

Letter to the Editor published 10/18/09

To say that "ability grouping is segregation of the worst kind" assumes that there is a better kind of segregation. How appalling that in 2009 we are still allowing race to drive the academic process. In doing so, we are doing a disservice to every racial and ethnic group in our community. The current debate over Middle School reform is about education not race.

Students are grouped by ability all across this country and not just in academics. Does everyone who wants to study at Julliard get to do so? Does every little league player who wants to be on the All star team get to make it? Does every aspiring ballerina get to perform at Lincoln Center? No, because ability matters. If we understand it for sports, dance, music, why can't we understand it for academics? Why should the aspiring engineer be treated any differently than the ball player? Today when the top math students of Stamford enter high school, they are one grade level behind their academic peers in the surrounding districts. This may not be much of an issue for those students who are not interested in pursuing math or science, but for those that are, it is enormous.

The problem with our middle schools is that we are offering the same curriculum to all our students regardless of the group that they are placed in. Even under the current scenario of two groups, the superintendent is adamant that the curriculum remains the same for both. Why? Many successful school districts offer a targeted curriculum and students are placed according to their ability to master it. In general, this translates to three groups: Honors I, Honors II and grade level. With respect to math, students in Honors I take algebra in 7th grade and geometry in 8th, students in Honors II take algebra in 8th grade and students at grade level take algebra in high school. If this is how it works in most top school districts, why are we short changing our top math students in Stamford? When did it stop being OK to excel in our district?

Christine Papadakis-Kanaris