

N.J. to toughen up standards for its high school students

Concerned the state is falling behind in math and science, Gov. Corzine wants changes.

TRENTON - Saying high school students need more science, mathematics and technology education even if they go right to work instead of college, New Jersey officials yesterday announced plans to rework high school requirements.

Gov. Corzine and education officials said they would work in the coming months on a gradual toughening of curriculum standards, assessment tests and graduation requirements to address concerns that New Jersey isn't keeping pace with the nation or the world.

"Just graduating isn't enough," Corzine said. "We now have a global economy. We live in a world where your competition is not your next-door neighbor."

He and acting Education Commissioner Lucille Davy said New Jersey would work with the American Diploma Project Network, a coalition of 23 states dedicated to ensuring curricula and assessments match the demands of college and work.

A study by the coalition determined that students need four years of science, for instance. New Jersey requires only three.

Davy noted that while New Jersey students must take four years of physical education, they needed to take only three years of science and mathematics to graduate.

As many as 80 percent of freshmen at some of the state's community colleges and as many as half the freshmen at some of its four-year colleges need remedial education, she said.

Corzine said changes would be gradual.

"We will work to make sure this is rolled out over the next several years," he said.

One reason, Davy said, is to protect against pushing students who may drop out when faced with tougher standards.

Davy said that extending the school year had not been discussed as an option, but that it could be considered. Corzine was not enthused by that idea.

"It comes with a cost," he said, arguing that the state needed to focus instead on raising its curriculum standards and offering improved after-school and summer programs.

Davy said a committee formed to consider changes planned to meet throughout the state with teachers, school officials and the public.

About 90 percent of the state's high school freshmen graduate from high school, and about 60 percent of them go to college, according to national education statistics.