brock

international prize in education

2015 Brock International
Prize in Education Nominee

Jeannie Oakes

Nominated by Deirdre Johnson Burel

Jeannie Oakes

Founder of UCLA's Institute of Democracy, Education and Access and UCLA's Center X,

Dr. Oakes has done groundbreaking work to address inequality in education while emphasizing the critical importance of civic virtues and democracy in public education reform. Her work over more than two decades outlines a path for our country as we now grapple with addressing achievement for a new majority-minority public school enrollment. She firmly believes that the most effective reforms must include the voices and realities of the communities it aims to serve. Her research has supported the leadership of community-based organizations in advancing change for minority youth.

The man who wears the shoe knows best that it pinches and where it pinches, even if the expert shoemaker is the best judge of how the trouble is to be remedied.

— John Dewey in 1927

Summary of Qualifications

Jeannie Oakes is a Presidential Professor Emerita in Educational Equity in the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at UCLA. She also was the ***founder and former director of UCLA's Institute for Democracy, Education and Access (IDEA***), former director of the University of California's All Campus Consortium on Research for Diversity (ACCORD), as well as the ***founding director of Center X***. Oakes' research focused on schooling inequalities and followed the progress of educators and activists seeking socially just schools. In November 2008, Oakes left UCLA to join the Ford Foundation as its Director of Education and Scholarship. She is a member of the National Academy of Education. Oakes taught courses in urban school policy and history in the Urban Schooling division of UCLA's Graduate School of Education and Information Studies.

She is the author of 17 scholarly books and monographs and more than 100 published research reports, chapters, and articles. An updated edition of her landmark book, Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality was published in 2005 by Yale University Press. Oakes book (with UCLA colleague John Rogers), Learning Power: Organizing for Education and Justice (Teachers College Press), released in April 2006, reports on students, parents, teachers, and grassroots groups struggling for more socially just schools. Oakes' awards include three major awards from the American Educational Research Association (Early Career Award; Outstanding Research Article; and the 2001 Outstanding Book Award for Becoming Good American Schools: The Struggle for Civic Virtue in Education Reform) and the Lifetime Achievement Award from the California Education Research Association. She is also the recipient of the National Association

for Multicultural Education's Multicultural Research Award, the Jose Vasconcellos World Award in Education, and a Distinguished Achievement Award from the Educational Press Association of America. She is a member of the National Academy of Education.

Education

- Ph.D., University of California, Los Angeles
- M.A., California State University
- B.A., San Diego State University

Selected Publications

Oakes is the author of 17 scholarly books and monographs and more than 100 published research reports, chapters, and articles.

Below is a short sampling of her publications:

- An updated edition of her landmark book, *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality* was published in 2005 by Yale University Press.
- The second edition of Oakes' teacher education textbook *Teaching to Change the World* (McGraw-Hill) was published in 2002.
- Oakes book (with IDEA colleague John Rogers), *Learning Power: Organizing for Education and Justice* (Teachers College Press), released in April 2006, reports on students, parents, teachers, and grassroots groups struggling for more socially just schools.

Keeping Track: Structuring Equality and Inequality in an Era of Accountability
Jeannie Oakes — 2008
The five papers in this volume represent a new generation of tracking research. In this commentary, Oakes reflects on their contributions in light of the twenty years of research and reform since the publication of the first edition of her landmark book, *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality*.

John Dewey Speaks to Brown: Research, Democratic Social Movement Strategies, and the Struggle for Education on Equal Terms
John Rogers & Jeannie Oakes — 2005
On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Brown, we turn to John Dewey to explore what we consider a centerpiece of the struggle to achieve Brown's promise—a revitalized public life that persuades all groups to speak on "equal terms" and compels the powerful to account for what they hear.

Investigating the Claims in Williams v. State of California: An Unconstitutional Denial of Education's Basic Tools?

Jeannie Oakes — 2004

What basic conditions and opportunities do standards-based schooling reforms require? To what extent do students currently have access to these resources and conditions? How does the distribution of these basic educational tools interweave with students' race, language proficiency, and poverty status? To what extent do state policies (including high-stakes, test-based accountability systems) ensure that all students have adequate and equitable opportunities to learn what a standards-based educational system demands of them? What kind of data is available to answer these questions, to whom are data available, and what data are lacking?

Education's Most Basic Tools: Access to Textbooks and Instructional Materials in California's Public Schools

Jeannie Oakes & Marisa Saunders — 2004

This article addresses critical issues regarding students' access to textbooks, curriculum materials, equipment, and technology. Using California as a case, it reviews the importance of these instructional materials to education, generally, and in the context of current standards-based education policies.

Detracking: The Social Construction of Ability, Cultural Politics, and Resistance to Reform

Jeannie Oakes, Amy Stuart Wells, Makeba Jones & Amanda Datnow — 1997

This article presents results from a three-year longitudinal case study of ten racially and socioeconomically mixed secondary schools participating in detracking reform. We connect prevailing norms about race and social class that inform educators' parents' and students' conceptions of intelligence, ability, and giftedness with the local political context of detracking.

Two Cities' Tracking and Within-School Segregation

Jeannie Oakes — 1995

Evidence from two school systems whose ability grouping and tracking systems were scrutinized in 1993 in conjunction with school desegregation cases demonstrates how grouping practices can create within-school segregation that discriminates against black and Latino students. In both cases, grouping practices created a cycle of restricted opportunities and diminished outcomes.

Collaborative Inquiry: A Congenial Paradigm in a Cantankerous World

Jeannie Oakes, Sharon E. Hare & Kenneth A. Sirotnik — 1986

This article illustrates the contradictions between the collaborative paradigm and the real world by analyzing a recent experience in a collaborative curriculum inquiry.

Tracking and Ability Grouping in American Schools: Some Constitutional Questions

Jeannie Oakes — 1983

The purpose of this article is to examine, from a constitutional perspective, the bases on which ability grouping and tracking might be challenged as barriers to equal educational opportunity. Findings from educational research on ability grouping, commentary from law review journals, and the texts of cases themselves are included as a part of this inquiry into the direction such legal challenges might take.

Awards

Oakes' awards include three major awards from the American Educational Research Association:

- Early Career Award
- Outstanding Research Article
- and the 2001 Outstanding Book Award for *Becoming Good American Schools: The Struggle for Civic Virtue in Education Reform*

Additional awards include:

- The Lifetime Achievement Award from the California Education Research Association
- The National Association for Multicultural Education's Multicultural Research Award
- The Jose Vasconcellos World Award in Education
- A Distinguished Achievement Award from the Educational Press Association of America

Mission, Background and Impact of UCLA's Center X

Center X Roots

A brief history of Center X and its work to transform public schooling

Our center is called Center X to capture both the intersection of research and practice as well as our roots as an activist community. First conceived in 1992 as a result of the upheaval and self-examination stemming from Los Angeles' Rodney King verdict uprisings, Center X strives to challenge the status quo that perpetuates inequity and poor educational practice. As a community, we are working to enact our ideals—"making the rhetoric real," as the center's founder Jeannie Oakes framed our effort in 1996. We believe that transformative work must tackle head on the deep social inequalities manifest in schools as gaps in educational opportunities and achievement. We do not believe that these gaps or inequities will be solved by schools alone, yet we remain committed to public schooling as one of the best democratic spaces for working to become a better, more just society.

Our Community

Over the past 15 years our center at UCLA has grown into a community of more than 100 educators working across multiple programs: two graduate credential programs, Teacher Education Program (TEP) and Principal Leadership Institute (PLI), and many professional development initiatives.

Together, we work to transform public schooling to create a more just, equitable, and humane society. We believe that this work is an enduring feature of our democracy and that it occurs within and across multiple communities—of teachers, students, parents, community members, elected officials, researchers and others engaged in democratic life. Together, these communities transform public schooling through inquiry and change, by asking questions and solving problems, fueled by passionate resolve and persistent effort.

Education in Troubled Times

In 1993, when the University of California's Advisory Committee on Professional Education released *Education in Troubled Times: A Call to Action,* Center X emerged as the response of UCLA's Graduate School of Education and Information Studies (GSE&IS). The report emphasized the inequitable circumstances reflected in American public schools and stated:

Changes within the cultures of all our educational institutions are required. Any effort to transform teacher education and reform urban schools must also transform the relationship between the university and the schools and make fundamental changes in the culture of the university itself.

As a result of the report, the GSE&IS focus changed—guided by principles of social justice—to serve and collaborate with the lowest-resourced and underserved schools in the Los Angeles community, specifically East Los Angeles, Pico Union downtown area, South Los Angeles, and the Crenshaw District.

Teacher Education Program

UCLA
Teacher Education Program
Teach. Transform. Inspire.

Combining research-based, culturally responsive curricula with focused efforts on recruiting teachers of color, Center X's Teacher Education Program (TEP) began in 1994 as an intensive two-year program leading to state certification and a master's degree. In their first "novice" year, teacher candidates engage in coursework and student teaching. The next "resident" year consists of full-time classroom teaching in a partnership high-poverty urban school, supported by a faculty advisor, and the completion of a master's inquiry project. In 1999, we expanded the program to include an intern-based credential for teachers currently working in schools. To date, Center X's Teacher Education Programs have prepared more than 1,500 teachers for placements in Los Angeles' hardest to staff urban schools.

Principal Leadership Institute

UCLA
Principal Leadership Institute
Leading for Justice

In 2000, the Principal Leadership Institute (PLI) at UCLA and UC Berkeley was chartered by the Governor of California to "make a contribution towards positive change in urban schools in need of improvement…and instill in participants the motivation to withstand pressure and make a difference." Now in its fourteenth year, PLI is refocusing and deepening its responsibility for urban school transformation—preparing aspiring principals to be change agents within urban school districts. Specifically, UCLA's PLI prepares educators to be social justice leaders who advocate for quality learning opportunities, improve teaching and learning, promote educational achievement for all students, create democratic and culturally-responsive learning environments, and build partnerships with parents and community groups. PLI students engage in 15 months of course work and field-based learning experiences, culminating in a master's project that demonstrates candidates' competency to be transformative instructional leaders. To date, PLI has prepared more than 400 social justice leaders.

Professional Development & Partnerships

Center X also engages thousands of practicing and accomplished educators through a portfolio of professional development opportunities, including five California Subject Matter Projects (Writing, Reading and Literature, Mathematics, Science, and History-Geography), the Computer Science Project, the UCLA Parent Project, and a National Boards Project, supporting educators pursuing National Board Certification. Since its founding the center's professional development work has developed district partnerships to support teachers serving the lowest achieving students. These partnerships are not just about providing teachers with professional development; they are about working with the district, school administrators, teachers, parents and students to develop a rigorous and caring college-going culture—one focused on learning high-level knowledge and skills and developing students' identities as readers, writers, mathematicians, scientists and so on. Given the intensity of this work, the Center engages with a small number of local low-performing districts to leverage change. We work across content domains in professional development with teachers while placing our TEP and PLI candidates in these same schools. We continue this work with urban schools to create rich opportunities for student learning.

Mission and History of UCLA's Institute of Democracy Education and Access (IDEA)

UCLA's Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access (IDEA) is a research institute seeking to understand and challenge pervasive racial and social class inequalities in education. In addition to conducting independent research and policy analysis, IDEA supports educators, public officials, advocates, community activists, and young people as they design, conduct, and use research to make high-quality public schools and successful college participation routine occurrences in all communities. IDEA also studies how research combines with strategic communications and public engagement to promote widespread participation in civic life.

Jeannie Oakes & John Rogers founded UCLA's Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access (IDEA) in 2000 with the goal of using UCLA's research capacity and commitment to confront what may be the most pressing public issue in Los Angeles and in California today: bringing neighbors together across the many communities of Los Angeles to address the critical problems of public education. IDEA faculty, postdoctoral scholars, staff, and graduate students partner with young people, parents, teachers, and grassroots organizations to conduct research on the conditions of education and the challenges to educational change.

IDEA provides data and analyses in response to specific questions posed by the people who are most directly affected by schooling—students and their parents. To make these data and analyses useful, IDEA shares its knowledge of research methods and facilitates connections among members of grassroots organizations, media professionals, researchers, and policy makers. IDEA's research has focused on such varied topics as 1) equity litigation seeking to provide prepared teachers and adequate facilities, resources, and learning opportunities to schools serving disadvantaged students; 2) the impact of school resources, structure and culture on the school success and college access of African American and Latino/a students; 3) activities through which parents and community members hold the education system accountable for ensuring the quality and equity; 4) supports for urban teachers seeking to become leaders of reform networks, developers of community-based urban curriculum; advocates for students; and organizers of teacher-community reform alliances; and 5) efforts to increase college access, retention, and success of low-income students of color; 6) the role of youth research in developing academic and civic skills and shaping public policy.

A Tribute to Jeannie Oakes (by her co-founder)

The following is a transcript of a speech delivered by John Rogers on October 8, 2008 at a community tribute for Jeannie Oakes at Edward R. Roybal Learning Center in Los Angeles.

It has been my great privilege to work alongside Jeannie over the past 13 years, first at Center X and, since 2000, at UCLA's IDEA.

A couple weeks ago, Sandy Mendoza asked me to take five minutes to summarize Jeannie's scholarship on social justice and education. Let me tell you, this is no easy task. Jeannie has written more than a hundred articles and more than a dozen books exploring the themes of democracy and equality in American schools. Google "Jeannie Oakes" and you get 17,000 hits, with 905 hits on google scholar alone.

Rather than trying to do justice to this whole body of work, I'd like to share an image that calls to mind Jeannie's scholarly project.

When you walk into our conference room at UCLA IDEA the first thing you see is a mural designed by Nery Orellana and painted by our staff. The centerpiece of the mural is a picture of the great civil rights organizer Ella Baker. And there is this quote from Ella Baker: "Strong people don't need strong leaders."

Baker's vision speaks to three themes that are central to Jeannie's work.

- First, there is a deep belief in the intellectual capacity of all community members. We don't need to create a hierarchy of those who lead and those who follow. We should not conceive of some people as thinkers and others as workers. This, in essence, is the idea of Jeannie's first book, *Keeping Track*. *Keeping Track* highlighted the faulty logic of separating students by their perceived ability and exposed the ways that this logic has too often been used to maintain racial and class hierarchy. The book has been printed so many times in so many languages that it has become a classic. In 1999, *Keeping Track* was named one of the 100 most important books in education from the 20th century.
- A second theme that falls out of Baker's vision is the social character of learning. We don't need strong leaders to tell us what to do because we can learn so much from each other. Jeannie's scholarship on teacher education illuminates this approach to learning. Her highly influential textbook calls on teachers to use socio-cultural learning theory to "change the world." And anyone who has worked with Jeannie has seen this ideal in action. She thrives in settings that encourage give and take. Whether she is working with a team of researchers or joining community members working on reform, Jeannie always looks to learn from others. She is never the expert from on high, but rather the colleague and partner trying to figure things out together.
- Finally, Ella Baker's statement speaks to the power of organized people. Baker's problem with charismatic leaders was that they were too easy a target for enemies. The forces sustaining Jim Crow could kill off or buy off any one leader. But, if people become

> informed and organized, they represent an undeniable force for justice. Jeannie was one of the first educational researchers to understand this critical point. When others researched and partnered with superintendents and mayors, Jeannie studied and joined forces with community organizers. Her scholarship has documented the essential importance of social movement activism to equity reform in education. And through her partnerships with grassroots community groups, she has supported and helped sustain this activism.

Since Jeannie made her announcement a few weeks ago, many friends and colleagues have come up to me concerned that the work of building a scholarly community committed to educational justice would wane now that Jeannie will no longer be with us at IDEA or in LA. But they did not understand how fully Jeannie has embraced Ella Baker's vision. Jeannie Oakes has consistently rejected charismatic leadership in favor of helping the people around her become stronger. It is this legacy at UCLA, in the community, and in LA's schools that will fuel the movement for high quality, equitable schooling in the years ahead.

A Community Tribute in video
Impact of her work at IDEA

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zsUT2TWQEs

A Lasting Imprint: Dr. Oakes Recent Appointments

For Immediate Release
March 14, 2014
Contact:
Tony Pals, tpals@aera.net
office: (202) 238-3235
cell: (202) 288-9333
Bridget Jameson, bjameson@aera.net
office: (202) 238-3233

Jeannie Oakes Voted AERA President-Elect;
Other Key Members Elected to AERA Council

WASHINGTON, D.C., March 14, 2015—Jeannie Oakes, director of the Ford Foundation's programs in Educational Equity and Scholarship, has been voted president-elect of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). Her term as president begins at the conclusion of AERA's 2015 Annual Meeting. She will serve as president during AERA's centennial year, following one year of service as president-elect.

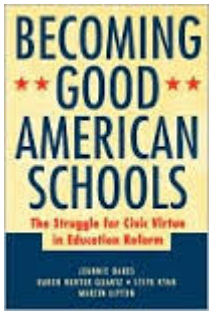
Oakes is also Presidential Professor Emeritus in Educational Equity at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), where she founded the Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access; UC's All Campus Consortium on Research for Diversity; and Center X's urban teacher education program.

Oakes's scholarship examines the effect of social policies on the education of low-income students of color and investigates equity-minded reform. Her *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality* was named one of the 20th century's "most influential" education books, and *Becoming Good American Schools: The Struggle for Civic Virtue in Education Reform* won AERA's Outstanding Book Award.

She also holds AERA's Early Career, Palmer O. Johnson Memorial, and Social Justice in Education Research Awards, and has given five distinguished AERA lectures. Oakes is a Fellow of AERA. Her previous AERA service includes Council member-at-large; Early Career Award and Professional Development Committee chairs; and other committee and editorial board memberships.

Oakes's other honors include the California Educational Research Association's Lifetime Achievement Award, the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education's Margaret Lindsey Research Award, the National Association for Multicultural Education's Multicultural Research Award, the Educational Press Association's Distinguished Achievement Award, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference's Public Service Award. She is a member of the National Academy of Education. Oakes has a Ph.D. in education from UCLA.

She will succeed Joyce E. King, the Benjamin E. Mays Endowed Chair of Urban Teaching, Learning and Leadership at Georgia State University. King will assume the AERA presidency on April 8, 2014, after the close of the association's 2014 Annual Meeting in Philadelphia.



AUTHOR: JEANNIE OAKES, KAREN HUNTER QUARTZ, STEVE RYAN, AND MARTIN LIPTON

TITLE: Becoming Good American Schools: The Struggle for Civic Virtue in Education Reform

SOURCE: Phi Delta Kappan 81 no8 568-75 Ap 2000

SARAH Chatsworth did not expect to become a martyr. Ben McCall did not set out to be a hero. Fred Antouli did not think his tendency to be a renegade would become his leadership "style." Then these three principals became entangled in school reform. Now, some 10 years later, Sarah has been fired, Ben has attained national recognition and has a fine new job, and Fred continues to battle convention and bureaucracy on behalf of his students. We can learn much from their efforts to transform their schools.

Sarah, Fred, and Ben are three of the 16 principals we came to know in our nearly decade-long study of school reform. Like most of the other educators, policy makers, community members, and parents we met in the course of that study, these three found very compelling a vision of school reform that emphasizes the public good and aims to make schools effective in more than the narrow sense of raising students' achievement scores. This vision led them and the teachers at their schools to craft new structures and practices that were intended to make their schools deeply educative, socially just, caring, and participatory. Their efforts proved enormously difficult, their successes only partial. Together, the experiences of these schools raise questions that lie at the core of America's efforts to reform its public schools.

* Why and how do schools struggle for both civic virtue and individual freedom in our complex multicultural society?
* How do schools make sense of contradictions inherent in their reforms?
* How does this sense-making process affect implementation?
* How might education policies better address the cultural and political forces that shape and constrain school improvement?

The confrontations of Sarah, Fred, and Ben with these reform questions illuminate the considerable achievements and painful setbacks that we saw in most of the 16 schools we studied. With these questions, we sought to understand what contemporary reform reveals about our culture's ongoing struggle for goodness in its public schools and in children's lives. And although the lessons we have learned may not smooth the reform path, they certainly point out many treacherous spots along the way.

The 16 schools we studied were engaged in a particular reform -- the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development's middle-grades reform effort as outlined in Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century. However, the challenges they faced are not unique either to the schools implementing Turning Points reform or to the middle grades. Echoing the principles of most large-scale reform initiatives, Turning Points seeks to create community-like schools that foster meaningful engagement with ideas, as well as with caring people, diverse environments, and democratic processes. The eight primary recommendations for reform proposed by Turning Points are:

* creating small, respectful communities for learning,
* teaching a core of academic knowledge,
* ensuring success for all students,
* empowering teachers and administrators,
* preparing teachers for the middle grades,
* fostering young adolescents' health and fitness,
* reengaging families in the education of young adolescents, and
* connecting schools with communities.

Many of these hallmarks of Turning Points reform are reminiscent of John Dewey's thinking about schools and take from Dewey his strong sense that democratic principles must guide the reform process as well as its ends. But in our study, we found that such an agenda invariably aroused fundamental contradictions in an American culture that embraces democratic ends for its schools but resists the democratic means from which the ends cannot be separated.

The cultural and political contradictions we saw threatened such reform at every turn. Turning Points reforms enticed many educators and local and state policy makers toward civic virtue -- that is, in the direction of policies and practices that characterize the public good as embodied in a citizenry that can come together across differences and solve common problems in a democratic sphere. But these reformers were blindsided by the contested meanings of the common, public good.

Many Americans -- typically the most advantaged and powerful -- take the common good to mean an aggregate of the actions of self-interested individuals who are free to be guided by such marketplace values as competition and the accumulation of social and material resources. For them, school reform would bring quite different policies and practices -- specifically, ones that allow individuals to exercise their preferences, maximize their private and unequal resources, and compete effectively. So, although the goals of reforms often met with initial agreement, the harmony soon dissipated amid suspicion that enacting the means of reform would help some and would diminish the schooling benefits of others.

These contradictions make especially clear the limits of technical and rational approaches to framing and implementing school reform policies. Reforms that were meant to advance civic virtue galvanized interest, pressure, and some support, but they barely touched (and often provoked resistance from) powerful cultural and political opponents. Because the prevailing reform rhetoric and strategies were largely silent with regard to the cultural and political dimensions of the changes they sought, few educators and fewer members of the community had opportunities to learn how to engage in the broad social struggle that genuine reform entails.

Thankfully, the frustrating experiences of these schools also bring us important insights about how educators and communities that are committed to fostering public virtue can create better American schools. We found remarkable changes in schools -- and some equally remarkable student responses to them -- that resulted from the efforts of reform leaders and communities to

infuse into daily practice (in American revolutionary John Adams' words) "a positive passion for the public good." Developing such positive passion, it turned out, was usually painful, often exhilarating, and always critical. These schools offer the steady reminder that fundamental school reform is an essentially human process whereby teachers, administrators, students, parents, and community members come together to think respectfully but critically about what they value.

THREE SCHOOLS TACKLE AN AMBITIOUS AGENDA

In 1989, Sarah Chatsworth won the principalship of affluent, white Verbena Middle School, largely because of her reputation in Vermont as a "futurist" and an expert on middle schools. Her hiring fit Verbena's proud tradition of staying at the forefront of progressive schooling. Built in 1967 as an "open" school, Verbena's classrooms have only three walls and open onto common hallways that converge in the school's unwalled library. Over the years, most of the school had gradually shifted toward a more structured approach. However, the school's 20-year-old alternative program, called the Logos Team, still set the standard for progressive middle-grades education in the state. Verbena's 300 students are among the state's very highest achievers.

Ben McCall couldn't be more different from Chatsworth. A former English teacher, McCall did not see himself as a cutting-edge reformer; he stayed in middle schools simply because he loved the life. He was a passionate advocate for kids as well as the funniest man in the world -- sitting caged inside a rented dunking machine to earn quarters at school fund-raisers. He was the coolest principal ever when he took off on his motorcycle trip across the Midwest each summer. McCall had been principal of all-white Inland Junior High, serving three prosperous Illinois suburban towns, when, at the end of the 1980s, shrinking enrollments and a fiscal crisis forced Inland to merge with West Junior High. West served the sprawling district's African American neighborhoods. That these families were largely middle class did little to quell white fears. Even in the mid-1990s, some whites called the West neighborhoods "the ghetto" and warned visitors not to drive there. In the white neighborhoods, a volunteer group (whose members called it a "neighborhood watch," while others called it a "vigilante group") patrolled the neighborhoods on the lookout for "troublemakers," and some educators worried about "crack babies" in the schools. McCall's task was to create a new school for 700 seventh- and eighth-graders in a dilapidated and overcrowded building, where black youngsters and white youngsters would come together for the first time.

Fred Antouli, a scrappy former coach, is the longtime principal at James Madison Middle School in Massachusetts. Madison was built in the 1920s to serve both affluent white and blue-collar "ethnic" families. By the mid-1980s it served students from low-income neighborhoods, public housing, and temporary homeless shelters near the school. About half of the students were of color, and a third had first languages other than English. In spring 1987, Madison became the city's first magnet junior high school. However, its reputation as the site of a rape and a shooting kept white families away. That same year, the school gave 590 suspensions to its 575 students, attendance hovered around 67%, and teachers averaged nine sick days. One teacher put it bluntly, "Nobody was coming to school. Teachers weren't coming. Kids weren't coming, and when kids got there, they were getting thrown out." Antouli's task was to bring a "burning building" under control.

Verbena, Inland, and Madison were among the first schools to participate in their states' reform projects, funded by the Middle Grades Schools State Policy Initiative of the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The initiative aimed at fundamentally transforming middle-grades schools in line with the reforms outlined in Carnegie's Turning Points.

Sarah Chatsworth set the reform ball rolling at Verbena in 1991. Using the school's Logos Team as a model, she and the highly skilled faculty reorganized all students and teachers into heterogeneously grouped, multi-age teams and developed integrated curricula, portfolio assessments, and advisory groups. They sought to combine high expectations with a nontraditional structure and child-centered teaching to create a rich educative environment.

Ben McCall launched Inland's reform by attacking the school's system of tracking students into separate classes -- a system that depended on highly questionable judgments of students' abilities and resulted in considerable racial segregation. With five tracks in math, three in language arts, and two in reading, the school's structure was so rigid that students rarely mixed for such untracked subjects as foreign language, science, and social studies. Because McCall required that all teachers teach some low-level classes, most were eager to eliminate them. Politically, the change also made sense since, in his words, "The bottom has very little political clout, and you're cutting them loose. It's like you set these kids free."

Nevertheless, McCall moved carefully. One teacher recalled that, as students moved out of the low-level classes and into regular classes, McCall was "smart enough not to let us know who they were." At the end of the first grading period, teachers were told the identity of the former "basic" kids. There was surprise that most of the students were doing quite well. By the early 1990s, McCall and the Inland faculty were well on the way with detracking, and they had reorganized the school into teams. Teachers began using cooperative learning, interdisciplinary curricula, and portfolio assessment. They researched and taught one another about learning styles and multiple intelligences; many brought multicultural content into classrooms.

Fred Antouli targeted both physical and educational deterioration at 70-year-old Madison. He hired 80 students to spend one summer painting the school, and he pressed the art teacher to frame the front door of the three-story brick building with "Welcome to Our School" in more than a dozen languages. She and her students painted the interior walls with dramatic murals; they created a huge, colorful map of the world on the pavement of the interior courtyard (Madison's only outdoor space). The faculty adopted teaming, block scheduling, and mixed-ability grouping. They mainstreamed 80% of the school's special education and bilingual students onto "regular" teams. Each team controlled its own schedule, met during common planning time, and in most cases engaged students in long-term interdisciplinary units, some of which led to extensive community service projects.

STRUGGLING FOR CIVIC VIRTUE

High academic achievement and a safe, orderly campus were important reform objectives for all three principals and their staffs. At Verbena and Inland, Chatsworth, McCall, and their faculties understood the unspoken agreement that high achievement test scores were a prerequisite to pushing ahead with reform and that reform would be allowed to continue only as long as scores remained high. Like many affluent Americans, Verbena parents demanded evidence of high test scores to help them feel confident that their children would gain entry to the best colleges and follow their family's path to high incomes and status. One Verbena school board member shared what he saw as the prevailing parental attitude: "I want mine in the top 5%, and if you give me a standardized test, I can pump the scores. I know how to work the system. My parents did it for me, and I will have my kid in Stanford." For these parents, working the system meant ensuring their children's competitive edge within a familiar structure of test-driven instruction.

Inland's affluent white families were not so different. Maintaining solid test scores was essential in reducing community and district suspicions that the school's nontraditional practices

would lower performance. McCall and his faculty also knew that Inland was being watched closely by its racially charged community to make sure that the new, student-centered way of doing things didn't breed unruliness or worse. "We gotta get the test scores up; gotta get those test scores up" was McCall's refrain.

For Antouli and his Madison Middle School faculty, safety was the most pressing community concern. Test scores had been so low for so long that there was little to lose with reform.

STRUGGLING TO EDUCATE

Each school had its core of tradition-minded faculty members who favored approaches that matched their images of middle-schoolers as large elementary students who needed developmentally appropriate, fun, and engaging instruction in basic facts and simple skills. Each school also had another group of faculty members who saw their students as miniature high school and college scholars who needed highly structured instruction in the academic disciplines. Teachers who were firmly committed to one of these camps generally resisted not only the other camp but middle-grades reforms as well.

However, each of the three schools also had faculty members who recognized the powerful capacity of middle-schoolers to respond to an educative learning environment guided by a vision of civic virtue. These teachers welcomed reform suggestions that young adolescents could become lifelong members of democratic communities of problem solvers. In some cases, college coursework and staff development workshops had primed these teachers to be receptive to the reforms. Often, their own years of experience convinced them that conventional transmission teaching (lively or dull) that sequenced bits and pieces of content did not work well with their students. Some of these teachers had developed independently an educative approach to teaching and learning that was engaging and fun even as it challenged students to delve deeply and reflectively into significant problems that crossed traditional disciplinary lines. This group of faculty members took readily to Turning Points and to the prospect that the educative practices they valued might become part of the teaching and learning culture -- the mainstream -- at their school.

At Verbena, for example, Chatsworth and the faculty worked to create and sustain classrooms in which students learned together across ages, skill levels, and subjects. They integrated curricula around themes, often including students in the planning. For example, the theme of origins grew from students' own questions about themselves, the world, and the nature and relevance of history and science. Activities within the theme included questions concerning the creation of the universe, life on Earth, civilization, and more. The teachers often found themselves teaching together and making relevant links between their particular subject specialties and other disciplines. The math department adopted Math in the Mind's Eye, a curriculum that asks students to approach mathematics as a way of looking at and functioning in the world, instead of as a paper-and-pencil skill learned in school. Day-to-day instruction became rooted in active learning strategies, and some teachers encouraged students to share responsibility for their own and the class's curriculum and activities. Revealing her profound conversion to participatory engagement in learning, one teacher told us, "It's really important that ... we are no longer [exclusively] the disseminators of knowledge."

STRUGGLING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

The three schools also strove to be places where difference was not seen as a problem or an abnormality to be managed. As at most of the 16 schools we studied, many faculty members were solidly committed to the principles of racial equality and fairness, and they struggled with

discrimination, inequality, and injustice. Not surprisingly, these were also schools that showed concern for gender fairness, and they questioned and challenged many of the commonly accepted "limits" that schools place on special education students. They tried to change their curricula and structures to expand access, provide extra support when needed, and improve relations among diverse groups of adults and children.

For example, McCall and Inland's faculty attacked the racial issues at the school head-on. This is partly why they pushed so hard on detracking. Community hostility was acute, and the principal worried about riots. Together, he and his newly merged faculty established a program called From Neighbors to Friends that consisted of a series of informal social gatherings, games, and trust-building activities to engender a close community of diversity. Moms -- black and white -- became a familiar part of the school landscape. Inland didn't hide its conception of a good school as a socially just place. As McCall put it, "That's one of the things I've learned: if you believe it, write it down and put it on the wall ... in the johns." (Signs throughout the school now proclaim that "different is not deficient.") He wanted to rid the school of what he called an arrogant belief that some students' capabilities are limited: "All kids have great potential. Who the hell are we to decide who gets access to what learning?" McCall and the Inland teachers believed that their struggle went beyond ensuring the civil rights of low-income and racial-minority students. As McCall explained, they were also fighting for the betterment of themselves as individuals and society in general: "The struggle is not about blacks; it's about us. It's about what we as humanity will do to each other and will tolerate. That's why I get passionate about this stuff; I get excited about this stuff. This is where it's at."

STRUGGLING TO CARE

Verbena, Inland, and Madison also tried to build close connections among educators, children, parents, and the neighborhood. They attempted to make the schools themselves communities that students belong to and help sustain. They worked hard to provide for many of their students' social and health needs and to make their schools safer and more welcoming.

Madison's compassionate adults, for instance, expended enormous energy providing social support to students and their families, much like the settlement house schools of a century ago. They developed before- and after-school recreation programs and a full-scale, subsidized breakfast and lunch program. Madison's nurse counseled students about "social problems that they don't tell you about right away," including their parents' drug and alcohol problems and their own neglect. She referred students for pregnancy testing and to mental health agencies. Madison faculty members and the probation department often joined forces to work with those in legal trouble.

Fred Antouli also forged personal ties with his school's minority neighborhood. Home visits had fundamentally altered his view of students' lives, and he encouraged teachers to follow his example. Many did. According to Antouli: "It's not the best neighborhood, but it's not the worst either. It's what you make it. I go outside. I walk the streets. I walk the streets on Saturdays and Sundays and stuff like that, just so people know who you are around the streets. I think people look at strangers, and they say, 'What's he doing here?' But if they see someone they know...."

On weekends, Antouli worked with the Community Minority Cultural Center, a 25-year-old group of African Americans and Hispanics. Madison provided Saturday programs at the center, where some teachers volunteer and many Madison students participate. Antouli also initiated an annual free spaghetti dinner (with himself as cook) to entice reluctant parents into the building; after three years, he was serving more than 750 attendees at his annual dinner. He was proudest

of his efforts to create a welcoming, accepting, and responsive community that was increasingly tolerant of racial, ethnic, and language differences.

STRUGGLING TO PARTICIPATE

The schools also worked to make decisions democratically. Chatsworth convened a "transformation" study group of 25 community members, teachers, and administrators, paying much attention to developing a process through which difficult school and social issues could be discussed openly. Working with the Verbena teachers was pretty straightforward -- at least in the beginning. Unlike teachers who make trying anything new a battle, most of these teachers viewed the sweeping reform effort in their school as part of their professional duty. As Chatsworth told us, "They may be busy, they may be frenetic, they may be tired, they may not want any more on their plates right now, but they are not resistant to change." She engaged the transformation study group in reading and talking about research, including the literature on corporate change. She used change ideas familiar in the business world. She hired a high-priced corporate consultant to help the community and the faculty understand how to "shift paradigms and embrace transformation."

McCall's relentless and inspirational energy galvanized the Inland faculty, and many teachers eagerly discussed and debated the school's mission. Because everyone saw him as a regular guy whose rhetoric came from the heart, he could challenge people and even make them nervous without alienating them. He set up regular Friday morning breakfasts at which the teams of teachers took turns hosting one another and having fun. Most important, he used these breakfast sessions to engage faculty members in talking seriously, if informally, about their efforts to change. His theory? "You want to change the school? Change the norms. Change the group norm. Get people infected with the disease that you want them to have." He worked to win parents over and succeeded with many -- through tireless, face-to-face contact. He took every opportunity for dialogue about how they could, together, create a community that reflected a passion for all of Inland's students.

In contrast to Chatsworth and McCall, Antouli realized that a deliberative process wasn't a good match with his impatient and abrasive style, although he knew that a participatory process was necessary. So he named well-liked home economics teacher Rose Athens (who'd grown up in the neighborhood and had attended the school) to lead the reform process within the building. After spending a year examining Madison's problems, seeking best practices, visiting model programs, and selecting a school theme, Athens and her team of teachers recommended housing students and teachers in small clusters and emphasizing communication arts. Meanwhile, Antouli accompanied a social worker on her rounds to students' homes to solicit parents' help with attendance and discipline. He says that parents "got sick of my face." Although his car was stolen repeatedly and he was shocked by what he saw, the visits energized him.

RESISTANCE FROM INSIDE AND OUT

So much in the culture of these schools and their districts worked against reform. The three schools had to respond to a glaring spotlight of local public attention, district office skepticism, and jealousy from other building administrators. Sometimes, even those who were at the core of the reform -- in the state projects, for example -- could act in ways that slowed or obstructed the reform. Policies, technical support, and resources frequently carried unanticipated and unhelpful consequences. Nevertheless, the schools did not shrink from pressure to demonstrate that reform works.

In various ways, each school provided this proof. Verbena's already high test scores held

steady. Inland's early years brought minor ups and downs in test scores and considerable and painful political fallout. But, happily, the building stayed calm. Finally, in the 1994-95 school year and again in 1996-97, Inland showed clear achievement gains in writing, math, reading, and science. For two years running, all the eighth-graders passed the admissions test for college-prep mathematics at the senior high school. At Madison, both teacher and student attendance increased dramatically -- among students, to about 95% -- and student behavior showed amazing improvement. By 1994, test scores had reached the state's average.

In the end, however, even the very proof that was demanded by those outside the school wasn't enough. Despite all her efforts to craft a reform process that would include the members of her vocal, upper-middle-class community, Sarah Chatsworth became the target of angry parents. Many, it turned out, considered the much-acclaimed Logos Team a hippie-era leftover, rather than a reasonable approach for their children. They formed the Group for Educational Accountability, and, in a most uncollaborative move, presented a widely signed petition to the board of education demanding that Verbena return to a basic curriculum and traditional teaching. Some parents demanded that specific books be read, and others prescribed specific amounts of time for certain lessons. The innovative Math in the Mind's Eye curriculum became a lightning rod for a group of fathers -- many with degrees in science and engineering -- who blasted the program as failing to prepare their children for the rigors of the university. One former student, now attending an elite college, wrote to the local paper, blaming his middle-school experience and Chatsworth for his being only an average math student in his college class. One school board member summed up the attack: "These people are out for blood. I mean, they're with the 'I pay your salary' stuff." With all the uproar, teachers began to feel that Chatsworth might have pushed "too fast, too much, too soon," eroding their professionalism rather than enhancing it.

Ben McCall confronted extraordinary nervousness from Inland's district office. He was sure that the superintendent wished he would just go away. The superintendent, fresh from a district that had experienced dramatic white flight, badgered McCall about changing practices in ways that might make families uncomfortable. For example, he balked when Inland adopted a grading scale that differed from the one used in the elementary schools, and he complained that the faculty didn't have a traditional homework policy. When the school took a slight dip in its scores on the "study skills" subtest of the state exam, the superintendent threatened to undo many of the changes at Inland. Not surprisingly, the superintendent's nervousness did little to assuage community fears that racial diversity at the school had brought a decline in academic standards. It also encouraged a political environment in which other district administrators cast McCall as a self-aggrandizing showman.

Fred Antouli and his faculty were bitterly disappointed that Madison didn't shake its image locally as a burning building or battleground. Even after receiving a stream of visitors from other schools and recognition from the governor, Antouli lamented, "People -- from the superintendent to the school community -- are ignorant of what has been happening here, and that is kind of sad." Few of Madison's graduates gained entrance to the city's academic high schools. Antouli also became embroiled in controversy over bilingual education. He had integrated language-minority students -- along with their bilingual teachers -- into the regular teams because he felt that the social isolation of Spanish-speaking students kept them from learning English and exacerbated behavior, attendance, and achievement problems. With characteristic impatience, he dismissed Latino community activists' concerns as "absurd." That dismissal led the activists to file a complaint with the state department of education. The ensuing controversy jeopardized the entire reform and eroded the hard-won neighborhood support for the school.

Serious resistance of another type came from inside the Madison building. As hard as the school struggled to be caring, many faculty members couldn't let go of their harsh judgments about students' families and potential. One told us, "With teachers only being able to go so far, and with some of the backgrounds [students] have, they will just not go the distance."

COMPROMISE

In the face of this considerable resistance from both outside and within their schools, Chatsworth, McCall, and Antouli made compromises that stalled their reforms and left the schools "only part way there." Chatsworth gave in to parent demands for more traditional curricula and instruction by creating a traditional team that avoided such progressive practices as active learning, integrated curriculum, and a classroom community environment. This team also closed its classroom walls, placed its desks in rows, and relied more on textbooks. Parents unhappy with the child-centered reforms were free to choose this "scholarly" team for their children.

McCall asked Inland's teachers to give up some of the time they devoted to the From Neighbors to Friends activities and multicultural curricula in order to drill students on the skills measured on the standardized tests. He never did persuade the district office to allow him to blend all of the mostly white honors English classes into the regular ones.

Antouli backed off on his efforts to integrate Madison's bilingual and regular programs and allowed parents to place their children in separated bilingual classes if they wished. To his regret, much classroom instruction remained quite traditional, in large part because too few faculty members gave up their low estimates of the students' abilities. His participatory governance process never went beyond the small inner circle of Madison teachers whom he trusted to run the school. He continued to fend off district concerns by brashly ignoring administrative directives and by effectively discouraging his teachers from electing a union representative.

TEN YEARS LATER

Sarah Chatsworth left Verbena Middle School. Her attempts to instill a meaningful curriculum, child-centeredness, and community ended bitterly in the face of parents' unrelenting pressure to retain a traditional curriculum and a school climate stressing individual achievement, competition, and upper-class entitlement. Rather than cave in, she agreed to resign when the school board offered to buy out the remaining year of her contract. Even so, years later, three reform-minded teams still survive alongside the one traditional team. Chatsworth now works as a private educational consultant.

Inland's Ben McCall became a nationally recognized leader. He is regularly invited to speak at national and regional meetings on school reform, and educators from around the country phone him seeking advice about detracking their schools. But acclaim from the outside made it harder and harder for him to negotiate local district politics, and his superintendent made life increasingly uncomfortable. In 1998, McCall left Inland (with considerable ambivalence) to become the assistant superintendent in a school system on the other side of the state. His new boss told us that he hopes McCall will do in the new district's schools exactly what he did at Inland -- and more. McCall connected with experts in gifted education, who began to help him develop a dramatically new type of inclusive gifted program for his new district. He began at once to collect, assemble, and share data that would reveal both the problems and progress in the district. The Inland staff misses him terribly, and he misses them.

Fred Antouli remains principal of James Madison Middle School. He takes great pride in his continuing reputation as a renegade.

THE CULTURE OF THE STATUS QUO AND THE CULTURE OF REFORM

Despite the ubiquitous clamor for better schools and the quite impressive energy directed at achieving them, the unsettling stories of reform at Verbena, Inland, and Madison are neither surprising nor unique. Although the Turning Points approach to reform was in many ways a "best case" example, it provided little support for the most difficult reform challenges the schools confronted. Churning away in what we, with due disrespect, call the reform mill, state reformers focused policy changes, technical assistance, and new resources on changing the organization and classroom practices of the schools. As is usually the case, little attention was paid to the profound cultural and political challenges that lay at the heart of the reform.

Conventional school reform is a largely technical process. At the policy-making level, policy makers read the public interest and set schooling goals. Then they enact policies that channel technical support and resources to bring greater capacity for reform to schools. They design these policies to take effect in a coherent policy system by bringing new and existing policies into alignment. Policies are designed to compel and "incent" with rewards and consequences (carrots and sticks).

At the local level, school district administrators implement reform policies by making structural and procedural changes -- for example, by adding new course offerings, rearranging school schedules, providing new materials, changing assessment and accountability strategies, and engaging teachers in professional development. As at the policy-making level, schools approach reform as a technical problem that can be solved by sending clear and consistent messages, providing resources and new knowledge, and holding teachers and principals accountable through systematic evaluations. Reformers even manage to take such patently cultural and normative concepts as "working relationships" and attention to the "school culture" and package these into standardized workshops and inservice training sessions. Such policy making does not begin to capture how reform actually works. Reform is far less logical and technically rational. It is idiosyncratic -- dependent on the context of local relationships, histories, and opportunities.

CONFRONTING CULTURAL CONTRADICTIONS IN SCHOOLS

Current reform efforts are proceeding as if there were strong consensus on the meaning of school reform. Typically, there is not. In spite of political and policy rhetoric calling for school reform that ensures "high standards for all students" and "excellence and equity," these goals are not commonly understood. When acted upon, they are often little more than facile catch phrases, riddled with the contradictions and controversies that lie at the heart of the American culture. They embody, for example, the enduring tension between fostering in young people both rugged and competitive individualism and egalitarian civic mindedness. Throughout their history, American schools have been pressured to preserve the status quo while juggling multiple, competing visions of what makes a school good.

At the start of the 21st century, as individual interests and freedom from government interference dominate social policy (for example, through deregulation, privatization, and the glorification of market forces), reforms like those embodied in Turning Points press policy makers and educators to revisit and act upon countervailing American traditions that stress civic virtue. We view much of the reform struggle at Verbena, Inland, Madison, and the other schools we studied as a struggle between venerable, though conflicting, American cultural values with deep historical roots. These schools attempted to probe beneath the conventions of what it means for citizens to become educated, to participate in social justice, to care for all the community's children, and to listen and be heard in the public sphere. As educators attempt to enact a vision of

the common, public good, without compromising an equally compelling commitment to individual liberties and private interests, they will find themselves grappling with a series of profound questions about schooling.

Teaching and learning. How can schools deepen the intellectual quality of classrooms when most policy makers, educators, and parents hold tightly to conventional ideas of teaching as a process of transmitting knowledge and of learning as a process of receiving it? How can schools combat the widespread conviction that individual differences between students are such that many students are not suited for serious academic study?

Dominance and competition. How can schools attempting to become more inclusive and socially just deal with educators and communities that are wedded to an Anglo-dominated school culture? How can schools balance their obligation to educate all children well with the demands of those who vigorously pursue competitive advantages for their own children through schooling?

Dignity of students and others. How can schools broaden their academic mission to provide greater care for disadvantaged students without reducing them to needy and helpless clients who require condescending charity or bureaucratic social services? How can educators avoid detached professionalism and instead join respectfully with families and neighborhoods to promote engaging and healthy activities in safe, community settings?

Genuine participation. How can schools that want to pursue a vision of participatory democracy go beyond the conventional, largely procedural approach to collaborative decision making and superficial parent involvement?

The larger context of reform. What reform policies and implementation strategies might help schools move beyond the reform mill and enable them to address the cultural and political dilemmas that such reforms raise, as well as to develop the technical capacity to make changes in practice?

REFORM AS A STRUGGLE FOR BETTERMENT

At Verbena, Inland, and Madison, as in the other schools we studied, it was cultural norms and politics -- local beliefs and power -- that shaped the schools' reform goals, processes, and outcomes and that altered (modified, thwarted, adapted, finessed, etc.) the rational and technical strategies of policy makers and program designers. In the American liberal tradition, these schools took it as axiomatic that to pursue self-interest is to support the general good and that to pursue the civic virtues of learning, diversity, and justice for all is to establish a climate in which individuals can compete and excel. These schools were committed to principles of equality and fairness. They consistently, if not always effectively, confronted the nation's ambivalence over race, and they stood up to persistent discrimination and inequality. They worked under the glaring spotlight of their local communities and interest groups, of national foundations, and of state policy agencies. As is nearly always the case in such a heightened political context, the reforming schools were expected to attain success within a few years.

In the face of resistance from within and outside the schools, educators in most schools compromised and scaled back their reform practices. But this did not render their accomplishments meager. And theirs is not a story of failed school reform. The interventions were often catalysts that converted unproductive struggle (or absence of struggle) into genuine consensus around small shifts in practice that served children better. Sometimes, because the change was embedded within the school culture, teachers did not see themselves as having changed their beliefs or done anything new. Sometimes change did not last long. Sometimes nine steps forward were countered with eight steps back. In nearly all cases, tackling the complex and

often contradictory task of creating good American schools made the schools better for children and adults than they would have been otherwise. But things should have gone better for these schools, and in the end we argue that the lessons learned from their experiences can inform a society that wants its schools to be better.

We believe that our study argues for alternatives and additions to the technical aspects of reform (finding and implementing best practices). In our view, the "best" schools for children were also the best for the adults who worked in them and visited them. With assistance from outside and by drawing on resources from within, educators at these schools opened dialogues on fundamental moral issues that are at the heart of their reforms. In these respectful and critical explorations, educators constructed new meanings and strategies that shaped both their goals and their practices. In this way, they married the means of educating to the ends of education. The results in such schools are never "good enough." Good American schools do not settle for "good enough" any more than a good nation is satisfied that it is fair enough or free enough.

ADDED MATERIAL

JEANNIE OAKES is a professor and associate dean of the Graduate School of Education & Information Studies, UCLA, where KAREN HUNTER QUARTZ is associate director of research for Center X and MARTIN LIPTON is a research associate. STEVE RYAN is an assistant professor of education, University of Louisville. This article is adapted from their new book, Becoming Good American Schools: The Struggle for Civic Virtue in Education Reform (Jossey-Bass, 2000), and is reprinted with permission of the publisher. The book can be ordered by phoning 800/956-7739 or by visiting www.josseybass.com. The price is $28.95.

Illustration by Jem Sullivan

CALIFORNIA EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY REPORT

2007

UC/ACCORD
ALL CAMPUS CONSORTIUM ON RESEARCH FOR DIVERSITY

UCLA IDEA
INSTITUTE FOR DEMOCRACY, EDUCATION, AND ACCESS

CALIFORNIA EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY REPORT

2007

California Educational Opportunity Report 2007

November 2007

To access this report online, please visit http://www.edopp.org

UCLA/IDEA and **UC/ACCORD**
1041 Moore Hall, Box 951521, Los Angeles, CA 90095
phone: (310) 206-8725; fax: (310) 206-8770; email: idea@ucla.edu

Support for the 2007 California Educational Opportunity Reports was provided
by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation,
the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the University of California.

UC/ACCORD
ALL CAMPUS CONSORTIUM ON RESEARCH FOR DIVERSITY

UCLA IDEA
INSTITUTE FOR DEMOCRACY, EDUCATION, AND ACCESS

The 2007 California Educational Opportunity Report:

The Racial Opportunity Gap

UC ACCORD & UCLA IDEA

I. Introduction

In August 2007, California's Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell called for greater public attention to the racial achievement gap in education. Highlighting evidence that white and Asian students in California consistently outperform their African American and Latino peers, O'Connell urged a state wide focus on eliminating this gap. Some commentators responded to O'Connell's statement by arguing that the persistent racial gap in achievement scores is a product of cultural differences that must be addressed if the gap is to be closed.[1] This cultural argument suggests that the problem of low test scores resides within the African American and Latino communities; it fails to account for the fact that California students *generally* have lower test scores than students across the nation. Notably, white students in California also perform well below white students in almost all other states.

In response to O'Connell's call, the *2007 Educational Opportunity Report* examines California's poor and unequal educational achievement in light of the conditions in California's public schools. As the latest in a series of reports on educational opportunities in California,[2] this report uses the most recent state data available to:

- Document, for every high school, the relationships among California's educational infrastructure, rates of high school completion, and enrollment in the state's public four-year colleges and universities;
- Examine the educational infrastructure of the state's middle schools;
- Investigate the opportunities provided in schools serving different racial groups—schools that serve a majority of white and Asian students; schools that serve a majority of African American, Latino, and American Indian students; and schools that are intensely segregated and enroll over ninety percent of African American, Latino, and American Indian students;
- Analyze the math pipeline through middle school and high school and the flow of students through it—including how well students are being prepared to succeed in high-stakes accountability measures;
- Show the changes in graduation rates for the Class of 2006, overall and for different groups of high schools.

Five key findings emerge from these analyses:

- **A national opportunity gap.** California lags behind most other states in providing fundamental learning conditions as well as in student outcomes.
- **A racial opportunity gap.** Within California, African American and Latino students are far more likely to attend schools that lack fundamental learning conditions than their white and Asian peers.
- **A restricted flow through the "mathematics pipeline."** The flow of students through California's middle school and high school math curriculum is slowed by students' lack of access to reasonably-sized classrooms, rigorous coursework, and well-trained teachers.
- **Systemic problems.** Inadequacy and inequality are found throughout California. The state's educational problems are most severe in schools serving the highest proportions of African American and Latino students.
- **Worse outcomes for the Class of 2006**. The consequences of poor learning conditions were greater for young people in the Class of 2006 in part because they were the first class to face the California High School Exit Exam's "diploma penalty." In 2006, California graduated a smaller proportion of its 9th grade cohort than the proportion of any cohort of 9th graders graduating since 1997.

In essence, we expose two significant *opportunity* gaps that mirror California students' academic performance: the gap between learning opportunities in California and other states and the gap in learning opportunities between schools within the state. We conclude that understanding and eliminating California's racial achievement gap will require simultaneous attention to these two substantial gaps in educational opportunity.

The remainder of the report is organized in six sections:

- Achievement, graduation, and college preparation
- California's racially disparate schools
- Inadequate and unequal learning conditions and opportunities
- Unequal outcomes mirror unequal opportunities
- Restricted flow through California's K-12 mathematics pipeline
- Conclusion

Additional Analyses of Educational Opportunity in California

We supplement the analyses reported here in two accompanying reports—*African American Educational Opportunity Report, 2007* and *Latino Educational Opportunity Report, 2007*. These reports reveal that California's racial gaps occur in concert with considerable racial isolation. Although California high schools are extraordinarily diverse, half of all of African American high school students are concentrated in a relatively small number (107) of predominantly minority schools. Another 90 California high schools enroll especially high concentrations of English Learners who speak Spanish as a first language. These two groups of schools experience more severe opportunity problems than the rest of the state's high schools.

We also provide our analyses separately for each Congressional, State Senate, and State Assembly district in California, as well as for each high school and middle school.

II. California's Persistent Low Achievement, Graduation, and College-Going

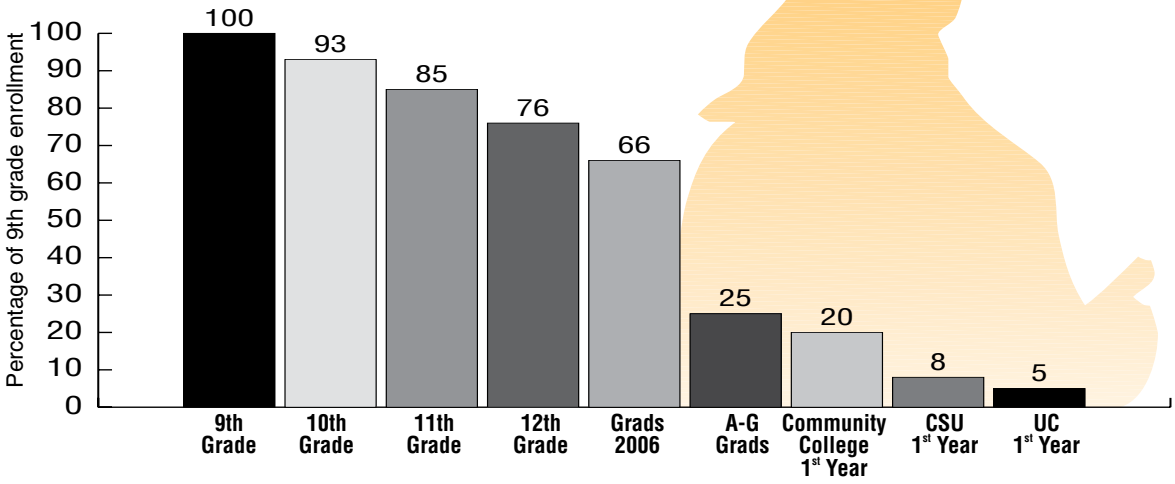
Many California public school students achieve at high levels, enroll in challenging courses, and graduate high school ready for college, the workplace, and civic life. In the last few years, California schools have made some notable gains. We have seen modest increases in the proportion of California's students scoring proficient on the California's Standards Tests since those tests were implemented in 2002-2003. We have seen a growing number of students enrolling in rigorous math classes in California's middle schools and high schools.[3] And between 1997 and 2005, California steadily increased the proportion of 9th graders who graduated high school.

Yet despite this recent progress, California lags behind almost all other states in key markers of student achievement and rates of high school graduation and college enrollment. The 2007 results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP, are particularly sobering. NAEP is commonly referred to as the "nation's report card" because it allows state-by-state comparisons of student achievement at grades 4 and 8 in reading and mathematics. California's 4th graders rank 48th of all states in reading and 46th in mathematics. California's 8th graders rank 47th in reading and 45th in mathematics.[4]

Although surveys suggest that almost all California students enter high school with aspirations to graduate and enroll in college, few California students achieve these goals.[5] More than 520,000 students enrolled as 9th graders in Fall 2002. Four years later, fewer than 350,000 Californians graduated from high school. That means the Class of 2006 shrunk to two-thirds of its original size. Not since 1997 has California failed to graduate such a high percentage of its 9th grade enrollment. The historically low graduation level in 2006 can be explained in part by California's decision to fully implement its Exit Exam policy in June 2006. This policy meant that the state denied diplomas to students who had not passed the Exit Exam but had fulfilled all other graduation requirements.[6] As a consequence, California's graduation rate now has fallen far below the national average.[7]

California

Class of 2006: **Pathway to College**



Produced by UCLA/**IDEA** and UC/**ACCORD**

The number of 2006 California high school graduates who completed the sequence of courses necessary for enrollment in California's four-year public universities was only one-quarter the size of the 520,000 students in the original class. And, only slightly more than one student for every eight in the original cohort enrolled at a California State University or University of California campus in the fall of 2006. According to data from the College Board, California ranks 48th among the states in the percentage of its senior class that matriculates into a four-year college the following year. Only Mississippi and Arizona have lower rates of sending high school seniors to four-year universities.[8] In part, California's poor ranking on this measure reflects the strength of California's community college system. A number of California seniors enroll in community colleges, and some later transfer to four-year colleges. Nonetheless, California still ranks well below most other states in the percentage of high school graduates who receive a bachelor's degree within six years.[9]

Some argue that California's low rates of educational achievement are a product of the state's large number of students from low-income families, students of color, and students learning English. However, California's white middle class students perform well below comparable white students across the nation. For example, California's white 8th graders' NAEP math scores are well below white 8th graders in most states, and their reading scores rank behind white students in all but two states.[10] Similarly, California's non-poor 8th graders rank below non-poor students in all but six states in both reading and math.[11] In sum, California has an education *crisis* that applies across the state and affects all students from all groups.

To focus on the so-called "achievement gap" as the reason for California's poor educational performance draws attention away from other critically important education gaps. One is a *national opportunity gap* that relegates nearly all California students to schools with fewer fundamental resources and learning opportunities that students across the nation enjoy. The second is a *racial opportunity gap* within California that is characterized by consistent patterns of unequal opportunities experienced by students from traditionally underserved groups—African American, Latino, American Indian, and poor students.

In the sections that follow, we examine the evidence about these two opportunity gaps. Our analyses reveal clear *patterns* among the distribution of learning resources and opportunities, and the demographic characteristics of schools. These analyses make clear that the racial composition of schools is implicated in the inadequate and unequal educational opportunities that California students experience. These inadequacies and inequalities affect the likelihood that African American, Latino, and American Indian students will thrive academically and persist in their schooling.

III. California's Racially Disparate Schools

California's public secondary schools (including middle schools and high schools) serve an extraordinarily racially diverse student body. Forty-five percent of California's secondary students are white or Asian, Pacific Islander, or Pilipino.[12] Fifty-three percent are Latino, African American, or American Indian—the three groups that are underrepresented in California's higher education system.[13]

Despite this considerable diversity, most of California's African American and Latino students are quite isolated from white and Asian students.

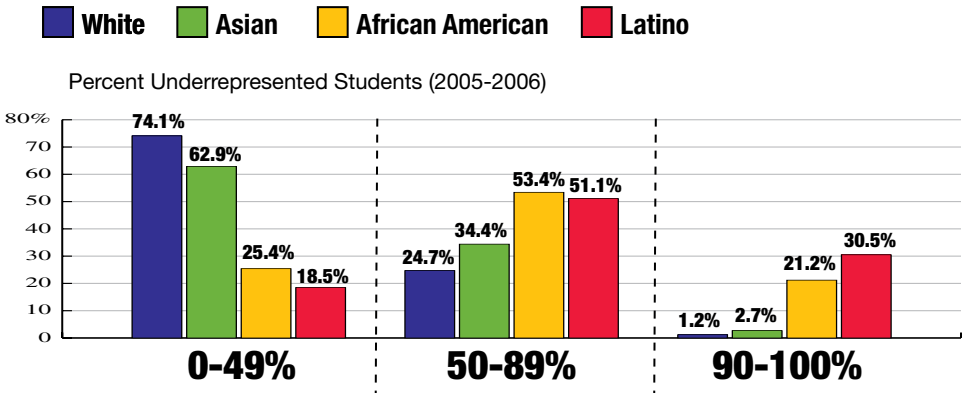
- Less than one-third of the state's African American students and approximately one-quarter of Latino students attend secondary schools with majority white and Asian enrollments.
- Approximately three-quarters of African American and Latino students are enrolled in secondary schools where the majority of students are from underrepresented groups, and a sizeable portion of these students attend intensely segregated minority schools—schools where 90-100% of the students are from underrepresented groups.

These patterns have resulted in California being one of the nation's most racially segregated states for African American and Latino students.[14] By contrast, the vast majority of California's white and Asian students attend secondary schools where less than half of the students are from underrepresented groups.

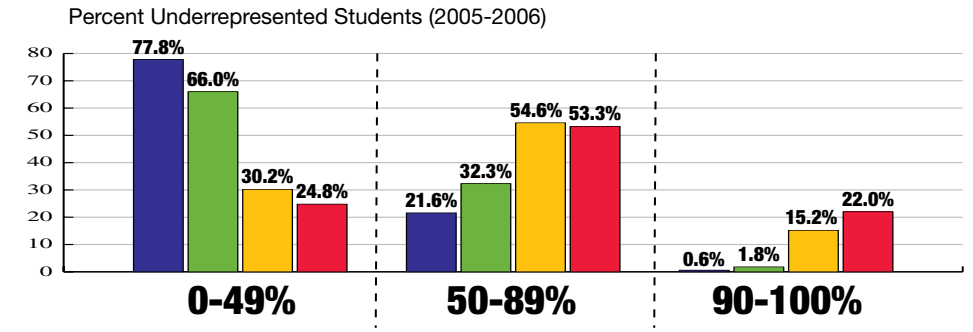
- Fewer than 2% of white and Asian students are enrolled in intensely segregated minority schools.

The following graphs display the percentages of middle and high schools students from different racial and ethnic groups in schools of varying composition.

Racial Composition of California
Middle Schools 2005–2006



High Schools 2005–2006



Source: California Basic Education Data System, available at www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/

Intensely segregated minority schools are far more likely than other secondary schools to serve high concentrations of low-income students and students learning English.

- Almost all (95%) of the intensely segregated middle schools enroll a majority of low-income students. In 70% of these middle schools, at least one-third of all students are English Learners.

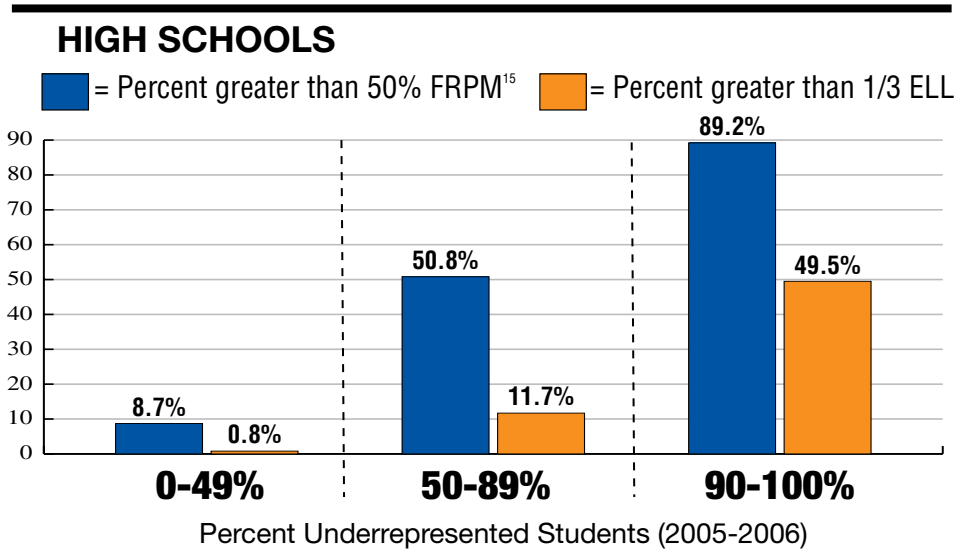
In contrast, few middle schools with small proportions of underrepresented students have low concentrations of low-income students and English Learners.

- Only 13% of predominantly white and Asian schools enroll a majority of low-income students, and only 2% enroll one-third or more English Learners.

As the graph below displays, similar patterns are found at the high school level. Intensely segregated high schools are more than 10 times as likely as high schools where underrepresented students are in the minority to have high concentrations of low-income

students, and 60 times as likely to enroll more than one-third English Learners than schools where most students are white and Asian.

Concentrations of Low-Income Students and English Learners 2005-2006



Source: California Basic Education Data System, available at www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/

IV. Inadequate and Unequal Learning Conditions and Opportunities

We now turn to analyses of the resources and opportunities provided in California's secondary schools. We find that almost all California students experience fewer educational opportunities than students across the nation. Their schools are more often overcrowded, and they have less access to teachers and counselors than their peers in most other states. Within California, secondary schools where the majority of students are from underrepresented groups are those most likely to face these critical opportunity problems. These shortages are particularly burdensome for students from low-income families that do not have a history of college-going. Without qualified adults available at their schools, such students often lack information and support to navigate toward graduation and college preparation.[16]

Overcrowded Schools

California's secondary schools are larger, on average, than schools in every other state except Florida.[17] Many of California's middle schools and high schools are among the largest secondary schools in the nation.

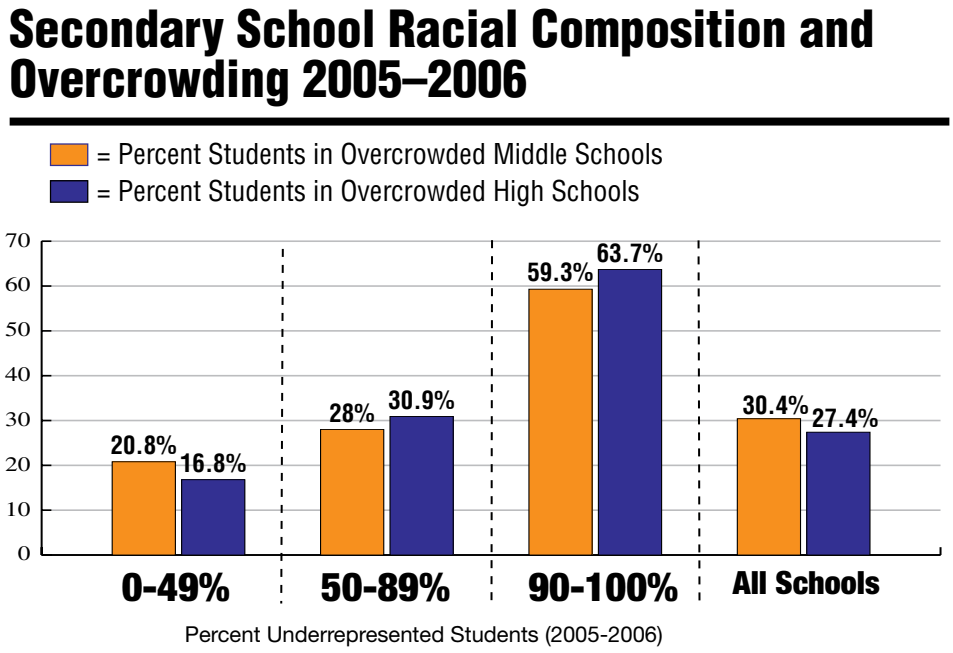
- 36 middle schools enroll more than 2,000 students. 120 high schools enroll more than 3,000 students. Nationally, the average middle school enrolls 605 students and the average high school enrolls 751 students.[18]

Many California schools are overcrowded, but minority students are most affected.

- More than one-fourth of California middle and high school students attend schools that the state has defined as overcrowded. This includes almost two-thirds of students in intensely segregated minority schools.

Overcrowding creates unsafe environments and makes teaching and learning more difficult. Schools may need to teach students in auditoriums, gymnasiums, storage rooms, and other areas never intended to be used for instructional purposes.[19] Schools with too little space may not be able to maintain specially equipped rooms such as science labs or libraries because these spaces need to be "flexible" for teaching multiple subjects. Overcrowding has led some California school districts to employ policies such as year-round, multi-track school calendars in order to keep some portion of the teachers and students off campus and "on break." Some of these calendars provide students with fewer days of instruction than are provided to other California students.

The graphic below displays the relationship between race and overcrowding in California schools.



Source: California Basic Education Data System, available at www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/

Limited Access to Counselors

Counselors provide students and their families with information, guidance, and support as students navigate through secondary schools and toward their postsecondary opportunities. Such counseling is particularly important for students whose families lack both knowledge of available opportunities and how students might take advantage of them. Immigrants and students learning English may be especially dependent on the support of knowledgeable counselors.[20]

On average, however, California's high schools provide 1 counselor for every 556 students compared with a national average of 1 counselor for every 229 students. The American School Counselor Association ranked California last of all states in providing high school students with access to counselors.[21]

Eight in nine California high school students attend schools that provide less access to counselors than the national average.

- Students attending intensely segregated minority schools are most likely to attend schools with fewer counselors than the national average.
- Middle school students in California have less access to counselors than high school students. On average, California's middle schools provide 1 counselor for every 753 students.

Limited Access to Qualified Secondary Teachers

California secondary teachers are responsible for more students than secondary teachers in any other state. Middle school teachers teach 49% more students than the national median. High school teachers teach 42% more students than the national median.[22]

Student to Teacher Ratio in Secondary Schools
2003 - 2004

	U.S. Median	CA Median
Middle Schools	15.8	23.5
High Schools	15.4	21.8

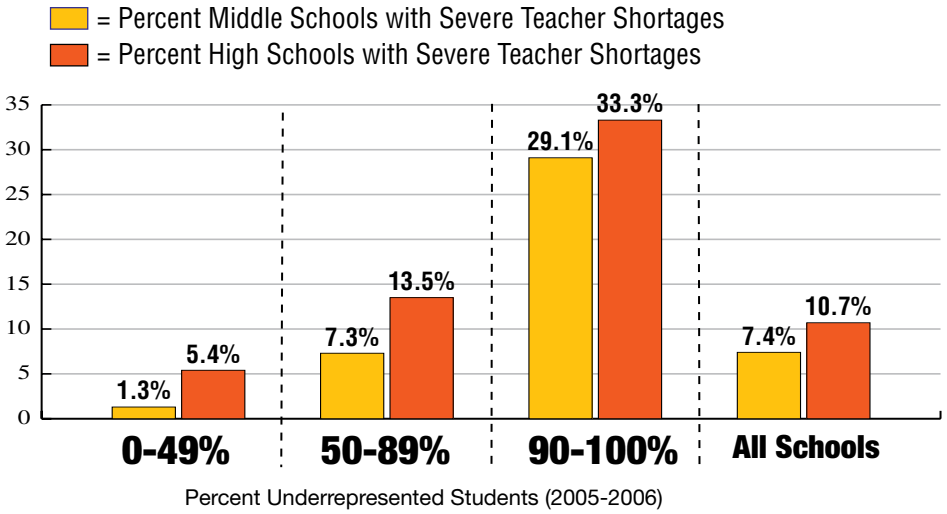
Source: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), available at http://nces.ed.gov/

Qualified secondary teachers are an essential resource, and California has an insufficient supply. Poorly qualified teachers have less content area knowledge, rely heavily on lecturing, and are often unprepared to have students engage in higher-order thinking and work. Schools with a severe shortage of qualified teachers, where more than 20% of the teachers lack full credentials, have high levels of teacher turnover; moreover, these schools do not have enough experienced and qualified teachers to mentor new and less prepared ones.[23]

As the graph below displays, a severe shortage of qualified teachers is rarely found in secondary schools that enroll a majority of white and Asian students. By contrast, these shortages are common in schools with large concentrations of underrepresented students.

- 29% of intensely segregated minority middle schools have severe teacher shortages; they are 22 times more likely to experience such shortages than are middle schools where fewer than half of students are from underrepresented groups.

School Racial Composition and Teacher Shortages 2005–2006



Source: California Basic Education Data System, available at www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/

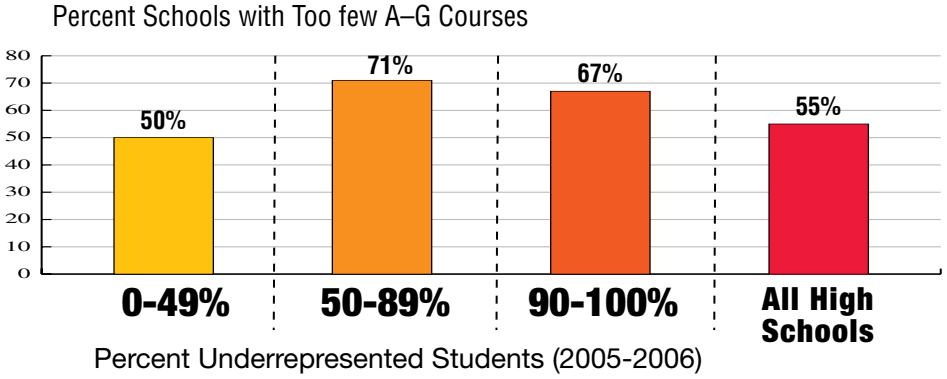
Limited Access to High-Quality College Preparatory Curriculum

The California State University and the University of California have the same basic course requirements for admission, commonly referred to as the "A-G Requirements." To be eligible to attend any public four-year university in the state, a student must take a minimum of 15 A-G courses—approximately two-thirds of their high school courses. Accordingly, to provide every student with the opportunity to satisfy these college eligibility requirements, California high schools must ensure that *at least* two-thirds of their courses meet the A-G Requirements. In schools with high rates of college-going, it is common for more than three-quarters of the school's courses to satisfy the A-G Requirements.[24]

Nearly a million (995,436) California high school students attend schools that do not offer enough A-G courses for all students to take the college preparatory curriculum.

- Half of the high schools serving majority white and Asian students lack sufficient courses.
- More than two-thirds of the high schools with a majority of underrepresented students face this problem.

School Racial Composition and Access to the College Preparatory Curriculum 2005–2006

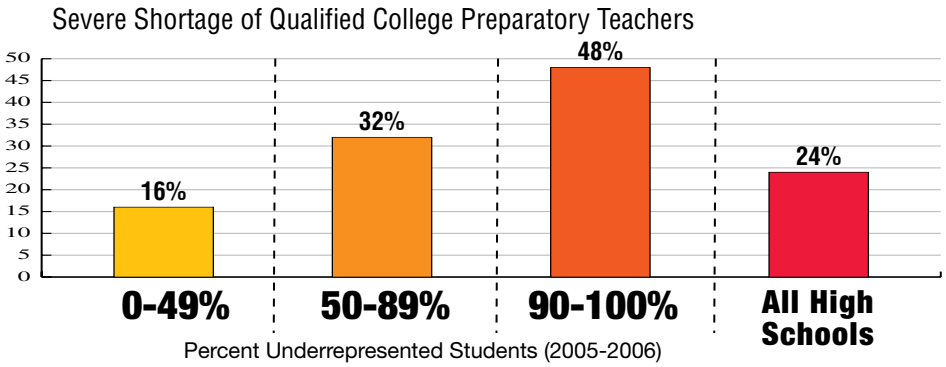


Source: California Basic Education Data System, available at www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/

Sometimes schools offer college preparatory courses without providing high-quality instruction in those courses. For example, in one-quarter of California's high schools, more than 20% of college preparatory courses are taught by teachers teaching outside their subject area expertise. More than 300,000 California students attend schools facing this problem. Again, this problem is not shared equally.

- Intensely segregated minority high schools are three times as likely to have large numbers of teachers teaching college preparatory courses without the appropriate credential as are high schools where less than half of the students are underrepresented.

High School Racial Composition and Access to Qualified College Preparatory Teachers



Source: California Basic Education Data System, available at www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/

V. Unequal Outcomes Mirror Unequal Opportunities

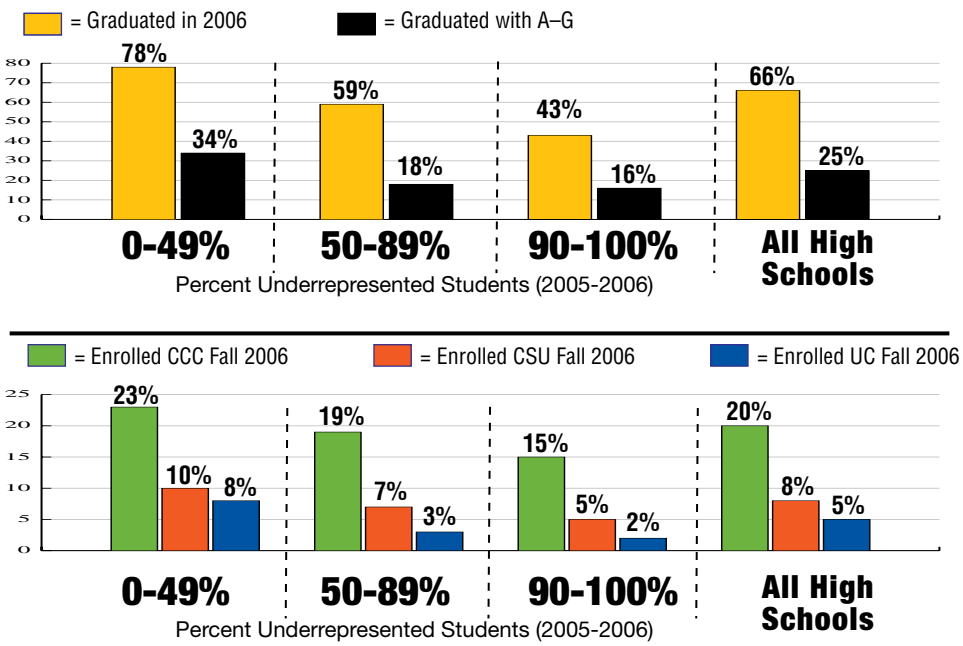
The unequal academic outcomes produced by California's schools strongly mirror the unequal educational opportunities present in those schools. High schools enrolling different proportions of underrepresented students yield dramatically different rates of progress to high school graduation and college.

- Students in predominantly white and Asian high schools were twice as likely as students in intensely segregated minority schools to complete the course sequence required for admission into California State Universities and University of California campuses.

These differences translate into comparable differences in college enrollment.

- Students in predominantly white and Asian high schools were over twice as likely (17% to 7%) as those in intensely segregated minority schools to matriculate into four-year California public universities in Fall 2006.

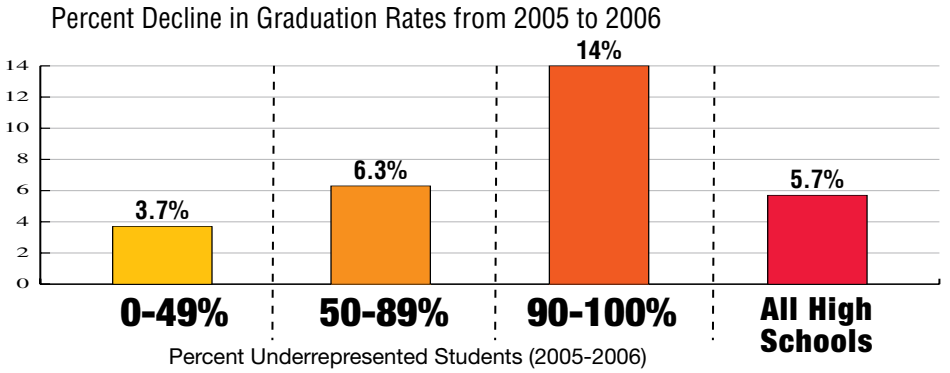
High School Racial Composition, Graduation, College Eligibility, and College-Going



Source: California Basic Education Data System, available at www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/;
California Postsecondary Education Commission, available at www.cpec.ca.gov

These patterns of disparate graduation and college-going rates across these three groups of schools are longstanding. However, the proportions of graduates fell across the board in the Class of 2006. The decline was steepest for the intensely segregated minority high schools where the graduation rate fell by 14% from 2005 to 2006. In comparison, the graduation rate decreased by 3.7% in the group of high schools with the smallest proportion of underrepresented students.

High School Racial Composition and the 2006 Decline in Graduation



Source: California Basic Education Data System, available at www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/

Intensely segregated minority schools are far more likely to face state sanctions

Over the last decade, California's Legislature has adopted a set of standards and tests of student proficiency that many have praised as among the most rigorous in the nation.[25] Following the requirements in No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the California Legislature has enacted accountability measures that tie punitive consequences to these standards and tests. Schools are designated as "Program Improvement" (PI) schools if they fail to meet the state's test-score-increase goals for two or more consecutive years.[26]

Unfortunately, as the analyses in the previous sections make clear, California has not invested in the conditions necessary for schools to achieve these high standards and meet the requirements of the state's tough accountability mechanisms. In 2006, 43% of California's middle schools and 15% of California's high schools were identified by the state and federal government as low-performing and in need of serious improvement.

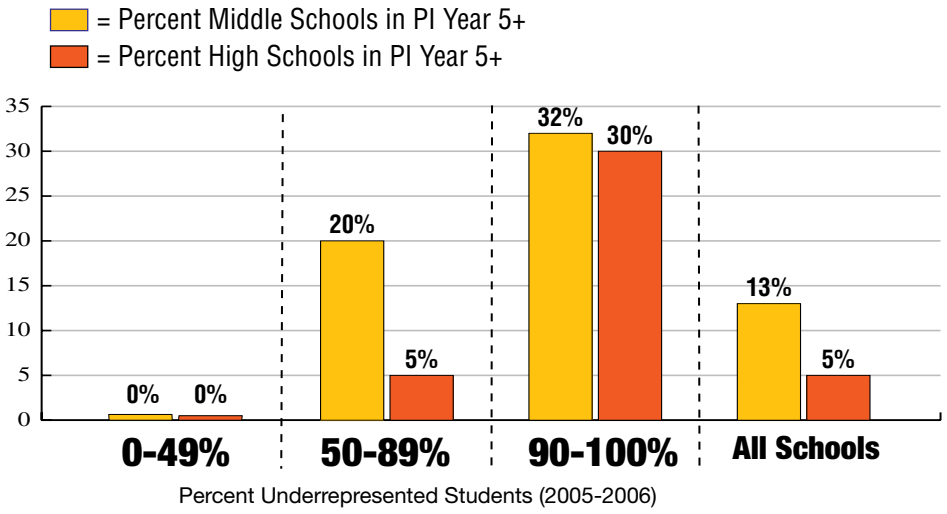
- California's intensely segregated minority middle schools are more than six times as likely (89% to 14%) as majority white and Asian middle schools to be designated as PI schools.

Although a smaller proportion of high schools in either category have been designated as PI, the disparity is even more pronounced in intensely segregated minority high schools.

- California's intensely segregated minority high schools are more than 19 times as likely (58% to 3%) as majority white and Asian schools to be designated as PI schools.

Some of these California middle and high schools face serious sanctions because they have been in Program Improvement status for at least five years. NCLB requires districts to close or "reconstitute" such schools.[27] As the graph below shows, almost a third of intensely segregated minority middle and high schools are "PI 5" schools that face these sanctions. Notably, no majority white and Asian high schools are in this stage of Program Improvement.[28]

School Racial Composition and "Program Improvement 5" Status 2005–2006



Source: California Basic Education Data System, available at www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/

VI. Restricted Flow Through California's K-12 Mathematics Pipeline

One clear consequence of the state's combination of high standards and low opportunity is the restricted flow of students through California's math pipeline—the sequence of mathematics instruction that impacts students' college opportunities and life chances. Students' success in these math courses, according to many analysts, also holds the key to the state's future well-being.[29]

California's math standards, adopted in 1997 and then pushed forward with legislation supporting new textbooks in 2001-2002, called for students to take more and more rigorous math classes. This framework, combined with the state requiring Algebra for graduation and the implementation of the California High School Exit Exam, have prompted an increase in secondary math enrollment overall, and in 8th graders taking Algebra.[30]

Middle-school obstructions in the math pipeline

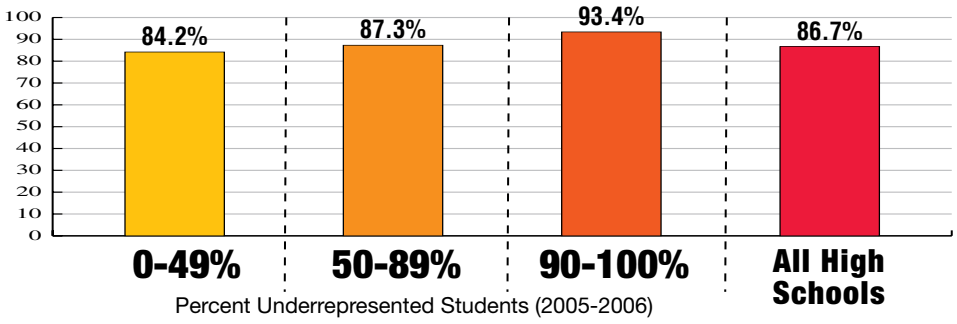
The results of the 8th grade math NAEP suggest that California's standards and accountability reforms alone are not sufficient to promote math proficiency. In 2007, the average NAEP math score for California 8th grade students was 270, placing California behind 44 other states, and below the national average of 280. Fewer than 1 in 4 California 8th graders scored at the proficient or advanced level. More than 40% of California 8th graders scored "below basic"—the lowest level.[31] As noted earlier in this report, California's sub-par performance on the math NAEP holds for all students and all sub-groups—including white and non-poor students.

Among the complex mix of factors underlying this outcome are three middle school conditions known to undermine learning—large math classes, lack of access to rigorous mathematics coursework, and shortages of teachers trained in mathematics.[32]

Math class size. The state's Quality Education Investment Act (QEIA) of 2006[33] calls for secondary schools to limit class size to 25. Although this standard is a move in the right direction, California is far from reaching it, and it would still leave California students with less access to teachers than most students across the nation.

- California ranks last among all the states in the average number of students in its secondary math classrooms.
- 93% of intensely segregated minority middle schools enroll more than 25 students per math class.

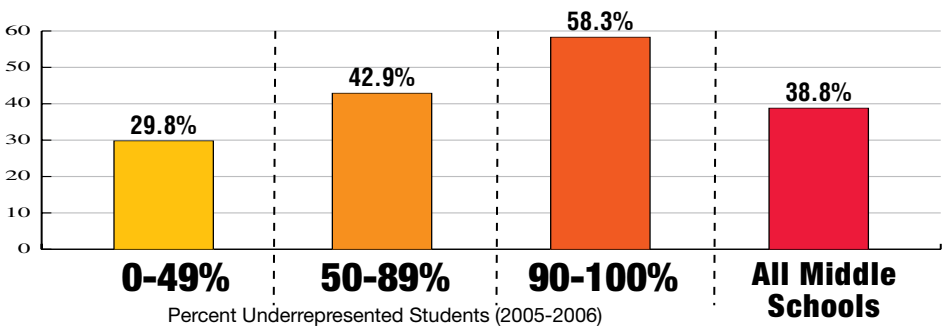
Middle School Racial Composition and Math Class Size 2005–2006



Source: California Basic Education Data System, available at www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/

Rigor of coursework. California's curriculum framework in math encourages schools to enroll all students in Algebra by 8th grade.[34] However, 57% of California's middle schools enroll fewer than half of their 8th graders in Algebra or its equivalent. More than 600,000 students attend such schools. This problem cuts fairly evenly across all groups of California middle schools.

Middle School Racial Composition and 8th Grade Enrollment in Algebra 2005–2006

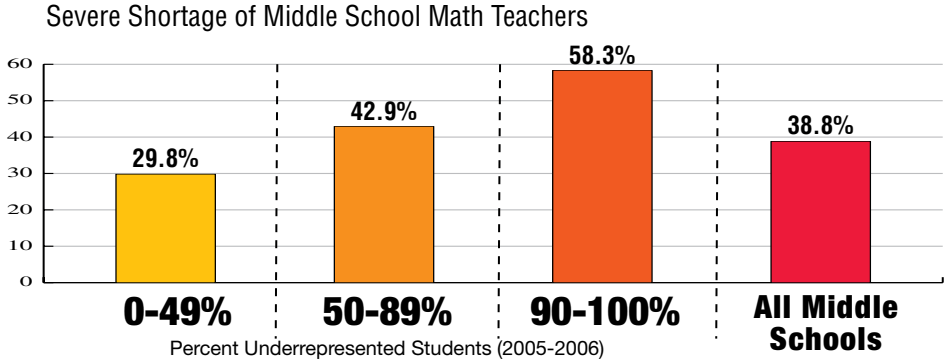


Source: California Basic Education Data System, available at www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/

Math teacher preparation. California state law allows middle school math teachers to hold either a credential in mathematics or a "multiple subjects" credential. And, in more than one-third of California middle schools, the majority of math teachers lack specialized mathematics credentials.

However, California's high math standards require teachers with a strong grasp of the subject matter and a deep understanding of how to convey key mathematical concepts to adolescents. Without sufficient math specialists, middle schools have difficulty mounting high-quality mathematics programs. This shortage of middle school math teachers impacts more than 400,000 students statewide, but it is twice as likely to occur in intensely segregated minority middle schools as in majority white and Asian middle schools.

Middle School Racial Composition and Shortage of Math Teachers 2005–2006

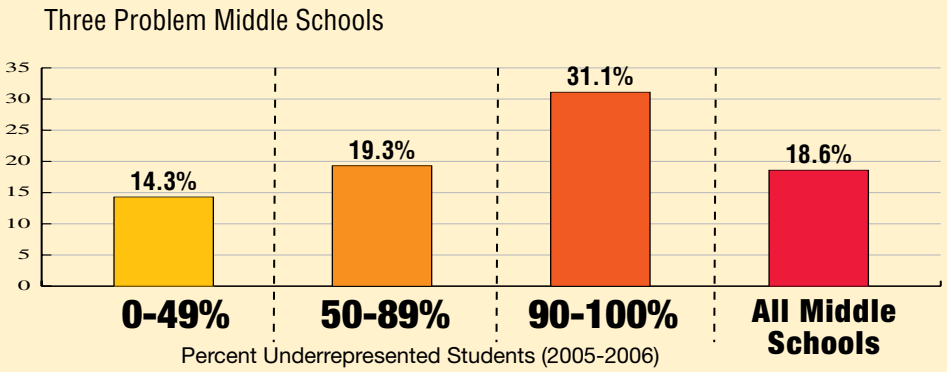


Source: California Basic Education Data System, available at www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/

97% of all California middle schools experience at least one of the above problems (overcrowded classrooms, insufficient access to rigorous coursework, shortages of prepared teachers) that limit students' access to high-quality mathematics instruction.

Some middle schools in the state face all three of these problems, making it extremely difficult for them to mount a quality mathematics program and for the students enrolled in these schools to meet the state's standards. More than 200,000 California students are enrolled in such middle schools and, as such, experience the combined impact of overcrowded math classes, insufficient access to algebra, and too few qualified math teachers. Intensely segregated minority middle schools are more than twice as likely as majority white and Asian middle schools to face all of these math problems.

Middle School Racial Composition and Multiple Math Pipeline Problems 2005–2006



Source: California Basic Education Data System, available at www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/

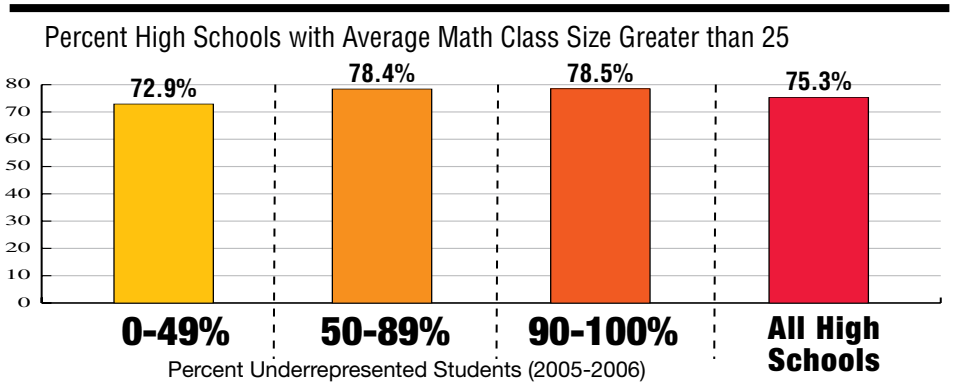
Given the prevalence of these problems, it is no surprise that so many California students leave middle school insufficiently prepared for the rigor of high school math.

High school obstructions in the math pipeline

With access to intensive support at the high school level, many students with inadequate middle school preparation might still be able to meet the state's rigorous math standards. But, the lack of opportunities for high-quality math instruction in California's middle schools continues in California's high schools. The poor preparation of the state's middle school students combines with poor math preparation at the high school level and both leave many students at the end of their schooling without core academic skills in mathematics.[35]

Math class size. As noted above, California's secondary math classes are the largest in the nation. More than 75% of California high schools average more than 25 students per math class—this is more than the state recommends in its QEIA, and far more than the national average. One and one-half million California high school students attend schools with such overcrowded math classes. This problem is more common in schools where the majority of students are from underrepresented groups.

High School Racial Composition and Math Class Size

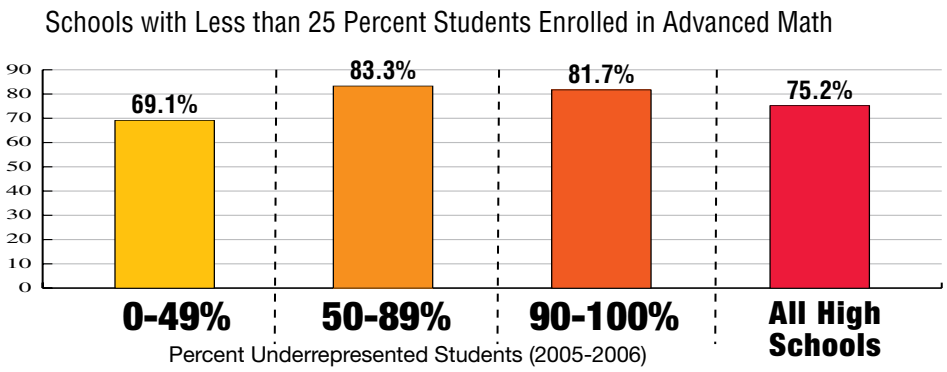


Source: California Basic Education Data System, available at www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/

Rigor of coursework. In the last four years, the proportion of California high school students taking higher-level math classes has increased. According to a widely-acclaimed U.S. Department of Education study, enrolling in a rigorous high school curriculum is key to increasing students' chances of earning a bachelor's degree.[36] The study also found that of all the high school courses, the highest level of mathematics taken is the most important for college success. The study also reported that taking rigorous high school courses had a greater impact on African American and Latino students than on white students.

Despite the recent increases, the proportion of students enrolling in such rigorous math classes remains quite small in most California high schools. In 75% of California high schools, less than one-quarter of 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students enroll in courses that the state designates as "higher level" math classes. Students in schools serving majority African American and Latino students are more likely than those in majority white and Asian schools to experience this problem.

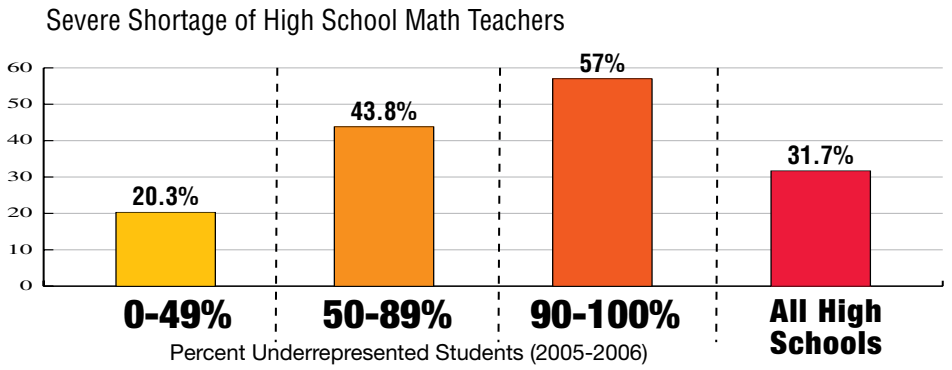
High School Racial Composition and Enrollment in Advanced Math Classes 2005–2006



Source: California Basic Education Data System, available at www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/

Math teacher preparation. High-quality math instruction at the high school level requires a deep understanding of the subject matter. Yet, almost one-third of California high schools face severe shortages of fully certified math teachers, and, as such, fail to meet NCLB requirements. In these schools, more than 20% of the college preparatory math classes are taught by teachers without state credentials to teach mathematics. This problem impacts more than one-half million California students. Schools serving predominantly African American and Latino students are almost three times as likely as majority white and Asian schools to face this problem.

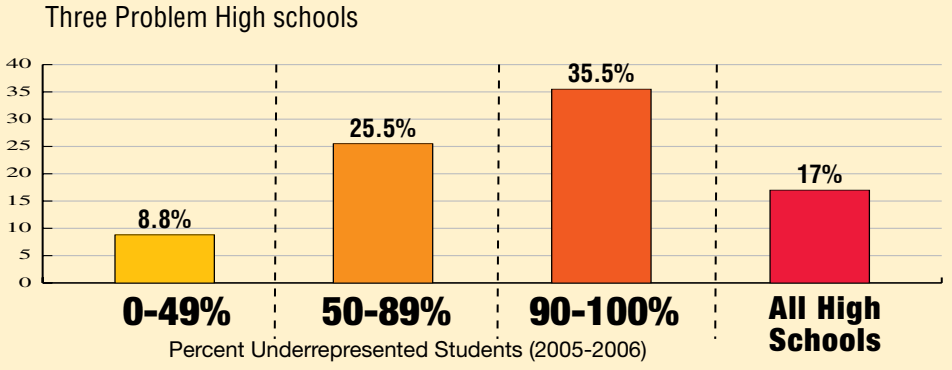
High School Racial Composition and Math Teacher Shortages 2005–2006



Source: California Basic Education Data System, available at www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/

As is the case with middle schools, 97% of California's high schools face at least one of the three math problems that create serious challenges for student learning—large class sizes, few students enrolled in advanced math, and shortages of qualified math teachers. However, these three math problems converge in one out of every six California high schools, affecting 398,426 students. Here, too, students attending intensely segregated minority schools are affected disproportionately. Students in these schools are more than four times as likely as students in predominantly white and Asian schools to experience all three of these problems.

High School Racial Composition and Multiple Math Pipeline Problems 2005–2006



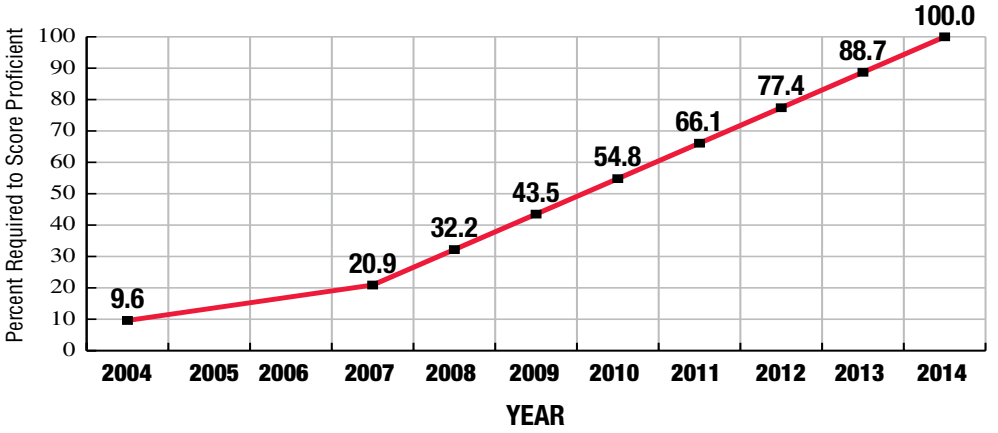
Source: California Basic Education Data System, available at www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/

Almost all students in California's Class of 2006 attended a school with at least one of these math problems sometime during their middle and high school years. Yet, because middle schools with poor resources often feed into high schools with poor resources, a sizeable number of students in the Class of 2006 experienced a convergence of math problems both in middle school and in high school. California lacks a longitudinal data system that would allow us to say with certainty how many students faced how many problems for how many years. What is clear, however, is that many California students, and particularly those

attending predominantly African American and Latino schools, did not have sufficient opportunities to prepare for, and reach the state's goals in mathematics instruction.

One important consequence of these inadequacies and inequalities in the math pipeline is that few if any California secondary schools are on track to meet the goal of promoting universal proficiency. NCLB calls for all students to reach proficiency in mathematics and English/Language Arts by 2014. In the years leading up to 2014, high schools must demonstrate that they are moving toward this goal by enabling more and more of their students to achieve proficiency on standardized tests. For example, in 2007, high schools are required to show that at least 21% of their students have attained proficiency in mathematics. By 2010, 55% of students must attain proficiency.

NCLB's Rising Standards 2005–2006 High Schools

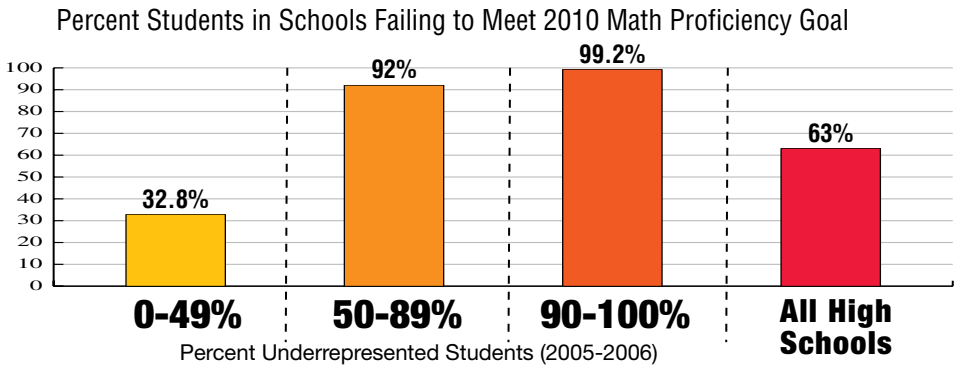


Source: California Basic Education Data System, available at www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/

This accountability framework assumes that California schools have the capacity to continually improve student performance. However, the prevalence and distribution of math problems in the state's middle and high schools that we described above calls that assumption into question.

In fact, only about one in three California high school students attend schools that currently meet the math achievement goal for 2010. And, as the graphic below shows, less than 1% of those California students enrolled in intensively segregated minority schools are in schools that already meet this goal.

High School Racial Composition and Failure to Meet 2010 Math Proficiency Goal



Source: California Basic Education Data System, available at www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/

Many California high schools have increased the proportion of students scoring proficient in math over the last two years, and these schools hope to sustain their improvement. But, it won't be enough for California high schools to continue to increase at their current rates (a very challenging prospect indeed). California's accountability scheme within NCLB requires that the yearly increases that schools make in the proportion of students that attain proficiency grow larger and larger over time. So, at their current rates of progress, nearly every high school in the state will be a failing school by 2014. By that year, less than 5% of California high school students would attend schools that achieved the math proficiency target. In fact, more than half of California students attend high schools that would need *more than 50 years* beyond 2014 to attain NCLB's math goal—*even if* these schools continue to improve every year at the rates they have demonstrated over the last two years.

VII. Conclusion

In August 2007, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell called for Californians to address what he called the state's "racial learning gap." The fact that California's African American and Latino students perform below their white and Asian peers on standardized tests is well documented and their progress to graduation and college lags behind white and Asian students as well. We agree that these disparities deserve attention and public action.

To close the so-called racial learning gap, Californians need to address the gaps that this report highlights. The fact that California public schools offer fewer of the fundamental conditions all students need to learn is compounded by the fact that California's fundamental conditions for learning are not equally distributed. These two gaps combine in many harmful ways. For example, California's worst-in-the-nation student-to-teacher ratio and its unequal distribution of qualified teachers means that students in intensely segregated minority schools more often experience very large classes taught by unqualified teachers.

Closing these gaps requires that Californians look beyond the rhetoric of "accountability" and "standards" in isolation, and focus on the opportunities for learning that students experience in their classrooms. California has enacted educational standards designed to produce a highly educated workforce for a technology-based economy and a well-informed citizenry. But achieving these standards is not a simple matter of motivating teachers and students (through "carrots" and/or "sticks") to "try harder." California has not invested in its schools at a level commensurate with its standards, and our educational infrastructure is incapable of providing the opportunities these goals demand.

Further, the quality of education students receive is strongly related to their race or ethnicity and that of their classmates—replicating the inequalities historically associated with racial segregation. Truly closing the gaps that divide California's students will require directing new resources to those students who are most deprived of fundamental learning conditions. It is a necessary step if the state is serious about making California's learning standards accessible to all, regardless of race.

(Endnotes)

1 See, for example, *A way to close the achievement gap between white and minority students in California*, editorial in the San Francisco Chronicle, Tuesday, August 21, 2007.

2 In 2006, ACCORD and IDEA released two reports: *The 2006 California Educational Opportunity Report: Roadblocks to College* and *Removing the Roadblocks: Fair College Access for All California Students*. These reports analyzed how well California's K-12 public schools prepared their diverse students for college, and they compared California's high schools with high schools across the nation. The reports concluded that all California students face significant roadblocks on their pathway to college, and students attending schools with the highest concentrations of Latino and African American students face these problems most often. The accompanying reports on African American and Latino students, as well as the reports for each legislative district and each California high school are available online at www.EdOpp.org.

3 Ed Source. (2007). *Higher Standards + Support = More Students Taking Tougher Math*. Mountain View, California: Ed Source. Available online at http://www.edsource.org

4 United States Department of Education: National Center for Education Statistics. (2007). *National Assessment of Educational Progress*. Available online at http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/

5 Parents and Students for Great Schools. (2007). *Now That We Have the Facts: California Parents and Students Voice Their Demands for Public Education*. Available online at www.caljustice.org/cfj_live/images/stories/07_reports/Education%20Survey.pdf and Baldasare, M. et al. (2007). *Californians and Higher Education*. San Francisco, CA: The Public Policy Institute of California.

6 Rogers, J. (2007). Constructing Success: Accountability, Public Reporting, and the California High School Exit Exam. *Santa Clara Law Review* 47:755-80.

7 The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reported that California's graduation rate was only marginally lower than the national average in 2005. NCES calculates graduation, what it calls an Average Freshman Graduation Rate by dividing the number of graduates by the average of the number of students enrolled as 8th, 9th and 10th graders five, four, or three years before. In 2005, NCES reported a national average graduation rate of 74.7% and a California average of 74.6%. While NCES has not yet reported graduation rates for the Class of 2006, we expect that California's graduation rate will now fall roughly 4 percentage points below the national average.

8 College Board. (2007). *Higher Education Landscape*. Available online at http://www.collegeboard.com/highered/res/hel/hel.html.

9 National Center For Higher Education Management Systems. (2007). *Completion: Bachelor's degrees awarded per 100 high school graduates 6 years earlier*. Available online at http://www.higheredinfo.org/dbrowser/index.php?submeasure=85&year=2005&level=nation&mode=data&state=0.

10 United States Department of Education: National Center for Education Statistics. (2007). *National Assessment of Educational Progress*. Available online at http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/

11 United States Department of Education: National Center for Education Statistics. (2007). *National Assessment of Educational Progress. The Nation's Report Card*. Available online at http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/http://nationsreportcard.gov/math_2007/m0005.asp

12 Hereinafter, we use the shorthand "Asian" to refer to students designated as Asian, Pacific Islander, or Pilipino.

13 Hereinafter, we use the shorthand "Underrepresented" to refer to students designated as African, American, Latino, and American Indian. These groups are underrepresented in the University of California system.

14 Orfield, G. and Lee, C. (2007, August). *Historic Reversals, Accelerating Resegregation, and the Need for New Integration Strategies*. Los Angeles, California: Civil Rights Project/ Proyecto Derechos Civiles, University of California, Los Angeles.

15 Free and Reduced Price Meals (FRPM) is the only indicator available to measure concentrations of poverty at the school level. See *California Educational Opportunity Reports Data Sources and Definitions*. Available online at www.EdOpp.org.

16 McDonough, P. (2004). Counseling Matters: Knowledge, assistance, and organizational commitment in college preparation. In William G. Tierney, Zoë B. Corwin & Julia E. Colyar (Eds.) P*reparing for College: Nine Elements of Effective Outreach*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

17 United States Department of Education: National Center for Education Statistics. Available online at http://nces.ed.gov

18 Table 5. – Average public school size (mean number of students per school), by instructional level and by state: School year 2000-2001; Available online at nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/overview/table5.asp

19 Oakes, J. (2002). Education Inadequacy, Inequality and Failed State Policy: A synthesis of expert reports prepared for *Williams v. State of California*. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA/IDEA. Available online at www.idea.gseis.ucla.edu.

20 McDonough, P. (2004). Counseling Matters: Knowledge, assistance, and organizational commitment in college preparation. In William G. Tierney, Zoë B. Corwin & Julia E. Colyar (Eds.) P*reparing for College: Nine Elements of Effective Outreach*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

21 The American School Counselor Association analyzed the most recent available data (covering the school year, 2004-05) from the National Center for Educational Statistics' Common Core of Data. Available online at http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?contentid=460.

22 We report here on NCES' most recent published data (from 2003-2004) on student-teacher ratio. See: Table C-8. Median public school student/teacher ratio, by instructional level: United States and other jurisdictions, school year 2003-2004. Available online at http://nces.ed.gov/

23 Darling-Hammond, L. (2004). Inequality and the Right to Learn: Access to Qualified Teachers in California's Public Schools. *Teachers College Record*, 106, No. 10.

24 We provide data about the percentages of A-G courses and rates of college-going separately for each high school in the on-line version of this report. Available online at www.EdOpp.org

25 Finn, C., Petrilli M. and Julian, L. (2006). *The State of State Standards*. New York, NY: The Fordham Foundation. See also: Cronin, J. et al. (2007). *The Proficiency Illusion:* New York, NY: The Fordham Foundation.

26 NCLB requires that state and school districts annually review the academic progress of all schools receiving federal Title I funds and to identify those schools that do not make annual progress toward 100% proficiency by 2014. Schools are identified as Program Improvement (PI) schools after two consecutive years of not making adequate yearly progress (AYP). California determines AYP for high schools by considering the following four measures: 1) The percentage of students scoring at the "proficient" or "advanced" level on the California Standards Tests for English-language arts and mathematics; 2) The percentage of students participating in those tests; 3) The graduation rate for high schools; 4) California's own accountability measurement of progress, the Academic Performance Index (API).

27 United States Department of Education. No Child Left Behind Act: Part A Sec. 1116.b.8.B. Available online at www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg2.html#sec1116

28 We report here on the number of California middle schools and high schools in at least their fifth year of Program Improvement in the 2006-2007 school year.

29 For discussion of the need for California to improve its math instruction to sustain its competitive advantage in STEM related industries, see: California Council on Science and Technology and Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning (2007). *Critical Path Analysis of California's Science and Mathematics Teacher Preparation System*. Sacramento, California.

30 Ed Source. (2007). *Higher Standards + Support = More Students Taking Tougher Math*. Mountain View, California: Ed Source. Available online at www.edsource.org

31 National Center for Educational Statistics. (2007). *Mathematics 2007 State Snapshot Report: California Grade 8 Public Schools*. Available online at http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/stt2007/2007495CA8.pdf

32 Darling-Hammond, L. (1997). *The Right to Learn*: *A blueprint for creating schools that work*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

33 The Quality Education Investment Act (QEIA) was created through Senate Bill (SB) 1133 (Chapter 751, Statutes of 2006). The legislation provided approximately $3 billion for use by schools ranked as either decile 1 or 2 in the state's Academic Performance Index to reduce class sizes, improve teacher and principal training, and hire more school counselors.

34 The introduction to California's math framework states: "A goal of this framework is to prepare all students to study Algebra by 8th grade." California Department of Education (2006). *Mathematics Framework for Califronia Public Schools: Kindergarten through grade 12*. Sacramento, CA. Available online at http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/ma/cf/documents/math-front-intro.pdf.

35 For example, more than 1 in 3 (37%) of the Fall 2006 first-year students in the Califronia State University system required remediation in mathematics. See California State University, CSU Analytic Studies Development (2007). *Fall 2006 Regularly Admitted First-Time Freshmen Remediation Campus and Systemwide*. Available online at http://www.asd.calstate.edu/remediation/06/Rem_Sys_fall2006.htm.

36 C. Adelman. (2006). *The Toolbox Revisited: Paths to Degree Completion from High School Through College*. Washington, DC: United States Department of Education.

Cover Art- Mural at Esperanza Elementary School (LAUSD)

Paul Botello

Assisted by Ray Sanchez, Daniel Molina, Silvia Guadalupe Santos, Luis Fernando Mojica.

Date: 1995
Location: Esperanza School

Born and raised in East Los Angeles, Paul Botello's work can be found in the permanent collections of Armand Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA and Laguna Art Museum, Laguna Beach, CA. He has been featured in both national and international exhibitions.

Principal Researchers
John Rogers
Jeannie Oakes
Sophie Fanelli
David Medina
Siomara Valladares
Veronica Terriquez

Contributing Editors
Jaime Del Razo
Erica Hamilton
Martin Lipton
Arif Shaikh
Michelle Renée

Design and Production
Nery Orellana
Jared Planas
Carolyn Castelli
Jessie Castro

UCLA IDEA
INSTITUTE FOR DEMOCRACY, EDUCATION, AND ACCESS

UCLA IDEA is a research institute seeking to understand and challenge pervasive racial and social class inequalities in education. In addition to conducting independent research and policy analysis, IDEA supports educators, public officials, advocates, community activists, and young people as they design, conduct, and use research to make high-quality public schools and successful college participation routine occurrences in all communities. IDEA also studies how research combines with strategic communications and public engagement to promote widespread participation in civic life. **www.ucla-idea.org**

UC/ACCORD
ALL CAMPUS CONSORTIUM ON RESEARCH FOR DIVERSITY

University of California's All Campus Consortium on Research for Diversity (UC ACCORD) is an interdisciplinary, multi-campus research center. UC ACCORD serves as an information and research clearinghouse and catalyst for promoting the delivery of high-quality, equitable schooling to all students. UC ACCORD harnesses the research expertise of the University of California to identify strategies that will increase college preparation, access, and retention. **www.ucaccord.org**

This report can be accessed online at **http://www.EdOpp.org**
For further information, contact UCLA/IDEA
phone: (310) 206-8725; fax: (310) 206-8770; email: idea@ucla.edu

Keeping Track, Part 1: The Policy and Practice Of Curriculum Inequality

BY JEANNIE OAKES

The basic features of schools may lock them into patterns that make it difficult to achieve either excellence or equality, says Ms. Oakes. The practice of tracking, for example, contributes to mediocre schooling for most secondary students.

THE IDEA OF educational equality has fallen from favor. In the 1980s, policy makers, school practitioners, and the public have turned their attention instead to what many consider a competing goal: excellence. Attempts to "equalize" schooling in the Sixties and Seventies have been judged extravagant and naive. Worse, critics imply that those well-meant efforts to correct inequality may have compromised the central mission of the schools: teaching academics well. And current critics warn that, given the precarious position of the United States in the global competition for economic, technological, and military superiority, we can no longer sacrifice the quality of our schools to social goals. This view promotes the judicious speeding of limited educational resources in ways that will produce the greatest return on "human capital." Phrased in these economic terms, special provisions for underachieving poor and minority students become a bad investment. In short, equality is out; academic excellence is in.

On the other hand, many people still argue vociferously that the distinction between promoting excellence and providing equality is false, that one cannot be achieved without the other. Unfortunately, whether "tight-fisted" conservatives or "fuzzy-headed" liberals are in the ascendancy, the heat of the rhetoric surrounding the argument largely obscures a more serious problem: the possibility that the unquestioned *assumptions* that drive school practice and the *basic features of schools* may themselves lock schools into patterns that make it difficult to achieve *either* excellence *or* equality.

The practice of tracking in secondary schools illustrates this possibility and provides evidence of how schools, even as they voice commitment to equality and excellence, organize and deliver curriculum in ways that

advance neither. Nearly all schools track students. Because tracking enables schools to provide educational treatments matched to particular groups of students, it is believed to promote higher achievement for all students under conditions of equal educational opportunity. However, rather than promoting higher achievement, tracking contributes to mediocre schooling for *most* secondary students. And because it places the greatest obstacles to achievement in the path of those children least advantaged in American society--poor and minority children--tracking forces schools to play an active role in perpetuating social and economic inequalities as well. Evidence about the influence of tracking on student outcomes and analyses of how tracking affects the day-to-day school experiences of young people support the argument that such basic elements of schooling can *prevent* rather than *promote* educational goals.

WHAT IS TRACKING?

Tracking is the practice of dividing students into separate classes for high-, average-, and low-achievers; it lays out different curriculum paths for students headed for college and for those who are bound directly for the workplace. In most senior high schools, students are assigned to one or another *curriculum track* that lays out sequences of courses for college-preparatory, vocational, or general track students. Junior and senior high schools also make use of *ability grouping*--that is, they divide academic subjects (typically English, mathematics, science, and social studies) into classes geared to different "Levels" for students of different abilities. In many high schools these two systems overlap, as schools provide college-preparatory, general, and vocational sequences of courses and also practice ability grouping in academic subjects. More likely than not, the student in the vocational curriculum track will be in one of the lower ability groups. Because similar overlapping exists for college-bound students, the distinction between the two types of tracking is sometimes difficult to assess.

But tracking does not proceed as needy as the description above implies. Both curriculum tracking and ability grouping vary from school to school in the number of subjects that are tracked, in the number of levels provided, and in the ways in which students are placed. Moreover, tracking is confounded by the inflexibilities and idiosyncrasies of "master schedules," which can create unplanned tracking, generate further variations among tracking systems, and affect the courses taken by individual students as well. Elective subjects, such as art and home economics, sometimes become low-track classes because college-preparatory students rarely have time in their schedules to take them; required classes, such as drivers' training, health, or physical education, though they are intended to be heterogeneous, become tracked when the requirements of other courses that *are* tracked keep students together for large portions of the day.

Even as they voice commitment to equality and excellence, schools organize and deliver curriculum in ways that advance neither.

Despite these variations, tracking has common and predictable characteristics:

- The intellectual performance of students is judged, and these judgments determine placement with particular groups.
- Classes and tracks are labeled according to the performance levels of the students in them (e.g., advanced, average, remedial) or according to students' postsecondary destinations (e.g., college-preparatory, vocational).
- The curriculum and instruction in various tracks are tailored to the perceived needs and abilities of the students assigned to them.
- The groups that are formed are not merely a collection of different but equally-valued instructional groups. They form a hierarchy, with the most advanced tracks (and the students in them) seen as being on top.
- Students in various tracks and ability levels experience school in very different ways.

UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS

First, and clearly most important, teachers and administrators generally assume that tracking promotes overall student achievement--that is, that the academic needs of all students will be better met when they learn in groups with similar capabilities or prior levels of achievement. Given the inevitable diversity of student populations, tracking is seen as the best way to address individual needs and to cope with individual differences. This assumption stems from a view of human capabilities that includes the belief that students capacities to master schoolwork are so disparate that they require different and separate schooling experiences. The extreme position contends that some students cannot learn at all.

A second assumption that underlies tracking is that less-capable students will suffer emotional as well as educational damage from daily classroom contact and competition with their brighter peers. Lowered self-concepts and negative attitudes toward learning are widely considered to be consequence of mixed-ability grouping for slower learners. It is also widely assumed that students can be placed in tracks and groups both accurately and fairly. And finally, most teachers and administrators contend that tracking greatly eases

the teaching task and is, perhaps, the *only* way to manage student differences.

THE RECORD OF TRACKING

Students clearly differ when they enter secondary schools, and these differences just as clearly influence learning. But separating students to better accommodate these differences appears to be neither necessary, effective, nor appropriate.

Does tracking work? At the risk of oversimplifying a complex body of research literature, it is safe to conclude that *there is little evidence to support any of the assumptions about tracking*. The effects of tracking on student outcomes have been widely investigated, and the bulk of this work *does not* support commonly-held beliefs that tracking increases student learning. Nor does the evidence support tracking as a way to improve students' attitudes about themselves or about schooling.[1] Although existing tracking systems *appear* to provide advantages for students who are placed in the top tracks, the literature suggests that students at all ability levels can achieve at least as well in heterogeneous classrooms.

Students who are *not* in top tracks--a group that includes about 60% of senior high school students--suffer clear and consistent disadvantages from tracking. Among students identified as average or slow, tracking often appears to retard academic progress. Indeed, one study documented the fact that the lowered I.Q. scores of senior high school students followed their placement in low tracks.[2] Students who are placed in vocational tracks do not even seem to reap any benefits in the job market. Indeed, graduates of vocational programs may be less employable and, when they do find jobs, may earn lower wages than other high school graduates.[3]

Most tracking research does not support the assumption that slow students suffer emotional strains when enrolled in mixed-ability classes. Often the opposite result has been found. Rather than helping students feel more comfortable about themselves, tracking can reduce self-esteem, lower aspirations, and foster negative attitudes toward school. Some studies have also concluded that tracking leads low-track students to misbehave and eventually to drop out altogether.[4]

The net effect of tracking is to exaggerate the initial differences among students rather than to provide the means to better accommodate them. For example, studies show that senior high school students who are initially similar in background and prior achievement become *increasingly* different in achievement and future aspirations when they are placed in different tracks.[5] Moreover, this effect is likely to be cumulative over most of the

students' school careers, since track placements tend to remain fixed. Students placed in low-ability groups in elementary school are likely to continue in these groups in middle school or junior high school; in senior high school these students are typically placed in non-college-preparatory tracks. Studies that have documented increased gaps between initially comparable high school students placed in different tracks probably capture only a fraction of this effect.

Is tracking fair? Compounding the lack of empirical evidence to support tracking as a way to enhance student outcomes are compelling arguments that favor exposing all students to a common curriculum, *even if differences among them prevent all students from benefiting equally*. These arguments counter both the assumption that tracking can be carried out "fairly" and the view that tracking is a legitimate means to ease the task of teaching.

Central to the issue of fairness is the well-established link between track placements and student background characteristics. Poor and minority youngsters (principally black and Hispanics) are disproportionately placed in tracks for low-ability or non-college-bound students. By the same token, minority students are consistently underrepresented in programs for the gifted and talented. In addition, differentiation by race and class occurs within vocational tracks, with blacks and Hispanics more frequently enrolled in programs that train students for the lowest-level occupations (e.g., building maintenance, commercial sewing, and institutional care). These differences in placement by race and social class appear regardless of whether test scores, counselor and teacher recommendations, or student and parent choices are used as the basis for placement.[6]

The net effect of tracking is to exaggerate the initial differences among students rather than to provide the means to better accommodate them.

Even if these track placements are ostensibly based on merit--that is, determined by prior school achievement rather than by race, class, or student choice--they usually come to signify judgments about supposedly fixed abilities. We might find appropriate the disproportionate placements of poor and minority students in low-track classes if these youngsters were, in fact, known to be innately less capable of learning than middle- and upper-middle-class whites. But that is not the case. Or we might think of these track placements as appropriate if they served to remediate the obvious educational deficiencies that many poor and minority students exhibit. If being in a low track prepared disadvantaged students for success in higher tracks and opened future educational opportunities to them, we would not question the need for tracking. However, this rarely happens.

The assumption that tracking makes teaching easier pales in importance when held up against the abundant evidence of the general ineffectiveness of tracking and the disproportionate harm it works on poor and minority students. But even if this were not the case, the assumption that tracking makes teaching easier would stand up *only if* the tracks were made up of truly homogeneous groups. In fact, they are not. Even within tracks, the variability of students' learning speed, cognitive style, interest, effort, and aptitude for various tasks is often considerable. Tracking simply masks the fact that instruction for any group of 20 to 35 people requires considerable variety in instructional strategies, tasks, materials, feedback, and guidance. It also requires multiple criteria for success and a variety of rewards. Unfortunately, for many schools and teachers, tracking deflects attention from these instructional realities. When instruction fails, the problem is too often attributed to the child or perhaps to a "wrong placement." The fact that tracking *may* make teaching easier for some teachers should not cloud our judgment about whether that teaching is best for any group of students -- whatever their abilities.

Finally, a profound ethical concern emerges from all the above. In the words of educational philosopher Gary Fenstermacher, "[U]sing individual differences in aptitude, ability, or interest as the basis for curricular variation denies students equal access to the knowledge and understanding available to humankind." He continues, "[I]t is possible that some students may not benefit equally from unrestricted access to knowledge, but this fact does not entitle us to control access in ways that effectively prohibit all students from encountering what Dewey called "the funded capital of civilization."[7] Surely educators do not intend any such unfairness when by tracking they seek to accommodate differences among students.

WHY SUCH DISAPPOINTING EFFECTS?

As those of us who were working with John Goodlad on A Study of Schooling began to analyze the extensive set of data we had gathered about 38 schools across the U.S., we wanted to find out more about tracking.[8] We wanted to gather specific information about the knowledge and skills that students were taught in tracked classes, about the learning activities they experienced, about the ways in which teachers managed instruction, about the classroom relationships, and about how involved students were in their learning. By studying tracked classes directly and asking over and over whether such classes differed, we hoped to begin to understand why the effects of tracking have been so disappointing for so many students. We wanted to be able to raise some reasonable hypotheses about the ways in which the good intentions of practitioners seem to go wrong.

We selected a representative group of 300 English and mathematics classes. We chose these subjects because they are most often tracked and because nearly all secondary students take them. Our sample included relatively equal numbers of high-, average-, low-, and mixed-ability groups. We had a great deal of information about these classes because teachers and students had completed extensive questionnaires, teachers had been interviewed, and teachers had put together packages of materials about their classes, including lists of the topics and skills they taught, the textbooks they used, and the ways in which they evaluated student learning. Many teachers also gave us sample lesson plans, worksheets, and tests. Trained observers recorded what students and teachers were doing and documented their interactions.

The data gathered on these classes provided some clear and consistent insights. In the three areas we studied--curriculum content, instructional quality. and classroom climate--we found remarkable and disturbing differences between classes in different tracks. These included important discrepancies in student access to knowledge, in their classroom instructional opportunities, and in their classroom learning environments.

Access to knowledge. In both English and math classes, we found that students had access to considerably different types of knowledge and had opportunities to develop quite different intellectual skills. For example, students in high-track English classes were exposed to content that can be called "high-status knowledge." This included topics and skills that are required for college. High-track students studied both classic and modern fiction. They learned the characteristics of literary genres and analyzed the elements of good narrative writing. These students were expected to write thematic essays and reports of library research, and they learned vocabulary that would boost their scores on college entrance exams. It was the high-track students in our sample who had the most opportunities to think critically or to solve interesting problems.

Low-track English classes, on the other hand, rarely, if ever, encountered similar types of knowledge. Nor were they expected to learn the same skills. Instruction in basic reading skills held a prominent place in low-track classes, and these skills were taught mostly through workbooks, kits, and "young adult" fiction. Students wrote simple paragraphs, completed worksheets on English usage, and practiced filling out applications for jobs and other kinds of forms. Their learning tasks were largely restricted to memorization or low-level comprehension.

The differences in mathematics content followed much the same pattern. High-track classes focused primarily on mathematical concepts; low-track classes stressed basic computational skills and math facts.

These differences are not merely curricular adaptations to individual needs, though they are certainly thought of as such. Differences in access to

knowledge have important long-term social and educational consequences as well. For example, low-track students are probably prevented from ever encountering at school the knowledge our society values most. Much of the curriculum of low-track classes was likely to lock students into a continuing series of such bottom-level placements because important concepts and skills were neglected. Thus these students were denied the knowledge that would enable them to move successfully into higher-track classes.

Opportunities to learn. We also looked at two classroom conditions known to influence how much students will learn: instructional time and teaching quality. The marked differences we found in our data consistently showed that students in higher tracks had better classroom opportunities. For example, all our data on classroom time pointed to the same conclusion: students in high tracks get more; students in low tracks get less. Teachers of high-track classes set aside more class time for learning, and our observers found that more actual class time was spent on learning activities. High-track students were also expected to spend more time doing homework, fewer high-track students were observed to be off-task during class activities, and more of them told us that learning took up most of their class time, rather than discipline problems, socializing, or class routines.

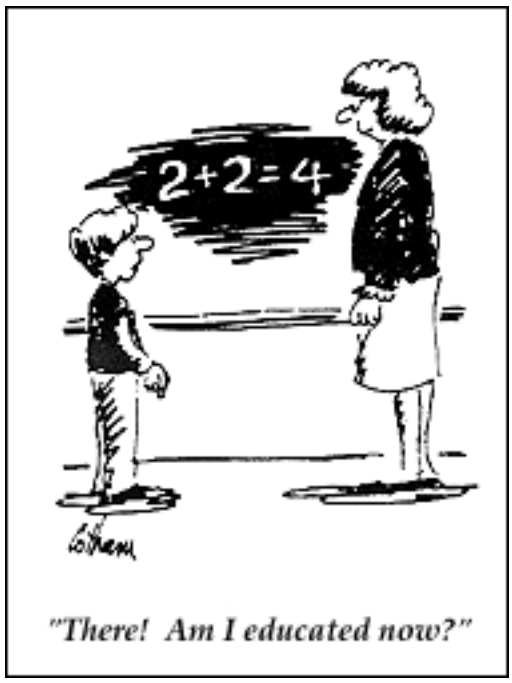
Instruction in high-track classes more often included a whole range of teacher behaviors likely to enhance learning. High-track teachers were more enthusiastic, and their instruction was clearer. They used strong criticism or ridicule less frequently than did teachers of low-track classes. Classroom tasks were more various and more highly organized in high-track classes, and grades were more relevant to student learning.

These differences in learning opportunities portray a fundamental irony of schooling: those students who need more time to learn appear to be getting less; those students who have the most difficulty learning are being exposed least to the sort of teaching that best facilitates learning.

Classroom climate. We were interested in studying classroom climates in various tracks because we were convinced that supportive relationships and positive feelings in class are more than just nice accompaniments to learning. When teachers and students trust one another, classroom time and energy are freed for teaching and learning. Without this trust, students spend a great deal of time and energy establishing less productive relationships with others and interfering with the teacher's instructional agenda; teachers spend their time and energy trying to maintain control. In such classes, less learning is likely to occur.

The data from A Study of Schooling permitted us to investigate three important aspects of classroom environments: relationships between teachers and students, relationships among the students themselves, and the intensity of student involvement in learning. Once again, we discovered a distressing

pattern of advantages for high-track classes and disadvantages for low-track classes. In high-track classes students thought that their teachers were more concerned about them and less punitive. Teachers in high-track classes spent less time on student behavior, and they more often encouraged their students to become independent, questioning, critical thinkers. In low-track classes teachers were seen as less concerned and more punitive. Teachers in low-track classes emphasized matters of discipline and behavior, and they often listed such things as "following directions," "respecting my position," "punctuality," and "learning to take a direct order" as among the five most important things they wanted their class to learn during the year.



"There! Am I educated now?"

We found similar differences in the relationships that students established with one another in class. Students in low-track classes agreed far more often that "students in this class are unfriendly to me" or that "I often feel left out of class activities." They said that their classes were interrupted by problems and by arguing in class. Generally, they seemed to like each other less. Not surprisingly, given these differences in relationships, students in high-track classes appeared to be much more involved in their classwork. Students in low-track classes were more apathetic and indicated more often that they didn't care about what went on or that failing didn't bother most of their classmates.

In these data, we found once again a pattern of classroom experience that seems to enhance the possibilities of learning for those students already disposed to do well -- that is, those in high-track classes. We saw even more clearly a pattern of classroom experience likely to inhibit the learning of those in the bottom tracks. As with access to knowledge and opportunities to learn, we found that those who most needed support from a positive, nurturing environment got the least.

Although these data do show clear instructional advantages for high-achieving students and clear disadvantages for their low-achieving peers, other date from our work suggest that the quality of the experience of average students falls somewhere between these two extremes. Average students, too, were deprived of the best circumstances schools have to offer, though their classes were typically more like those of high-track students. Taken together, these findings begin to suggest why students who are not in the top tracks are likely to suffer because of their placements: their education is of considerably lower quality.

It would be a serious mistake to interpret these data as the "inevitable" outcome of the differences in the students who populate the various tracks. Many of the mixed-ability classes in our study showed that high-quality experiences are very possible in classes that include all types of students. But neither should we attribute these differences to consciously mean-spirited or blatantly discriminatory actions by schoolpeople.

Obviously, the content teachers decide to teach and the ways in which they teach it are greatly influenced by the students with whom they interact. And it is unlikely that students are passive participants in tracking processes. It seems more likely that students' achievements, attitudes, interests, perceptions of themselves, and behaviors (growing increasingly disparate over time) help produce some of the effects of tracking. Thus groups of students who, by conventional wisdom, seem less able and less eager to learn are very likely to affect a teacher's ability or even willingness to provide the best possible learning opportunities. The obvious conclusion about the effects of these track-specific differences on the ability of the schools to achieve academic excellence is that students who are exposed to less content and lower-quality teaching are unlikely to get the full benefit out of their schooling. Yet this less-fruitful experience seems to be the norm when average- and low-achieving students are grouped together for instruction.

Schools seem to have themselves locked into a structure that may unnecessarily buy the achievement of a few at the expense of the many.

I believe that these data reveal frightening patterns of curricular inequality. Although these patterns would be disturbing under any circumstances (and though many white, suburban schools consign a good number of their students to mediocre experiences in low-ability and general-track classes), they become particularly distressing in light of the prevailing pattern of placing disproportionate numbers of poor and minority students in the

lowest-track classes. A self-fulfilling prophecy can be seen to work at the institutional level to prevent schools from providing equal educational opportunity. Tracking appears to teach and reinforce the notion that those not defined as the best are *expected* to do less well. Few students and teachers can defy those expectations.

TRACKING, EQUALITY. AND EXCELLENCE

Tracking is assumed to promote educational excellence because it enables schools to provide students with the curriculum and instruction they need to maximize their potential and achieve excellence on their own terms. But the evidence about tracking suggests the contrary. Certainly students bring differences with them to school, but, by tracking, schools help to widen rather than narrow these differences. Students who are judged to be different from one another are separated into different classes and then provided knowledge, opportunities to learn, and classroom environments that are vastly different. Many of the students in top tracks (only about 40% of high-schoolers) do benefit from the advantages they receive in their classes. But, in their quest for higher standards and superior academic performance, schools seem to have locked themselves into a structure that may *unnecessarily* buy the achievement of a few at the expense of many. Such a structure provides but a shaky foundation for excellence.

At the same time, the evidence about tracking calls into question the widely held view that schools provide students who have the "right stuff" with a neutral environment in which they can rise to the top (with "special" classes providing an extra boost to those who might need it). Everywhere we turn we find that the differentiated structure of schools throws up barriers to achievement for poor and minority students. Measures of talent clearly seem to work against them, which leads to their disproportionate placement in groups identified as slow. Once there, their achievement seems to be further inhibited by the type of knowledge they are taught and by the quality of the learning opportunities they are afforded. Moreover, the social and psychological dimensions of classes at the bottom of the hierarchy of schooling seem to restrict their chances for school success even further.

Good intentions, including those of advocates of "excellence" and of "equity," characterize the rhetoric of schooling. Tracking, because it is usually taken to be a neutral practice and a part of the mechanics of schooling, has escaped the attention of those who mean well. But by failing to scrutinize the effects of tracking, schools unwittingly subvert their well-meant efforts to promote academic excellence and to provide conditions that will enable all students to achieve it.

Footnotes

[1] Some recent reviews of studies on the effects of tracking include: Robert C. Calfee and Roger Brown, "Grouping Students for Instruction," in *Classroom Management* (Chicago: 78th Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, University of Chicago Press, 1979); Dominick Esposito, "Homogeneous and Heterogeneous Ability Grouping: Principal Findings and Implications for Evaluating and Designing More Effective Educational Environments," *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 43, 1973, pp. 163-79; Jeannie Oakes, "Tracking: A Contextual Perspective on How Schools Structure Differences," *Educational Psychologist*, in press; Caroline J. Persell, *Education and Inequality: The Roots and Results of Stratification in America's Schools* (New York: Free Press, 1977); and James E. Rosenbaum, "The Social Implications of Educational Grouping," in David C. Berliner, ea., *Review of Research in Education*, Vol. 8 (Washington D.C.: American Educational Research Association, 1980), pp. 361-401.

[2] James E. Rosenbaum, *Making Inequality: The Hidden Curriculum of High School Tracking* (New York: Wiley, 1976).

[3] See, for example, David Stern et al., *One Million Hours a Day: Vocational Education in California Public Secondary Schools* (Berkeley: Report to the California Policy Seminar, University of California School of Education, 1985).

[4] Rosenbaum "The Social Implications..."; and William E. Shafer and Carol Olexa, *Tracking and Opportunity* (Scranton, Pa.: Chandler, 1971).

[5] Karl A. Alexander and Edward L. McDill, "Selection and Allocation Within Schools: Some Causes and Consequences of Curriculum Placement," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 41, 1976, pp. 969-80; Karl A. Alexander, Martha Cook, and Edward L. McDill, "Curriculum Tracking and Educational Stratification: Some Further Evidence," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 43, 1978, pp. 47-66; and Donald A. Rock et al., *Study of Excellence in High School Education: Longitudinal Study, 1980-82* (Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service, Final Report, 1985).

[6] Persell, *Education and Inequality...*; and Jeannie Oakes, *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985).

[7] Gary D. Fenstermacher, "Introduction," in Gary D. Fenstermacher and John I. Goodlad, eds., *Individual Differences and the Common Curriculum* (Chicago: 82nd Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 3.

[8] John I. Goodlad, *A Place Called School* (New York: McGraw-Hill,

1984).

JEANNIE OAKES is a social scientist with the Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, Calif. *This article is an extension of analyses that appear in* Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality, *published by Yale University Press in 1985. The work was conducted under the auspices of the Laboratory in School and Community Education, Graduate School of Education, of California, Los Angeles. "Keeping Track, Part 2: Curriculum Inequality and School Reform, " will appear in the October* Kappan.

Footnotes

[1] Some recent reviews of studies on the effects of tracking include: Robert C. Calfee and Roger Brown, "Grouping Students for Instruction," in *Classroom Management* (Chicago: 78th Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, University of Chicago Press, 1979); Dominick Esposito, "Homogeneous and Heterogeneous Ability Grouping: Principal Findings and Implications for Evaluating and Designing More Effective Educational Environments," *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 43, 1973, pp. 163-79; Jeannie Oakes, "Tracking: A Contextual Perspective on How Schools Structure Differences," *Educational Psychologist*, in press; Caroline J. Persell, *Education and Inequality: The Roots and Results of Stratification in America's Schools* (New York: Free Press, 1977); and James E. Rosenbaum, "The Social Implications of Educational Grouping," in David C. Berliner, ea., *Review of Research in Education*, Vol. 8 (Washington D.C.: American Educational Research Association, 1980), pp. 361-401.

[2] James E. Rosenbaum, *Making Inequality: The Hidden Curriculum of High School Tracking* (New York: Wiley, 1976).

[3] See, for example, David Stern et al., *One Million Hours a Day: Vocational Education in California Public Secondary Schools* (Berkeley: Report to the California Policy Seminar, University of California School of Education, 1985).

[4] Rosenbaum "The Social Implications..."; and William E. Shafer and Carol Olexa, *Tracking and Opportunity* (Scranton, Pa.: Chandler, 1971).

[5] Karl A. Alexander and Edward L. McDill, "Selection and Allocation Within Schools: Some Causes and Consequences of Curriculum Placement," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 41, 1976, pp. 969-80; Karl A. Alexander, Martha Cook, and Edward L. McDill, "Curriculum Tracking and Educational Stratification: Some Further Evidence," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 43, 1978, pp. 47-66; and Donald A. Rock et al., *Study of Excellence in High School Education: Longitudinal Study, 1980-82* (Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service, Final Report, 1985).

[6] Persell, *Education and Inequality...*; and Jeannie Oakes, *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985).

[7] Gary D. Fenstermacher, "Introduction," in Gary D. Fenstermacher and John I. Goodlad, eds., *Individual Differences and the Common Curriculum* (Chicago: 82nd Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 3.

[8] John I. Goodlad, *A Place Called School* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984).

---

*Please use the browser's **Back** button to return to the previous page.*