

## Upgrade high school standards, panel says

By *MICHAEL RISPOLI*  
*Gannett State Bureau*

New Jersey's high school curriculum should be overhauled and testing of students revised, in an effort to better prepare students for a seamless transition into college or the workplace, a task force appointed by Gov. Jon S. Corzine said Friday.

Math, science and language arts requirements for graduation would become more specific -- including a new requirement in economics -- and content would be more rigorous in these areas to match knowledge needed for academia or a job.

The goal, said Education Commissioner Lucille Davy, is to update an outdated curriculum to better meet the demands of today's higher education and economy.

"The need for these skills goes far beyond just participating in the global economy," Davy said, as the report was unveiled at a meeting at William Paterson University. "It's also important for students to have these skills in order to be informed citizens and consumers."

State regulations currently require a certain amount of years to be taught for a general subject area. The new requirements would specify what classes would be needed for those subjects -- such as algebra II for math and chemistry for science. Students then would be tested on these specific classes, replacing the general High School Proficiency Assessment.

Superintendent Emily Capella of Lenape Regional High School District said many of the recommendations, such as creating small learning communities, are already in place at her district's schools.

"I do think that in terms of the rigor of the curriculum, they are moving in the right direction," she said. "I'm always a supporter of doing things to enhance the rigor and help prepare kids for the post-secondary world."

However, as in all things educational, there are cost concerns. For example, the recommendations would make college preparatory biology and chemistry mandatory for students.

"If you're going to take the entire population and put them into laboratory sciences, that's going to increase the need for instructors and also space," Capella said.

"So, I think the model is a good one, but I think in terms of the expectations for all students to have this, it's going to take some funding program changes."

Davy said she did not expect costs to rise for schools with the changes because many of the required classes are already being taught at high schools without being required.

"I think all districts are offering these classes. The question is: Are all students getting access to the courses?" said Davy.

The recommendations come from a group called the New Jersey High School Redesign Steering Committee, which Friday released the results of its 20-month study. The report says New Jersey's current high school graduation requirements do not reflect the skills students need to be successful once they leave high school.

The report, citing Commission on Higher Education data, says 40 percent of the students entering four-year colleges in New Jersey and 78 percent of those entering community colleges need remedial courses.

There is a direct link between those needs and graduation rates. Seventy-six percent of college students nationally who take remedial reading do not earn their degrees; 63 percent taking remedial math fail to get degrees, the report says.

The new requirements would be phased in starting with ninth graders in the 2008-09 school year. Frank Belluscio, spokesman for the New Jersey School Boards Association, said local boards "wrestled with the concept of course requirements" because each school is tailored to meet the students' needs.

"We just don't want the communities to be overburdened with these new requirements," said Belluscio.

Other recommendations in the report include strengthening teacher recruitment, emphasizing personalized learning approaches and creating a council to align the education system from preschool through four-year colleges.

Staff writer Matt Katz contributed to this report. Reach Matt Katz at (856) 486-2456 or [mkatz@courierpostonline.com](mailto:mkatz@courierpostonline.com)