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## **High school diplomas are now harder to get**

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Many people, especially parents with young children, may not be fully aware of a new set of graduation requirements that apply to Michigan's children. Governor Jennifer Granholm signed these requirements, known as the "Michigan Merit Curriculum," into law on April 20, 2006.

Starting with the class of 2011, students must complete four credits of Mathematics, (including Algebra I & II, as well as Geometry), four credits of English Language Arts, three credits of Science (including Biology and Physics or Chemistry), three credits of Social Studies (including World History, U.S. History, Civics/Economics) one credit of Physical Education/Health, and one credit in Applied Arts. In addition students must have an online experience or course, as well as two credits of a world language for students who will graduate with the class of 2016.

These new requirements are some of the broadest and toughest in the nation. The Legislature, the State Board of Education, the State Superintendent, and Governor Jennifer Granholm set the bar high because they believe education is the key to our state's role in our growing global economy.

The result of these new requirements: high school diplomas are now harder to get. Despite the efforts of school staff, many parents of juniors (class of 2011) and beyond will be shocked to learn that their student may not have enough credits to graduate during their senior year. Students who have not taken math levels above pre-Algebra traditionally will now be required to pass Algebra II. This will cause some students to repeat classes and limit what other classes they can fit into their schedules.

The term "one size fits all" has sparked a great deal of discussion about the new requirements. The main concern is that a significant percentage of students will struggle with the higher expectations. Parents, too, will have difficulty understanding why their student must take Algebra II along with Chemistry or Physics to receive a diploma, especially if they do not intend to go to a four-year college or pursue a career requiring this high level of academics.

As a former high school principal, and now superintendent, I urge parents to get involved in their child's education in a number of ways. First, know what the new graduation requirements are. Second, check your child's schedule to be sure the requirements are covered. Third and most important, be a partner in your child's education by attending conferences, reading newsletters

and other notices, staying in contact with the teacher, tracking assignments and test results, and asking for help when needed. Support and encourage your child if a credit recovery class is needed.

As a father of two current high school students (one who will have to follow the new requirements), I believe that raising the bar is a good thing. Michigan's students must have a high level of skills and knowledge in order to pursue college, technical training, associate's degree programs, and career skills training. High school students who are well prepared in the areas of mathematics, science, and technology will be in a better position to complete these kinds of programs. Ultimately they will be strong competitors in our global economy.