



What follows is a heartfelt letter to the editor by a white 7th grade student in Stamford, Connecticut. I was told the piece was submitted to the editor of The Advocate, regarding proposed changes in academic tracking. The New York Times picked up the story in a front page NY section. Not addressed in the NYT's article is that upwards of 92% of special education students in special education in Stamford are black and brown students. AA and HA make up approximately 18% of Connecticut citizens, and approximately 45 - 49% of the demographic in Stamford's public schools. In the Cloonan middle school highlighted in The New Times piece below, special education students are in the basement of the school, as they are placed/held in many of America's schools. 86% of Connecticut prisoners are AA and HA.

Please know this 7th grader wrote this piece without any support from his/her parents. For those who are skeptical about how a 7th grade student could write so well, please know he/she did.

Have a great summer,  
Eric Cooper  
[www.nuatc.org](http://www.nuatc.org)

Anonymous  
To the editor:

Recently, I've read many articles in The Advocate on the impending grouping changes in Stamford Public Schools. As a 7th grade student at Cloonan Middle School, I'd like to give my opinion on the matter.

I believe that students of all abilities would benefit from mixed grouping. Before changes come into effect, however, the school system must make sure that all teachers know how to effectively teach mixed-ability classes. This entails learning to cater to the needs of both high and low scoring students.

When students in my class hand in papers late or misbehave, my teacher lectures, "We expect better from zero group kids." This implies that he/she expects worse behavior from lower groups, although grouping is mainly based on test scores. He/she is judging an entire class by their group placement, as many other teachers and kids do, assuming test scores determine ability to learn and behave well. I believe that all students deserve to be given high expectations, and therefore, higher challenges. Seventh graders should have an equal opportunity to be challenged in class, no matter their scores on the CMT's. However, I'm certainly not claiming that all teachers think along unfair lines. Under the direction of a talented educator (and there are many of these in the Stamford Public School System), ability-based grouping can be helpful to all students.

In the current classroom situation, though, I believe low-performing students are constantly neglected. The school district could only pull off a successful middle school reform by assuring that teachers are able to effectively aid high and low achieving students. This means not passing out an easy worksheet to everyone, it means actually teaching a lesson that incorporates group and



individual work. With the proper education of our own educators on this matter, all students can thrive in a new classroom environment.

Diversity is also a major factor in grouping changes. Quoting a New York Times article written about Cloonan Middle School, "Students were largely segregated by race and socioeconomic background, both inside and outside classrooms." This is completely true. Peers tend to socialize after school and in the cafeteria with friends from their own group. This results in few relationships between kids of different race and class. The article also reads, "Black and Hispanic students...make up 46 percent of this year's sixth grade, but are 78% of the twos [referring to grouping] and 7 percent of the zeros." If parents and teachers wish for classes to be more diverse, then mixing groups to create more tolerance between students of different ethnic background is a must.

Education is definitely not just about passing tests. Character and social development is a key aspect of middle school for all students. If classrooms aren't diversified, if kids aren't taught to tolerate peers of different ability, if group work isn't emphasized in the classroom, then the students in our area will get nowhere in life. It seems to me that students' ability to help their fellow students and thrive socially is just as important as reading at a high level. In the right classroom, every student, no matter what their tests scores are, can learn a lot, help each other out, and yes, be challenged, but only if our school districts takes the initiative to make changes in the way our system functions.

-- Name Withheld  
-- Stamford, Connecticut

### [Connecticut School District That Clung to Tracking Is Letting Go ...](#)

**No Longer Letting Scores Separate Pupils.** Christopher Capozziello for The New York Times. Kyle James, legs tucked, and Vincent Walters in a ...June 15, 2009 - By WINNIE HU - Education