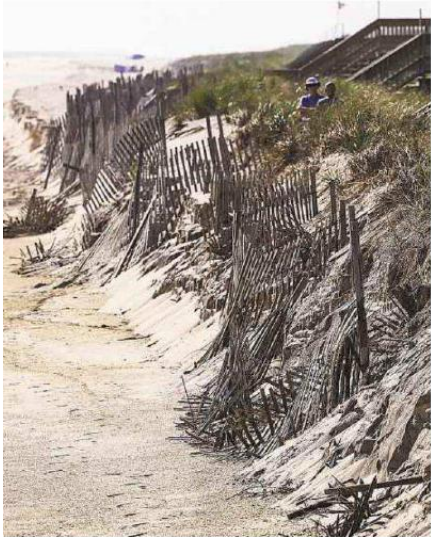


'Enormous' Fire Island Erosion

A5
VIDEO AT NEWSDAY.TV



NEWSDAY / STEVE POST

Erosion is visible on the ocean side of the beach at Davis Park on Tuesday.

House Ousts McCarthy As Leader

Says he won't run again

PLUS: LI GOP reps all backed him as speaker

A6-7

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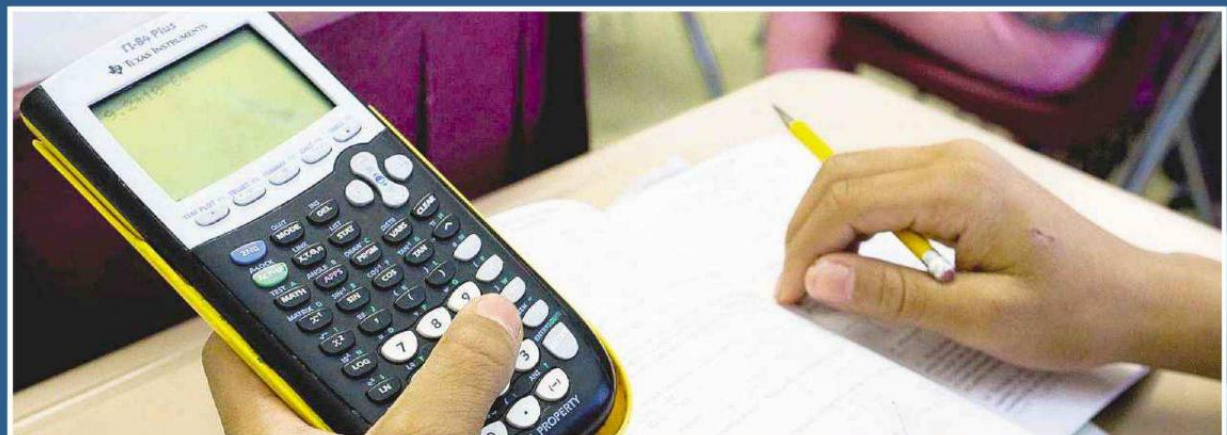
FUTURE OF REGENTS EXAMS

Teachers union seeks to de-emphasize tests' role in graduation

Defenders say they're essential to measure learning

State panel to propose grad revisions next month

A2-3 | UPDATES AT NEWSDAY.COM



HEATHER WALSH

Most New York State students now must pass at least four Regents exams to graduate from high school.

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NASSAU NOW PROBING ALLEGED GILGO KILLER'S GUNS A4

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TOP STORIES

TEACHERS: LESS

Commission set to revise H.S. graduation requirements

BY JOHN HILDEBRAND

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As New York State heads toward an overhaul of high school graduation requirements, an influential teachers union is urging that any changes in the system include reduced emphasis on Regents exams.

Melinda Person, president of the New York State United Teachers union, recently said in a public statement that students should be allowed “multiple pathways” to graduate — an approach that, logically, could leave Regents exams as options rather than requirements. Students currently must pass at least four exams to earn diplomas.

“Simply put, we need more teaching, less testing,” the union chief declared in a Sept. 20 op-ed published by Newsday. She went on to say “there should be multiple pathways to a diploma and more than one way to measure student learning.”

Emily Allen, a union spokesperson, did not respond Tuesday to Newsday's request for more specifics on the organization's position.

NYSUT is a union umbrella



Melinda Person, president of New York State United Teachers

NYSUT / EL-WISE NOISEITE

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group representing nearly 700,000 working and retired teachers, along with other educators.

Person and other organization leaders are stepping up their involvement in a statewide testing debate during a pivotal moment for forces on both sides.

On Nov. 13, a state advisory commission is scheduled to release its plan for revisions in graduation requirements, including Regents exams. Those tests have served as a barome-

ter of student achievement in high schools since the 1870s.

One regional group that has campaigned strongly to keep testing standards in place is the Long Island Council for the Social Studies, representing about 1,100 school supervisors and teachers.

Gloria Sesso of Port Jefferson, the group's co-president, challenged Person's comments during a recent phone interview.

“More teaching, less testing is based on a false premise,” Sesso said. “How do you know what's been taught if you're not assessing? You have to hold learning accountable.”

Regents exams are written at a college-prep level and some advocates for change say this presents an unfair barrier to graduation for thousands of students who do not intend to pursue academics after high school.

An additional argument is that students who don't test well should be provided with alternate ways of demonstrating their abilities — for example, by writing research papers, delivering oral presentations or participating in civic improvement projects.

Feds: Motel shuttered

BY NICOLE FULLER

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The shuttered Sayville Motor Lodge, where federal prosecutors say sex trafficking and drug dealing ran rampant, has been sold to a private company for \$2 million in a sale facilitated by federal authorities after the owners and operators of the motel were arrested last year on conspiracy and drug charges.

U.S. District Judge Joanna Seybert approved the court-ordered sale last month. The sale's proceeds will be used to pay the property's prior lenders and the remaining funds are earmarked for government forfeiture.

Prosecutors did not identify the entity that purchased the

shuttered motel, but in a news release called it “a company that is partially owned by a principal of a neighboring business with long-standing ties to the community.” It's unclear how the property will be redeveloped.

“As a result of this sale, the Sayville Motor Lodge is no longer ground zero of an insidious moneymaker for prostitution and narcotics trafficking, and a blight on the surrounding community,” said U.S. Attorney Breon Peace, of the Eastern District of New York, whose office facilitated the sale. “Instead, the property will be repurposed by its new owner for the benefit of the residents of Long Island.”

The Town of Islip shuttered

the motel last November when federal prosecutors charged the following individuals with sex trafficking conspiracy: Narendarakuma Dadarwala, 77, his wife, Shardaben Dadarwala, 70, their son, Jigar Dadarwala, 45, who all lived at the motel; Ashokbhai Patel, 59, a former employee who lives in Omaha, Nebraska; Timothy Bullen, 36, of Bay Shore and Michael Johnson, 34, of Selbyville, Delaware.

The Dadarwalas, Patel, and Himanshu Inc., which did business as the Sayville Motor Lodge, were also charged with managing a drug premise. Narendarakuma Dadarwala was charged with distribution of proceeds of prostitution and narcotics businesses.

EMPHASIS ON REGENTS TESTS

WHAT TO KNOW

■ **An influential statewide teachers union** is calling for reduced emphasis on Regents exams, as the state approaches a crossroad in its efforts to revise high school graduation requirements.

■ **Leaders of the New York State United Teachers union** say students should be offered alternative “pathways” to earn diplomas, rather than relying on standardized tests that have served as gatekeepers since the 1870s.

■ **A state advisory commission** is due in mid-November to issue recommendations on revamped graduation rules, adding its voice to a growing statewide debate.

Defenders respond that standardized tests such as Regents exams should be maintained, because they are a time-tested means of measuring knowledge in a uniform way among large numbers of students.

Dates back to 1990s

The controversy over Re-

gents exams goes back to the mid-1990s, when the state’s Board of Regents decided virtually all students — not just those bound for college — should pass the three-hour exams in order to graduate. The Regents are a 17-member panel representing different regions of the state, who are appointed by state legislators and set much of the state’s education policy.

At the time, state educational leaders described the move as one that would create a scholastic “gold standard.” Expanded testing also was seen as a means of eliminating much of the academic “tracking” that automatically separated students into different levels of classes based on perceived aptitude.

Disillusionment gradually set in, however, as New York’s graduation rates remained stuck at mediocre levels, despite the state’s relatively significant school spending. The latest federal rankings show, for example, that 84% of New York’s high school students graduated on schedule in 2019-20 — three percentage points below the national average and lower than figures in 26 other states.

In response, some have ar-

gued that New York should drop its “exit” exams as requirements, since only 10 other states follow that practice. Others note the 10 states include some major rivals with outstanding education programs — most notably, Massachusetts — adding that New York should fight to retain its position as an academic leader with rigorous testing.

Once the advisory commission delivers its recommendations, the Regents are empowered to decide what happens next. The commission was named in September 2022 by Education Commissioner Betty A. Rosa, a key figure in the state’s effort to review and revise graduation standards.

Federal law requires states to test students at least once in English, math and science during their high school years, so some form of testing is bound to continue.

However, Regents could opt, if they choose, to drop some or all of the exams as graduation requirements.

Roger Tilles of Manhasset, who represents Long Island on the Regents board, told Newsday it’s too early to predict how the issue will be decided. Tilles went on to say, however, that he looked forward to a future

when less class time was spent drilling for tests, with more time left for subjects ranging from art and music to personal finance.

“It’s hard to assess some of these things that we’re talking about with the standard bubble tests,” Tilles said. “I think we’re moving toward more performance-based testing but we haven’t decided that yet.”

Tilles and other education officials agreed any changes approved could take several years to put into effect.

Changes could take years

State education officials, who report to the Regents, acknowledged their review of Regents exams has led to some public criticism.

Angelique Johnson-Dingle, a deputy state education commissioner, talked about this in a July interview on “Capitol Pressroom,” a public radio program broadcast from Albany.

“You know, it’s interesting that when you look at and talk about making changes, there seems to be this insinuation that you may be lowering standards or you are not setting as high levels of expectation of rigor,” said Johnson-Dingle, who formerly served as superintendent of Western Suffolk BOCES.

She added that, far from lowering expectations, the advisory commission’s work really was aimed at updating graduation requirements “to fit what our students need to be successful in the future world.”

Outside Albany, some analysts said talk about Regents exams and graduation standards could be missing a major point.

Too many of the state’s younger students are struggling to master basic skills long before they reach the diploma stage, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, these experts said.

One leading education advocate, Jeff Smink, noted in a phone interview that only about a quarter of eighth graders statewide scored proficient in math, according to the latest published test results from spring 2022.

Smink is deputy director of Education Trust-New York, a Manhattan-based group that focuses on issues surrounding achievement of minority students who are economically disadvantaged.

“It’s the wrong discussion,” Smink said of the diploma debate. “Too many kids are not prepared to succeed, regardless of graduation requirements.”

in sting sold

Their cases are pending and no trial dates have been set.

Officials for the Town of Islip did not return a phone call seeking comments on the sale.

North Babylon-based defense attorney William D. Wexler, who represents Narendarakuma Dadarwala, who has owned and operated the motel with his wife since 1984, did not immediately return a message seeking comment Tuesday.

From approximately 2014 until 2018, Bullen allegedly operated a sex trafficking business out of the motel, in coordination with the Dadarwalas and Patel, who prosecutors said were aware that prostitution was taking place and warned the traffickers and their victims

when law enforcement was present at the motel. At least one trafficking victim was a minor, prosecutors said. Johnson allegedly operated a sex trafficking business out of the motel from about 2018 to 2020.

Prosecutors said Narendarakuma Dadarwala allegedly wired the funds received from renting rooms where sex and drugs trafficking took place to his son and Patel, prosecutors said.

Jigar Dadarwala also allegedly sold crack at the motel and brokered sexual liaisons between customers and women, often taking a cut of the proceeds, prosecutors said.

The traffickers, sex workers and drug dealers called the hus-



The Sayville Motor Lodge, which was shuttered in November after sex trafficking and drug charges were issued to its owners and other defendants, was sold for \$2 million, federal prosecutors said.

band-and-wife owners “Ma” and “Pa” during their frequent interactions, prosecutors said.

Bullen and Johnson “routinely subjected” the trafficking victims to “mental and physical violence,” prosecutors said, and “kept the women who worked

for them addicted to drugs and introduced them to prostitution in exchange for drugs.”

The Dadarwalas, Patel, and Himanshu, Inc., also allegedly profited from the narcotics trafficking that was conducted openly on the motel property

since 2014, allegedly allowing customers to “freely use drugs, including heroin, cocaine and crack cocaine, in plain view and in motel rooms,” prosecutors said.

Attorneys for the other defendants could not be reached.