

Will high school graduation get tougher?

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High school students would have to complete a rigorous set of math and science courses under a set of education reforms proposed by Governor Corzine today.

"We need to make sure that we give 21st century skills to all of our people – math, science, economics and life skills," Corzine said during a meeting at William Paterson University in Wayne. "We need to do so in a disciplined way for all children, so that we end up with a workforce that makes New Jersey the most competitive place in the world."

Corzine, along with state education, higher education and labor leaders, announced a plan to make high school more rigorous for all students, and ensure that diploma requirements correspond to the skills that colleges and employers say graduates need. If the changes are approved by the state Board of Education, they would be phased in over the next eight years.

While many students opt to pack their high school course load with challenging lab sciences and Advanced Placement classes, they are not obligated to do so. The proposed changes are intended to ensure all students take at least some rigorous classes.

Among the proposals:

- Required classes in math, science, English and social studies, rather than minimum years of study. All students would have to take Algebra I, Geometry and Algebra II, at least one semester of economics and four years of English survey courses.
- New end-of-course exams in math, science and English, to replace the general 11th grade test. Students would not be held back a grade if they failed, but would be required to pass all tests before receiving a diploma.
- A new state "P-16" council, to ensure coordinated educational standards from preschool through the completion of a college degree.
- Expanded recruiting and professional development opportunities for teachers, particularly in math and science.
- Despite New Jersey's high graduation rate and top-tier performance on national achievement tests, only one in four graduates eventually earns a college degree. On average, 40 percent of students at four-year colleges and 78 percent of community college students are required to take remedial classes. Remedial courses cost between \$100 million and \$150 million statewide per year, Corzine said.
- In addition, the state's employers routinely report that high school graduates do not have the skills needed in the workplace. In a recent New Jersey Chamber of Commerce survey of 100 businesses, 99 reported that high school graduates were unprepared for entry-level jobs.

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