New Strategy Announced to Improve City Schools

By SHARON OTTERMAN

The Education Department on Thursday detailed a new model for turning around some of New York City's lowest-performing schools, saying that the schools would serve as the first testing ground for new teacher evaluation laws passed by the Legislature in May.

The model, known as transformation, will be put in place beginning in September in 11 of the 34 city schools that the state has identified as "persistently lowest achieving," a designation covering the lowest-achieving 5 percent of schools in the state. The remaining 23 schools on the list will almost certainly be closed and replaced by smaller schools or charter schools, although that process is not to begin until the start of the 2011-12 school year, officials said.

In an agreement reached Thursday between the city and the United Federation of Teachers, the schools will be permitted to hire two new kinds of teachers: master teachers and turnaround teachers. Those teachers will be paid as much as 30 percent more than their base salaries and will train other teachers in addition to their full-time teaching duties.

"We have taken a bold step in creating positions that honor great teacher performance for teachers who want to take on the biggest challenges," said John White, a deputy chancellor.

The schools would also be the first to use student performance data in evaluating teachers' performance, including improvement on state tests and other work. At the end of the year, the teachers will receive a rating of highly effective, effective, developing or ineffective. If teachers are rated ineffective for two consecutive years, they will face firing through an expedited hearing process.

All city teachers will be subject to these rules once the city and the union agree on a new teachers' contract, but the transformation schools will get a jump-start on the new regulations, union and city officials said.

Each school will receive $2 million in federal stimulus money over each of the next three years. The money will also be used to extend instructional time, develop curriculums and provide more psychological support to homeless and other at-risk students. Most of the principals will be replaced, though the city may keep on principals who are new or who have shown strong improvement in recent years, education officials said. On Friday, the city will announce the 11 schools it has chosen for transformation.

Michael Mulgrew, the union president, praised the model, calling it preferable to closing struggling schools. "We have the opportunity to come up with a real plan that will support the teachers and the students," he said.