Next Year's State Ninth Graders Face More Demanding Curriculum

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — Next year's ninth graders will be facing a more demanding curriculum — including more required English, math and science courses — to earn a diploma.

The new requirements drew praise from educators and the leader of the state's largest business lobby, who says the new standards will put Louisiana in an education leadership role in the South.

The graduation requirements were approved Tuesday on a 6-4 vote by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. They will apply to public high school students who will graduate in the spring of 1988.

"You have done a remarkable job. You have fought hard. This is the dawn of a new day in education in Louisiana," said Ray Reech, chairman of the BESE panel that drafted the new requirements.

The only change made in the committee's proposal was dropping the requirement that a student have two years of a foreign language to graduate.

The new standards more than double — from 5½ units to 11½ — the required courses outside of physical education required for graduation. The choice of electives — non-required courses — a student can take and still graduate will be reduced, falling from 8½ units to 5½.

"We have jumped way ahead of the other states in the South in our educational requirements with this move," said Ed Steimel, director of the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry.

"This is by far, the board's finest day. I didn't think we'd get this much."

He said the tougher requirements will make the state more attractive for businesses to relocate and may lead to more people putting their children in public schools.

"This is exactly what we wanted," he said.

Two months ago, LABI proposed tougher graduation requirements. The new curriculum follows that proposal with the exception that it doesn't require a year of world history.

Earlier in the day, LABI got behind a compromise proposal pushed by Tom Clausen, incoming superintendent of state education.

However, Clausen's proposal — which also had the backing of organized labor and Gov.-elect Edwin Edwards — wasn't debated by BESE.

After about 40 groups and individuals were heard, the board moved to go with the requirements proposed by a study committee that had been wrestling with the question since the fall of 1982.

Under the new requirements, a student still will need 22 units of credit to graduate from a Louisiana high school, but he or she

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will have to take more required courses.

Four years of English will be required. Since 1977, four English units have been required, but the one unit could be substituted in a course not as tough as English IV.

The required math courses will be algebra I and II and geometry. Now a student needs three math units, but there are no required subjects.

In science, the units are being pushed from two to three with a year of biology and chemistry required. Now a student can get his two units in any science courses.

“I voted against it, but I can’t say that I’m sorry it passed,” said BESE member Marie Louise Snellings of Monroe.

She said her “no” vote was because she didn’t think some rural school systems would have enough teachers or money to implement the new requirements.

Member John Bertrand of Crowley said it was time the board expected more of students.