

## Gov. Christie introduces new N.J. high school testing program

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**PLAINSBORO** — New Jersey high school students will need to pass as many as 12 end-of-year tests to earn their high school diplomas, under a plan unveiled today that's designed to ensure "a New Jersey high school diploma is a meaningful measure of college and career readiness."

The proposal calls for a multi-year phase-in of the tests, which will be given to 9th, 10th and 11th graders and start to "count" for students now in the fourth grade. The state's current graduation tests, the High School Proficiency Assessment and Alternative High School Assessment, will be phased out.

Students will be tested in language arts, math, science and social studies. However, neither the number of tests that will be required for graduation nor the passing scores have been determined.

The proposal, unveiled by Gov. Chris Christie and Acting Education Commissioner Christopher Cerf during a press conference at West-Windsor Plainsboro High School North, was billed as the culmination of work by the state Department of Education's College and Career Readiness Task Force.

"We need to make sure that the students we send from New Jersey's high schools either into the workforce or into higher education are prepared on that first day to sit in that college classroom or to perform the job that a business has asked them to perform," Christie said.

The plan came under immediate fire from some educators.

"Overall, I think it's a plan for more tests, not for better secondary reform," said Stan Karp, director of the Secondary Reform Project at the Newark-based Education Law Center, which advocates for students in the state's poorest cities. "Test-based reform has just not been effective in closing gaps or improving instruction."

Roxbury Interim Superintendent James O'Neill said he does not support the idea of multiple end-of-year exams.



Tony Kurdzuk/The Star-Ledger

Gov. Chris Christie speaks in front of acting Education Commissioner Christopher Cerf during a press conference in March. Today the governor announced new testing standards for high schools.

**New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie touts new testing regimen for high schools**

New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie unveils his administration's plan to replace the High School Proficiency Exam (HSPA) and Alternative High School Assessment (AHSA) currently taken by 12th graders with a series of tests taken at the end of 9th, 10th and 11th grades. Speaking at West Windsor-Plainsboro North High School, Christie touted the new tests as a way of boosting teacher accountability and student performance. The plan comes amid news that new federal formula has recalculated that state's previous 94 percent graduation rate to 83 percent.

"Politicians are intent on making education into a sporting event with scores available at the end of each inning," he said. "Good teachers, classrooms with access to technology and a rigorous curriculum help prepare kids to be successful in college."

Christie and Cerf said the tests are a way to make sure students are meeting state standards and are on track for success in college and the work world. Currently, students are passing the HSPA to graduate, but aren't college ready, they said. A third of students at Rutgers University need remedial classes, and 90 percent of students attending Bergen and Essex County community colleges need remedial classes.

The new system will identify students who are lagging earlier, instead of waiting until the end of their junior year. Districts will be required to help students who don't pass parts of the tests by offering remediation, such as tutoring or summer classes, so the students get up to speed and can retake the sections they failed.

The proposal echoes a similar plan put forth under former Gov. Jon Corzine in 2009. Known as "Secondary Education Redesign," that plan called for more rigorous high school programs and up to seven year-end tests.

A pilot program began in which tests were offered in biology and algebra, but Karp, of the Education Law Center, said the state backed away from requiring those tests after "tens of thousands" of students were unable to pass.

Justin Barra, a spokesman for the state Department of Education, said the algebra test was not fully implemented because of a procurement issue, not the passing rate. The bigger issue, he said, was that those tests were not closely aligned with the state's standards.

The new tests are part of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, an effort in which 24 states, including New Jersey, joined forces to institute a new set of assessments to match common core standards. PARCC has a \$185 million federal grant to develop tests in language arts and math for students in grades 9-11.

New Jersey now spends \$32 million a year on assessments and will use that funding for the new tests, Barra said.

While students now in the eighth grade will begin taking the tests in 2013-14, they will not begin to "count" as a requirement for graduation until current fourth-graders are in ninth grade.

State officials hope the tests will lead to higher graduation rates.

While some students may dread the prospect of a dozen year-end tests, others said they thought it was a good idea.

"I feel like it'll be easier for us," said Sandy Kelman, a ninth grader at Manalapan High School. "I think it's going to be a lot less pressure for us, I figure four little tests throughout the year would be easier than one big test at the end of the year."