

KIDS MISS THE MARK

8th-graders fail miserably in math and reading

By KENNETH LOVETT
and CARL CAMPANILE

The city's eighth-graders continue to perform abysmally in math and reading, new student-achievement test results show.

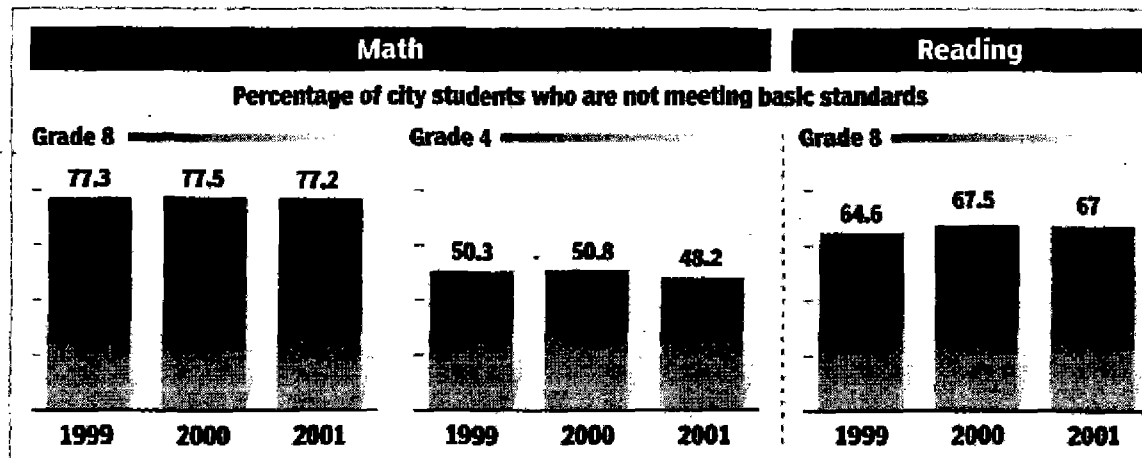
Despite historic increases in school aid the past several years, performance among eighth-graders has remained stagnant — and horrid, state Education Commissioner Richard Mills announced yesterday.

Just 22.8 percent of eighth-graders are meeting the state's math standards — the same percentage as in 1999, the first year of the new statewide assessment test.

That means a whopping 77 percent can't compute.

In reading, just 33.1 percent of the city's eighth-graders are meeting the standard, down from 35.3 percent two years ago. In other words, two-thirds can't read well.

"The performance of the middle grades in New York City has held steady but at a very low level," Mills said.



On the bright side, fourth-graders showed some improvement on math — scores shot up 5.5 percentage points. Still, only 51.8 percent met math standards — meaning nearly half are still not meeting the standards.

Statewide eighth-grade test results were also flat — but they were still 15 percentage points higher than in the city. However, Big Apple test scores were better than in the four largest upstate cities.

Schools Chancellor Harold Levy said he was heartened by fourth-grade math scores, but disturbed by the eighth-grade results.

"I continue to be disappointed that the school system has not made greater progress," Levy said.

Levy stressed that he's overhauling the Board of Education's math program, and will provide teachers with a Web-based software program to help analyze student

test results and improve instruction.

Parent leaders were upset with the results.

"We think the results for the middle schools are terrible," said Ernest Clayton, president of the United Parents Association of New York City.

"A lot of these kids are not going to be prepared for the Regents exams required to graduate high school. It's disheartening."

Clayton noted the board

has pumped more into the middle schools last year, but "it's surely not helping."

The board also has set up a task force — led by Manhattan member Irving Hamer — to try to turn around sagging middle schools. A report is expected shortly.

With the state facing a potential fiscal crisis in the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, some legislative officials are worried that academic results in New York will

only get worse.

The city and state, they say, were already having trouble attracting qualified teachers before the attacks. And now the money will not likely be there to beef up teacher salaries.

"If numbers didn't improve after we pumped in more than \$3 billion over the past four years, what's going to happen when the budget increases are more stagnant?" one key lawmaker asked.

Mills recognizes the impediments, but says the state must stay the course with its tougher standards.

"It would be a mistake to say 'time out,' that we'll only improve performance when times are good," Mills said.

"I don't think we can expect backslides and we certainly can't accept them," he said.

Mills said schools will have to figure out how to do more with less funding. "Money alone isn't the whole story," he said. "It's about the fundamental programs at each school."