

## High-school revamping rigorous but valuable

High school may never be the same.

The state Department of Education unveiled an ambitious program Friday to reform high school education in New Jersey. The New Jersey High School Redesign Steering Committee has based its recommendations on studies that show high school students — no matter what their plans are after graduation — need the same knowledge and skills, whether they're directly entering the job market or going to college.

Under the committee's proposal, high school is not going to be easy. All students will have to take math courses through Algebra II and geometry, plus courses in biology, chemistry and economics. Present requirements in social studies, health, physical education, the arts, world languages, technological literacy and life skills will continue.

The current High School Proficiency Test will be replaced by a new Language Arts Proficiency Assessment, along with exams in math and science.

The thrust of the proposal is to create a serious and rigorous academic environment. High schools will be redesigned as "learning communities" that emphasize personalized strategies for students. It's also part of the concept to create a continuum of education through college graduation.

The idea of instituting more difficult courses and tougher standards for high school graduation has universal appeal. No one doubts students need to be prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Their future and the state's future depend on young people receiving the best education possible to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world and job market.

But before the proposed reforms become a reality, the state should pledge to provide local school districts with the resources to implement the changes. In short, school districts — already strapped for cash and at the mercy of residents frustrated with rising property taxes — need more state aid.

The state is suggesting funding for the program may need to be "realigned" within school districts, a task that may prove next to impossible for small districts that already have difficulty in meeting state mandates. Small high schools, such as Dunellen and Bound Brook, may have to start thinking about consolidation.

State officials need to reassure local school districts that the resources necessary to institute the reforms will be forthcoming. That will go a long way to encouraging that this welcome proposal will be given an enthusiastic reception on the local level.