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SPORTS

STATE LAW PROPOSAL EVALUATING TEACHERS

Opt-out leaders:
Bill that plays down
scores on state tests
falls short

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Teacher bill criticized

Opt-out leaders say it fails to unlink test scores from evals

BY JOHN HILDEBRAND

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Leaders of the opt-out movement are criticizing proposed legislation that they say would not go far enough in de-emphasizing use of student scores in evaluating teachers, saying that their boycott of the exams would likely continue even if the measure is approved in Albany.

Parent representatives of the movement on Long Island said in interviews this week that the state law that links students' test scores to teachers' job evaluations should be wholly repealed, rather than revised.

On this issue, the parents differ with New York State United Teachers or NYSUT, a statewide union umbrella group, that has often worked in tandem in the past. NYSUT contends the pending legislation would represent a big step forward in decoupling standardized tests from the job-performance ratings of professional educators.

Parent activists disagreed, saying the legislative measure would simply substitute one set of testing requirements for another. Their opposition suggests that the boycott movement will remain strong, especially on Long Island, which has the greatest concentration of test resisters in the state.

The dispute over legislation, which in part would make use of state tests optional rather than mandatory in evaluations, is the latest in a decadeslong debate over how far New York State and other states should go in setting rigorous academic standards for students, while using tests to help enforce such standards.

"This deal has nothing to do with children — it doesn't take the burden off," said Jeanette Deutermann, chief organizer of Long Island Opt Out, a regional parent network.

Deutermann, the mother of two students in the North Bellmore district, added, when asked how she would react if the legislation wins adoption, "I wouldn't stop calling for a boycott."

The opt-out leader went on to say that parents were unlikely to be intimidated by a separate proposal, recently put forth by the state Edu-



Opt-out leader Jeanette Deutermann, seen at home in Bellmore with her sons Jack and Tyler, called the proposal to impose financial penalties on districts with high opt-out rates a "declaration of war."

cation Department, that would set financial penalties for school districts where large numbers of students refuse to take state tests. Federal law requires at least 95 percent test participation by eligible students — a standard met by only a handful of elementary and middle schools on the Island.

Deutermann called the proposal a "declaration of war," and said it flew in the face of past assurances by state education officials that they wanted to regain parents' trust.

Deborah Brooks, a Port Washington attorney and mother of an eighth-grader who has opted out of state testing the past four years, agreed that test resistance is likely to continue.

"I think that parents who un-

derstand what it means to link tests of any sort to a teacher's evaluation will not bring their children back," said Brooks.

Like Deutermann, Brooks is active in New York State Allies for Public Education, a statewide consortium of educators and parents opposed to what they regard as excessive testing.

Even those with different perspectives than the parents have voiced misgivings about the legislation.

State Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia has said the bill could result in more student testing, rather than less. Statewide organizations representing school boards and superintendents have expressed similar misgivings.



Patty Kolodnicki, a teacher union representative, backs the law.

April. Among a range of concerns, opponents contend that linking students' scores to teachers' evaluations places undue pressure on both groups.

In response to the uproar, both houses of the State Legislature have taken up identical bills to revamp the system. The Democratic-run Assembly overwhelmingly approved the measure last month and Republican Senate leaders said they expect to follow suit before they adjourn June 20.

A summary of the bill states that it seeks "to maintain the rigorous standards set for teacher and principal evaluations, while simultaneously addressing some of the concerns of parents and educators."

One major amendment would make the use of state-created tests optional, rather than mandatory, in evaluating teachers. Another provision would eliminate the use of state-provided "growth" ratings.

Job performance of teachers would continue to be measured in part on the basis of test scores, however. Assessments to be used would be negotiated by districts and their unions, under guidelines set by the state.

Local teachers union leaders interviewed by Newsday said they understand the frustrations felt by many parents over testing issues, but believe nonetheless that the pending legislation deserves support.

"I think this was a good start in the right direction," said Patty Kolodnicki, a math teacher in the Levittown district who represents her union local at state-level meetings. "It's taking pressure off teachers — therefore, it's taking pressure off students. It's not the end goal for any of us. We're going to continue pushing."

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