REGENTS REVERSAL

Under pressure from two sides, won't let poor job evals be appealed

BY JOHN HILDEBRAND
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The Board of Regents, under fire from Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo, reversed course yesterday and set aside a proposal that would have allowed teachers to appeal poor job ratings under the state's new evaluation rules.

The tabled provision, which the Regents had OKd in a preliminary vote Monday, would have let teachers appeal "ineffective" evaluations from the 2012-13 and 2013-14 school years, on grounds they were inadequately trained to provide instruction based on the state's new Common Core curriculum.

The Regents have acknowledged the Department of Education was slow in providing curriculum guides for educators before tougher state tests were given. In the new system, teacher job ratings are tied to their students' test performance.

Chancellor Merryl Tisch, who heads the education policy board, noted after yesterday's vote that the appeals plan was blasted both by Cuomo, who said it went too far, and by New York State United Teachers, which said the provision did not go far enough. NYSUT is the state's largest teachers union.

"NYSUT came out against this, the governor came out against this, for opposite reasons," Tisch said. "There was so much non-solidarity about this that we felt it needed to be discussed."

Tisch repeatedly has described the governor as "a strong ally" in the push for higher academic standards — she repeated that yesterday — and the chancellor also went along when Cuomo has pressed in the past to make student scores a bigger factor in teacher ratings.

The board vote setting the provision aside for further discussion was unanimous.

Education Department officials said a firm decision on the appeals provision is needed by April. The timing is driven by the need to have the issue settled by summer, when teachers are to receive their ratings for the 2013-14 school year.

The appeals plan was part of a broader 19-point package designed to ease public anxieties over the state's rapid rollout of curricula and tests based on the Common Core academic standards.

Most of the package, which won tentative approval Monday, got a final Regents endorsement yesterday on a 15-2 vote. Some elements require further action by the Regents, the State Legislature or other parties.

One provision that goes into effect immediately will allow high school students, until 2022, to pass Regents exams required for graduation with a minimum score of 65. At that point, scores required for graduation will rise to 75 on English exams and 80 in algebra.

Cuomo considers the toughened evaluation system a hallmark of his administration. In a radio interview yesterday, the governor said of attempts to revise the system, "I get that they don't want to do it. The teachers don't want an evaluation system. My problem is, the people of the state want the teacher evaluation system implemented."

NYSUT, which has sought a two-year suspension of the evaluation system, considered the appeal provision inadequate. However, spokesman Carl Korn said the organization was disappointed the provision was set aside because it confirmed that implementation of evaluations was "faulty."

Another storm, another 8 inches possible on LI

BY PATRICIA KITCHEN
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WINTER ALERT
Get updates on school schedule changes and traffic, LIRR conditions.
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Plows and operators are ready to clear Long Island roads of a potential 4 to 8 inches of snow as a winter storm watch takes effect from midnight today to 6 a.m. Friday, the National Weather Service said.

An additional 32 plows are being deployed to the area from the state Thruway Authority and upstate regions, a state Department of Transportation spokeswoman said. "The region is fully loaded with 30,000 tons of salt," she said.

A spokeswoman for the Long Island Rail Road said she expected regular preparations would be initiated in advance of the storm, such as spraying passenger train door panels with an antifreeze agent, activating switch heaters in Jamaica and putting salt on platforms.

Also getting ready is PSEG-Long Island, which is fueling trucks and checking electrical system equipment, said a spokeswoman. "We're monitoring the storm," she said, and that will determine staffing needs.

Look for treacherous travel conditions tomorrow, as snow develops after midnight today across the Island, mixes with rain during the day tomorrow, and switches back to snow, the weather service said.

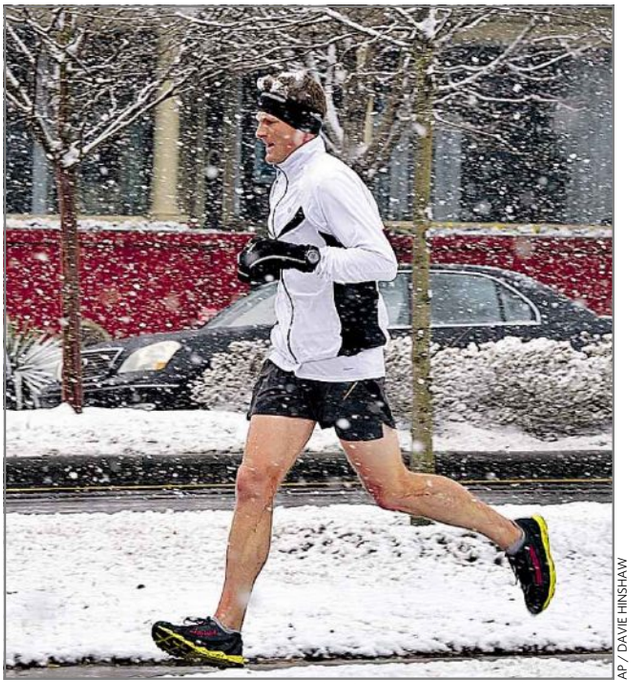
Such a watch means there's potential for "significant snow, sleet or ice accumulations," the service said. Forecasters said the storm's exact track and intensity were still uncertain last evening.

Several inches of snow, 2 to 5 inches, could accumulate into tomorrow's morning rush before a changeover about 8 to 9 a.m. to a rain-snow mix for most of the Island, said Peter Wichrowski, weather service meteorologist in Upton. There's a higher probability for snowfall to linger closer to New York City, he said.

While there's considerable uncertainty as to the changeover, with much depending on how much warm air enters the upper atmosphere, he said, we are looking at a nor'easter, "a strong coastal storm and strong northeasterly winds."

By 5 to 6 p.m. tomorrow, that mix is expected to turn back to snow, dropping possibly "another couple of inches," he said.

Snow was expected to start tapering off overnight tomorrow, clearing the area by around 6 a.m. Friday.



AP / DAVIE HINSHAW

John McCormick braves a run in Charlotte, N.C., yesterday. Long Island is braced for another winter storm starting late tonight.

