SUCCESS FOR EVERY STUDENT? TRACKING AND THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

**A Statement Prepared by the
Montgomery County Education Forum**

*To Encourage Meaningful Public Dialogue about Equity in
Education in Montgomery County Public Schools*

February 2002

PREFACE

What is the Montgomery County Education Forum?

The *Montgomery County Education Forum (MCEF)* is a four-year old group of parents, students, teachers, and community members who have studied, discussed, and researched educational inequity – specifically as it manifests in rigid ability grouping or "tracking" – and the impact it has on all children in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). MCEF has begun to reach out to other parent, student, and activist groups and has established a formal relationship with Progressive Maryland to collaborate on the Forum's *Campaign to Close the Achievement Gap.* We are now prepared to thrust this issue on the forefront of the County's education agenda and consciousness for discussion and action by its citizens. Our goal is to ensure educational equity for all children in MCPS through a grassroots campaign to increase community awareness of the relationship between tracking and the achievement gap.

We believe that:
- all students deserve equal opportunity for a quality education;
- "tracking" or "rigid ability grouping" practices perpetuate persistent race and class-based inequities due to the disproportionate placement of poor and minority students in lower tiered learning tracks;[1]
- "tracking" institutionalizes low expectations for poor children and children of color; and
- "tracking" is a major contributor to the achievement gap and must be abolished.

We believe that in Montgomery County, as elsewhere, high academic achievement for all and the closing of the achievement gap between white children and children of color depends on principled application of the idea that "all children can learn" by policy makers and educators who truly believe in it.

Finally, we believe that by taking up this issue, substantial progress can be made toward equity and quality education for all children in Montgomery County.

This report is our collective, considered opinions based on vast research, community anecdotes and our own experiences. We welcome discussion, suggestions and even criticism from MCPS and other concerned members of the community.

"I am always affected by students who say they've wondered why they were left in the "dumb" classes as friends were placed in the honors level classes or GT. Some lost their best friends in kindergarten or first grade over such labeling; some gave up on themselves before they had a chance to shine. Some of my students in 'on-level' classes are angry at being expected to fail; but they don't know who to blame, so they blame themselves or the new teacher facing them on the first day of class."
—High School Teacher, MCPS

INTRODUCTION

Ask what the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy.

—John Dewey, *School and Society*

One of the most urgent and controversial issues in educational circles today is the achievement gap, with much debate about its causes and potential solutions. Many well-known researchers on disparities in educational achievement cite abundant evidence that rigid ability grouping or "tracking" decreases students' educational opportunity.

What is tracking?

Tracking is defined as "the rigid and static assignment of students to classes, programs, or schools on the basis of ability, achievement, or teacher/counselor judgment for a long period of time with no options, and with whole group instruction as the predominant mode of instruction."[2] In layman's terms, it's the sorting and labeling of students into groups into which they are locked throughout their schools careers.

Further research shows that there is a direct correlation between minority students' limited educational opportunities and the achievement gap – different course participation and classroom experiences cause academic outcome disparities.[3]

The disparity in educational achievement between children who are white and Asian and children who are minority and/or poor is not just a "today" issue. Barriers to equitable, quality education for children of various racial and ethnic minorities, and lower socio-economic classes are rooted in historical American social, economic, and political constructs, such as racial segregation, assimilation of selected groups of immigrants, and inequitable distribution of educational resources.

Throughout much of American history, children of various ethnic and racial minorities as well as children from lower socio-economic classes, have been schooled separately from white middle and upper-class children, thus effectively limiting educational opportunity and stunting academic growth for these students. Education policy in the 1800s generally rested on two basic tenets for educating Native American, Hispanic, Asian, and African American children: to instill "American" culture and values, and to provide the minimal training necessary for future employment in low-wage jobs.[4]

> " tracking is the ... rigid and static assignment of students to classes, programs, or schools on the basis of ability, achievement, or teacher/counselor judgment for a long period of time with no options... "

In the early years of the 20th century, many states spent an average of two or three times more money educating white children than they did educating black children. By the 1950s, this difference rose to five times greater spending for whites than for black students.[5]

In the early 1950s, the NAACP successfully challenged many of these inequalities. Both legislative and court actions resulted in the abolition of dual school systems and the integration of schools. Since the 1954 landmark decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, and the Supreme Court's unanimous decision to overrule the "separate but equal" doctrine, *states have a constitutional duty to provide equal educational opportunity in public schools.* Yet more than a half-century later, U.S. schools remain widely inadequate and unequal in funding and staffing, resulting in wide gaps in student achievement, especially across race. Educational equity is an unfulfilled promise.[6]

Differences remain between white and Asian children and children who are African American, Hispanic, and low-income in SAT scores, college preparedness, high school graduation rates, and the over-representation of minority and low-income students in low-level classes. These differences, in MCPS and nationally, demonstrate that we still do not have equal educational opportunity. To what extent does the sorting of students into high and low tracks continue to limit the educational and occupational futures of low-income and minority students?[7]

If we believe that all children can learn and succeed, we must, as a democratic society, remove the barriers that keep any of our children from reaching their potential. As concerned citizens of Montgomery County, we must ask ourselves if we are serious about closing the gap or if we are prepared to face the consequences of not eradicating it. If we value educational equity, we must transform and reform our educational policies, structures and attitudes to reflect a true belief in the potential of each and every child in our classrooms.

PROBLEM DEFINITION:
African American, Latino and low-income students are not receiving an equal education in our schools.

Montgomery County's reputation for educational excellence is well-deserved – many children get a quality education here. The county attracts a good pool of teachers. Significant effort is put into training and professional growth for teachers. The county's stated goals make sense: focusing on student learning outcomes, offering challenge to every student, and success for every student. Unfortunately, it also structures education in some ways that contradicts its stated goals.

Achievement data indicate that Montgomery County has a multi-tiered educational system that affords upper- and middle-class white and Asian children a better education than African American, Latino, Native American, special education, and less economically advantaged children. MCPS's educational indicators illustrate a pervasive and ever-growing student achievement gap with minority and poor students clustered in the lower tiers and whites and Asian American students positioned in the higher tiers. (See Exhibit 1 below.)

Exhibit 1—MCPS Outcomes Measures as Evidence of the Achievement Gap

Achievement Gap Indicators	African American	Latino	Anglo	Asian	Gap
Average MSPAP (2001)	30.7	30.7	62.5	62.7	31.9
Average SAT Scores	922	973	1149	1131	192.5
Percent Participation in Honors and AP	30.3	30.9	64.6	69.2	36.3
Percent Participation in Pre-Algebra	14.4	12.7	45.0	53.3	35.6
Percent Completion of Algebra 1 by 9th Grade	48.6	44.3	85.5	86.4	39.5
Percent Participation in PSAT Tests	40	29	73	73	38.5
Overrepresentation in Special Education	5.80	4.83	4.33	0.85	2.73
Suspension Rates	11.7	7.1	4.1	2.7	6.0

Source: MCPS Outcome Measures Annual Report 1998-1999 /Web Site

Over the past 15 years, MCPS commissioned six reports to investigate achievement among its students. All six reports condemned a pervasive and systemic problem of tracking as one of the primary contributors to the achievement gap. However as the achievement gap widened, Montgomery County, under previous leadership, appeared to place more emphasis on preventing "White Flight" than on closing the learning gap. Despite its own findings, the main thrust of MCPS policy over the past 15 years has been to prevent "White Flight" rather than to close the learning gap. For example the Washington Post Education Review November 1999 quotes Eileen Steinkrauss, coordinator of Blair's magnet program:

> "Our effort is supposed to bring majority students into the school. But if we find in the testing and screening process very talented minority students, certainly they are welcome and they are invited to come. The breakdown is about 60 percent white, 30 percent Asian, 10 percent Hispanic and African American.[8] Before the magnet, there was middle-class flight of all races from Blair, parents, African American and white, who felt the school was not doing enough for their students. And that has definitely stopped. People want to come here."

While touting "Success for Every Student," MCPS made only modest attempts to address the crisis. The initiative became a set of empty promises as educational and institutional policies and structures that hold these inequities in place remained. MCPS has used ability grouping policies and practices to expand gifted and talented, magnet, and other special selective programs to keep white upper- and middle-class families in the public school system. Even now as the county suffers a budget shortfall, MCPS plans to set up two additional "centers for the highly gifted." Selective programs such as these serve to re-segregate the public schools leaving Black and Latino students without the education to which they are entitled, or, as one Blair parent put it, in the "general prison population." If the current leadership is serious about closing the gap it must take a critical look at these policies and programs.

Sadly, African American, Latino and low-income students being assigned to the "general prison population" has not outraged our school system or community as a whole. For a society numbed by racism, the "miseducation" of our minority and low-income students is seen largely as another "difference" between whites and non-whites. We ignore the systematic and systemic conditions that create and maintain this "difference." And the prevailing inertia of our society tells us that "there is nothing to be done about it" or worse yet, that the students, their families, and circumstances are to blame.

The Montgomery County Education Forum holds that MCPS ability grouping policies and practices are largely responsible for educational disparities because they institutionalize low expectations for children of color. The policy/practice of re-segregating or separating out, and subsequently labeling our students begins in the early grades. It impacts the attitudes and expectations of the students themselves and adults in their lives including their parents and teachers. It has enormous consequences: African American, Latino and low-income students do not receive equal education in our schools in

"To call some students 'academic' and others 'unacademic' has a devastating impact on how teachers think about students and how students think about themselves. The message to some is: 'You are the intellectual leaders, you will go on to further education.' To others it is 'You are not academic, you are not smart enough to do this work.' Students are thus divided between those who think and those who work, when, in fact, life for all of us is a blend of both."
— The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1988
An Imperiled Generation

three ways: unequal resources, inferior instructional practice and stigmatization. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (1999) named three ways that tracking leads to educational inequality:[9]

1) Students placed in certain classes or programs receive fewer resources than students placed in other programs;
2) Certain classes or programs, because of their structural rigidity or inefficacy, place limitations on the educational potential of students in those classes or programs; and
3) Certain programs unnecessarily stigmatize students.

Further, the separation and labeling serves to magnify and distort the relatively small differences which students bring in preparedness when they enter kindergarten. Separation and labeling emphasize school as a race, a zero-sum game, a competition, rather than as a community activity in which everyone can win and everyone can help everyone else make progress.

> *"We pass through this world but once. Few tragedies can be more extensive than the stunting of life, few injustices deeper than the denial of an opportunity to strive or even to hope, by a limit imposed from without, but falsely identified as lying within."*
> — Steven Jay Gould,
> *The Mismeasure of Man*

Tracking and other student segregation mechanisms that sustain the achievement gap must be abolished through strong, deliberate, targeted initiatives. MCPS must seek to replace policies and programs that encourage and support achievement by particular groups with implementation of research-based heterogeneous grouping programs that provide enrichment and equal educational opportunity for all students.

"TRACKING" FURTHER DEFINED

While the terms "tracking" and "ability-grouping" have to some extent become interchangeable, it is critical to differentiate the terms. Ability grouping is the formation of homogeneous groups, or groups of students with similar achievement, for instruction. Not all grouping practices are "tracking." Ability grouping that is short-term, flexible, and frequently evaluated and where children can be regrouped according to evaluations can be used effectively to meet specific student learning goals.

Jeannie Oakes's extensive research on the subject defines the following four steps in the tracking process:

- First, students are identified in a rather public way as to their intellectual capabilities and accomplishments and separated into a hierarchical system of groups for instruction.
- Second, these groups are labeled quite openly and characterized in the minds of teachers and others as being of a certain type – high ability, low achieving, slow, average, and so on.
- Third, individual students in these groups come to be defined by others – both adults and their peers – in terms of these group types. In other words, a student in a high-achieving group is seen as a high-achieving *person*, bright, smart, quick, and in the eyes of many, *good*. And those in the low-achieving groups come to be called slow, below average, and – often when people are being less careful – dummies.
- Fourth, on the basis of these sorting decisions, the groupings of students that result, and the way educators see the students in these groups, [young people] are treated by and experience schools very differently.[10]

Oakes found the following characteristic differences between strategies, activities and opportunities in high- and low-tracked classes.

Grouping-Related Differences in Learning Opportunities

Higher-Group Advantages	Lower-Group Disadvantages
Curriculum emphasizing concepts, inquiry, and problem solving	Curriculum emphasizing low-level facts and skills
Stress on students developing as autonomous thinkers	Stress on teaching students to follow rules and procedures
More time spent on instruction	More time spent on discipline or socializing
More active and interactive learning activities	More worksheets and seatwork
Computers used as learning tools	Computers used as tutors or electronic worksheets
More qualified and experienced teachers	More uncertified and inexperienced teachers
Extra enrichment activities and resources	Few enrichment opportunities
More engaging and friendly classroom atmosphere	More alienating and hostile classroom atmosphere
"Hard work" a likely classroom norm	"Not working" a likely classroom norm

The following examples of teacher expectations and student outcomes, excerpted from a publication of the California State Department of Education, paint a more graphic picture of tracking:[11]

Teachers on Tracking

Question: What are the five most critical things you want the students in your class to learn this year?	
High Track Classes	**Low Track Classes**
Interpreting and identifying. Evaluation, investigating power. *Science – junior high*	More mature behavior (less outspoken). *Science – junior high*
Ability to reason logically in all subject areas. *Math – senior high*	I want them to respect my position – if they get this, I'll be happy. *Math – junior high*

Students on Tracking

Question: What is the most important thing you have learned so far in this class?	
High Track Classes	**Low Track Classes**
Probably the most important thing I've learned is the understanding of the balance between man and his environment. *Science – senior high*	I can distinguish one type of rock from another. *Science – senior high.*
I learned things that will get me ready for college entrance examinations. *English – junior high.*	Learned how to get a job. *English – junior high.*

> "*The children in the gifted classes try really hard. [The other students] they just sort of die.*"
> — Fifth Grade Student, MCPS

TRACKING AND THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

Montgomery County Education Forum holds, and research confirms, that there is a direct connection between the practice of tracking beginning in early grades and the resulting achievement gap. In elementary schools, research shows that the gap between students in lower ability groupings and those in higher ability groupings grows larger from the beginning of the school year to the end.[12]

A University of Minnesota study suggests that tracking and the quality of the academic opportunities available in the school affects both the test score gap and the gap in academic performance generally.[13] This study assessed causes of the achievement gap and reported the following findings:

> "For both white students and students of color, success … was positively correlated to how an individual had been tracked. Only 6.9 percent of students of color compared to 23 percent of white students had access to 'gifted and talented' programs."

Similarly, the MCPS 1999 Honors/Advanced Placement Policies, Practices and Enrollment Work Group Report found that "it is likely that the identification as gifted and talented may, itself, have enhanced the subsequent academic progress of the selected students. (page 101) … even among students that shared the same Grade 3 academic test score, those who had been identified as gifted and talented eventually took about nine more honors courses (on average) while in high school than did their classmates not so identified."

> *" There are many hypotheses about the reasons for the achievement gap. The feeder schools to my elementary school track early using gifted and talented identification. The children who come to my 4th grade class without that identification are often working below grade level in reading and math. I am concerned that the gifted and talented identification allows some children to get more advanced instruction at the expense of educating all children at an interesting and high level. "*
> — 4th Grade Teacher, MCPS

Specific strategies, activities and opportunities common in "higher track" classrooms are major factors contributing to academic success:

"Granted, it is hard to deny the superiority of the instruction in gifted-and-talented programs and some other honors or high track classes, what with hands-on learning, student-designed projects, computers, field trips, and other enrichments. But research generally shows that it is precisely those enrichments that produce better results rather than the fact they are accorded only to a select few. What happens in those classes is more decisive than the fact that they are homogeneous."[14]

It is no surprise that when students' potential is nurtured, success is the outcome – higher-track designation almost ensures it. By definition, lower-track designation does the opposite. This fact remains a constant as students progress in their school careers. Expectedly, tracking widens the achievement gap from kindergarten through 12th grade.

DOES MONTGOMERY COUNTY TRACK ITS STUDENTS?

Over the past decade and a half, the achievement gap has been the major impetus for a number of MCPS sponsored investigations and evaluations of its educational policies and programs. Six of these efforts clearly substantiate that MCPS does indeed track its students, that tracking has a major causal effect on the achievement gap, and that it must stop. Furthermore, the amount of tracking seems to have increased over the years. This section briefly discusses the key tracking-related findings of each study. However, the reader is encouraged to review the reports of these investigations for a full presentation and discussion of the findings.

1988-89: The Gordon Report: "A Study of Minority Achievement in MCPS – If Not Now, When; If Not Here, Where?"

Impetus: A sharp fall in African American and Latino SAT scores; community urging.

Lead Investigator: Dr. Edmund W. Gordon of Yale University

Findings: Documented notable differences in participation in educational enrichment opportunities (gifted and talented program, pre-algebra and algebra, honors/AP courses) by race and ethnicity. Institutionalized lower expectations for students of color cited as the cause of the achievement gap.

Recommendations: Change the institutionalized attitudes and behaviors of teachers who expected less of some students while providing higher academic opportunities to others.

1990-91: Success for Every Student Annual Outcome Measures Reports.

Impetus: Responding to Gordon Report, MCPS established a new vision and strategic plan.

Recommendations: Every child has a right to a quality education, all children can learn, and all children have a right to be successful. Twelve outcome measures were delineated and were to be reported on annually. These included:

- Increase completion by African American and Hispanic students of PreK-8 pre-algebra mathematics programs that prepares students for successful completion of algebra in grade 9 (Outcome E)
- Increase participation of African American and Hispanic students in Honors and Advanced courses, including successful completion of algebra 1 in Grade 8 (Outcome F)
- Increase participation and improve performance of African American and Hispanic students on PSATs and SATs (Outcome G)
- Eliminate disproportionate suspension rates of African American and Hispanic students in the system (Outcome H) and in each school (Outcome I)
- Eliminate disproportionate representation of African American students within special education programs (Outcome J)

" I went to Back-to-School night when my daughter was in fourth grade, and was quite pleased with the teacher and rich mix of parents in the room. Then the bell rang to send us to our children's math and science class. All of the white parents got up and went in one direction and all the parents of color went in the other. My mouth dropped. I thought, 'This can't be happening in Montgomery County.' I later discovered that all the white parents had been on their way to the GT science classroom."
— Parent, MCPS

- Increase the percentage of students each year who meet the MCPS criterion-reference test proficiency levels so within 5 years all racial groups in the system meet the standard (Out come K) and in each school meet the standard (Outcome L)

Result: Goals not met; elimination of publication of SES Outcome Measures Annual Reports.

1994: Committee Report on Student Grouping Practices

Impetus: Responding to the Gordon Report, MCPS commissioned this study.

Investigators: Teachers, principals, administrators, academics and other community education professionals.

Recommendations: See below.

Committee's Vision Statement – "All grouping decisions in Montgomery County Public Schools should promote student learning, enhance self-esteem, facilitate positive social interactions, and build a strong school community."

Topic	Student Grouping Practices Committee Recommendations
1. EQUITY	School's grouping practices should ensure equitable educational opportunities, resource, and access for all students
2. VARIETY OF GROUPING PRACTICES	Students should experience a variety of types of groupings during the course of the school day, throughout the year, and from year to year. They should have the opportunity to be with, work with, and learn from a variety of students.
3. FLEXIBILITY	All grouping arrangements should be flexible with frequent, regular evaluation allowing students to move from one group to another as their needs change.
4. TRACKING	Schools should eliminate grouping decisions and practices that lead to and result in long-term, unintentional tracking.
5. LOCAL DECISION MAKING	Each school should develop a plan for grouping its students. This plan should be consistent with the recommendations of this report.
6. STUDENT AWARENESS	Students, with the support of school personnel and parents, should develop an awareness of how their effort, behaviors, attitudes, and learning characteristics influence the groups in which they will learn and work.
7. STAFF DEVELOPMENT	MCPS should support system-wide, ongoing staff development that addresses grouping issues and practices.

Result: Recommendations never implemented.

1997: Honors/Advanced Placement Policies, Practices, and Enrollment Work Group Report.

Impetus: Continued lack of proportional representation in enriched education among ethnic and racial groups in the County.

Findings: Numbers of students in honors and advanced placement courses has increased steadily. However, the findings suggest that "*these changes are not system-wide nor uniformly evident within each school, to the point that inequity has increased in the selection of honors and advanced placement courses, particularly among African American and Hispanic students, and that some regular class offerings of high schools are lacking in academic rigor… The growth in*

enrollment of African American and Hispanic students has not been met with sufficient preparation and training among personnel of the system in a manner sufficient to address the change."[15]

Other notable report findings are highlighted below:

> *"Racial and ethnic differences in pre-high school academic preparation among African American, white, and Hispanic students largely, but not completely, account for racial/ethnic group differences in honors course taking in high school."*

> *"Students described the regular classes as 'slow,' filled with 'behavior problems,' having 'low academic and behavioral expectations'"*

> *"Students in honors classes 'worked harder and were well behaved.' 'The environment is quieter, and you don't miss what the teachers say.' 'Teachers have more time to explain things instead of disciplining.' Likewise, some teachers in some honors classes are perceived to have a 'more supportive attitude towards students' than in regular classes."*

Result: No clear action taken.

2000:A Curriculum Management Audit of Mathematics Education in MCPS.

Impetus: Continued racial/ethnic disparity in math scores.

Lead Auditor: Dr. William Poston

Findings: *"Tracking [in MCPS] that begins in early years and an exaggerated emphasis on acceleration (see Finding 5) rather than enrichment[16] places African American and Hispanic students at extreme disadvantage. Moreover, tracking [in MCPS] ultimately results in the separation of students along socio-economic and racial lines (see Finding 1). Thus a dual system in curriculum design and delivery permeates the district (see Finding 1). Solutions to the problems of low achieving minority and poor children – slowing down the pace – further limits the possibility that these students will ever achieve at a high level (see Finding 1 and Finding 2)…. Moreover, the use of ability grouping … which results in … racial and economical segregation in effect, is a practice that must be terminated if the system is serious about comprehensive and complete success for its entire student clientele."*

Result: No action on tracking-related findings taken.

2001: MCPS-Sponsored Study Circles.

Impetus: Continuation and growth of achievement gap.

Investigators: Facilitated groups of parents, teachers, students, administrators and community members

Action Team: "To Provide Equal Opportunity for All Students to Succeed"

Top Recommendation: Stop long-term persistent ability grouping and labeling (tracking).

Within the span of approximately 15 years, MCPS has issued the above reports revealing the continuous negative impact of its educational programs and ability grouping practices on African American and Latino students. Therefore, we believe that there is ample and undeniable evidence of the relationship between tracking practices and disparate student outcomes: the Board of Education and MCPS leadership have been made fully aware of this correlation and have been given research-based solutions.

Whether intentional or not, MCPS does track its students. Many of its programs and policies rely on inflexible sorting mechanisms to "address" the needs of students. In actuality, these very programs and policies do not "address" the needs of all students, but set up conditions for potential failure of many students – especially the educational failure of poor and minority students.

MECHANISMS OF TRACKING: HOW MONTGOMERY COUNTY TRACKS ITS STUDENTS

Tracking from Elementary Grades through Middle School to High School

Tracking in MCPS begins with "gifted and talented" (GT) program policies and practices in elementary schools that create the foundation for an achievement gap for students of color and lower socio-economic status. Once identified as gifted and talented, students carry this designation throughout their school career paving the way for entry into and success in honors classes in middle school, and honors, AP and magnet programs in high school. The longer students remain in their respective "tracks" the more they diverge – they become increasingly segregated and the achievement gap widens.

What does "gifted and talented" mean? According to MCPS policy, "gifted and talented" students are defined as:

> ## Schools should emphasize:
> → Releasing intelligence rather than quantifying it;
> → Nurturing effort rather than defining ability;
> → Building strengths rather than sorting according to weakness;
> → Building on students' aspirations rather than circumscribing their dreams; and
> → Recognizing students as members of a learning community rather than as products of an assembly line.
> — Anne Wheelock,
> *Crossing the Tracks*

1) children and youth with outstanding talent who perform or show the potential for performing at high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment; and

2) children and youth who exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative, and /or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields.

However, the term "gifted" derives directly from the eugenics movement[17] of the early 1900s, specifically the work of Leta S. Hollingsworth, sometimes called the "mother of gifted and talented" programs:

"(Gifted children), she explained, "originate in families where the father is a professional man, an owner or executive in business, or a clerical worker." Educational policy, in Hollingsworth's (1924) view, disregarded gifted children due to a misguided social philosophy that denied "innate permanent, hereditary superiority"…(Hollingsworth's text) Gifted Children: Their Nature and Nurture continues to be cited in contemporary texts on giftedness. [18]

MCEF believes that "giftedness" is a socially constructed concept that has been reified by its proponents. According to Jeannie Oakes, "criteria for giftedness constantly change, and they vary from place to place. Who is gifted often gets decided in the halls of the state legislatures. Some states and school districts designate two percent of their students as gifted. Others choose five percent, and others adjust the cutoff scores to make the number of qualifying students match the available funding."[19] Most experts in the GT field estimate that truly gifted students make up at

most three percent of the population. In Montgomery County we chose to identify close to 33 percent of our students as "gifted and talented." The identification of students as "gifted" has taken on political, not scientific, meaning.

Elementary School

The institutionalization of low expectations begins here. Students are given tests which measure a) cognitive skills (verbal reasoning, memory, analogies and sequencing) and b) visual and spatial relationships (patterning) as early as kindergarten. Based on these tests, teacher recommendations and parent nominations children are identified as "gifted and talented." Middle class children may do better than others on the tests because of background experiences and readiness for the testing process. Many middle class children who do not test into the GT program, additionally, have families that advocate for them to be GT identified, through further testing or requests for provisionary placement, resulting in an unusually high percentage of white middle class identification.

Although GT participation data are not formally collected, reported, or otherwise made available to parents at every school or to the public in general, a review of limited available data indicates that white children far outnumber children of color in "gifted and talented" programs. For the years 1995-99, an average of 41.15 percent of white children in Montgomery County were identified GT; 15.33 percent of African American and 17.13 percent of Hispanic children were thus identified.

The GT program also seems to have expanded in certain schools to accommodate the number of white children. Piney Branch Elementary School in SY 2000-2001 identified 48 percent of its students as gifted and talented. In its fourth grade class, this included 100 percent of white boys and most white girls, in a school where only 47% of the school was white.

The mechanisms through which children are grouped vary from school to school. Some schools regroup only for certain subjects – for example, math and reading. Others regroup for science. Some use a pullout model, while other schools separate students by entire classes. Certain programs, such as the William and Mary Reading program or Great Books, are available, in some schools, only to those who have been labeled "gifted and talented."

Curricula in MCPS are county-mandated, so all classes are supposed to cover the same material. However, in GT classrooms and programs there are

> *"I am the mother of a sixth-grade African American male who was identified as GT in second grade. Each year his classes become less populated with other African American, Latino or Native American students. And each year, I grapple with this dilemma: do I keep him in GT, a predominantly white environment, where he will have access to abundant classroom resources but little or no peer support, or do I place him in 'regular classes' where there are less resources to support his achievement, but where he will have plenty of peer support because most of the faces in these classes resemble his. In essence, I choose between my son's academic well-being and his social well-being. This year, I clearly made the wrong decision because my son feels isolated and he is failing. And I know, his teachers know, and he knows that it's not because he isn't capable. Takoma Park Middle School is 31% African American, 14% Asian American, 14% Latino, and 40% white. How is it then mathematically probable that with the exception of gym, my son's core classes are 8% minority, which averages out to one other minority student (African American or Latino) out of 25 students in his classes?"*
> — Parent, MCPS

> *"Tracking has forced me to be the only African American Female in my AP Language and Composition class. Not only do I already have to learn in an uncomfortable atmosphere but I am subjected to read books such as Native Son by Richard Wright. Don't get me wrong I love Native Son, but when I have to speak on behalf of 'Bigger Thomas' as an African American, I think there is something terribly wrong. If I had to choose to take AP English again, I wouldn't, not because the class is rigorous, but because of the ignorance and lack of sensitivity of not only the students but the educators. I believe most of the time, students of color choose not to take these "honors and AP" classes not because of the coursework but because of attitudes and discrimination that they receive in the classroom."*
> — 11th Grade Student, MCPS

more enrichment opportunities with a variety of hands-on activities and, creative teaching and learning experiences. There are even county-sponsored extra-curricular activities available only to GT children. Special training is available for teachers to teach GT classes and enrichment activities.

Middle School

The gap grows wider as these students are placed in selective, enriched honors and accelerated classes in middle schools. These are geared to "groom" them with early preparation for success in higher level classes in high school. Most middle schools offer honors classes for all academic subjects. Students are recommended for honors placement by elementary school teachers. Clearly, students identified early as GT and given an enriched education are most likely to move on to honors work in middle school.

Recently the Gazette featured a story about a curriculum unit on ancient Greece, taught at Eastern Middle School, in which for the first time, students from the "non-gifted" classes participated. The students recreated ancient Greece, with traditional costumes, games and plays. A sixth grade magnet teacher commented, "We're providing students who are not in the [magnet] program with an opportunity to have lessons presented to them in the same way we present it to our students [in the magnet program]." This type of teaching should be the norm. Such rich learning experiences should not be reserved for the so-called gifted and magnet students.

High School

At the high school level, the mechanism for delivering "gifted" education is through the magnet programs and/or honors and AP classes.

The educational inequities institutionalized through gifted programs in elementary school have defined by ninth grade, the subset of students who are adequately prepared to participate in a magnet program or in honors and AP classes. In 1997, for example, 24.5 percent of white ninth grade students in Montgomery County took four or more honors classes while only 3.8 percent of African American students and only 3.6 percent of Hispanic students did so. When visiting and observing classes at Blair, the disparity becomes quickly obvious. Honors and magnet classes are predominantly white and Asian, "regular" classes, predominantly African American and Latino. Confirming the findings of the Gordon report a decade ago, Black and Latino students who do take Honors, AP and Magnet classes speak of their isolation by being the one or two minority students in the programs. Others have commented about the counselors and teachers who often openly expressed doubts that they are either prepared for or able to handle the level of academic challenge.

The original goal of the magnet programs was to "integrate" schools. Schools are integrated, but are then re-segregated by the large percentage of white students in magnet programs and the dominance of students of color in "regular" classes.

The MC Education Forum believes that it makes good sense to structure for learning success, and invest significant resources in curriculum development, instructional materials, teacher preparation and technology. Learning should be structured so that all students achieve meaningful success.

Language Minority Students

Any discussion of student tracking and the achievement gap must also consider students from language minority backgrounds.[20] In MCPS, such students include Latino students, African immigrant students, students from Asian/Pacific Island backgrounds, as well as those from the former Soviet Union, Europe and island nations. Parents of language minority students believe in the promise of American education for their children and believe they will face a better future. Does MCPS in fact fulfill this promise to the children of these immigrants?

The main tracking-related obstacle that faces students who are English Language Learners, or Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, is the type of programs provided for them. Federal law identifies a subset of language minority students who are Limited English Proficient Students. These are students, who include U.S. born and foreign born students, who have sufficient difficulty speaking, reading, writing, and understanding English that this is an obstacle to their success in English language classrooms. LEP students are entitled under Title VI and Title VII to compensatory services, such as ESOL classes, to meet their additional educational needs.

However, language minority students' needs are not being met through the various programs and instructional practices. Eugene Garcia, author of *Hispanic Education in the U.S.* explains,

> *"… schooling practices that contribute to the academic vulnerability of this student population and that tend to dramatize the lack of fit between the student and school experiences are reflected in the monolithic culture transmitted by the schools in the forms of pedagogy, curricula, instruction, classroom configuration, and language. Such practices include the systematic exclusion of the students' histories, language, experience, and values from classroom curricula and activities; the use of tracking, which limits access to academic courses; learning environments that do not foster academic development and socialization and perception of self as a competent learner…"*

In MCPS and throughout the state of Maryland, pullout ESOL programs are the most common type of program offered. In pullout programs, students receive one or two periods daily of ESOL instruction, depending on their grade level, and spend the remainder of their day in regular classes. A 1997 study by Thomas and Collier[21] found that students who learn English in pullout programs never catch up with native English speakers. In fact, as they move through school, they fall further and further behind. When compared to other types of programs such as transitional bilingual programs, sheltered English or two-way bilingual programs, results for students in pullout programs show by far the worst results for LEP students who begin school with significant academic gaps when compared with their English-speaking peers. Records of over 44,000 students were reviewed, and the study concluded that students in ESL pull-out programs take up to ten years to develop competence in the academic English they need to function in regular education classes. Given these findings, it becomes apparent why many of the language minority students who enter the MCPS in kindergarten may still lag behind their native English-speaking peers in high school.

While MCPS offers French and Spanish immersion programs, these programs are directed at English-speaking students as an enrichment experience. Language immersion programs in the MCPS primarily benefit native speakers of English who already have many advantages over their language minority peers. MCPS also offers Spanish for Spanish Speakers classes in high school. The purpose of such classes should be to develop literacy in Spanish-speaking students' first

language and academic language skills in Spanish. [22] It is unclear from available course descriptions and student reports if literacy actually is the focus of Spanish as a Second Language classes.

A growing number of the LEP student population is adolescent students who enter at the high school level. Some of these students arrive in the United States with grade-level or above academic skills, but lack the English language skills needed to participate immediately in "mainstreamed" classes. Others students arrive having had limited schooling or interrupted education in their native countries due to poverty or war and civil strife, and lack of educational opportunities beyond the elementary school level. Under-schooled students need intensive literacy development and basic skills development, while students with grade-level academic skills but limited English need intensive English programs concurrently with academic content offerings in their native languages. There are models currently being used and evolving in other states and school districts to address the needs of adolescent immigrant students who have been until recently ignored. One such effort, Project Accelerated Literacy (PAL), being implemented in Northern Virginia is designed to identify effective approaches to developing literacy in under-schooled adolescent English language learners and provide graduate level coursework for teachers as well as classroom observations and weekly seminars. [23]

Special Education and Tracking

Historically, students with disabilities have been tracked by 1) providing special education programs in separate, isolated classrooms with little to no integration or mainstreaming into regular education programs, and 2) through the over-representation of minority and poor children referred, assessed and identified as special education students.

In recent years, educators and parents have recognized the significant benefits of educational models that promote "inclusion." Thus, aggressive, parent-led reforms have greatly changed the educational opportunities for students who require special education services. Federal laws now prescribed "education in the least restrictive environment" for all students with disabilities and promotes delivery of individualized services for a child within the mainstream classroom.

In MCPS the most serious tracking-related problem in the area of special education is the over-representation of African American males students in certain special education categories: learning disabled, emotionally disturbed, and mildly mentally retarded.

> *The U.S. office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and the U.S. Office for Civil Rights (OCR) have three concerns about disproportionate representation:*
> 1. *Students may be unserved or receive services that do not meet their needs.*
> 2. *Students may be misclassified or inappropriately labeled.*
> 3. *Placement in special education classes may be a form of discrimination.*
>
> *Overrepresentation is a complex problem, and reducing it calls for pervasive strategies. Reducing overrepresentation is a matter of creating a successful school environment for all students and accurately distinguishing disabilities from cultural differences. An ecological approach that recognizes the influence of the learning environment on the process of teaching and learning is critical. It is important to appreciate that the risk of low academic performance and challenging behaviors does not reside solely within the child or family – instructional, classroom and school variables can and do contribute to academic problems.*[24]

The importance of this problem in MCPS resulted in identifying it as a system-wide goal in the Board's SES plan and calling for annual reporting. Yearly data are reported as Outcome J: Eliminate disproportionate representation of African American students within special education programs. In response to a formal complaint received through the U.S. Department of Education, MCPS has made some efforts to address the problem and reverse the trend. However, the latest numbers (1999) still reflect an overrepresentation of minority students compared to the much larger White student population.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Not all student grouping for instruction is illegal, but when the grouping has the characteristics of inequality commonly found in tracking by Oakes and others, it does become illegal in various contexts.

The first, critical question is whether some students are being assigned to programs which – whatever their intent – in actual practice are not effectively designed to teach the full range of challenging knowledge and skills adopted in state or district standards for all children, or which provide less effective opportunities to master that knowledge and skills than other programs:

It is illegal for schools receiving Federal Title I funds (*i.e.,* funds targeted for high-poverty schools) to place children – particularly those who are having greater difficulty achieving – in a program which:

> (a) does not have an enriched, accelerated curriculum that is aligned with the State's challenging academic standards for all children;
> (b) does not have highly qualified teachers who use effective instructional methods for enabling all children to meet those standards; or
> (c) does not provide timely and effective assistance when a student is having difficulty mastering those particular standards.

Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964:
> It is illegal to place children in low-tracks disproportionately composed of students of one race if those classes have lower academic content and do not fully address the challenging subject matter identified in standards for all students, or do not do so as effectively as other classes.

Under Title VI and the Federal Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974:
> It is also illegal to place children from a different language background who have limited ability to write, read, or speak English in a program not effectively designed to overcome these language barriers so that they can attain the same high standards expected for all children.

Under the Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
> It is generally illegal to assign a student with disabilities to a low-track program – including a low-track regular classroom – that provides less effective opportunity to learn and master the same high academic standards that the State and district has adopted for all children.

In many states, students are allows them to guaranteed rights to high-quality education which reach high standards – under the state constitution, state school-reform laws, and the school reform plans states and school districts adopt to get federal funds.

Under these laws, no assessments can justify assigning students to a curriculum or program, which fails to teach effectively the skills and knowledge in the standards that Maryland and MCPS have adopted for all children.

As part of the obligation to examine whether the use of assessments for grouping are in fact validly and reliably achieving their non-discriminatory

> ... but when the grouping has the characteristics of inequality commonly found in tracking by Oakes and others, it does become illegal in various contexts.

purposes, legal and professional standards governing these practices require a careful examination of whether there are negative unintended consequences. A prime example of such negative consequences is stigma – whereby students assigned to lower tracks (or excluded from higher ones) are viewed as less capable of learning, by their teachers, by other students, and by the students themselves.

NEXT STEPS: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO END TRACKING?

Based on:
1. MCPS's own data and investigations;
2. National research;
3. Our own research – both anecdotal and quantitative,
   we believe that MCPS must set new policy that abolishes the system of tracking.

What does that mean? Tracking is the "homogeneous" grouping of students with other students who are "like" them in academic performance; "detracking" is the opposite – creating classrooms which are "heterogeneous" or of "mixed-achievement" levels. And, yes, many schools systems around the country are "detracking" their schools because they are coming up against the same brick walls in effectively educating all students as in Montgomery County. We don't have to reinvent the wheel.

Detracking requires some attention to the conditions of teaching. It is, no doubt, more difficult to teach each and every student when the range in literacy and other skills is wider than it is to teach homogeneously grouped classes. Heterogeneously grouped classes cannot be too large, requiring some attention to class size. Teacher training and professional development are also issues. When the lead author of the Math Audit Report, Dr. Poston, addressed the MCPS Board of Education, he stressed de-tracking as a cornerstone of the solution but warned that it would take time to get there. He pointed out that it required a workforce of master teachers, strong teacher training support and smaller class sizes.

Author and educator Alfie Kohn agrees:

> …heterogeneity may be fairer but does not in itself constitute a prescription for effective teaching. In fact, heterogeneity is hard to do well. But the parents of high-scoring students ought to be providing support and respectful pressure for educators to do it better, rather than simply opting out of regular classrooms. "We remove the squeaky wheel, so we never repair the car," remarks Mara Sapon-Shevin. "We need fundamental changes in how we construct pedagogy and curriculum. If we continue to do segregation" – including segregation of the so-called gifted and talented, whom she prefers to designate as the rich and lucky – "we'll never get there."[25]

In our very own Silver Spring International Middle School, under the leadership of Dr. Renee Brimfield, an experiment in detracking was initiated which is now teetering between success and failure due to limited MCPS administration support, high staff turnover and less staff development than is needed   Much can be learned from the SSI experiment. Teachers were working incredibly hard, were aware of supports that needed to be in place, and continued to be very committed to the effort because the vision it offered– both to teachers and parents – for belief in the possibility of success for all students, was so inspiring.

Research can be done, visits can be made, books can be read. (our appendix includes some of them.) Anne Wheelock describes many "detracking" schools and school systems in her book, *Crossing theTracks.* In Louisville, KY, Nyack, NY, Selma, AL, and Denver, CO grassroots movements are working toward solutions to the problem of tracking in their schools." In 1990 the National Governor's Association proposed eliminating ability grouping and tracking as a strategy to help meet the nation's education goals…The NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the Children's

Defense Fund, the ACLU, and the federal Government Accounting Office have all raised ability grouping, gifted programs … as a second-generation segregation issue."[26]

No single solution or pace will work for all schools under all conditions. According to Deborah Meier, former Principal of Central Park East Secondary School and nationally renowned educator:

> What the "system" can do is create the structural conditions that encourage people to want to change and give them sufficient autonomy to do so, and that provide support and encouragement even when they blunder in the course of creating their interpretation of the "good school." But in the end the change must be homegrown.[27]

According to Anne Wheelock,[28] "The stories of untracking schools suggest that certain components are basic to the process of eliminating tracking. They include:

- A clear school mission articulated in terms of the belief that all students can learn and the conviction that schools must play the major role in intellectual development by ensuring equal access to knowledge;
- School-based leadership with teacher and parent support for change;
- A plan for change grounded in research-based practices;
- Ample time for staff development;
- A phase-in process supported by school organizational arrangements; and
- Changes in school routines to create a climate that reflects a commitment to involve all students equally in learning opportunities.

Can untracking hurt?

Many parents of "higher track" students express the fear that changing the "tracking" paradigm will be harmful to their children. Research shows over and over again that this is not the case. According to Anne Wheelock:

> Of the hundreds of research studies conducted on heterogeneous groups, the vast majority concludes that high-achieving students do not lose ground in diverse-ability classes. In almost every case, classroom environment is found to be far more important than student enrollment. When curriculum and instruction are engaging, students of all levels benefit, including the most confident learners.

> These findings apply even to the "top" three percent of students. In a recent study Robert Slavin and Robert Stevens of Johns Hopkins University compared student progress in heterogeneous classes that were using the Cooperative Integrated Reading and composition (CIRC) curriculum with that in homogeneously grouped classes. Students rated among the top 33 percent, one percent, and three to five percent were examined. The result was that, in fact, the reading and writing performance of the heterogeneously grouped students surpassed that of the homogeneously grouped ones at all levels.

> Educators emphasize that attention be paid to these findings. As Jake Burks of Maryland's Harford County Public School District, reminds parents:

> "We need to make educational decisions based on the best knowledge available; we have to have research inform everything we do. I want *all* parents to say, 'Meet my child's needs.' That's their job. But in our job, we're not in the business of educating one group of students. As professionals we're responsible for educating everyone, and there are things that we must not do. That's a moral and professional issue."

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is critical to recognize that there are significant social costs for failing to educate all students to their potential. Students in lower-track classes have few opportunities to develop to their full potential, including academic, social, and leadership skills, which impact their future. By lowering students' academic possibilities, tracking perpetuates existing socio-economic inequalities and "warehousing" of young people and keeps poor students in tracks that often lead to minimum-wage jobs, unemployment, or even prison. Because lower-track students are less likely to receive college guidance to continue their education after high school or even to complete high school, the perpetuation of the so-called "underclass" continues.

> " *Tracking has a detrimental effect on all students, not just the lower tracked ones. Last year in my Advanced Placement English Language class we read several books about racial struggle such as Native Son, I Tituba, and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. We discussed these novels in depth without a single black student in the class. This is just one example of how a more diverse class would lead to better discussions and a superior learning environment for all students.* "
> — 11th Grade Student, MCPS

We must remember that the purpose of public education is more than academic achievement. We live in a democracy and in our democracy live all kinds of people. Perhaps more important than whether or not our children get into Harvard or land partnerships in a law firm is whether they can see – more clearly than our generation – the assets of the child sitting next to them in the school cafeteria. Describing the common schools of the 1880's the court wrote:

"Is it not better for the grand aggregate of human society, as well as for individuals, that all children should mingle together and learn to know each other?... At the common schools, where both sexes and all kinds of children mingle together, we have the great world in miniature; there they may learn human nature in all its phases, with all its emotions, passions, and feelings, its loves and hates, it hopes and fears, its impulses and sensibilities;... but on the other hand, persons by isolation may become strangers even in their own country; and by being strangers, will be of little benefit either to themselves or to society. As a rule, people cannot afford to be ignorant of the society which surrounds them; and as all kinds of people must live together in the same society, it would seem to be better that all should be taught in the same schools."[29]

Alfie Kohn similarly addresses this issue:

"What Garrison Keillor said about school choice proposals could easily be applied to ability grouping and gifted programs: they seem to make sense 'until you stop and think about the old idea of the public school, a place where you went to find out who inhabits this society other than people like you.' The experiences of students who have to struggle for what they have, who take so much less for granted, are not just valid but valuable for their privileged peers to hear. The latter get less than a full education, arguably become less than fully human, when they are segregated for the purposes of purely academic acceleration."[30]

Tracking hurts all our children, including children in the higher tracks. Our classrooms should be microcosms of our world, and when they are not, students in higher tracks are forced to navigate their growing years without the benefit of seeing themselves in the context of the real world. Their classroom and learning experience is deficient and devoid of the rich contributions that every child has to offer. Whether intentional or not, their classroom environment is one that perpetuates race and class stereotypes. And it is through the example of in-class segregation that we falsely teach higher track students that they are better than whole groups of their peers. And worse, we teach them that segregation and race and class biases are not wrong.

Ending tracking, alone, will not right the wrongs of in-school segregation or close the achievement gap. "Untracking schools recognize that changes in the school culture and involvement of parents and the community along with innovations in curriculum, instruction, assessment and counseling are necessary to support new grouping practices." (Anne Wheelock, *Crossing the Tracks*)

Children who have been tracked since first grade will not automatically be ready for calculus in high school because we detrack. They will need double math periods, Saturday school, tutoring or other forms of extra help. A teacher trained in whole group instruction will not automatically learn techniques in differentiated instruction or cooperative learning because we detrack. She/he will need staff development and support from her administration to be successful. Innovative, challenging curricula will not emerge automatically because we detrack. Schools will still need to do the research and piloting of new curricula to see what will work. We will continue to think about and rethink issues related to how to best assess the successes of our young people after we de-track.

However the converse is also true. Exhorting teachers and students to have higher expectations, training teachers, offering students tutoring, Saturday school, and counseling will not achieve the desired effect if students continue to be segregated by so-called "ability" each and every day in the majority of their classes. We will be setting both students and teachers up for continued failure.

Ending tracking requires a change in perspective. It requires us to think of ourselves, our children, our neighbors and our neighbors' children as a community as opposed to a contest of individuals. It requires us to stop believing that some children are better than other children. It forces us to look for the glorious assets that all children are born with and retain, despite the oppressive forces of society that hammer away at some more than others. It requires us to abandon the paradigm that quality education is a scarce commodity and we must fight so that our children and not others children receive it.

While grappling with race and class issues raised by tracking may be uncomfortable for many of us, we are confident that resolving the question of tracking will benefit all MCPS students. We place this issue on the table, expecting the best of our community of Montgomery County. If we expect the best of ourselves, we will rise to the occasion, because expectations become self-fulfilling prophecies.

> *"Young people finding their voice instead of being spoken for is a crucial part of the process. Then and now those designated as serfs are expected to remain paralyzed, unable to take an action and unable to voice a demand – their lives dependent on the goodwill and good works of others. We believe the kind of systemic change necessary to prepare young people for the demands of the twenty-first century requires young people to take the lead in changing it."*
>
> — Bob Moses, *Radical Equations: Math Literacy and Civil Rights*

MCEF PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Montgomery County Education Forum (MCEF) recommends these reforms as opening points of agreement for a deliberate de-tracking effort for Montgomery County Public Schools. All reforms must be policy-based.

1. **Board of Education and Superintendent**
   - Issue a strong policy directive against *all* types of tracking: long-term, persistent, homogeneous grouping programs and practices.

   - Set and meet aggressive de-tracking goals, using as a context the recommendations from MCPS reports on the achievement gap (the 1988 Gordon Report, the 1994 Committee Report on Student Grouping Practices, the 2000 Math Audit).

   - Gather and make public grouping data by race, ethnicity, native and non-native English speakers, and poverty indicators on GT screening and designation, honors, AP, and magnet enrollment.

2. **Action in the Schools at Every Level**
   - **Elementary Schools:** Make the methodologies and high expectations characteristic of "gifted" education available to every single elementary school student in heterogeneously grouped classes from K through 5. Eliminate "GT" designation.

   - **Middle Schools:** Continue a culture of high expectations through a policy of educating every student with teaching that reflects best practices. Expect ability grouping to be fluid with regular reassessment of student skills. Establish pilot programs that provide differentiated learning classrooms with heterogeneous grouping modeled on well-researched methodology.

   - **High Schools: Eliminate** designations of levels in courses with "honors" and "regular" labels in which the curriculum and assessments are the same but students are separated for the sake of separation. Expand the number of honors and AP classes with distinct challenging curriculum; instruct guidance counselors to advocate for every student to choose the most challenging path for them in course selection and career options.

3. **Student Support**
   - Provide **true remediation** (aggressive catch-up) for those who have previously been tracked in low-level classes. Implement research-based mechanisms to support academic success for these students through: Saturday academies, double math periods, tutoring, and smaller class size.

4. **Teacher Support**
   - Provide in-service training to support teachers in the more challenging methodologies required to implement these recommendations. Specifically, provide training for teaching differentiated instruction, teaching in multi-lingual and multi-cultural settings, using student managed instruction strategies, incorporating enrichment activities and creative methods of instruction at all levels. Continue to lower class size so that teachers can work individually with students in heterogeneous settings.

5. **Parent Education and Support**
   - Make sure all parents are informed in writing in language understandable to them and in a timely manner about all programs for which their children may qualify, including descriptions of the programs and testing or other entrance procedures, requirements or criteria – including honors, magnets, AP, and GT as long as these exist.
   - Include parents in all phases of the implementation of the de-tracking plan.

6. **ESOL Student Enrichment**
   - Because students from linguistically diverse backgrounds are found in every classroom, help all teachers, principals, and staff responsible for their educational achievement contribute to the success of all students. Affirm all students' languages, cultures, and experiences as invaluable resources in our schools and communities and assure that students' legal rights to educational equity and opportunity are vigorously enforced.

   - Consider implementing two-way bilingual programs like those that have been successful in Arlington and Washington, D.C.

   - Provide English Language Learners with stimulating curriculum at grade level while implementing best practice program models that have been shown to effectively eliminate the educational gap between native and non-native English-speakers. Mainstream students with grade level academic English skills into regular and high-level classes as soon as appropriate.

   - Provide US-born LEP students with Reading Recovery and other language development and enrichment services, rather than routinely assigning these students to ESOL classes.

   - Implement innovative literacy programs for high school English Language Learners who are under-schooled recent immigrants.

7. **Special Education**
   - Ensure that staff know requirements and criteria for special education referral and is kept abreast of current research affecting this process.

   - Provide training in alternative instruction and materials and in distinguishing the characteristics of a disability from characteristics that reflect cultural differences.

   - Include parents/family members in all stages of the identification process – referral, assessment, and placement of students.

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[14] Alfie Kohn, *Only For My Kid – How Privileged Parents Undermine School Reform,* http://www.alfiekohn.com

[15] Superintendent Paul Vance, Memo to Board of Education on Final Report of Honors/Advanced Placement Work Group, July 13, 1999.

[16] *acceleration* is the speeding up of the pace of learning a sequential set of information or knowledge; *enrichment* is the deepening of understanding within a set of information or knowledge.

[17] *eugenics* is a science that deals with the improvement (as by control of human mating) of hereditary qualities of a race or breed or the production of good offspring; *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary; tenth edition*

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