State aims to reduce number of unprepared college students

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

AUSTIN — The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board is set to consider an overhaul of the state's plan for preparing students for college in an effort to reduce the number of students who arrive on campus needing remedial work.

Teams of high school teachers, university professors and education experts have been working on the proposal since the Texas Legislature ordered new standards in 2006.

The proposal, which is scheduled to go before the board next month, will define the necessary skills to do college-level work in English, math, science and the social sciences.

Education officials hope the plan will help more students get bachelor's degrees, and do so more efficiently. Currently, more than half the entering freshmen at Texas colleges and universities need remedial classes.

"We've lost sight of what is acceptable," said Raymund Paredes, the state's higher education commissioner. "Readiness is about rigor. You can require schools to teach Faulkner and Hemingway, but the question is: What do you expect students to say about those works?"

The proposed standards would call for students to understand subjects including quadratic equations, the laws of thermodynamics and the effects of an author's choice of style and words.

Once the coordinating board signs off on the plan, the state Board of Education will be in charge of making changes to the state's curriculum to help students meet the new standards.

Some education officials said the state has been more focused on pushing students toward high school graduation than college preparedness.

"Being college-eligible doesn't mean you're college-ready," said Paula Roe, scholarship programs coordinator for Project GRAD, a nonprofit group in Houston.

Roe said the standards are "a good beginning" toward preparing more students for college.

Brock Gregg, director of governmental relations for the Association of Texas Professional Educators, said teachers are worried about the state implementing a uniform curriculum for all students.

"Teachers want students to have multiple pathways to college," he said. "They want access to courses that allow them to show the required skills in a different way."