

Altered high school curriculum questioned

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WASHINGTON TWP.

Teachers and administrators concerned about proposed changes to high school curriculum and graduation testing requirements spoke out Thursday night at a meeting hosted by the state Department of Education at the township high school.

The state is proposing a tougher curriculum in response to concerns about whether students are adequately prepared for the work force. Statistics also show many New Jersey students who graduate from high school and go on to college must take remedial courses their first year.

About 50 teachers, parents and administrators attended the meeting.

Williamstown High School principal Steve Stumpo questioned the toughened curriculum, and worried whether special education students would be able to handle the extra work.

Washington Township school board president Richard Gerber questioned whether all students could perform well under the higher expectations.

"My feeling is that there is this assumption that children are vanilla, and can all perform at the same level," he said.

"Some students are more intelligent than others."

The state proposes in-

creasing the number of math and science courses necessary for graduation and wants to require all students to pass algebra I, algebra II and geometry classes.

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In place of the test required for graduation, the state wants students to take an end-of-course examination, similar to a final, to make sure students know the core material in each class. The state plans to administer the first test in biology beginning in May 2008,

said Jay Doolan, assistant commissioner of the Department of Education.

Doolan said he was unsure how much financial support the state could give for the proposed high school changes, but said it was critical to raise the standards now and work through the financial issues later.

"The state's fiscal resources are limited," he said. "We believe it can be done, and we believe that our New Jersey students

can succeed in a more challenging environment."

New Jersey boasts one of the nation's highest graduation rates, with about 90 percent of high school students receiving diplomas.

About 60 percent of high school graduates attend college, but only about 25 percent earn a degree, according to the state. About 40 percent of New Jersey 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.

Richard Gerber

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