

**August 10, 2006**

## **BOARD REFINES HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENT**

*Focuses on district flexibility, standards and incentives*

IDAHO FALLS - State Board of Education members unanimously approved a plan to raise math and science classes required for high school graduation from two years to three years and offer school districts incentives to raise requirements higher.

The plan requires students to complete three years of science and three years of math, with at least one of the math classes taken in the student's senior year. Students would also be required to take algebra and geometry or classes that meet standards. Idaho has one of the lowest graduation requirements in math and science in the country. Current state requirements only require students to take two years of math and two years of science, versus four years of English and three years of social studies, and fine arts. English is the only course a student must take all four years of high school.

The Board also added language to ensure students could meet math and science requirements by mastering standards in other courses including professional technical classes or other standards-based classes districts develop.

While the state would require students to take an additional math and science course, the Board also intends to recommend incentives to reward districts who raise their requirements to four years of math and another incentive for districts to require students to meet Algebra II standards. The Board will develop a comprehensive implementation plan which will include funding recommendations as well as strategies to attract more math and science teachers, improve math curriculum, offer additional professional development for elementary and middle school teachers, and offer scholarships for students.

"These changes are highly responsive to what board members heard in recent forums around the state. The Board wants to raise requirements, but simultaneously give districts flexibility in implementing these important initiatives," said Sue Thilo, board member from Coeur d'Alene, who chaired a committee on high school graduation requirements. "These proposals are just the beginning. We need to address changes throughout the system. Strengthening middle school, in particular, was mentioned by educators around the state. We'll be following up on good ideas to finalize an implementation plan."

During June and July, the Board hosted 13 roundtables statewide from Sandpoint to Soda Springs to gather feedback on ways to improve education. More than 450 people attended the forums, including superintendents, principals, teachers, parents, Legislators, community leaders, business and higher education representatives.

The Board will focus on the suggestions given at the forums to create a package to bring forward to the Legislature. "High School graduation requirements will be just one piece of a larger package to improve preparation for our students. We'll be crafting a series of initiatives to help districts throughout the state to meet these requirements and also improve math and science education throughout the system," said Laird Stone, president of the State Board. Stone appointed Thilo to chair a new state board committee to work on education issues including middle school requirements.

Raising graduation requirements has been a top issue for the Board for two years. Board members reiterated their desire to better prepare students for work and college. Among the goals are to increase academic activity during the student's senior year, and decrease the amount of remediation students require in college and in the workplace. Higher education representatives have repeatedly testified that math is the gateway course for college students. Students who come to college unprepared in math drop out at a much higher rate.

Board members expressed concerns about Idaho being competitive in preparing students for success. More than 10 states have raised their requirements in the past 12 months including Utah, Texas, Florida, Kentucky, Michigan, and Ohio. "We want our students to have the best preparation possible to compete in a global economy," said Thilo, "But first our students have to be competitive with students from Kentucky and Arkansas."

Students would also be required to take a state funded college entrance exam either the ACT, SAT, or Compass. Several other states including Wyoming, Illinois and Colorado require students to take the exam. The plan incorporates greater opportunity for students to take advanced classes and requires students to do a senior project including an oral and written component. Districts would have the flexibility to determine how to implement the project.

A plan to raise graduation requirements passed the House Education Committee during the 2006 legislative session, but failed to receive adequate funding from JFAC. The Board had previously committed to withdraw the plan if districts were faced with an unfunded mandate. This new plan will go out for public comment and the Board will revisit the issue at a special meeting in November. The graduation requirements will then go to the Legislature in the form of legislative rules along with an implementation plan to assist school districts.