

## **Testing kids does not add up to ensuring success**

Dear Editor

New York State is failing our students. First we had the prospect of huge education budget cuts that were averted by the state legislature and now we have the Regents "Math A" Exam fiasco. Because of new "standards" for graduation this one test can keep well-performing students from getting a diploma this month. It is being reported that the failure rate on this new test exceeded 50 percent in schools across Long Island even in high-performing schools. The "Math A" test is a requirement for graduation which means that no matter how well a student does in class, this test is the final say on graduation. We have student's futures in question because of the test this year and seniors preparing to go to college are unsure as to where their graduation stands. The test is supposed to be a culmination of knowledge obtained in high school but really ends up being the culmination of late night cramming and tutoring. We are in the era of high-stakes, all or nothing testing of students starting in the fourth grade.

In Texas where the TAAS (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills) test has been around for years, students are so nervous, they are reduced to tears because ONE test will be their mark for future evaluations. The dirty little secret in Texas is that rising TAAS scores did not come from better education but from systematic exemption of low performing students. We do not need that to start happening on Long Island. We need to raise students up, not push them aside.

While we do need standards for grade promotion and graduation we do not need high-stakes tests that force schools to teach to the test rather than teach for knowledge. A good curriculum coupled with strong teachers and approved in-school evaluations will help students more than adding state test requirements.

A single test cannot gauge current and future ability or knowledge.

State and city education departments have swung the pendulum towards testing as a be-all, end-all solution because of years of assaults on public education by uninformed ideologues. In the past couple years there have been boycotts of standardized tests in Massachusetts, Minneapolis/St. Paul, and Scarsdale, New York.

These were not just students refusing to take tests but parents and educators backing their decisions and it was not as though the students were poor performing; Scarsdale is one of the top scoring school districts in the region. New York State Education Commissioner Mills is a proponent of standardized, high-stakes tests which means our students will have increased pressure to pass tests and schools will be forced to spend time not teaching curriculum but teaching test questions because those same tests are also used to gauge school performance. In some states, school funding is based on test scores which forces schools to concentrate on tests rather than education. High-stakes testing promotes fast learning (cramming) and not retention of the material.

Mr. Mills and the Regents board needs to reevaluate the "Math A" test and their whole battery of tests before we have more fiascos like this year and penalize high school seniors for a single test result. Long Island has a history of well-performing schools and will continue to educate with or without these tests. Let's not waste time and money (and it is a lot of money) on tests when we could better use the funds in the classroom. We need better-educated students and not better test-takers.

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