

Mastering math

THE ISSUE | Corning-Painted Post students perform poorly on Regents exams.
OUR OPINION | Students not reaching mastery level need just as much extra help as those not passing the tests.

The Corning-Painted Post school district has what Superintendent Mike Ginalski calls a “math problem.” That became apparent last week when the district released its Regents report card. It’s not that students didn’t pass the exam, most did. The problem is, very few in the district passed with flying colors. In fact, less than 10 percent at both East and West high schools scored an 85 or better on the exam.

For example, on the math exam, 75 percent of East students and 73 percent of West students passed with a score of 65 or better.

However, only 7 percent of East students and 4 percent of West students scored an 85 or better, which is considered mastery of the subject.

Time for students to hit the books and pay more attention to the Smart Board?

It couldn’t hurt. However, students who are passing the exam, just not with an 85 or better, are most likely already paying attention and doing their homework.

Part of the problem, Ginalski says, is the district has been focusing on raising the test scores of students who are failing.

Very necessary. However, that leaves less time for students who are passing but are unable to reach the mastery level.

Although the school board expressed shock and disgust Wednesday at this year’s report, this is not a new problem facing the district. In 2009, only 3 percent at East and 2 percent at West achieved mastery on the math Regents.

The school district needs to figure out why these students cannot “master” math and come up with a plan to help them because very soon, all students will be required to get a Regents diploma.

This year’s freshman class will be the first that won’t have the option of receiving a local diploma.

Because there will be more students taking the test, the school district will be spending even more time with those who can’t pass the exam.

That will make it even more difficult for students passing, but not at the mastery level.

Currently, Regents students are given practice tests and have review classes the weeks leading up to the exams. While it’s a great effort by the teachers leading the classes, most likely, it’s too little, too late, for many students.

The district is creating an “algebra stretch class” for those who perform poorly in math in eighth grade, spreading a year of math lessons over two.

Sounds like a great plan, and it should give teachers more time to help students who are falling short of the mastery level.

Unfortunately, the district can’t wait until the the stretch classes are up and running to tackle the problem.

Perhaps a mandatory after-school program that could be fun, yet challenging? More difficult homework assignments, different from the students who are struggling? An extra math class, in place of study hall, or tutoring during the free periods? Practice tests throughout the year?

Couldn’t hurt to set the bar higher for those students throughout the school year. Let them know what’s required and that nothing short of mastery will do.

Because in today’s world, when it comes to math (and science), simply passing just won’t do.

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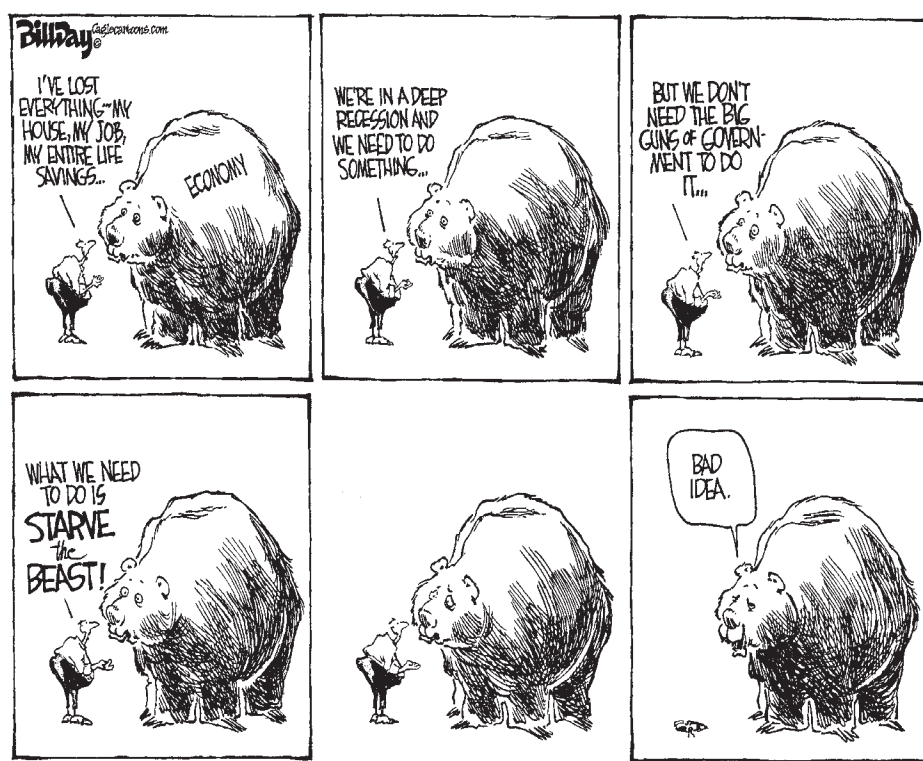
ON THE FRONT PAGE

Corning clocktower by artist
Larry Barone

POSTAL RATES

STEBUEN COUNTY		ELSEWHERE IN USA	
One month	\$26	One month	\$33.50
Three months	\$78	Three months	\$100.50
Six months	\$156	Six months	\$201
One year	\$288	One year	\$372

ARTIST'S VIEW



POLITICS | STATE SEN. TOM O'MARA

Rural America disappearing?

I don’t know how many of you saw it recently, but it sure caught my attention. It was an Associated Press report culled from the latest 2010 Census numbers and the article I read carried this headline, “Rural U.S. disappearing? Population share hits low.”

Following was the article’s lead paragraph: “Rural America now accounts for just 16 percent of the nation’s population, the lowest ever. The latest 2010 census numbers hint at an emerging America where, by midcentury, city boundaries become indistinct and rural areas grow ever less relevant. Many communities could shrink to virtual ghost towns as they shutter businesses and close down schools, demographers say.”

That’s a pretty alarming and stark assessment, to say the least, although it’s not one I completely share for rural New York. At least not yet. But the concern is real and deserves to be taken seriously. The short- and long-term challenges facing rural New York are undeniable.

While roughly 44 of New York’s 62 counties remain classified as rural, we’ve clearly witnessed the decline and ongoing struggle of countless rural communities across the upstate region over the past generation. It’s occurred as the state’s manufacturing base has steadily disappeared and significant population losses have followed. In

my short time as a member of the state Legislature, it’s also become clear how rural regions struggle to stay relevant in a government so dominated by largely downstate, urban-oriented leaders.

Upstate’s decline has been a tough luck story for decades, we know that. But the region as a whole is far from approaching “ghost town” status and opportunities exist to turn it around. So I continue to be grateful, as one of several new members of the Legislature’s joint, bipartisan Commission on the Development of Rural Resources (commonly known as the Rural Resources Commission), for the chance to address the challenge.

The commission has long been noted as a voice of rural New York within the Legislature. Its work has helped focus attention on the needs of our rural communities and economies here at home and statewide. It’s currently chaired by western New York Senator Catharine Young and members include local Assemblyman Phil Palmesano and Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton.

State legislators established the commission nearly three decades ago, in 1982, to examine the impact of rural communities and industries on the state economy, assess the effectiveness of state programs affecting rural areas, and otherwise develop rec-

ommendations to enhance and protect rural resources. Through the years, it’s helped produce landmark achievements on a range of issues in the areas of agriculture, economic development, universal broadband, education, land use, transportation and health care. I’ll also note that our region is fortunate to be home to Cornell University, which has long played a leading role in rural affairs nationally and in New York. The commission has often partnered with Cornell and it makes sense, in my view, to further develop a working partnership with the university to promote a shared vision and common goals for rural New York’s future.

Rural communities remain a mainstay of this region’s culture and economy. The challenges are many, but so are the opportunities – as long as we remain committed. I’m confident that the Legislature’s Rural Resources Commission will advance an even more aggressive and comprehensive “Rural New York Agenda” in the coming year.

The latest Census numbers reveal a bleak story for the future of rural America. But we’re still trying to write a more hopeful chapter for the future of rural New York.

■ Tom O’Mara is a Republican state senator from Big Flats.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

You missed a great reunion

TO THE EDITOR | I would like to thank the Reunion Committee for the 35th reunion of the East and West High Class of 1976.

Brad Aulin, Vickie Cornish Button, Steve Castellana, Joe Celelli, Sue Larrea Miller, Dennis and Carol Jenks Naylor,

Pam Cornish Rogers, Brenda Kline Starkey and Suzanne Hakes Whalen did a wonderful job.

Their hard work to organize and plan such an event is very much appreciated.

People traveled from as far as Florida, California, etc. to see old friends. The old friends that live locally are the people that don’t come! You may not care to maintain a friend-

ship with someone that also lives in town. This does not mean someone that moved away would not like to have a conversation to catch up with you and your life in Corning.

Next time, consider attending an evening you just may enjoy.

Carol Thurston Webster
Potsdam

OTHER VIEW | L.A. TIMES



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Half Dome at Yosemite.

Yosemite: The nature of danger

There were times when the trail up Half Dome was so crowded it looked like a human freeway at rush hour. So much so that last year, Yosemite National Park started issuing permits for the climb because of basic safety concerns. Vernal Falls is another hugely popular spot for tourists.

This summer, those landmarks also were the sites of four deaths within two weeks. Three people died July 19 when they reportedly climbed over the guardrail at the top of Vernal Falls and waded into the river, where they were swept over the falls. A woman died Sunday when she lost her footing near the top of Half Dome, despite the cables that were installed as handrails.

There are a dozen or so deaths each year in Yosemite, but so far this year there have been 14 – more than twice the usual number at this point. The increase in deaths may be a coincidence, or it may be that the park is more dangerous this year. The swollen rivers are faster; rain fell in the park last Sunday morning, and signs warn hikers away from the cable hike in wet weather, when the rock is slick.

Predictably, questions have been raised about whether the park has adequate protections in place. Families of the three Vernal Falls victims hired a consultant who, after viewing the site, announced to the *Sacramento Bee*, “I’m not content with that skimpy little rail.” Rangers said their preventive measures are adequate and they have no plans to change them.

As saddening as the deaths were, the rangers are right. The guardrail is clearly there to keep people out of the river, along with dramatically worded signs in multiple languages. A sign also warns Half Dome hikers not to attempt the cable climb during wet weather. Could more be done? More could always be done. The park could keep people out of the rivers with extensive fencing, perhaps with peepholes for viewing the scenic wonders of the park. It could litter the trails with signs and barriers. But then visitors might as well be on a freeway.

Some tourists are injured or killed because they purposely seek out risk; others innocently or ignorantly think a river or an animal or a hillside can’t be more dangerous than it looks. Some people enter wilderness areas woefully unprepared, without water, wearing flip flops, and go off-trail. And some visitors don’t do anything wrong, but bad things still happen. We can’t guard against it all and shouldn’t destroy scenic beauty in an effort to fend off liability. Nature has a power and thus an unpredictable danger all its own; that is its very attraction.

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