

Aquinas opting out of Regents

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Aquinas Institute is phasing out its use of state Regents exams, replacing them with a more rigorous set of tests it will develop on its own.

Students entering as sixth-graders in the fall will be the first class not to take any Regents exams. Current students will still need to take the exams required for graduation.

Public schools are bound to the state exams because it comes as a condition of accepting public money. Private and parochial schools, which rely instead on tuition and other private funding sources, don't have the same obligation.

Aquinas joins McQuaid Jesuit, Our

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Aquinas

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Lady of Mercy, Allendale Columbia, C.G. Finney and Harley as local private schools to eschew the Regents. Students at Bishop Kearney and schools run by the Diocese of Rochester do take the state tests.

Furthermore, private schools with admission exams avoid the difficulty that public schools face in getting lagging students to graduate, especially since New York removed the option of getting a local degree.

New assessments

"It's an issue of how we're challenging our kids and raising the bar," Aquinas principal Ted Mancini said. "When every single student in New York state is required to graduate with a Regents diploma, there's no way that can raise the bar."

Instead, Aquinas students will be asked to meet "research-based college readiness standards and new assessments that are true measures of student ability and accurately assess the rigor in our curriculum," Mancini wrote in a letter to parents.

John Scanlon of Brighton has a seventh- grader at Aquinas and another child who will enter sixth grade in the fall. He applauded the school for the decision.

"Any time your kids are at a school where teachers are trying to exceed minimum requirements, that's really good," he said. "My kids have done OK on the state tests, but I didn't feel it was a proper assessment of their abilities."

Even now, the school does not follow the state's Common Core-aligned curriculum, but instead has coursework designed for college preparation along with Catholic values. The graduation rate is 100 percent, Mancini said.

"There's a big difference between high school competence and college readiness," Mancini said. "The Regents exams measure high school competence. A student who graduates from Aquinas, by our mission, is ready for college."

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