

EDITORIAL

Chalk up a loss for our students

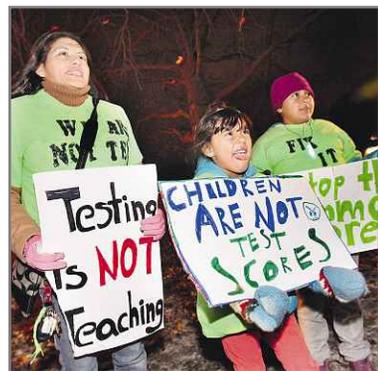
Issue persists: How to identify bad teachers?

The push to base evaluations of New York's public school teachers partially on how much their students' standardized test scores improve is on its deathbed.

The number of state legislators supporting a do-not-resuscitate order has grown. Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo, once a leading advocate of linking student performance on the federally mandated tests to teacher evaluations, is poised to help shovel dirt on the coffin.

That means the movement to identify effective and ineffective teachers, rewarding the good ones and retraining or firing the bad ones, will again suffer. That means students will continue to suffer.

A bill to disconnect scores from evaluations is being heavily promoted by the state's powerful teachers union, and it has overwhelming support in the Assembly. That Democrat-dominated body has been ready for years to desert evaluation measures passed in 2011, then abandoned with a four-year moratorium in 2015. What has changed is the climate in the Republican-controlled Senate, where that bill has 51 sponsors this year, including most Republicans.



Opponents of standardized testing protest in East Setauket in 2013.

NEWSDAY / JOHN PARASKEVAS

Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan always supported using the test scores in evaluations, but it's increasingly unlikely that he can hold out. New York State United Teachers, the state's largest teachers union, has won battle after battle, including the opt-out war that has 50 percent of test-eligible students on Long Island skipping federally mandated exams in math and English. And Flanagan, of East Northport, and the Republicans could lose their majority in November, an outcome NYSUT will fight hard for if Flanagan keeps battling.

Both Flanagan and state Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia warn that putting teacher assessments in the hands of local districts could mean even more standardized tests for students. But parent sentiment against standardized tests makes it clear the odds of this are low, and Flanagan and Elia don't need a false narrative to address the real concern.

The tragedy of this bill is that it would mean the end of the movement Flanagan and Elia both support, as Cuomo once did, to rate teachers, schools and districts based on objective standards used across the state to measure what students learn. Their strategy is to keep fighting, but they've run short of allies, weapons and time. Yet they are right.

There is no secret in any school or community about who the bad teachers are. Students, parents and educators know. The best system would be to evaluate principals based on the performance of their students, and to let those principals determine who should be rewarded, who needs further training and who needs to be dismissed. Principals who are judged on student performance can be trusted to pick teachers, just as bosses do in practically every professional setting.

Teachers unions oppose that. They also oppose objective standards that could be applied and understood uniformly across districts, the state and the nation. The reality is that the very nature of the union's role is to oppose dismissing the worst teachers and rewarding the best.

But the schools exist to serve the students' needs, not teachers' desire for job security. Even if this battle is lost, the fight to provide the best possible teachers must continue.

— *The editorial board*

MATT DAVIES



NEWSDAY/MATT DAVIES

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LETTERS

To ease traffic, electrify the LIRR

Traffic is a critical problem for North Fork businesses seeking to flourish in the increasingly seasonal economy on the East End ["North Fork struggles to find light at end of traffic-jam tunnel," News, May 12]. But with road-widening a political non-starter, the only realistic solution is to expand public transit.

The Long Island Rail Road should electrify from Ronkonkoma to Riverhead, where scoot trains and buses could then transport people to Greenport and stops along the way. This would take pressure off farmers pivoting to eco-tourism and help them keep their land open, protecting the vistas we and our visitors hold dear.

Electrification would also boost efforts to revitalize long-struggling downtown

Riverhead, where transit-oriented development could help address the acute shortage in workforce housing.

*Dave Kapell,
Greenport*

Editor's note: The writer, a former mayor of Greenport, is executive director of the Right Track for Long Island Coalition, an advocacy organization.

Why not trim to 15 school districts?

As a retired federal employee who lived and worked in Howard and Montgomery counties in Maryland for almost 40 years, I couldn't agree more with the two letter writers about the burden to taxpayers of 124 Long Island school districts in contrast with the more cost-effective one-county, one-school-district system in Maryland ["Maryland schools get more bang for bil-

lions," Letters, May 14].

If it is not feasible to reorganize the region's schools into Nassau and Suffolk county systems, why can't the 124 school districts be consolidated into 15 districts coincident with each of Long Island's 13 towns and two cities?

Recognizing the tradition of the town structure on Long Island and the social and cultural imprint of town governance, I fail to understand why this wasn't done long ago. The savings to taxpayers would be significant, with no sacrifice in the quality of education. The current high-cost situation cannot go on forever.

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