

May 20, 2009

Dear Members of the School Board and Superintendent Starr:

As a parent of 2 children in the Stamford City Schools and a third child soon to enter kindergarten, I am deeply concerned regarding middle school reforms that would incorporate heterogeneous ability groupings throughout the middle school curriculum. Having worked previously as a social worker in the Milford Public Schools for 10 years at both the elementary and middle school levels, I feel particularly knowledgeable of a variety of teaching techniques that work and do not work, in schools. I am of the opinion that there are academic tasks that require children to be grouped with others of like ability. While I appreciate the needs of all students, both low and high functioning, as well as everyone in between, to have learning experiences with others who may be differently-abled than themselves, I feel that in the core subject areas (math and reading), children need to be taught directly to their ability.

My children tend to be on the high end of the academic spectrum. In the second grade at Springdale this year, the school decided not to group children for their reading program as they had in previous years. Also, there is an across school curriculum in Math that “wraps” around learning. My son generally “gets it” the first time around, while most in the class need multiple repetitions prior to learning the skill. His teacher has worked hard to provide him with enrichment activities, but he finds himself bored throughout many lessons. He is a leader in the class, so he often assists other children in their learning process. He is reading well beyond grade level, but often does not receive direct instruction in this area because many other students require the teacher’s constant attention. I do not fault his teacher in this instance. I fully believe that she is offering him every opportunity for success available. But, the academic environment does not afford him the support that he requires. And, Stamford no longer has an enrichment program.

My reason for this example is that I feel my child will not reach his full academic potential if he is not grouped in higher academic level classes with like ability peers. His pace will constantly be slowed down. Without proper teacher training and adequate in classroom support both high and low achieving students will falter. Heterogeneous grouping is more appropriate in social studies and science curriculums where it is easier for teachers to utilize special projects and assignments for more abled students. Also, I would suggest that both special educators and regular classroom teachers employ more team teaching techniques throughout the curriculum. This allows the special educator to directly implement teaching techniques within the classroom, supporting all students, while the regular educator can teach the general curriculum and enrichment activities.

Thank you for your consideration on this issue. I am hopeful that the City of Stamford Schools will give this issue the extreme consideration it deserves.

Sincerely,
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