

# STATE EYEING BIG REGENTS CHANGES

Some LI educators worry requirement for grads could end

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One of Long Island's top educational policymakers acknowledged Wednesday that the state is considering dramatic and disputed changes in the status of Regents exams as part of a broad-scale rethinking of high school graduation standards.

One question before the state is whether to keep in place the "high stakes" associated with the exams — namely, that students generally must pass four or five of them in order to earn diplomas. On Wednesday, Roger Tilles of Manhasset, who represents the region on the state's Board of Regents, indicated that lifting that requirement was a possibility.

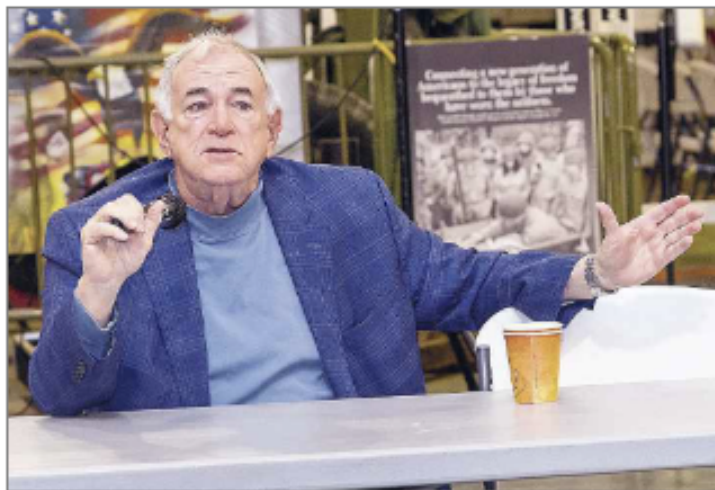
Tilles, one of the board's senior members with 19 years' experience, told a group of educational representatives gathered in Old Bethpage that he was speaking for himself, not the board.

"I don't believe that we're doing away with Regents tests," Tilles said. "There might be options on the table to do away with the high-stakes nature of the tests."

## Educators' sharp responses

Tilles' remarks drew sharp responses from some of the audience's 10 educators, all past or present administrators of social studies programs in the region. Wednesday's meeting was organized by the Long Island Council for the Social Studies, which has worried that the state's review will result in downgrading history exams.

"When you say it's not a requirement for graduation, when you say that, that's the end of Regents exams," said Gloria Sesso, co-president of the council. "If you don't require a Regents exam in U.S. history as a high



Roger Tilles represents Long Island on the state's Board of Regents.

school graduation requirement, you're contributing to illiteracy."

Tilles contended, on the other hand, that instruction actually might improve if teachers had more flexibility in offering creative lessons, rather than covering lists of topics included in tests.

"I think, if anything, social studies teaching will be enhanced," he said.

Tilles and others on the state's 17-member policy board are embarked on a re-examination of New York's graduation requirements that began in 2019, was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and now has resumed. An appointed "blue-ribbon" panel of school superintendents, teachers, parents and others is due to deliver recommendations by the summer of 2024, followed by final Regents action.

One hint of New York's direction surfaced last month, when state education officials, who report to the Regents, released results of surveys conducted by a consulting team. The surveys drew responses from more than 2,600 school administrators, teachers, parents and others, and consultants reported that the majority "suggested modifying the Regents exams or getting rid of them entirely."

Betty A. Rosa, the state education commissioner and a former Regent herself, who has led the

drive to reconsider graduation requirements, approvingly described such suggestions as "the voices of New York State."

## Poll results disputed

At Wednesday's meeting in Old Bethpage, some social studies representatives objected to Rosa's characterization of a poll representing a couple thousand respondents.

"Looking at the 2010 census data, that's one one-hundredth of a percent of the people in New York State," said Doreen Gordon, the other co-president of the council. She is also director of social studies in the Hauppauge district.

Currently, most students in New York State must pass at least four or five such exams in English, history, math and science. However, that could change.

Under federal law, all capable students nationwide are expected to take state exams in at least three subjects — English, math and science — at some point during their years in high school. What the law does not require is that the tests be used as diploma requirements.

For this reason, the Regents, if they chose, could keep Regents exams on the books while waiving the rule that students score 65 or higher to graduate from high school.

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