

## Response to Martin Levine's Op Ed by Alan Stockman

Martin Levine's Op-Ed piece in the November 5<sup>th</sup> ADVOCATE ("We must stop setting our kids up to fail") is well-intentioned but very much off-base. He outlines a range of important social and education challenges and declares that "we cannot afford to continue to postpone the reforms necessary to change how we program children to fail, in school and in life." His implication, however, is that people who support ability grouping in our schools (versus heterogeneous grouping) do not want the best for all children or that there are children in need that some residents are willing to leave behind. Mr. Levine is simply wrong. Advocates of ability grouping want the same things that supporters of heterogeneous grouping want: we agree that there should be flexible grouping; we agree that students should not be tracked but be able to move up and down; we agree that students should be able to be in different groups for different subjects; we agree that the school system has an obligation to every child reaching his or her full potential; We agree, Mr. Levine, on these important and cornerstone concepts.

We do not agree that the heterogeneous grouping supported by you and Dr. Starr is the solution to address what is not working. We do not agree that it is the right thing for all of our children or for us as a community. Interestingly, supporters of heterogeneous grouping usually refer to "all children" or "every child" in their arguments. Mr. Levine does so as well. He states, "The primary obligation of a public school system is to prepare *every* student to live a productive self-supported life." Well said, Mr. Levine. However, the heterogeneous grouping being implemented in Stamford will not benefit *every* student. There are many students whose challenges and needs are not remedial. These students have a legitimate claim to our schools' resources. Do we not fully support the pursuit of excellence as part of our responsibilities as well? Or is mediocrity now acceptable as long as we narrow the difference between top and bottom?

Our community spoke loudly and clearly on this issue in the recent election. There was a clean sweep by candidates who favor flexible ability grouping over those who favor heterogeneous grouping. It is time for the administration and our leaders to listen.

Interestingly, Alan Greenspan, one of the long-time architects of our recent economic implosion (ironically) comments nowadays with perfect 20/20 hindsight regarding what went wrong with our financial system. Similarly, as a decade-long member of the Board of Education, I would have hoped that Mr. Levine might have gotten to the very important points made in his article somewhat sooner.