

## Broaden Jersey's high school curriculum

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Headlines about plans to overhaul the state's high school curriculum trumpeted the proposed requirements as "rigorous" and "tough," but those descriptions really don't get at the heart of what a coalition of educators and business leaders, including the governor, really have asked the state to do: not to toughen the academic requirements but to broaden them.

The proposals put forth by The New Jersey High School Redesign Steering Committee ask that virtually all students engage in an academic program while in high school, that virtually all be eligible to attend college at graduation. In order to achieve that, it would require students to take three years of academic math, including Algebra II, and three years of laboratory science, including chemistry and biology. The requirements also would make a half-year economics course mandatory for all students.

These requirements would have no effect on students who have traditionally been enrolled in the college preparatory course; they always have taken three years of science and math. But it would force students usually shunted into general, technical and vocational curricula to stick with academics longer.

The question really comes down to philosophy: to whether people believe that most children are capable of this kind of work. There are many who do not. Put this page in the camp of those who believe students can do more.

Take a look at East Brunswick, which one story used as an example of a school district that has asked more of its students and gotten it. Since 1989, all students in East Brunswick have taken three years of a laboratory science. Algebra II is standard. "We don't have nonacademic courses," Deputy Superintendent of Schools Evelyn Ogden said. As a result, 98 percent of the students go immediately to college upon graduation, a gain of nearly a quarter in the 20 years since the standards were toughened.

Study after study has shown that a college degree is one of the most important indicators of future economic prosperity; and as manufacturing jobs disappear, the importance of an academic degree becomes ever greater. But it is not simply a matter of economics; it is also about expecting the best of and for our children, for all of our children.

This doesn't mean the state's path will be either easy or uncontroversial. There are plenty of high school students who struggle to achieve even the rudimentary skills the state requires. But the panel has suggested the changes be introduced over an eight-year period, which would help schools prep students for the changes. In effect, it would mean working to make sure the present-day elementary school pupils stay at grade level and on task; too often students get to high school having already forfeited their chances at academic success. If the standards are done right, they ought to help most of the children who are struggling under the lesser standards.

But by all means press forward with high expectations and academic achievement for all.