

## Panel wants tougher rules for high school graduates

MOUNT LAUREL — New Jersey is trying to make high school tougher.

A panel led by Gov. Jon S. Corzine proposes phasing in more specific — and rigorous — graduation requirements over the next eight years.

The New Jersey High School Redesign Steering Committees report is scheduled to be presented Friday at a special meeting of the state Board of Education.

The recommendations add New Jersey to a growing list of states trying to beef up high school requirements.

New Jersey's high schools are considered strong now. The state consistently has one of the nation's highest graduation rates. And its students are usually among the top performers on standardized tests given nationwide.

The proposed requirements — which need approval of the state Board of Education — aim to have almost all students close to meeting requirements for college entrance.

"We have an obligation and a vested economic interest to equip our high school students with the tools they need to build successful lives," Corzine said. "These recommendations are a blueprint for this process."

"Instead of taking three years of science, for instance, all students would have to take lab biology, lab chemistry and a third "rigorous" course.

As with science, the requirement to take three years of math would be boosted. Students would have to pass Algebra I, geometry and Algebra II to graduate. The report calls the Algebra II requirement "controversial" and says that some experts believe it would be too difficult for some students. But, the report says, those arguments "are not as compelling as the data that indicate how important Algebra II is for lifelong learning."

Under the new standards, students would also have to take a half year of economics.

Many classes would eventually come with end-of-course standardized tests.

The course schedules for most college-bound students would not look much different if all the changes are adopted.

Some school districts are already putting into place curricula that meets what the state is looking to require.

Jersey City, for instance, will have more challenging academic requirements starting this fall as it turns its four big high schools into specialized "academies."

To graduate, all the students there take three years of lab science; most take physics along with biology and chemistry. And Algebra II is a standard course there.

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