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BOARD GIVES INITIAL APPROVAL TO HIGH SCHOOL REDESIGN PACKAGE

COEUR D'ALENE - The Idaho State Board of Education unanimously approved a slate of additional middle and high school requirements aimed at preparing students for college and entry into the workforce.

The requirements will now go before the public for hearings across the state before coming back before the Board in November. The House or Senate Education Committee must also approve the rules.

"It's clear from a local, state and national perspective that more must be done to better prepare our students for postsecondary education and for entering the workforce. By putting more emphasis on core subjects such as math and science, we are hoping to provide the foundation for additional opportunities for our students," said Rod Lewis, President of the State Board of Education.

The new rule and policy changes include:

- Increase the number of required math credits from four to eight and science credits from four to six to graduate from high school.
- Require that eight elective credits be "career focused." Career focus electives would relate to a student's postsecondary readiness plan and could include subjects like art, music, debate, drama, computer science, professional technical etc.
- Require students to take a college placement exam by the end of 11th grade.
- Require students to complete a senior project.
- Ensure every Idaho high school offers advance opportunities for students like Advanced Placement, international baccalaureate and dual credit.
- Require a postsecondary readiness plan by the end of 6th grade. Students would create a plan with the assistance of a counselor and their parents to take classes that relate to their interests and educational goals after high school. The plan can be changed to accommodate new interests and career goals.
- Create a cumulative "C" average requirement for middle school students in math, science, language arts and social studies.
- Require successful completion of pre-algebra before entering 9th grade.

The Board began evaluating the need for increasing the rigor of middle and high school by appointing a taskforce to look at the issue. The taskforce, made up of teachers, curriculum directors, higher education representatives, board members, and professional technical educators created a comprehensive list of recommendations to redesign Idaho's middle and high schools.

"The taskforce began with a notion that we need to do better and after reviewing national and international data, it became clear: we not only need to do better, but change is essential if we are to maintain our economic success," said Sue Thilo, Chair of the Taskforce and State Board Member.

National research shows that American students aren't measuring up compared to their international counterparts. Only one country outscores American 4th grade students in math, but by grade 12 every other industrialized country outscores American students with the exception of Cyprus and South Africa. Recent comparisons show American 15 year old students scored 29th out of 34 industrialized nations in math. Because American students score well in early grades, but scores drop steadily in later grades, more must be done to ensure students are challenged continually throughout middle school and high school.

Research also shows increasing requirements in high school increases the college going rate for all students. Currently, Idaho has one of the top high school graduation rates in the country, but one of the lowest college attendance and graduation rates. The Board believes by requiring more of students in high school, more students will be ready for life after high school. Once students enter postsecondary education they are more likely to not require remedial courses and are more likely to graduate on time. Currently in Idaho, 41 percent of incoming college freshman take remedial courses, costing both the state and the student additional funds.