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## State Board Reviews Flanagan's Recommendations For State High School Graduation Requirements

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November 15, 2005

LANSING – The State Board of Education will begin reviewing a set of more rigorous high school graduation requirements proposed Tuesday by State Superintendent Mike Flanagan.

Four years of math and English language arts and three years of science are among the recommendations. Currently, only one semester of civics is required for high school graduation under state law.

“We have to have high expectations for all kids,” State Board President Kathleen N. Straus said. “This really goes a long way to right the wrong all these years of only requiring civics for graduation. We can’t keep doing everything we’ve been doing. Otherwise, we’ll be getting the same results.”

Flanagan presented to the State Board six recommendations that laid out his plan for high school graduation requirements in Michigan. The recommendations include what he called the Michigan Merit Curriculum that combines a core list of rigorous academic classes, along with a list of 21<sup>st</sup> Century skill sets that will be integrated and taught in all elective courses.

The State Board will consider the Superintendent’s recommendations and come back at its monthly meeting on December 13 to develop and act on its ideas on how best to improve high school outcomes. If the State Board’s final actions in December require any change in state law, its plan will be forwarded to Governor Jennifer M. Granholm and the Michigan Legislature for their consideration.

The Michigan Merit Core of academic courses in Flanagan’s plan include:

- four years of English language arts;
- one year each of Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, and an additional math class in the senior year;
- one year each of Biology; Physics or Chemistry; and one additional year of science;
- three years of social science, which must include a semester of civics and a semester of economics;
- one year of health or physical education; and
- one year of fine arts, which may include music, art, or theater courses.

This required curriculum only would fill 16 of the traditional 24 credit hours in a high school career, leaving the remainder of the course time for electives, or career and technical education programs.

Flanagan also recommended to the State Board that all high school students be required to take the Michigan Merit Exam, or the alternate MI-ACCESS assessment for students with disabilities; and that all students complete at least one on-line credit or non-credit course or learning experience, in order to graduate.

“If we do this, we’ll become among the best educated states in the country,” State Board Vice President John C. Austin said. “It’s a terrific recipe that is consistent with the Cherry Commission Report and with what the Governor has charged us with.”

Governor Granholm has called for the adoption of a state mandated curriculum for all high school students, arguing that Michigan’s economy will suffer if the state does not have a highly-educated workforce. She appointed last year The Cherry Commission on Higher Education and Economic Growth, which called for higher academic standards to prepare students for greater success in their post-secondary education, and

to meet the Governor's goal of doubling the number of college graduates in Michigan .

The Michigan Merit Curriculum would begin with the freshman class next year, Flanagan explained, if any necessary legislation is passed and enacted by March 1, 2006 . If legislation is not enacted by that time, the requirements would begin with the following freshman class.

"We can't wait any longer," said Flanagan. "The mindset has to be urgent to get this done. The perfect storm is heading toward Michigan – the pressures of the global economy that our current system is not set up for, and the belief that the old auto industry will come back and everything will be fine just the way things were. Well, those days are over and we need to change the culture of education in Michigan ."

While Flanagan's plan would instill rigor into high school graduation requirements, it also provides some flexibility in the form of district phase-in of the curriculum and student opt-out provisions in limited circumstances.

The basis of Flanagan's recommendations was collected by a research task force of education experts he commissioned to study the issues and investigate the best practices of five other states that have implemented high school graduation requirements.

Flanagan's recommendations to the State Board, and a weblink for the public to comment on these recommendations, can be accessed through the Michigan Department of Education webpage: [www.michigan.gov/highschool](http://www.michigan.gov/highschool)

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