

**The Stamford Advocate May 5, 2009**

**Some students could suffer with classroom change**

To the editor:

In response to your May 1 editorial "Put Cloonan change in perspective," I am a parent who is extremely concerned that my children's education will suffer with these reforms.

Your editorial states that experience has shown that heterogeneous grouping works and that it does not negatively impact high-performing children. Dr. Joshua Starr and his Middle School Reform Committee have not provided one example of a district with a similar demographic composite to Stamford where this has worked.

My children attend a Stamford public elementary school whose population is very similar to the district make-up, and we have heterogeneous grouping. My experience has been that the teachers spend the majority of time teaching to the lower-performing students in an effort to raise the Connecticut Mastery Test scores to the detriment of higher-performing children. There is not enough time or resources for our teachers to teach differentiated instruction, and as a result the higher-performing children are often unchallenged.

How will this reform work at middle school when it currently does not work at an elementary-school level? Furthermore, the plan is to roll out the new program to all the Stamford middle schools in September. It is already May, and with no final decisions yet made, will there really be enough teacher training in the next three (summer) months before the new school year begins?

You also state that mixed-ability classes do not drag down high-performing students. Since when has the goal of our school system been to not drag down students? The goal of a public school system should be to challenge and educate all students and push them to work to their highest level of ability. I firmly believe that a child will perform to the highest level of his/her ability when challenged by teachers, provided with materials that require thinking to stretch, and is surrounded by others with similar academic abilities. This will certainly not be the case if there are only two academic groups in our middle schools. The range of ability is much too wide in Stamford to have only two groups.

The editor as well as the Board of Education are mixing the issues of tracking and grouping. I agree that students should not be placed in one track and never moved through their middle-school and high-school career. There should be multiple evaluations throughout the years to determine whether students should move to a higher level once certain goals have been achieved. And if a child is strong in math and not as strong in reading, he/she should be placed in two different groups and not forced into one inflexible group.

These are all reforms I think most Stamford parents would agree with. Why doesn't the Board of Education start with these reforms and see how they work before they completely overhaul the system and force many families (including myself) to seriously considering leaving the Stamford public school system?

Nicole Zussman

Stamford

