



## NJDOE News

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### **2003-04 School Year Promises More Alternatives for High School Seniors with the 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Option Pilot Program; *Opportunities Abound for Last Year of School***

As part of a continued emphasis on creating, maintaining and encouraging diverse and multiple paths for student success, the Department of Education (DOE) will continue assisting schools that have agreed to participate in the 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Option Pilot Program in the coming 2003-2004 school year.

Supported by the Gov. James E. McGreevey Administration, the 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Option Pilot Program is an initiative that was created to help eligible students utilize their last year of high school to gain purposeful experiences that will help them get on track to their futures.

"The 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Option program is designed to enhance the educational experience of high school seniors who have completed their high school graduation requirements and passed the high school proficiency assessment (HSPA)," said Commissioner of Education William L. Librera. "This initiative focuses on promoting the Department's goal of providing leadership by creating superior opportunities for New Jersey's children through multiple and diverse paths and programs."

Past initiatives incorporating this theme have been well-intentioned, Librera said, but didn't take the integrative approach that the DOE is now implementing, which involves participation by high schools and colleges, businesses and the larger community.

The initiative was launched this past May at the State Museum in Trenton by Commissioner Librera and several other DOE officials, along with keynote speaker Harold Levy, former chancellor of New York City Schools.

The DOE had originally hoped for one pilot program in each of the state's 21 counties. The number of current proposals before the DOE is more than double what was originally hoped for.

Schools participating in the 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Option Program encourage eligible students to take advantage of activities to enhance the experience of the senior year, rather than succumb to the infamous "senioritis" that has been known to set in once students have completed required coursework or been accepted to college.

"This program is guaranteed to fulfill the DOE's most important objectives, because it opens up options to seniors rather than restricting them to the same programs despite their separate goals and interests," said Judith Weiss, Assistant Commissioner for the Northern Region.

Regional DOE officials, stationed in the northern, central and southern regions of the state, organize meetings of the schools in their district and serve as resources to share different successful senior year option initiatives.

DOE regional offices are able to provide guidelines for schools interested in expanding their senior year alternatives based partly on current programs. Programs can be approved for individual schools by local boards of education, and then filed with the DOE through the regional offices.

Some of the most popular programs include:

- College and university partnerships carried out on high school campuses or on site at an institute of higher education;
- Technical courses, on or off-site;
- Service-learning partnerships conducted in field settings with close supervision, including but not limited to full or part-time service with AmeriCorps organizations;
- Work-based internships and apprenticeships in conjunction with local businesses;
- Advanced placement programs;
- Mentorships with teachers at elementary, middle or high school level; and

- Student in-depth research projects designed for mastery learning, culminating with exhibition and assessment.

Examples of successful senior-year programs shared through the pilot program include, but are not limited to:

- the "Middle College Program" in Bergen, Passaic and Hunterdon counties, in conjunction with Farleigh Dickinson University. In this program, high school teachers from individual schools are certified as part-time professors through FDU, and teach approved college courses on their own high school campuses. The program features reduced tuition rates for the seniors to help with financial expenses and serves over 1,800 students in 60 schools throughout the state.
- a multitude of programs at Fort Lee High School in Bergen County including a for-credit community service partnership, an advanced math and science program with Columbia University, a School to Work vocational program with Bergen Technical School, a college credit program through AHEAD at Bergen County Community college, and a science research and mentoring partnership with local laboratories.
- the "Senior Practicum" program at Allentown High School in Monmouth County offers three options to interested seniors, all aimed to help them on the road to greater self-understanding and self-direction: community service projects, unpaid internships in government, business or the service professions, and an independent option that allows students to focus in on a special interest area and produce a product or perform to demonstrate command of the area.
- the "Entrepreneurship/Business Management Academy" in Camden County High Schools, in association with Camden County Community College, Rutgers University and local Business/Industry. Program provides juniors and seniors interested in a career in business management with a seamless educational pathway into the greater community, with established academic and industry support. Through practical experience and coursework at the colleges, students develop understanding of small business environment as well as an understanding of the specifics of small businesses.
- the Teaching and mentoring program in Parsippany-Troy Hills School District in Morris County. Seniors who are interested in teaching are assigned a faculty mentor who works with the student on a daily basis. Students are introduced both practically and theoretically to the teaching profession through participation in evening seminars and observation in classrooms. Students also complete assigned readings and maintain a professional journal/portfolio, and receive credit equivalent to two normal courses.

Many high schools are using this inauguration year of the 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Option Program to begin new initiatives or expand their current options for seniors. For instance, Mainland Regional High School in Atlantic County is beginning its limited senior year options program this year, according to school Principal Dr. Robert Blake.

For the first time this year, Mainland has one student participating in a program in conjunction with the Clarkson School, which admits high school seniors early for dual enrollment, allowing them to earn high school credit while taking college courses.

"We are looking to expand Mainland's program on a student-to-student basis," said Dr. Blake. "We are seeing what students are interested in and what will be most effective and worthwhile for the students. Some of the things we are looking into are programs with Atlantic County Community College and Richard Stockton College. I see a lot of avenues we can go down for the students."

Schools involved in the pilot project are coordinated by the DOE regional offices. A school interested in joining the pilot can attend regional meetings and file paperwork for a program with the appropriate regional office.

For more information, please contact the Department of Education Public Information Office at (609) 292-1126.