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Michigan Schools Improve High School Graduation Requirements

By Patricia Hawke

Michigan Schools presented its new high school graduation requirements -- the Michigan Merit

Curriculum -- in December 2005. The Michigan schools are determined to better prepare students for work and college success, by assuring that all students have the knowledge and skills needed to succeed.

Previous requirements for graduation in the Michigan schools reflected an economy and society that no longer exist, nor did they represent the real world demands of work and college. Michigan schools skills and course subjects that were once optional for students after graduation now are essential to enter college or the workforce. In a 2005 survey, only 24 percent of the graduates said they were significantly challenged during high school, while a recent survey showed one-in-five graduates thought expectations were low and it was easy to "slide by". National data indicate that academic achievement in high school reading, mathematics and science has been mostly stagnate for decades.

Michigan's Governor Jennifer M. Granholm backs the new Michigan schools program, stating that the state's economy will suffer if Michigan does not have a highly educated workforce. Her goal is to double the number of college graduates in Michigan, and the new Michigan schools high school graduation requirements will ensure the goal is met.

The new Michigan Merit Curriculum requires Michigan schools graduates to successfully complete both the Michigan Merit Core and the 21st Century Learning Core. The new Michigan Merit Core consists of the following coursework:

- English Language Arts, integrated Humanities sequence, or CTE sequence -- 4 credits
- Mathematics -- 4 credits with one credit each in Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, AND an additional mathematics or mathematics-related credit in the senior year, integrated mathematics sequence, or CTE sequence
- Science -- 3 credits with one credit each in Biology, Physics or Chemistry, and one additional credit of science, integrated math sequence, or CTE sequence

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- Social Sciences — 3 credits
- Civics and Economics — 5 credits
- U.S. History and World History — 1 credit each, integrated with Geography, integrated Humanities sequence, or CTE sequence
- World Languages — 2 credits
- Health and Physical Education — 2 credits
- Visual and Performing Arts — 1 credit

Additionally, students in their junior year must take the Michigan schools' Michigan Merit Exam or the alternate MI-ACCESS assessment exam. Those who do not pass in their junior year have another opportunity to take the exam in the spring of their senior year. Additionally, the Michigan schools are developing high school content expectations to serve as a guide to curriculum development for the school districts.

The Michigan schools new graduation requirements instill rigor into the high school coursework, but provides some flexibility for school district phase-in of the new requirements and student modification provisions in some limited situations. The new Michigan schools requirements begin with the freshman class in the fall of 2006.

Patricia Hawke is a staff writer for Schools K-12, providing free, in-depth reports on all U.S. public and private K-12 schools. Patricia has a nose for research and writes stimulating news and views on school issues. For more on Michigan schools visit

<http://www.schoolsk-12.com/Michigan/index.html>

Michigan Schools Taking Direction From Governor Granholm

By Patricia Hawke

Governor Jennifer M. Granholm has a vision for the state of Michigan and the Michigan schools. In 2005, the Cherry Commission on Higher Education recommended that the state must double its number of college graduates in order to compete economically. Granholm took this recommendation and developed her small high school initiative for the Michigan schools.

She believes that smaller high schools allow students to develop relationships and interact more with their teachers, subsequently creating an atmosphere for more rigorous coursework and graduating students who are bound for college.

It has been proven across the nation that smaller high schools with smaller classes make a big

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difference in the lives of students. The Governor, along with the Skillman Foundation, are encouraging the Michigan schools to create, expand and develop smaller high schools. The Foundation is encouraging and organizing foundation support for the initiative.

Specific Michigan schools are being targeted first for smaller school and classroom development. Any high school that has fallen short of the federal student achievement goals under the No Child Left Behind Act and/or are located in districts with high dropout rates are first on the Governor's list for redevelopment.

After the Cherry Commission's recommendations, the Governor called on state lawmakers to pass legislation to make it easier for Michigan schools to renovate and build new schools. Under the Governor's Jobs Today program, which funds needed public improvement projects, Michigan schools districts may borrow up to \$180 million over a three-year period to renovate or construct new buildings, as long as the finished schools house no more than 400–500 students each.

Other incentives under the Governor's program include:

- A proposed New Merit Scholarship for Michigan schools students, who go to college and successfully complete at least two years — these Michigan schools students will receive a minimum of \$4,000 in scholarship support from state and federal sources.
- The Governor has called for a statewide mandatory curriculum for the Michigan schools — rigorous and relevant coursework will be included to ensure students are prepared to continue their education after high school.
- Beginning with the class of 2008, Michigan schools students will be required to take the nationally recognized ACT (American College Test) college entrance exam — another recommendation of the Cherry Commission to pave the way for students to attend college.

The Michigan schools want to prepare every student for success in college, in the workplace, and in life. The Governor is helping the Michigan schools reach higher standards with her initiative. Both the Governor and the Michigan schools believe that helping all students attain and remain on a successful path that leads to a college degree is the most important goal. They wish to help students view a college degree as an attainable goal and be motivated to go after it.

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