

Graduating in NY may become easier

Regents consider easing requirements

Gary Stern

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WHITE PLAINS — The state Board of Regents plans to add flexibility to its high school graduation requirements, hoping to make it easier for students to focus on career training, “STEM,” the arts and other areas. Students would have the option of not taking one social studies Regents exam currently required for a Regents diploma. They could instead take a “comparatively rigorous” assessment in career/ technical education, STEM (science, technology, engineering and math), the humanities, foreign languages or the arts. The Regents, who met Monday morning in Albany, expressed strong support for the move and will likely adopt the change in January. The change would affect students who entered ninth grade in September 2011 and beyond. Right now, for students to earn a Regents diploma, they must pass one Regents exam in math, ELA and science, and two in social studies. Under the new approach, students who take an optional course of study would have to pass either the Regents exam in U.S. history and government or a Regents exam in global history and geography, but not both. Chancellor Merryl Tisch emphasized that the added flexibility should make it easier for high schools to offer career and technical education to students in urban and rural school districts. Tisch said urban districts are anxious to provide more career training.

Tisch and Education Commissioner John King said that giving students options aimed at their interests would increase graduation rates. King said that the state is trying to strike a balance, “ensuring that students have good exposure to the core academic fields and can pursue their areas of interest.”

Several Regents were concerned about tracking. “I think students must have the flexibility to switch from one track to another,” said Regent Jim Dawson, based in Plattsburgh. Tisch said training would be hightech, not like the vocational education of old.

Tests for the new options would include Regents exams, Advanced Placement tests, and national certification tests for technical careers. A state panel would choose exams for the arts. Funding for courses and programs leading to new tests would be a challenge, King said. The Regents plan to request additional funding from the Legislature.

Some board members wanted to explore additional ways to loosen the state’s testing requirements. Regent Roger Tilles, who represents Long Island, said it might be best to have no required Regents exams for all students. Others, including Harry Phillips, who represents the Lower Hudson Valley, suggested making two exams optional rather than one. Pending a January vote, the Regents exam in global history and geography would cover only material from the second year of the twoyear course. A new, Common Core-based version of the exam is scheduled for 2018. The state is in the process of rewriting its Regents exams to reflect the Common Core.

Special education students should benefit from the career-training option, said Harold Coles, district superintendent for Southern Westchester BOCES.

“Hands-on education helps some students grasp the material,” he said.

GSTERN@Gannett.com