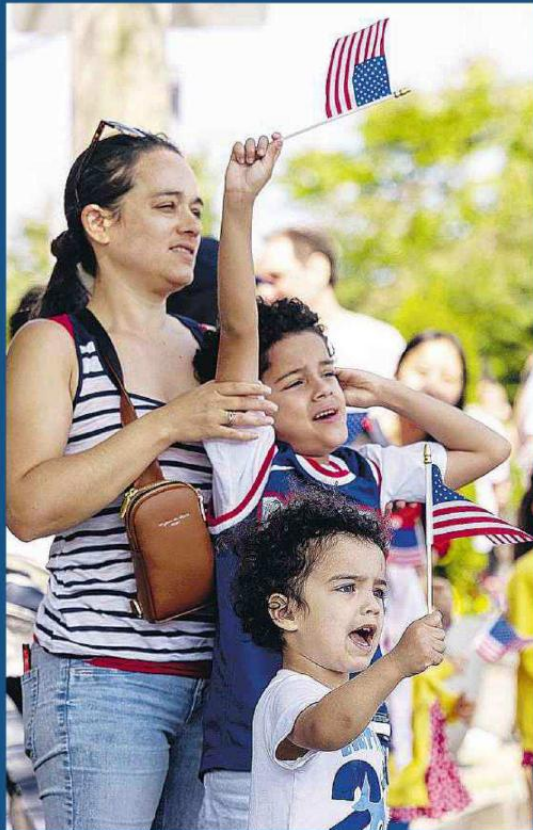


ONLY IN NEWSDAY



Mason and Lennox Nunez, with their mom Sabrina, cheer at the Great Neck Memorial Day parade.

HOWARD SCHNAIPP

Honor & Duty

LI, nation remember
our fallen heroes

A4-7 | VIDEO AT NEWSDAY.TV

Migrant Influx

Biden facing pressure
from NY Dems

A10-11

SOCIAL STUDIES & SCHOOLS

Advocates: State trying
to downgrade importance
of history, civics in school ratings;
Education Dept. says it's temporary

A3 | UPDATES AT NEWSDAY.COM

DINER'S LAST DISH

One of LI's last 24-hour eateries appears closed **A11**

DRIVEWAY DRAMA

Residents revved up after proposed ban on gates **A15**

CONCERN OVER SOCIAL STUDIES

Groups worry NY will downgrade history and civics

ONLY IN NEWSDAY

BY JOHN HILDEBRAND
john.hildebrand@newsday.com

Social studies groups statewide are pushing back against a plan out of Albany they say would downgrade the importance of coursework in history and civics during a time when such lessons should take top priority.

The critics, who include a strong contingent from Long Island, add that the state's plan could lead to elimination of two major Regents exams. Those tests cover U.S. History and Government, and Global History and Geography.

At issue is a recent announcement by the state's Department of Education that it would drop, for the next two years, its practice of including scores from such exams in its academic ratings of high schools. Agency officials describe the move as a temporary "pause" and insist that social studies retains its status as a core academic subject, along with English, math and science.

Albany's plan has alarmed many educators, who note that the state already has taken steps to reduce the amount of class time spent on history, geography, civics and related subjects. Social studies leaders at the state level recently stepped up their criticism, joining colleagues from the Island.

Lisa Kissinger, president of the New York State Council for the Social Studies, fired off a letter to state education officials on May 22, urging them to reconsider their planned change in school ratings. A copy of the letter was obtained by Newsday.

"This 'pause' sends a message to all New Yorkers that Social Studies education is not a priority," Kissinger wrote. "We are concerned that 'pausing' the inclusion of results demonstrates a devaluation of Social Studies that could lead to the elimination of the Social Studies Regents exams and minimization of the critical impor-

WHAT TO KNOW

■ **Social studies groups statewide are pushing back** against a plan out of Albany they say would downgrade the importance of coursework in history and civics.

■ **At issue is a recent announcement by the state's Department of Education** that it would drop, for the next two years, its practice of including scores from such exams in its academic ratings of high schools.

■ **The president of the New York State Council for the Social Studies** fired off a letter to state education officials on May 22, urging them to reconsider the planned change.

ance of this core subject."

Kissinger is a social studies administrator in the suburban Shenendehowa district near Albany, and her state organization represents hundreds of administrators, teachers and college faculty. Her letter was addressed to Lester W. Young Jr., chancellor of the Board of Regents, which oversees the education department and sets much of the state's education policy.

State: Subject is integral

A senior department official, Theresa Billington, responded to Kissinger's letter the following day, insisting that her agency placed a high priority on social studies.

"The department values Social Studies as an integral part of our shared civic discourse and the critical role it plays in educating and shaping the students of New York State to become active citizens and future leaders of our nation," Billington wrote. She is an assistant state commissioner for school accountability.

Billington noted that some Regents history exams were canceled during the COVID-19 pandemic and added that this would seriously limit the amount of data available for school ratings. Kissinger pointed out, on the other hand, that data would be available from a global history exam administered last year, as well as from other tests sched-



Gloria Sesso, co-president of the Long Island Council for the Social Studies, opposes state's plan.



State education Commissioner Betty A. Rosa and Board of Regents Chancellor Lester W. Young Jr. last fall in Albany. State officials say social studies is a core academic subject for New York students.

uled for June and for the 2023-24 school term.

The assistant commissioner's response did not directly address Kissinger's concerns about the future of Regents exams. That's one of the thorniest issues facing the education department, which recently accelerated a previously announced overhaul of graduation requirements.

The overhaul could include a decision to stop using Regents exams as a diploma requirement. A state-appointed commission is scheduled to release recommendations for revised graduation rules by November — seven months earlier than originally planned.

Regents, which established the commission last September, have said that one goal is to

help more students gain the knowledge and skills needed to graduate, even if they do that through pathways other than traditional exams. "This is not about lowering standards," Young remarked at the time.

Worries changes will stay

Social studies representatives have cautioned, however, that any changes in testing policy could affect studies of history and related subjects in a negative way, if not handled carefully. Under federal law, students must be tested periodically in English, math and science, but there is no such requirement for social studies.

As a result, social studies testing has sometimes taken a backseat. In 2010, Regents voted unanimously to eliminate so-

cial studies tests in fifth and eighth grades, on grounds that the state was short of money for assessments.

Those tests were never restored, and supporters of the social studies said there's a lesson in that.

"Once they pause, they will never return," said Gloria Sesso, co-president of the Long Island Council for the Social Studies.

On May 12, the regional group sent its own protest to Betty A. Rosa, the state's education commissioner. The letter asserted that the state's planned change in school ratings could create a "danger to democracy" by lessening the time schools spend on social studies lessons.

Billington responded to the Island group's letter, much as she did to Kissinger's, by insisting that her department placed great value on social studies.

Alan Singer, a Hofstra University education professor, agreed with critics that "once paused, it is unlikely social studies performance will ever be included in the assessments, and what is not assessed is not going to be a priority."

In a recent blog, Singer noted that a state decision in 2016 to limit events covered by global history exams to those occurring after 1750 had excluded topics such as the impact of Columbus' voyages. The blog's title: "History is in Trouble in New York State."

HOWARD SCHINAPP

AP / HANS PENNING