

News

FAILURE INSPIRES SUCCESS - BENEFITS OF MIKE PLAN

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332 words

20 April 2009

New York Post

NYPO

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English

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Controversial A-to-F report cards - the heart of Mayor Bloomberg's new accountability system in education - have helped spur improvements in low-performing schools, two preliminary studies reveal.

Kids in elementary and middle schools that received F's on their first progress-report cards in 2007 registered substantial increases on subsequent state math and reading exams - even showing greater gains than kids in schools that received higher grades, according to one analysis.

"One of the big benefits of this accountability system is that it lights a fire under the schools that are lagging behind," said Columbia professor **Jonah Rockoff**, who conducted one of the studies.

Schools that receive an F or a D face a shakeup that includes ousting the principal. If their grades don't improve after several years, they're shut down for good.

The grade is based largely on results on state test scores - 60 percent for progress made and 25 percent for overall performance.

Another 15 percent of the grade comes from the results of parent, teacher and student surveys.

A second study, by Marcus Winters of the Manhattan Institute, confirmed that students in schools initially graded F fared better in math - mostly in the fifth grade.

A former Board of Education data chief said the controversial report-card system would never have been implemented without mayoral control.

"The old Board of Education was unwilling to hold schools accountable for performance. They were more interested in making excuses," said Ray Damonico, now head of the Metro-Industrial Areas Foundation.

Still, one academic critic slammed the report cards as "ridiculous."

NYU professor Diane Ravitch - a former US Department of Education official - said Bloomberg and Schools Chancellor Joel Klein are using the grades as an excuse to shut down low-performing schools rather than help improve them.

"They began measuring the schools to close them down and put in charter schools. They look at closing schools joyfully," Ravitch said.

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