

LETTERS

Keep standards high for students

We support the editorial board's call for maintaining standards and not watering down high school graduation requirements to simply boost the percentages of graduates ["Measuring student success," Editorial, Sept. 4].

Unfortunately, we share the board's concern that the "Blue Ribbon" committee will simply continue down this path.

The erosion of standards is a pattern we have witnessed in social studies with the elimination of the eighth-grade examination in U.S. history, and it has continued in the many recent exemptions from graduation requirements requiring a knowledge of history.

We suspect that the goal of the "Blue Ribbon" commission and the Commissioner of Education is the elimination of most Regents exams, thereby opening the door to "diplomas on demand" rather than diplomas based on demonstration of the acquisition of skills and content.

— **GLORIA SESSO, PORT JEFFERSON**

The writer is co-president of the Long Island Council for the Social Studies.

I agree that improving academic achievement cannot be done by lowering standards.

However, I don't believe that the current system of measuring academic achievement by testing, be it Regents exams or other assessment testing, is an accurate barometer of how our students are learning. It certainly forces our teachers, who are evaluated by these test results, either formally or informally, to "teach to the test."

Perhaps a better way to measure academic success would be to devise an instrument that takes into consideration that students learn at different rates.

Lowering passing grades to 50% has no value in measuring academic achievement. Having no instrument available for measuring academic success is valueless, as is opting out of testing altogether.

— **JIM KIERNAN, HOLBROOK**

The writer is a former member of the Sachem school board.

No one should doubt the alarm bells about the lack of academic student achievement. But there is one critical aspect of student achievement and the learning process the editorial board has overlooked.

In a country such as ours, where advertising, the social media and freedom of speech have overpowered our students' ability to distinguish the difference between truth and lies, this problem cannot be solved by teaching reading, writing and arithmetic.

What is needed is a course in the ability to "think" and analyze complex social political and economic issues. It should be a vital part of the educational process and taught every day to all students. A good name? "Critical thinking."

— **LEO MONTAGNA, CALVERTON**

The astounding statistic that 82.4% of 2021 graduates were exempted from at least one Regents exam is just another brick in the wall separating teachers from educating and students from learning ["Many 2021 grads got exemptions on exams," News, Aug. 10]. I'm a retired teacher. Many friends and family who are educators agree that we're on the wrong path.

Education Secretary Miguel Cardona in a June speech acknowledged that our country is in a "crisis" shortage of teachers and asked, "Do we have the will to address that as a nation?" The answer currently is no.

Why are teachers retiring early and incoming replacements few? The editorial cites a trend noxious to education: "the political momentum is away from rigorous objective tests . . . [toward] the fast path to easy diplomas."

Teachers want their students' learning accountable. Their morale is crushed by administrators' pressure to pass along unqualified students, and school boards bend knees to parental complaints against true evaluative responsibility. Diplomas should be accurate reflections of learning. Give teachers more power to hold students to the standards appropriate to those diplomas.

— **HANK CIERSKI,**

PORT JEFFERSON STATION