

July 29, 2008

## Parents want say in special 'contracts'

### Program ups aid for some schools

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*Albany Bureau*

ALBANY -- Following complaints from parents and education advocates, and a call to police, the state Board of Regents promised Monday to reject school accountability plans known as Contracts for Excellence unless districts follow the rules for public input and disclosure.

This is the second year of the Contracts for Excellence, in which districts that have at least one low-performing school and get an increase in state funding of 10 percent or more receive additional money to help improve student achievement.

About 100 people participated in a rally outside the state Education Department on Monday. The group, which included members of the Alliance for Quality Education, the Campaign for Fiscal Equity and other organizations, tried to attend a Board of Regents' meeting to speak about the contracts. They were accused of disrupting the meeting, and the Education Department called police. Regents ultimately permitted a small group to speak.

Board of Regents Chancellor Robert Bennett said the panel would "do the right thing" on the contracts. "We do hear you. We want to continue to hear from you. You represent the most important group in the whole enterprise, and that's your kids," he said.

Districts have to spend CFE money on programs proven to improve student performance, such as smaller class sizes, and funds must be targeted to the neediest students.

The state School Boards Association was not aware before Monday that there was concern over a lack of public input on the contracts, spokesman David Albert said. Because of the timing of the new program, districts were rushed in getting the contracts off the ground last year. This is the first year districts are developing a full public process, he said.

At least two districts in the Southern Tier have Contracts for Excellence and received extra funding in 2008-09: Binghamton, \$3.9 million; and Norwich, \$1 million.

