

State plans to raise schools' science, math standards

TRENTON -- New Jersey high school students need more science, mathematics and technology education, even if they plan to go right to work instead of college, state officials said Thursday as they unveiled plans to rework high school requirements.

Governor Corzine and education officials announced that they plan to spend the coming months working on a gradual toughening of New Jersey's high school curriculum standards, assessment tests and graduation requirements to address concerns 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."

Whatever is decided, Education Commissioner Lucille Davy said the changes will affect all students, whether or not they plan to further their education after graduation.

"College prep and work prep are now the same thing," Davy said.

Corzine and Davy said the plan calls for New Jersey to work with the American Diploma Project Network, a coalition of 23 states dedicated to ensuring curriculums and assessments match the demands of college and work.

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

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

She said as many as 80 percent of freshmen at some of the state's community colleges require remedial education, with as many as 50 percent of the freshmen at some of the state's four-year colleges requiring at least one remedial class.

"These numbers are staggering and they require our immediate attention," Davy said.

Corzine said changes will be implemented gradually.

"We will work to make sure this is rolled out over the next several years," he said. "It will not be an immediate revolution."

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

"That's another one of our challenges," she said.

Davy said extending the school year hasn't been discussed as an option, but could be considered. The governor wasn't enthused by that idea.

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