

10/29/09 On Nabel's op ed in the Advocate

By Christine Papadakis, to the Stamford BOE, 10/29/09

In an editorial published in yesterday's Stamford Advocate Ms. Nabel wrote: "As stewards of the district's children, members of the Board of Education must be mindful of their responsibility". I completely agree with this statement and that is why I find the remainder of her editorial to be so disturbing. Is Ms. Nabel implying that the BOE has not been mindful of their stewardship in the past? Please clarify exactly what Ms. Nabel is saying in her editorial? Is she saying that students who were placed in the honors group in the past were not placed there based purely on academic merit? What other criteria then was used to place them there? Is she saying that when Dr. Singer placed students in their 6th grade "groups" she used anything other than their academic scores to do so? I would like to know what else other than "work and performance" earned students a place in the coveted 0 group? As a member of the BOE if Ms. Nabel has information that students were given a "gold star sticker of 0 group" without having earned their place, she has a fiduciary responsibility to address it? What does Ms. Nabel know and why has she as president of the Board of Education not taken appropriate measures?

I have been in and out of Hart School for the past seven years and not once did I ever witness a teacher, administrator or parent differentiate their treatment of a child based on their socio-economic status. So long as they were in that building every single child, regardless of gender, race or ethnicity, had the same opportunities bar none. If Ms. Nabel or any one else in the administration has knowlege that "doors were closed" to certain students in our district they have a legal responsibility as "stewards of the district's children", to address it. As a parent of this public school system and a tax payer of this community, I demand that the statements made in her editorial be either substantiated or publicly retracted.

The question as to why the MS honors groups do not reflect the greater Stamford population is a very legitimate one. The most unfortunate consequence of the current focus on MS reform is that it has allowed this administration to leave it unanswered. What actually has this new system accomplished? Is the racial and ethnic make-up of the current 6th grade honors groups any different from the past 0/1 groups? Has the achievement gap that existed at the end of elementary school suddenly narrowed? If so, why would that have not been reflected in an ability grouped environment?

All students in Stamford have had the opportunity to work hard. How does eliminating ability grouping in math open the doors for more students to work harder? Lets not forget that entry into Julliard or MIT is not based on hard work alone; ability is a pre-requisite. If this Board of Education truly wants to shrink the achievement gap then please focus on what will have the maximum long term impact namely smaller class sizes for K through third. Maybe then the achievement gap can be shrunk by lifting up the lower performing students without sacrificing the higher performing ones. Maybe then all students will graduate elementary schools with a competitive advantage and you won't have to do away with the remaining honors group to create it.