

EDITORIAL

Don't lower test standards

NY's biggest teachers union simply wants its members to look good

New York's largest teachers union says the state has some explaining to do about how public school students are measured on state tests. But the truth is obvious, and it's the union that is wrong.

Before annual exams for students in grades three through eight began last week, New York State United Teachers published an "open letter" claiming it is unfairly hard to achieve a score of "proficient" on the tests. To support this preposterous claim, NYSUT argues that the percentage of kids scoring proficient or better on the grade-school English and math tests is far lower than that of high schoolers passing state Regents exams. So, the union concludes, the younger students' results must be wrong.

A good teacher would fail any student citing that evidence to support his or her argument.

The numbers do differ dramatically. About one-fifth of students statewide opt out of the tests, but of the students in grades three through eight who took the tests over the last two years, about 40 percent scored proficient or higher. In contrast, 74 percent of the students who took the Algebra 1 Regents exams last year "passed," as did 84 percent of the students who took the English Language Arts Regents exam.

Which result is inaccurate? NYSUT said it's "betting it's not the Regents," but the union is loading the dice. The score students need to pass the Algebra 1 and ELA Regents is 65. But that 65 does not signal proficiency. The state says 75 in English and 80 in math indicate career and college readiness, because those are the levels that correlate with success in first-

year college courses.

Q. So what percentage of New York's students achieve Regents scores indicating they are ready to move on?

A. Between 35 and 40 percent. That's just about the same percentage of New York's students found to be proficient in the annual National Assessment of Educational Progress, which tests and compares U.S. students. And it's the same percentage found to be college- and career-ready based on PSAT and SAT scores.

Every reliable measure of the proficiency of New York's students is in a range far lower than the percentage who pass Regents and graduate from high school. If those were the numbers to trust, graduates would be ready for the next step. But 50 percent of new students at New York's two-year colleges and 10 percent of new students at the state's four-year colleges have to be enrolled in high school-level remedial courses. And many employers say many of these graduates lack entry-level skills.

NYSUT wants the proficiency standards on the grade-school tests lowered because the union wants nearly all students to pass to show that nearly all teachers excel. That wouldn't help kids get the education they need. And it would be devastating in high-needs districts, where cries for resources could be ignored because more students would meet the lower standards.

By every reliable indicator, New York puts about 40 percent of its public school students on the path to college and career readiness. Lowering an array of accurate standards to match more upbeat but dishonest ones would mean ignoring our children's needs in favor of NYSUT's desires.

And that's the wrong answer.

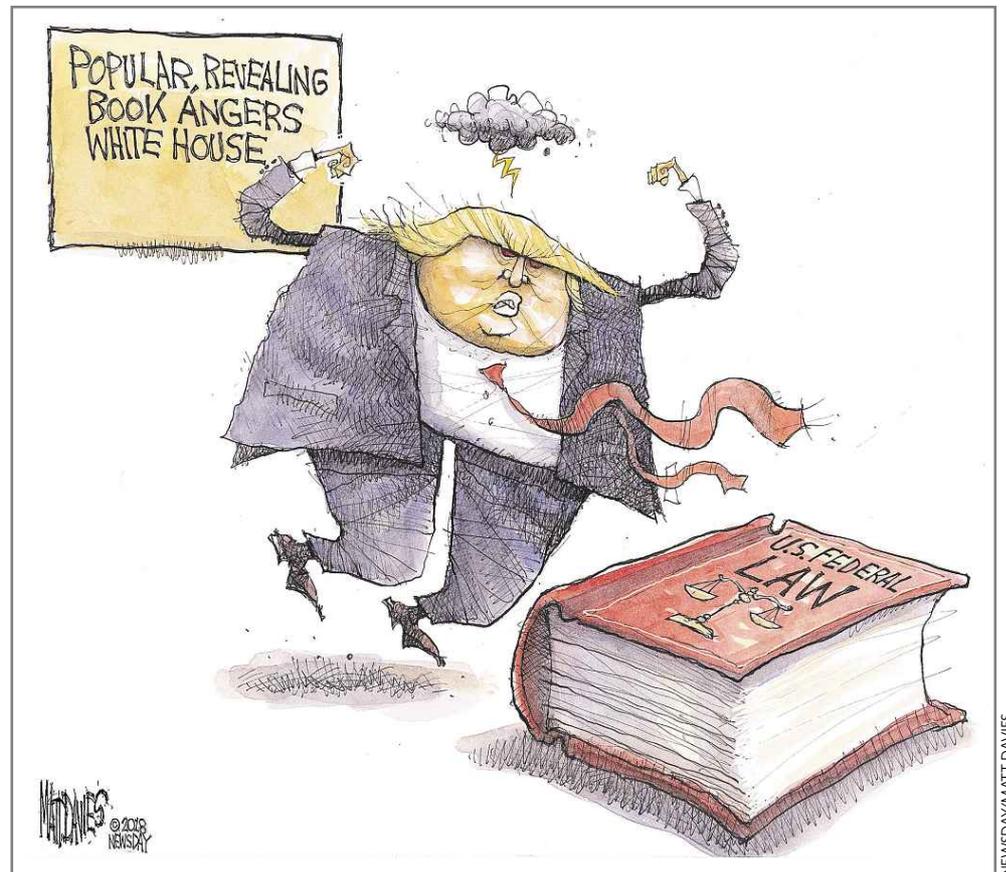
— *The editorial board*



NEWSDAY / JOHN PARASKEVAS

A third-grader at Holbrook Road School in Centereach participates in state testing on Thursday.

MATT DAVIES



NEWSDAY/MATT DAVIES

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LETTERS

Political correctness will distort history

The tactic of taking down allegedly offensive statues seems to be attracting leftist groups ["Opposite opinions on Jefferson statue," News, March 31]. It serves the left's agenda to act as victims.

Where does it stop? Do we take down statues of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. or John F. Kennedy because they were womanizers?

Erasing history prevents remembering and ensuring that we do not repeat long-past injustices. These statues are monuments to how far this nation has come in promoting equality.

Joseph Ruszczyk,
Kings Park

I have a degree from Hofstra University, and I consider the effort to remove the Thomas Jefferson statue there an example of political

correctness run amok and beyond pathetic.

Jefferson, a great Founding Father, lived in a time when slavery was the way of things. At some point, most ethnic groups have experienced slavery.

American Indians had slaves, George Washington had slaves. Should we change the name of the nation's capital? The world has moved on and so should these protesters.

Walter McCarthy,
Massapequa

What about parking in Ronkonkoma?

With all the improvements being undertaken to increase train service at the Long Island Rail Road's Ronkonkoma station, why would anyone want to severely decrease the amount of parking by building on lots used by commuters

["Suffolk selects \$1B sports arena plan," News, April 9]? Everyone who uses this station knows that every spot is taken early.

Who will get the contract to build parking towers to replace those spots?

A better place for a sports arena would be the old movie complex in Medford between Long Island Expressway Exits 64 and 65. That area has been vacant for far too long.

Joseph Totaro,
Yaphank

King rejected notion of black supremacy

There is a quote attributed to the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. which has been ignored by most ["Reflecting on MLK legacy," News, April 5].

After a speech in Harlem in 1958, King was stabbed by an irate black woman who