

N.J. goal: Improve high schools

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WASHINGTON TWP.

The state Department of Education is hosting a meeting at Washington Township High School next week to discuss plans to raise the standards for New Jersey's high school students.

The meeting will be held from 7 to 9 p.m. Feb. 8 in the Performing Arts Center to let parents, students and teachers ask questions and make suggestions.

The meeting is one of four across the state and the only one in South Jersey.

New Jersey boasts the highest graduation rates nationwide, with nearly 90 percent of high school students receiving diplomas. Once students leave high school, however, they are often unprepared to face the challenges of college or the work force, Department of Education Assistant Commissioner Jay Doolan said Tuesday.

"Our world is changing, and our high schools need to change with it," Doolan said. "Our economy is global. We've made a lot of technological advances and employers have a global work force to pick from."

According to the state, about 60 percent of high school graduates seek higher education at two- or four-year institutions, but only about 25 percent earn a degree. About 40 percent of students attending a four-year college or university must take remedial, or noncredited, courses their first year. At community colleges, about 77 percent of freshmen need remediation.

"That's some sort of sign that we need to look at how we are preparing our students," Doolan said of the statistics.

So far, the state has developed five goals to define state high school reform, which could begin to go into effect as early as spring 2008.

Ensure that high school standards in language arts and math are aligned with what colleges and business require for success.

Require all high school students to take a college and work-ready curriculum, with a focus on science and math.

Create a more rigorous high school assessment test required for graduation and implement exams after each course for core subjects, like math and science.

The state must devise a system to support schools during restructuring to make sure a tougher curriculum is taught to students.

Many superintendents Tuesday agreed with the tougher curriculum, but had doubts about the financial practicality of overhauling the high schools.

Cleve Bryan, superintendent of Clayton school district, said students who are not college-bound should not have to take a college-prep course load.