

# State counts on new math test to boost student achievement

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New Jersey will join eight other states in launching a common Algebra II test for high school students who take the math course, the latest step to boost math achievement in the high schools.

Given next spring, the new test will be voluntary for districts in its inaugural year, with state officials saying they would decide later whether to make it compulsory for graduation.

The state already announced its plans to start end-of-course exams in science subjects such as biology and chemistry, with the aim of making them compulsory as well. The new course exams would eventually replace the state's more-general High School Proficiency Assessment given in the junior year, officials said.

The new math test comes through a partnership of states involved in the American Diploma Project, which was started by a co-

alition of business and government leaders pressing for high school reform. It is the largest effort to date by states to develop a common exam.

Besides New Jersey, the states involved in the new test are Arkansas, Kentucky, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island.

Algebra II was chosen because it is considered by many as a key subject for a student to master before moving on to college and the workplace. One recent study found students able to successfully complete the course are more than twice as likely to go on to earn a four-year college degree.

"Regardless of whether they choose to continue their education or enter the work force after high school graduation, students need to know how to analyze and solve problems," said Arthur F. Ryan, chairman and CEO of Prudential Financial and a leading business voice in the ADP project.