



INCREASING STANDARDS & EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENTS

DESCRIPTION

New Jersey businesses need a skilled and trained workforce to maintain a high level of productivity, yet many businesses struggle to find workers with the skills they need. Furthermore, even traditionally blue-collar jobs will require increased skill levels in the future.

Increasing our expectations for New Jersey's educators and students is the single biggest reform that the State can undertake to increase achievement, give the high school diploma more meaning and produce graduates better prepared for the workforce.

To prepare our workforce for the 21st century, New Jersey must increase high school standards and expectations. The State should increase the difficulty of the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA) to more accurately reflect a quality high school education as well as the needs of the workforce. New Jersey should limit the use of alternatives to the HSPA, such as the Special Review Assessment (SRA) to only truly special needs students. And high school coursework should include more rigor and more advanced math and science classes.

BACKGROUND

Currently New Jersey mandates that a high school student take four years of language arts and health and physical education; three years of mathematics, science and social studies; and one year each of world language, visual and performing arts and practical arts. Specific courses are not required in these disciplines, allowing different districts to meet these standards through more or less rigorous means.

In 1996 the State established Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS) to guide student achievement and assessment, but schools are largely left with no responsibility to cover all the standards.

To graduate high school, students must either pass the HSPA, a test in the junior year linked to the CCCS, or pass the SRA, often described as easier and a back-door way to graduation.

This coursework, curricula and graduation flexibility allows for a wide spectrum in terms of the rigor demanded of high school students in different high schools and school districts.

NJBIA POSITION

To prepare students for the 21st century, New Jersey should establish more uniform standards among different high schools and set higher standards for all high school students.

The HSPA should be made more thorough and challenging for New Jersey high school diplomas to have more meaning for employers.

Graduating high school without passing the HSPA, such as with the SRA, should be rare and limited to those students with true special needs, not just those who do not pass the HSPA.

The New Jersey high school experience should be reformed to promote higher level coursework, including more advanced mathematics and science.

When reforming high school coursework and assessments, flexibility should be provided for students already preparing for the workforce through a licensed career and technical education (CTE) program.

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT OF HIGHER STANDARDS

Research has shown that challenging, high-level coursework leads to increased SAT scores, less remediation in college, higher college graduation rates and increased workplace earnings.

Research shows additional classes in Algebra I and II, Geometry, Trigonometry, pre-Calculus and Calculus increase a student's chances of completing college by as much as 62 percent.

Indications are that demanding coursework is even a better predictor of success than grades. Achievement does not matter as much as the fact that student expectations are raised and students are challenged.

More challenging high school coursework has also shown itself to be a potential solution to the achievement gap between white students and minority students.

A more thorough and challenging HSPA would make New Jersey high school diplomas more meaningful for employers. Currently, the HSPA tests students graduating high school at only an 8th grade level and yet it stands as the indicator of a successful high school education.

Reducing the use of the SRA is also important as overuse of the SRA can skew graduation rates. In Newark during the 2006-2007 school year, for example, three of the four largest public high schools had more students using the SRA to graduate than the HSPA.

The mindset of high expectations is also a critical part of increasing standards. The education association Phi Delta Kappa points out that high expectations among principals is an essential aspect to turning around many failing schools. Teach For America, a national education reform organization, believe that higher expectations for teachers is the main reform needed so that low-income urban and rural schools can be improved.

Businesses struggle to find workers, particularly entry-level workers, with the skills they need. In 2006 NJBIA's Business Outlook Survey indicated that only one-third of employers view New Jersey's high school graduates as good or excellent, and less than one-third report that the verbal communication skills, math and science skills, critical thinking skills and written communication skills of their entry level workers are good or excellent.

Postsecondary institutions, employers and young people spend more than \$17 billion per year on remedial classes so students can gain the knowledge and skills they should have acquired in high school.

Two-thirds of new jobs created between the years 2000 and 2010 will require more than a high school degree, and many traditionally blue-collar jobs will require some high-level skills in the future.

More rigorous schoolwork leads to a 13 percent increase in entry-level wages, while more advanced math classes can lead to an increase in the chances of completing college.

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