

TEACHER EVAL LAW AGAIN A HOT TOPIC

State likely to extend disputed moratorium

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ALBANY — Angry exchanges over the state's teacher-evaluation law reignited Monday as Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia confirmed that a moratorium on the controversial statute could be extended past its July 2019 expiration.

Elia's comments signaled that uncertainty over the law's enforcement is likely to linger longer than originally thought — a prospect that brought immediate pushback from the state's largest teachers union, among others.

"It is very possible that we may have to extend it," the commissioner said at a meeting of a Board of Regents committee.

Many opponents of the teacher-rating system had hoped the law would be repealed by the time the moratorium ends.

New York State United Teachers, or NYSUT, which has 600,000 members, denounced the idea of an extended moratorium.

"The teachers we represent believe the time to fix it is this year," said Jolene DiBrango, executive vice president of the organization, said during a break in the Regents meeting. "Now is the time. We've been talking about this for years."

The Regents, under emergency regulation, imposed a four-year moratorium on the evaluation law in December 2015, driven by backlash from educators and parents.

The law, which bases as much as 50 percent of teachers' job ratings on student test scores, was strengthened at a time when more rigorous standardized exams, based on the national Common Core academic standards, were being introduced into classrooms.

Dissent against the ratings system and the tests drove record boycotts statewide.

The test refusals have continued despite the moratorium on evaluations: This marked the third year of massive statewide boycotts, with the Island at the epicenter. Many parents who have signed their children out of testing say the evaluation law puts undue pressure on teachers and students.

Also on Monday, Elia told news reporters that the issue "has caused

upset across the entire education world in New York State" and the outcome of debate over teacher evaluations is unknowable.

NYSUT contends that the evaluation law should be repealed outright, and that teachers' performance ratings should be left in the hands of local district authorities.

Parent leaders of the Island's boycott movement continue to hope that their protests will eventually result in legislative action.

"Parents need to keep up the pressure on legislators and Governor Cuomo to change this inappropriate law," said Diane Venezia Livingston, a Port Washington parent organizer who has opted her own children out of state assessments.

New York State's battle over teacher evaluations has flared on and off for more than eight years.

In 2010, when New York, like other states, was recovering from recession, it won nearly \$700 million in education incentives from the federal "Race to the Top" program. In exchange, the state pledged to adopt the Common Core standards, to align its tests with those guidelines and also to strengthen teacher evaluations.

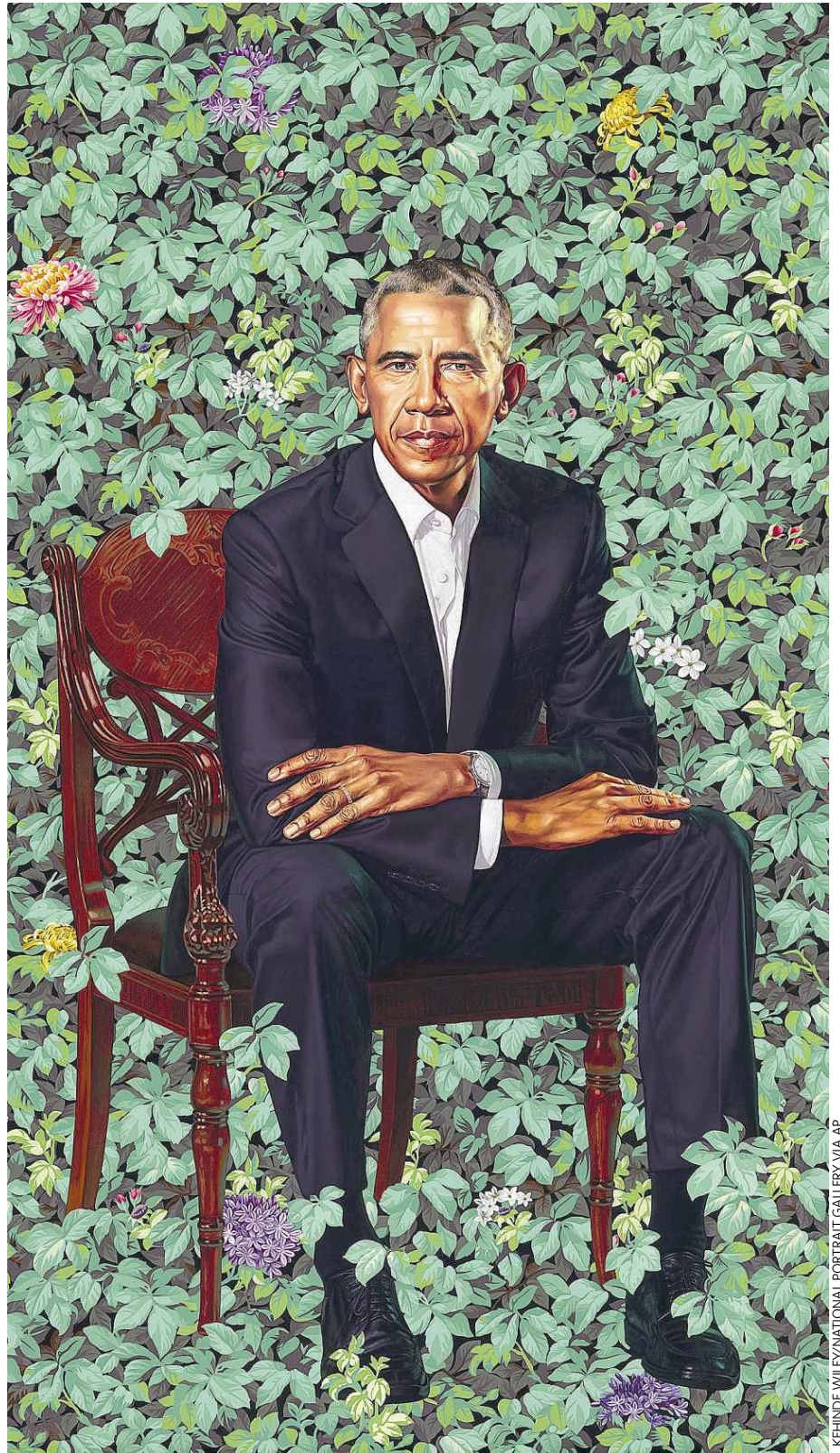
Until then, state law had banned districts from taking test results into account when rating teachers.

In April 2015, the state, with a strong push from Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo, substantially changed its requirements for evaluations of teachers and principals. The changes placed more emphasis on student test scores as a component of evaluations and established financial penalties for any school districts that did not comply.

Protests by teachers and parent allies erupted across the state. The Regents board responded that December by approving the four-year moratorium, which also had been recommended by a Cuomo-appointed advisory commission.

Under terms of the moratorium, educators still receive annual "growth" scores from Albany based on test results. Such scores are only advisory, however, and are not used in deciding whether principals and teachers are to be assigned improvement goals or fired.

Abbey Fashouer, a spokeswoman for the governor, noted Monday that the moratorium will remain in place until the beginning of the 2019-20 school year, adding, "We will revisit the issue at the appropriate time."



KEHINDE WILEY/NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY VIA AP

Portrait for history

This is the official portrait of former President Barack Obama, who joked that he tried to negotiate with artist Kehinde Wiley to show him with fewer gray hairs and smaller ears, to no avail. At right, Obama views the official portrait of first lady Michelle Obama.



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