

10/29/09

Dear Mayor Malloy, Dr. Starr and Members of the Board of Education:

As an advocate of ability grouping and a parent of a Cloonan 6<sup>th</sup> grader who happens to be in the honors group, I was completely offended by Susan Nabel's editorial and what it insinuated about the high achieving students in our district. She stated that "... [the] benefit [of mixed classrooms] is competition and a sense that only work and performance will earn a spot in Honors. Rather than feeling comfortable and perhaps entitled to a classroom of familiar faces, students who have not previously been given the gold-star sticker of "0 Group" will need to earn their entrance. They will be learning a valuable life lesson: one needs to earn privilege and recognition."

My child attended Hart Magnet School (which has heterogeneous grouping) and had the same teachers and level of instruction that all of his classmates received. There was absolutely no differentiation between the education he received and that of students who are considered educationally disadvantaged. He had many classmates who worked extremely hard and received all A's, yet they were not placed in Honors. How are these students supposed to learn according to Nabel that work and performance will earn them a spot? What these students learned is that they are not good test takers and are now in a classroom with students that are many academic levels below them. Nabel stated that students perhaps felt entitled to be in the top group and that placement in this group was not based on academic achievement but some of other type of elitist placement. This is insulting to those of us who spend endless hours working on homework with our children and providing extra-curricular academic enrichment.

The group, Stamford Residents for Excellence in Education ([www.keepgrouping.org](http://www.keepgrouping.org)) of which I am an officer is in agreement that tracking should have been eliminated. However, Stamford needs to put as much educational emphasis on higher achieving students (which is not solely defined by whether they placed in the honors group) as they do on the lower achieving students. The synopsis that I read of the District Improvement Plan did not even make mention of any plan to ensure that higher achieving students reach their maximum potential. The BOE should be mindful of their responsibility to all the parents in Stamford and not only to those families in need of improvement.

Sincerely,

Nicole Zussman