

Public School Press

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New Graduates, New Standards, New Era

Expectations Rising for Students As Historic School Year Ends

Talk about a well-deserved vacation.

Over a million students are completing a school year marked by historic changes.

Students in grades three through eight took the tough new state Common Core exams this year, which complemented the sweeping new curriculum standards. The more rigorous tests are a reflection of Schools Chancellor Dennis M. Walcott's push to ensure that students be prepared for college and careers when they graduate.

Meanwhile, the seniors who graduate this month are the second class in city history required to pass five out of five required Regents exams at a 65 or higher. In previous years, high school students could pass some of these exams at a 55.

The trend toward higher standards this year was no accident.

"The new requirements are designed to ensure that more of our students are ready to tackle the challenges of college coursework and a competitive job market," said Walcott.



Susan Watts / New York Daily News

The more difficult Common Core exams will likely result in lower test scores next month in comparison with the older, easier state exams. But Walcott says that students will rise to the occasion.

Which is exactly what graduating seniors have done.

Graduation statistics for 2012, released last week revealed that the graduation rate was less than one point shy of last year's record figure.

That means that the graduation rate in city public schools has risen by almost 40 percent since 2005, even as the graduation standards steadily climbed.

And far fewer students are dropping out – the rate has been cut by half since 2005.

"These students have proven what we already knew – that they're capable of great things when we expect more of them," Walcott said. "I'm proud of them."

A New Day for Students at Hundreds

Schools for Everything from Arts to Aviation

By this fall, the Department of Education will have opened 656 schools over the last decade, including 336 high schools. Many are small and offer students more one-on-one attention.

In 2012, graduation rates at these high schools soared past 70 percent. Many new schools have replaced ones that were struggling, and while they opened in the same buildings as the old schools, their graduation rates have nearly doubled since 2006. The graduation and dropout rates at these schools beat the citywide averages as well.

According to Lilly Lucas, principal of Excelsior Preparatory High School in Queens, “the small school environment is essential for teachers to establish a personal connection with their students. Our staff knows students on a personal basis.”

In addition to the emphasis on personalized education, many of the schools offer students a variety of specialized programs, including television and film, emergency management, aviation, and green careers, just to name a few. Thirty of these high schools will open this fall.

The following profiles highlight four campuses that have transitioned into smaller schools and have had tremendous gains in graduation rates.

Harry Van Arsdale Campus, Brooklyn



42.3%
POINT INCREASE

2002 graduation rate: 44.9%

OLD CAMPUS: Harry Van Arsdale High School

2012 graduation rate: 87.2%

NEW CAMPUS: Brooklyn Preparatory High School, Williamsburg Preparatory School, Williamsburg High School for Architecture and Design

Van Arsdale High School once suffered from poor student attendance and test scores.

But in 2004, three small schools opened in the building offering unique academic programs. The schools gave students the chance to tour colleges, receive intensive college and career planning, learn on-the-job skills through internships, and conduct environmental research in upstate New York.

Now, a majority of students on campus enroll in college. They also outperform the citywide average on four out of five required Regents exams.

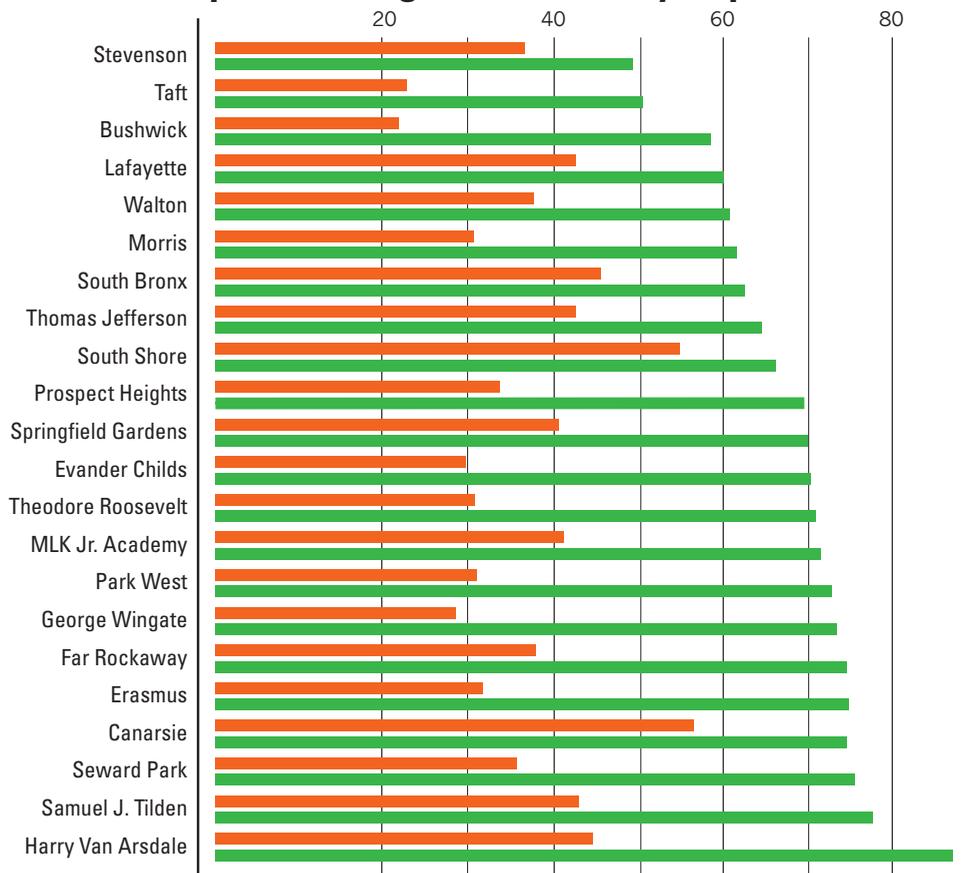
One of the new schools, the Williamsburg High School of Architecture & Design (WHSAD), is the only high school in America to offer an academic theme focused on historic architectural preservation.

Students can use a state-of-the-art 3D printer, and the school also has an engaging monthly program for parents to meet with teachers and better understand what their children are learning. In 2012, more than 90 percent of WHSAD students graduated in four years.

Principal Gill Cornell stressed that students have a range of opportunities. “Many of our students who get internships are hired back full-time after graduation,” he said.

*All statistics and figures for campus and school profile

Graduation Rates of New Schools Compared to High Schools They Replaced*



Legend: Large High Schools in 2002** (orange bar), High Schools in the same building in 2012*** (green bar)

*Excludes Transfer Schools. Schools presented above were all announced for phase out between 2002-2009. ** NYC traditional calculation includes Local and Regents Diplomas. GEDs, Special Education diplomas, and August graduates. It does not include disabled students in self-contained classrooms or District 75 students. *** The NY State method, used since 2005, includes Local and Regents Diplomas and all disabled students. It does not include GEDs and Special Education diplomas.

eds of New Public Schools

Springfield Gardens Campus, Queens



28.7%
POINT INCREASE

2002 graduation rate: 41.3%

OLD SCHOOL: Springfield Gardens High School

2012 graduation rate: 70.0%

NEW SCHOOLS: Queens Preparatory Academy, George Washington Carver High School for the Sciences, Preparatory Academy for Writers: A College Board School, Excelsior Preparatory High School

In 2001, an article in the *Queens Chronicle* lamented the school's poor test scores. Other newspapers reported rampant crime problems.

Now, the campus is split into four schools, and students have more engaging lessons and instruction. As a result, they perform equal to or better than the citywide averages on a majority of state exams. Each school has a student enrollment of less than 500, and a vast majority of students on campus feel their school staff knows them well, according to the school survey. Students can pick from programs that focus on writing or even animal science.

At Excelsior Preparatory High School, which opened on the campus in 2004, students can participate in internships at more than 45 companies in areas like construction, health, law, and journalism. Through an advisory program, school staff members get to know students on a personal level and give them targeted help based on their academic abilities and challenges. Students can take advanced courses and get college credit, and they perform better than the city averages on all five state required Regents exams.

Park West Campus, Manhattan



42.6%
POINT INCREASE

2002 graduation rate: 31%

OLD SCHOOL: Park West High School

2012 graduation rate: 73.6%

NEW SCHOOLS: Food and Finance High School, High School of Hospitality Management, Urban Assembly School of Design and Construction, Facing History School, Manhattan Bridges High School

In 2002, Park West High School had one of the highest dropout rates in the city—30 percent.

Today, five high schools provide a wide range of opportunities to keep students enrolled. Across the five schools, students earn over 250 hours of community service credit, learn extensive culinary skills, receive a certification in the hospitality and tourism industry, or learn in a dual-language environment. The schools also collaborate to set up an annual college fair, and principals meet often to discuss topics affecting their schools.

Manhattan Bridges, one of the new schools on the Park West campus, is a one-of-a-kind school that provides immigrant, native Spanish-speaking students with an in-depth bilingual English program. Students shadow professionals on the job, take field trips to major companies like American Express and Verizon, and earn college credit through a partnership with the City University of New York.

There's a strong emphasis on pushing students to graduate—bulletin boards in the hallway track their progress towards earning diplomas. One class recently published a book of students' college essays. Said one student, "We're more than classmates and friends—we're a family."

Evander Childs Campus, Bronx



39.4%
POINT INCREASE

2002 graduation rate: 30.7%

OLD SCHOOL: Evander Childs High School

2012 graduation rate: 70.1%

NEW SCHOOLS: Bronx High School for Writing and Communication Arts, Bronx Lab School, High School of Computers and Technology, High School of Contemporary Arts, Bronx Aerospace High School, Bronx Academy of Health Careers

Evander Childs High School once served over 3,000 students. In 2002, only 31 percent of them graduated.

The campus has since been reconstituted into six small schools, with each serving around 500 students on average.

Students can pick from a variety of specialized programs and curricula, including aviation, the arts, health, writing, or computers and Information Technology. A host of afterschool activities keep students involved and provide additional opportunities to learn. These programs encourage students to go to college too—compared to the rest of city schools, students at Evander Childs campus are much more likely to enroll in college or a vocational program after high school.

At the Bronx Academy of Health Careers, which opened on the Evander Childs campus in 2004, students learn the ins and outs of the field and gain experience and instruction in specialties like medicine, nursing, physical therapy, and more. They can receive certifications in the industry and earn college credit. The school also stresses science, and student scores on the state science exam reflect that—they perform better than 93 percent of schools citywide.



Straight Talk from the Chancellor

School Chancellor Dennis Walcott responds to parents' questions

What's the bottom line on the new graduation rate?

Graduation rates for 2012 were a half point shy of last year's historic figure. This, even as the state raised graduation standards.

For the first time in 2012, New York State required students to score 65 or higher on all five required Regents exams in order to graduate. Just three years prior, students only needed to pass two out of five with a score of 65.

Your child needs to graduate with 21st-century skills. If the state hadn't changed the rules, our grad rate would have increased, but that wouldn't be doing our students any favors—and they come first.

My child passed the five required Regents exams with a 65. Is he college ready?

Although 65 is the minimum passing score, we recommend that students aim for at least a 75 on the English Regents and an 80 on a math Regents and that they get a 480 on the SAT in Reading and Math. A majority of the city's graduates who enter college enroll at CUNY, and students who don't earn these higher scores are at a disadvantage because they must take high school-level classes that include additional costs and often delay college graduation.

There are other ways students can begin to prepare for college while in high

school, including taking higher level Regents courses such as chemistry or advanced math, or taking college-level classes such as advanced placements or CUNY's College Now courses.

The school year's almost over. Are there ways I can support my child's education over the summer?

Absolutely, and it's a great idea. Studies have shown that students who don't continue reading and learning over the summer lose some of their skills and start the next school year behind. Educators call it the "summer slide," but you can prevent it. Consider signing your child up for a free reading program at one of the City's public libraries. You don't need a library card to participate (visit summerreading.org).

To find other educational opportunities, such as computer camps and science or performing arts programs, search NYC.gov for Summer Learning.

Summer Learning Tips

It's summertime! How will your child be spending the summer? Below are some suggestions to help you keep your child active and learning throughout these next few months.

1. Search for an affordable summer program

Visit nyc.gov and search for "summer opportunities" for more information about some of the free and/or low-cost summer programs offered by New York City agencies. If you live in the South Bronx, your child may be eligible for a free five-week, full day program called NYC Summer Quest. Search at nyc.gov for "NYC Summer Quest" to learn more.

2. Visit your local library

Reading is one of the most important things a child can do to keep skills sharp for the next school year. Check out www.summerreading.org for booklists by grade, library locations, free events, and online resources.

3. Use New York City as your playground

Visit www.nycgovparks.org and click on the "Events", "Programs", or "Kids"

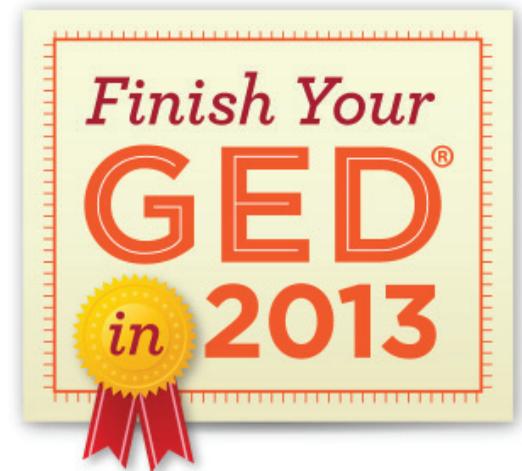
tab for more information on the many summer opportunities offered by NYC's parks department.

4. Discover why New York City is considered the cultural capital of the world

Check out www.NYCgo.com for free activities for kids and a list of NYC museums that are free on certain days of the week.

5. Make sure your child has brain food!

Remember that the summer meals program provides free breakfast and lunch to children 18 years old and younger even when school is not in session. Call 311 or visit nyc.gov and search "summer meals" for more information. *For more resources on how to provide your child with a fun and enriching summer experience, please visit nyc.gov. Happy summer!*



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Cover Image: Natalia Harris gets a big hug from her mom, Dr. Egli Alexandra Colon, as she graduates from Eleanor Roosevelt High School, beating bone cancer after enduring two years of treatment.