

## **Hurdles May Loom for Move to Raise Diploma Bar in N.J.**

The call by a high-powered task force that New Jersey stiffen its high school graduation requirements—by requiring Algebra 2, two laboratory-science classes, and economics—has top state education officials applauding, but some advocates worried.

“We’re very pleased with the results of this paper,” said Commissioner of Education Lucille Davy, a member of the New Jersey High School Redesign Steering Committee, which released its report April 25. “It provides a good blueprint for us to work with as we move forward.”

But she said that implementing the plan in three phases over the next eight years would be a challenge, as would be finding enough math and science teachers. The proposal would require approval from the New Jersey board of education.

Opponents, meanwhile, call the proposal’s implementation plan flawed, and take issue with what they see as a shift away from technical and vocational skills.

“Many of our students far exceed these proposed requirements, but the marginal students, ... the ones that need marketable skills, ... are at risk,” said Judy Savage, the executive director of the New Jersey Council of County Vocational-Technical Schools, a Trenton-based nonprofit group.

The recommendations are the product of a panel set up and led by Gov. Jon Corzine, a Democrat, which aimed to make the state’s high school students more competitive in the workforce. Its prescription: a greater emphasis on core academic courses, including math and science.

Such a push would come even as some states that have toughened their graduation requirements gird for the prospect that many students may fail to graduate. The New Jersey committee’s recommendations do not specifically address that concern.

Stan Karp, the director of the Secondary Reform Project at the Newark-based Education Law Center, an education advocacy group that initiated the long-running school funding equity case against New Jersey, also said that “business [and] university leaders ... had a disproportionate role in shaping the plan to the exclusion of other community, parent, and education stakeholders.”

The requirements still need the approval of the state school board, which is reviewing the proposal.

**By Mary C. Breden**