

# Talk

## about Today's Public Schools

**Editor's Note:**

STRAIGHT Talk is a publication of Northside ISD (San Antonio, TX) that contains one of a continuing series of articles that is meant to enlighten the public and staff about a variety of issues. STRAIGHT Talk content is either written by NISD or copied with permission from other sources.

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### *Preparing for the future*

**NISD supports increased challenge of math and science requirements, but some questions need to be answered**

We all know we have to do a better job of emphasizing the importance of math and science to our young people. That's why I've supported a state legislative initiative that will require all public school students - beginning with next year's ninth graders - to take four years of math and four years of science if they want to graduate with a Recommended or Distinguished diploma.

However, school districts across the state, including Northside ISD, have had a number of concerns with how to fulfill what's being referred to as the "4x4" initiative, based on how the original guidelines were written.

- How will we find enough teachers to teach new courses, considering there's already a major shortage of math and science teachers?
- Will students who take Algebra I in eighth grade still be required to take four years of math in high school?
- And will we truly be serving students' interests and career paths if they're all required to take Pre-Calculus for the fourth year of math?

A number of educators and school administrators testified before the State Board of Education earlier this month, and I also testified as president of the Texas School Alliance, a partnership of 30 districts from across the state. I'm pleased to say the members of the State Board heard our concerns and responded to our plea for flexibility.

Based on the State Board's preliminary approval of updated guidelines, those students on the Recommended graduate plan can take Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry and a fourth course that does NOT require Algebra II as a prerequisite. Students working toward the Distinguished diploma would need to take a fourth-year course for which Algebra II is a pre-requisite, such as Pre-Calculus, Advanced Placement Calculus or AP Statistics. For either graduation plan, students who take Algebra I in eighth grade will only be required to earn three math credits in high school.

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In science, students must take Biology, Chemistry, Physics and a state-approved course such as Aquatic Science, Astronomy, Earth and Space Science, Engineering or Anatomy and Physiology of Human Systems. For students on the Recommended plan, Integrated Physics and Chemistry, a course many students take to satisfy a science credit will be phased out, but not until the 2012-13 school year. IPC can not be taken to satisfy the fourth credit under the Distinguished plan.

Unfortunately, the State Board did not address all of our concerns. We are extremely worried how we'll be able to find enough math and science teachers to teach the additional courses we must offer. At the University of Texas at San Antonio, Bexar County's largest supplier of teachers, among last year's 636 student teachers, just 25 were aspiring secondary math teachers and 17 were aspiring secondary science teachers.

We also would prefer the students who first would be affected by the increased course requirements would be the same students who were first affected by the Student Success Initiative, which requires passage of TAKS in the third, fifth and eighth grade in order to be promoted to the next grade. These students, who will be ninth graders in 2008-09, are familiar with rigorous academic requirements, and they already have a number of sources of support from both the state and local school districts.

Final approval of the guidelines is expected for the State Board of Education's Nov. 15-17 meeting. I appreciate board members' response to our concerns to date, and I will continue to follow closely the action and implementation of this program. I urge you to do the same. As the state looks for more academic rigor in middle school and high school, we will be confronted with many changes, but I assure you, Northside will meet the challenges.

by John M. Folks, Ed.D  
Superintendent, Northside Independent School District  
President, Texas School Alliance

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**Northside ISD**

5900 Evers Road, San Antonio, Texas 78238, 210-397-8500

