



Karen Lessler, whose son graduated from Middle Country's schools and who now is president of the school board, charged that the state's scoring "is manipulated for political reasons, not student achievement."

Teachers and school administrators aren't against academic rigor, she said, and the state's decision to change grading standards after students had taken the exams seems punitive.

"The Department of Education is a test-and-punish system," Lessler said. "Instead of being education leaders, we're going backwards."

Some of the biggest drops in passage rates were recorded in mostly minority districts, where many students in the past have barely met the state's cutoff levels. In [Roosevelt](#), 42.6 percent of fourth-graders were deemed passing in math this spring, compared with 89.9 percent the previous year. [Hempstead](#)'s figures dropped to 55.1 percent, from 87.6 percent.

Charles Renfro, president of [Hempstead](#)'s school board, expressed mixed emotions.

"I would love to see the state raise the bar," he said. "But the thing is, without advance notice, it might be a bit unfair."

While state officials had suggested for months that they might toughen proficiency standards, the policy-making Board of Regents granted formal approval only last week. Technically, what the state did was to increase "scaled" scores required for passage. Such scores are based on raw point scores, and can be raised or lowered each year depending on the difficulty of specific questions.

This year saw a jump in points required for passage. In sixth-grade math, for example, a minimum 35 raw points were needed, up from 30 last year. In seventh-grade math, the minimum was 40, up from 35. In eighth-grade math, the minimum was 45, up from 40. In science, the minimum was 40, up from 35. In social studies, the minimum was 35, up from 30. In language arts, the minimum was 35, up from 30. In reading, the minimum was 35, up from 30. In writing, the minimum was 35, up from 30. In math, the minimum was 35, up from 30. In science, the minimum was 40, up from 35. In social studies, the minimum was 40, up from 35. In language arts, the minimum was 35, up from 30. In reading, the minimum was 35, up from 30. In writing, the minimum was 35, up from 30.