

EDITORIALS

Education reform has a way to go

The battle that has raged since 2010 to reform public education in New York originally centered on two issues: the adoption of rigorous national Common Core learning standards, and tying teacher performance evaluations to how their students scored on standardized tests based on those tougher standards.

Then, arguments over those two issues among the state's teachers unions, education reformers, politicians and parents spawned a third, unprecedented problem: about one-fifth of the students in third through eighth grades statewide and 50 percent of such students on Long Island now refuse to take the state standardized tests required by federal law.

The war over Common Core standards that had gotten so heated it spawned a statewide political party actually ended fairly well by 2017. As students, teachers and parents got used to the new curricula and learning methods that had initially been enacted too fast and with too little training, the state replaced the name Common Core with "Next Generation English Language Arts and Mathematics Learning Standards." It also allowed public comment on the standards, tweaking them but leaving them largely intact.

The fight to tie student test scores to teacher evaluations, though, is now dead. State law says the scores have to be part of the evaluations, but there is a moratorium on enforcing that rule which will almost certainly be extended until the law connecting student scores to teacher evaluations is repealed.

And any forceful attempt to make school districts push kids to sit for those tests appears to be dead, too. The state Board of Regents this week retreated on its plan to divert a portion of schools' federal funds toward encouraging test participation at high opt-out schools, and to make those schools craft plans to reduce those rates.

It's good news that the state has managed to keep a set of rigorous standards to ensure students are ready for work or college when they graduate high school. But the unions and Regents who claim teachers can be properly and rigorously evaluated without tests scores must craft a plan to do so. And parents and teachers, having won the battle to decouple standardized tests and teacher evaluations, must have the kids take the tests.

— *The editorial board*

A critical state action to protect drinking water

The successful culmination of a yearslong campaign by civic groups and environmentalists to shut down a Noyack sand mine is good news for two reasons. Not only did the state Department of Environmental Conservation stop Sand Land Corp. from further polluting groundwater, the agency also put other bad actors on notice that these actions will no longer be tolerated.

With no more sand to mine under its permit and its earlier request to expand rejected by the DEC, Sand Land was using the mine for large-scale mulching and composting, which is known to cause metals in the soil underneath to leach into groundwater. Worse, Sand Land is in a state-designated Special Groundwater Protection Area. After persistent Suffolk County Department of Health officials gained access to the mine, well tests detected levels of manganese, ammonia, alpha radiation and iron exceeding drinking-water standards — especially manganese, which can cause neurological disorders.

Now Sand Land must devise a reclamation plan to return the land to its natural state, a process the state must tightly monitor. But the essential message already has been delivered: No one has the right to pollute our precious aquifer.

— *The editorial board*

MATT DAVIES



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LETTERS

Federal workers deserve pay raise

In 2017, President Donald Trump persuaded the Republican-controlled Congress to pass a massive tax break for himself and other 1 percent taxpayers while the federal deficit grows. He plans to nix a modest 2.1 percent pay increase for federal government workers because the government "cannot sustain such increases" ["Trump cancels federal workers' pay raises," News, Aug. 31]. It appears that Republicans will hold up a pay raise for people who need it.

The president and Congress were elected to represent all of the people, not to line the pockets of the super-rich. Unless Congress does its job by being a check and balance on the president, we will go through another recession.

Roger Kaufmann,
East Northport

Maria toll figures are not exact

President Donald Trump disputes Puerto Rico's official estimate of 2,975 deaths there after Hurricane Maria ["Trump disputes death toll," News, Sept. 14]. He has a point.

There have been many academic analyses with different results. For example, Harvard University estimated 4,645 deaths above the government figure of 64. The University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez estimated 605 to 1,039 deaths. Penn State University estimated about 500 deaths in September 2017, and a total of 1,085 by the end of October. George Washington University estimated 2,658 to 3,290 "excess deaths." Then, it was decided to give a midpoint of 2,975.

These results are statistical projections based on

mathematical variables instead of body counts. But somehow if you disagree, you are considered unstable or unhinged.

Peter Scott,
Nissequogue

I feel sorry that hurricanes continue to devastate people's lives ["For former LI residents, storm's an echo of Sandy," News, Sept. 13].

It is unacceptable that many do not acknowledge that climate change strengthens hurricanes through warmer oceans, that humans have exacerbated climate change by burning fossil fuels, and that there is still a way to turn this around and prevent such damaging storms.

We can urge members of Congress to put a federal price on carbon emissions and return the proceeds to Americans through a divi-