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THURSDAY, JULY 29, 2010

# OBSERVER-DISPATCH

75 CENTS

Hundreds more area students failing to pass state exams under new scoring system

## DOWNGRADE



Observer-Dispatch file photo

James H. Donovan Middle School students Adela Racic, left, and Shannen Lindsey work together during a class in Utica in May. "We need to look at where kids were and where they are now," Utica director of instructional support, Carla Percia, said of how the tougher tests gauge student performance.

### Changes mean students answered harder questions

By **REBECCA CRONISER**  
and **JENNIFER BOGDAN**  
Observer-Dispatch  
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Ever get a report card you didn't want to show to Mom? Every school district in the Mohawk Valley got exactly that on Wednesday.

Far fewer elementary and middle students are making the grade locally and statewide under a new scoring standard for the state's standardized English language arts and math exams, the state Education Department reported.

#### MORE CHANGES TO COME

The new scoring standards are just the beginning of changes to state assessment testing.

■ **2010** – Moved test dates from January and March to April and May. Raised scores for proficiency rating. Cover 25 to 30 percent more material on math assessment.

■ **2011-2013** – Increase length of math and English tests. Test more performance indicators by including more open-ended questions. Make test items more difficult to predict. Improve quality of English Regents exam.

■ **2014-2015** – Redesign core assessments (This is expected to be funded by the Race to the Top federal funding if the state wins that grant).

Barely half the state's students are deemed proficient on the English exams offered between grades three and eight, and barely more than 60 percent of students reached that mark on the math tests.

A year earlier, 77 percent of students met or exceeded standards in English and 86 percent achieved that level in math.

Even though district officials were told of the grading standard change last week, the scores still shocked them.

"They're ugly," Utica City School District Superintendent James Willis said Wednesday. "There's no way around it."

Please see **STATE, 5A**

### New figures pose challenges for rural, suburban districts

By **JENNIFER BOGDAN**  
Observer-Dispatch  
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When state test scores have come out in the past, it's been no sweat for many of the Mohawk Valley's suburban and rural school districts.

But with a new scoring system in place this year, that's no longer the case.

Officials in the districts that have traditionally been stellar performers on state tests now are finding themselves with a lot of work on their hands to ensure elementary and middle school students are prepared for high school and college work.

"At Herkimer BOCES, we don't have city schools but we do have some very, Please see **RURAL, 5A**

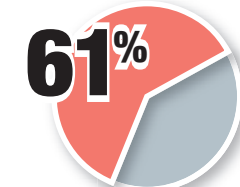
#### STARK CHANGES

New York state's Education Department released 2010 test scores for elementary and middle school students that reflect a tougher grading policy.



of grade 3-8 students across the state are proficient in English ...

... down from 77 percent last year.



of students are judged proficient in math ...

... down from 86 percent.

## State: No penalty planned for late Oneida Co. funds

Picente continues to withhold weekly Medicaid payments

By **BRYON ACKERMAN**  
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■ **ONEIDA COUNTY OKS DEAL WITH UTICA ON FORECLOSED PROPERTIES – PAGE 3B**

The state is not planning to immediately penalize Oneida County for withholding its weekly Medicaid payments to the state, state budget officials said Wednesday.

The state is \$30 million to \$34 million behind on payments to Oneida County, and in response, County Executive Anthony Picente made the unprecedented decision to withhold \$835,693 in Medicaid payments from the state last week, this week and going forward.

The act has received widespread attention, including in

the Wall Street Journal, and officials say counties across the state are watching to see what happens in Oneida County.

State officials have the option of penalizing the county by withholding payments or charging interest, but those actions aren't planned right now because officials assume the county is only temporarily withholding the payments, state Division of the Budget spokesman Erik Kriss said Wednesday.

Please see **STATE, 3A**

## Utica gang-fight case heads to grand jury

Judge closes portion of 5-hour hearing

By **EMERSON CLARRIDGE**  
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UTICA – After a five-hour felony hearing in City Court that ended Wednesday evening, a judge found sufficient evidence to send a gang-related assault case to a grand jury.

Judge Gerald Popeo ordered reporters and family members of the six teenage defendants to leave the courtroom during the testimony of civilian witnesses who prosecutors said had been threatened.

The closure was opposed by the defendants' attorneys, and Popeo denied an Observer-Dispatch request that he delay his decision on whether or not to close the hearing until the newspaper's legal counsel could be consulted.

"It would create an undue hardship on the court," Popeo said of pushing back the start of the hearing, which had twice before been adjourned. The judge also denied media requests to photograph the hearing.

The six defendants, whom police previously said were members of the Asian Boyz, were charged following a large Please see **GANG, 3A**

## Judge blocks parts of Ariz. immigration law



ROSS D. FRANKLIN / The Associated Press

**PHOENIX** – Naraoda, right, cries Wednesday as she is hugged by Marcela Saragoza, both of Phoenix, as they celebrate at the Arizona Capitol after the most controversial portions of Arizona's new immigration law were blocked by a federal judge, handing a major legal victory to opponents of the crackdown.

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### INSIDE: CONCERNS EXIST ABOUT FUNDS FOR REMEDIAL CLASSES; CHART ON ENGLISH RESULTS, 4A

#### NEW HARTFORD

## Town in dark about more employees' pensions

By **ELIZABETH COOPER**  
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■ **MORE DETAILS OF THE 3 PENSIONS – PAGE 3A**

NEW HARTFORD – Bookkeeper Carol Fairbrother isn't the only town employee who started collecting a pension without top town officials knowing, town records show.

Part-time police Officers – Francis Manfredo and Raymond

Hamo Jr., as well as town Planning Board member Jerome Donovan, also filed for their pensions, but no record exists of the required break in service or that top town officials were made aware of it, records show.

■ Manfredo's pension from his

job with the Utica Fire Department is \$65,268. He is now earning \$17,296 from his work with the town, figures show. He filed for his pension Sept. 27, 2008.

■ Hamo has two pensions – one from his part-time police work with the town is \$667 a month and the other, which is from his job as a corrections officer, is \$2,272.22 per month, state Comptroller's Office fig-

ures show. Meanwhile, he earned \$30,220 from the town in 2009, town figures show. He filed for his town pension Oct. 30, 2006.

■ Donovan makes \$1,250 a year as a Planning Board member. He also served as Planning Board chairman for about a year at an annual salary of \$2,500. In the past, he also worked for his Please see **TOWN, 3A**

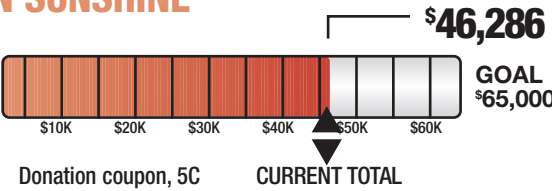
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#### OPERATION SUNSHINE

We are closer to our goal, but we still need your help.



#### WEATHER



Forecast, 2A  
An early shower, then sunshine.

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**VIDEO:** Mock hostage situation at Hamilton College.

**GALLERY:** Opening of the Boonville-Oneida County Fair.

