

RIDGEWOOD HIGH SCHOOL New state standards are already in place

BY MICHAEL GIARDINA
Staff Writer

Ridgewood education officials all had a similar reaction to the proposed NJ STEPS program introduced last week by Gov. John Corzine: It was simply old news.

The NJ STEPS follow-up policy paper, released on April 25, outlined a new standard for high school graduation requirements that Ridgewood already has implemented, according to Regina Botsford, the district's assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction and assessment.

"We are already ahead of the curve," said Botsford. "Virtually all of our students have taken and completed these courses."

The NJ STEPS program requires all students to take and complete Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry, Biology, Chemistry, and a half-year of Economics. It also calls for a newly formulated Language Arts Proficiency Assessment test and end-of-course exams in math and science that would replace the New Jersey High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA).

"These are some major changes in terms of the high school," said Sheila Brogan, who has been a member of Ridgewood's Board of Education (BOE) since 1996. "The goal here is to align high school education and graduation requirements with college and workforce requirements."

Ridgewood High School's 2008-2009 curriculum, which includes all of the above listed courses, was approved by the BOE in December 2007, well before the new program was required to go into effect. The curriculum, which outlines the individual grade- and graduation-completion requirements, has numerous courses that span out of

the general courses required within the new state program.

"Unlike Ridgewood, a lot of school districts adapt the minimum," said Interim Superintendent Dr. Timothy Brennan. "We are already doing all of this [offering the required courses] in Ridgewood."

The state Board of Education, working in conjunction with the New Jersey High School Redesign Steering Committee, introduced the new NJ STEPS concept almost 2 years ago and is slowly implementing these new standards in phases for the schools to follow. The new state school-funding formula calls for more than \$7.8 billion for kindergarten through 12th grade to be allocated for the 2009 fiscal year – an increase of \$530 million from the previous year.

"The one constant that has remained the same over the years is the American high school," said Jay Doolan, assistant commissioner for academic and career standards for the state Department of Education. "We think we have enough time for this change so that our students can benefit."

Phase I, which includes this year's ninth-grade class (set to graduate in 2012), requires students to take the end-of-course assessment exams for Algebra I and Biology, including the Language Arts Proficiency Exam. Phase II students, which will include the ninth-grade class to begin in September 2010, is required to take the geometry and chemistry end-of-course exams, plus all of the Phase I requirements. Phase III, which is set to take effect with the 2012-2013 ninth-grade class, requires all students take the Algebra II end-of-course assessment along with the Phase II requirements.

"We believe that we do well in

New Jersey," said Doolan. "But our students still need to be better prepared for their careers."

Ridgewood High School, which has been affected by these field tests, has ultimately benefited from the stricter standards, which tend to be the norm here, according to Botsford.

"Ridgewood is Ridgewood," she said. "We are always pushing our students to excel."

Michael Giardina's e-mail address is giardina@northjersey.com

