

A smart cure for opt-out spring fever

Adaptive tests used by many states take less time and judge skills better



Lane Filler

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The kindergarten through eighth-grade students of Rockville Centre sit for computerized tests in math and English several times a year. None of them ever refuse to take the tests, according to Superintendent William Johnson.

“Wait, actually never?” I asked Johnson Tuesday.

“I’ve never heard of one of our students opting out of the adaptive testing,” he replied.

That’s particularly notable because the opt-out rate in Rockville Centre for the state’s usual standardized tests varies from 40 to 70 percent, depending on grade level. It’s also notable because these computerized adaptive tests Rockville Centre administers by choice are far better than the ones it’s required by the state to give.

Rockville Centre’s students take supplemental tests devised by the Northwest Evalua-

tion Association, as do students in at least 20 other districts on Long Island. The tests are adaptive, meaning wrong answers are followed by easier questions, and correct answers by harder ones.

“Adaptive tests hone in on exactly where a child is proficient very quickly,” Johnson said. “And unlike the state’s tests, they can get as hard and as easy as they need to show what the highest and lowest achievers know, even if it’s way above or below grade level.”

Adaptive tests take far less time to pinpoint a student’s proficiency, typically just 45 minutes, while traditional tests might last three hours. They waste little time on questions that are far too easy or far too hard.

Adaptive tests don’t have to be administered to all students on the same day because every test is different. Traditional tests, whether taken on paper or computer, must all be administered on the same day so the questions cannot be passed on to other students.



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The state-required annual spring math test is taken at South Side Middle School in Rockville Centre in 2015. The district also administers computerized adaptive tests that it believes are better.

Tuesday, computer problems across New York during the administration of required English tests caused serious issues. With adaptive tests, which in Rockville Centre are administered throughout September, January and June, one day or even several days of glitches wouldn’t be a disaster.

Adaptive tests are scored on

a multiyear continuum for each student. That means progress can be charted over an entire school career as students go from, for instance, a score of 100 in math in first grade to a score of 900 by eighth grade.

Adaptive tests are scored quickly. That means teachers quickly find out what to address for each student based on individualized results. Tradi-

tional tests take longer to reveal less.

The political battle over standardized testing and its place in teacher assessment in New York has raged for a decade. The strongest point for the opt-out advocates’ case is the weaknesses of the state tests.

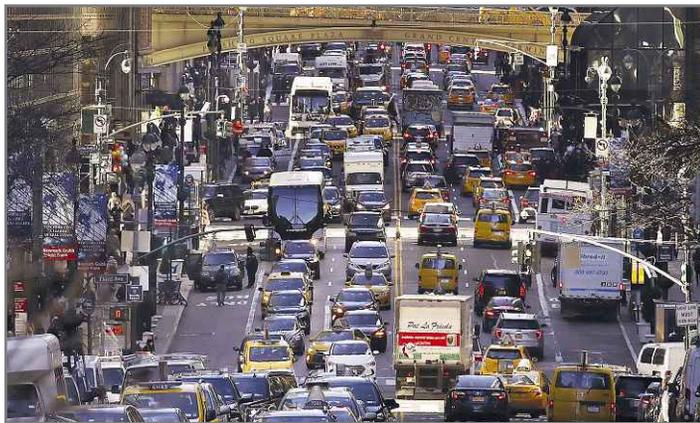
Moving to adaptive tests and proving to parents and teachers how well they work are the best ways to overcome opt-out rates of 50 percent on Long Island and 20 percent statewide.

It is reasonable to judge teachers at least partly by how much their students learn. Teaching children is the job. But it’s also reasonable for teachers and parents to expect the tests to be well-designed, valid and useful.

If no one opts out of the adaptive tests in Rockville Centre, it’s at least possible few would opt out of such tests if they became the state standard — and a part of how teacher success is measured.

And then, if opt-outs did continue, we would know they were all about the teachers and not at all about the tests.

Lane Filler is a member of Newsday’s editorial board.



Traffic fills 42nd Street in Manhattan. The street will be in the toll zone when congestion-pricing begins, possibly in 2021.

working New Yorkers. They’re trying to attract the attention of people concerned with air pollution and traffic in big cities [“\$1B for LIRR in congestion pricing deal,” News, March 29].

Congestion pricing is punitive, making drivers pay for what is free now. The toll will be a sham tax that unjustly pe-

nalizes low-income New Yorkers. The argument that congestion pricing is parallel policy with the Green New Deal is false. People drive to Manhattan because they have no choice, unless they want to pay high railroad fares, and deal with dirty trains and unruly passengers.

I believe the toll will not reduce traffic in Manhattan, will not clean our environment and will not speed up bus commutes.

Peter Beklian, Massapequa Park

State spending rises, and residents pay

The new state budget calls for increased spending for many things, including schools [“\$3B in NY aid for LI school districts,” News, April 2].

The budget comes with a sounds-good permanent 2 percent limit on property tax increases, but it also comes with congestion pricing for part of Manhattan — which could mean higher tolls for other crossings, too — and a raise for the governor (after state lawmakers got theirs on Jan. 1).

Long Island doesn’t have among the highest property taxes by accident. Now we read that more than 1,200 Suffolk

County workers made more than \$200,000 in 2018 [“Suffolk Gov’t \$200G earners way up in 2018,” News, April 2].

Our officials and the highest-paid unions used to work for the citizens. It looks like we now work for them.

Gary Maksym, Massapequa

Change the teen culture of violence

The March 29 letter “Be more proactive about school safety,” written about a 10-year-old boy who brought a loaded handgun into a Baldwin school, missed the point.

Everyone seems to ignore the lack of effort made by parents and educators to change the deep values and attitudes about violence in our society.

How many students come to school with violent games loaded on their smartphones or computers? Shooter games are among the most popular video

games, along with fighting and role-playing games that feature violence as ways to advance.

To become more proactive about school violence, parents and educators must work together to change the social values attached to violence in all forms, no matter how harmless those games appear. What do we say to the hundreds of students and teachers who have had to deal with serious violence in their schools? True proactive efforts would address our attitudes on violence more realistically.

Jim Incorvaia, Westbury

Editor’s note: The writer teaches at Harborfields High School.

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