - pass five Regents examinations in order to graduate.

Time Out From Testing, which says it has the support of about eight community groups, urges that the requirements be scrapped because they put far too much emphasis on high-stakes tests, ignore student work and effort during the year, stifle good teaching and penalize bright students who do poorly on tests. The group also claims the Regents exams are badly flawed.

"It punishes students for a system that has failed them," said Jane Hirschmann, chairwoman of the Parents' Coalition to End High Stakes Testing.

A spokeswoman for Time Out From Testing said the Buffalo projection is based on test score data for students who entered high school in 1998 and, assuming they finished their requirements in four years, would have graduated in 2002. Test scores for actual members of the Class of 2004 are not available for analysis, she said.

The projection assumes that test scores remain flat while the Regents requirements broaden. The 32 percent failure rate does not include students who have already dropped out, the spokeswoman added.

The projected failure rates are 51 percent in Albany, 46 percent in Rochester, 44 percent in both Syracuse and Yonkers and 39 percent in New York City.

Canedo said that even if Buffalo's 32 percent failure rate proves to be on target, it does not take into account students who graduate after staying in high school for a fifth year or those who later earn a high school equivalency diploma.

"It's certainly taking students longer to get their diplomas," she said.

Canedo said the Regents requirements should be retained but loosened.

She suggested that students be allowed to receive local, non-Regents diplomas by passing three or four of the five Regents exams and that some accommodations be made on the English exam for students who are new to this country and have been speaking English for just a year or two.