

EQUITABLE ACADEMIC OPPORTUNITIES

10 South Waverly Street
Shillington, PA 19607
Phone: 610-775-5089
Fax: 610-796-7471
www.governormiffinsd.org

Mary T. Weiss, Ed.D., Superintendent
Daniel G. Bulinski, Ed.D., Assistant Superintendent
Kristine W. Rosenberger, Director of Curriculum K-12
Eric L. Wolf, Director of Instructional and Pupil Services



GOVERNOR MIFFLIN
SCHOOL DISTRICT

PURPOSE OF THE INITIATIVE

The current system of “tracking,” or ability grouping, is most common at middle and high school levels. National educational and child advocacy organizations have recommended the abolition of tracking, stating that the practice creates class and race-linked differences in access to learning.¹ Because of these inequities in opportunity, tracking contributes to continuing gaps in achievement and low student success rates overall. To prevent such outcomes, Governor Mifflin School District proposes to implement the Equitable Academic Opportunity initiative.

RESPONSES TO COMMON CONCERNS

“The self-esteem of the Level three students will be harmed when they are mixed with the high achieving students.”

Students who need diversified instruction, or students with learning disabilities, show the most noticeable benefits of mixed ability instruction. These students are not often exposed to grade-level curriculum with instruction that expects excellence; but, by doing so, they begin to narrow the achievement gaps between themselves and their high-achieving peers. As these students experience the learning found in mixed ability classes with no stigma attached, self-esteem improves.

“Mixing students of varying abilities will hold back the learning of the high achieving students.”

Students of all abilities (including the high ability learner) benefit when the curriculum and instruction are truly engaging. Hundreds of research studies on heterogeneously grouped students verify that high-achieving learners do not lose ground in mixed ability classes. As an example, Slavin and Stevens of Johns Hopkins University compared students enrolled in heterogeneous and homogeneous classes who used the same reading and composition curriculum. Their results concluded that the top 33% of the students in the heterogeneous class surpassed their peers in the top level homogeneous class.

“Instead of mixing the students together, can’t we just fix the curriculum to make the Level 2 and 3 classes better?”

Upgrading the lower levels may be adequate if the district only wants the students to learn facts and information. If the district wants our students to become intellectual risk-takers who become life-long learners, then our students should be in mixed ability groups. Students interacting with a diverse group of peers learn many different ways of communicating ideas. Students who learn that everyone has something to contribute to understanding a concept, develop skills in asking for help when they need it. Students working on collaborative assignments learn that effort often matters as much as ability.²

CASE STUDY

Rockville Centre, a diverse, suburban school district on Long Island, started implementing its detracking initiative in the elementary grade levels. South Side Middle School teachers redesigned their classes using the honors curriculum as the guide, and students were scheduled into heterogeneously grouped classes with support class offerings for students needing additional help. Curriculum for gifted and talented students was blended into each classroom with a districtwide enrichment program called *STELLAR* (Success in Technology, Enrichment, Library, Literacy and Research).

As the students graduated to ninth grade, South Side High School replaced its ninth grade tracking system with a single, high-level course in English, social studies, science, math and foreign language. The school subsequently omitted multiple tracks in tenth grade English and social studies courses. Because it follows the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, the school maintains two levels of courses in the remaining Grade 10-12 subjects. However, enrollment for these courses is open to all students.

A Blue Ribbon School of Excellence, South Side High School has tracked its success with data from the Regents state assessment exams (similar to PSSAs), as well as student enrollment and achievement in advanced placement and IB courses.³

	ROCKVILLE CENTRE	Gov. Mifflin
Demographics		
Minority	20%	16%
Low Socio-economic	15%	22%
Special Ed	11%	19%
Implementation Period (HS)	1998-2003	
AP/IB Course Enrollment		
2001	53%	
2003	66%	
Assessment Success (Advanced Proficiency)		
2001	60%	
2003	99%	
Diploma Rate		
1993	58%	
1998	75%	
2003	90%	

¹ Ascher, Carol (1992). “Successful Detracking in Middle and Senior High Schools,” *ERIC/CUE Digest*, Number 82.

² Wheelock, Anne (1992). *Crossing the Tracks: How Untracking Can Save America’s Schools*. New York: The New Press.

³ Garrity, Delia (2004). “Detracking with Vigilance,” *American Association of School Administrators*.