

Flawed Regents test to be rescored

By **DAVID NOVICH**
THE JOURNAL NEWS
(Original publication: August 27, 2003)

ALBANY — State Education Commissioner Richard Mills announced yesterday that he would rescore June's flawed Math A Regents exam for ninth- and 10th-graders, after an independent panel of educators and students found the test was too difficult.

Mills' decision evoked praise and criticism from school administrators throughout the region, who said it would help boost the number of students who passed and prevent them from having to retake the test.

"I think they've really ameliorated the problem," Bedford Schools Superintendent Bruce Dennis said. "Now they just have to fix the test."

Mary Ann Gavioli, head of the math department at Clarkstown South High School, said she was upset about the flawed test but pleased that students would now know what they need to take.

"I'm really very happy about this news that we will have the information before the start of the school year, so that students can know exactly whether or not they have satisfied the Math A requirements by passing the Math A exam," Gavioli said.

Others, though, were still angry about the testing situation. Assemblyman Richard Brodsky, D-Greenburgh, said the decision was a "no-brainer," and has been pushing a bill that would allow districts to create alternative assessments that meet the standards of the state's tests.

"They're rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic," Brodsky said. "It's the system that needs changing, not one test."

Yesterday's announcement came after thousands of students failed the June exam and Mills gave schools the option to ignore the test as a requirement for seniors to graduate. To address the problems on the test, the Board of Regents formed a panel of educators and students who issued an interim report yesterday.

The panel found that the test was substantially more difficult than the 2002 exam and had several tough problems in a row that caused students to become frustrated and give up.

The panel also found that three of the 35 questions on the exam tested the Pythagorean theorem, which would dramatically lower the score of a student who struggled in that area. There were no questions on trigonometry, which had been on previous exams.

Mills gave school districts the option of discarding the June scores and substituting coursework results for upperclassmen who needed a passing grade to graduate.

Mills acknowledged an "inconsistency" with the way the test was administered and called it flawed and unfair. For example, one of the questions had two answers and other questions were unclear.

The exam, intended to cover the first three semesters of math instruction and to be taken by sophomores at midyear, is required for graduation.

The exam tests algebra and geometry as well as probability and statistics. The passing grade is 55. But the test may become more difficult to pass, if the Board of Regents follows its original plan to raise the passing score to 65.

The Associated Press contributed information to this report. Reach David Novich at dnovich@thejournalnews.com or 845-228-2278. The Associated Press contributed information to this report. Reach David Novich at dnovich@thejournalnews.com or 845-228-2278.