Alternative Approaches to the Politics of Detracking
Author(s): Kevin Welner and Carol Corbett Burris
Source: *Theory Into Practice*, Vol. 45, No. 1, Detracking and Heterogeneous Grouping
(Winter, 2006), pp. 90-99
Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd.
Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/3497021
Accessed: 14-08-2019 19:15 UTC

Kevin Welner
Carol Corbett Burris

Alternative Approaches
to the Politics of Detracking

Notwithstanding empirical, pedagogical, and ethical criticism, the practice of tracking remains widespread. In part, this is because the process of detracking is seen as difficult and uncertain. This article uses case studies to introduce and illustrate 2 alternative approaches for moving forward with detracking reforms. The first, winning them over, is effective in a school community that is willing to engage in school reforms that promote equity while trusting that its educators will ensure a high-quality education even during times of change. The second, taking them on, becomes necessary in school communities that are more resistant to change and where equity and excellence are seen as incompatible. In such communities educational opportunities are generally viewed from a more competitive perspective.

Kevin Welner is an Associate Professor in the University of Colorado School of Education. Carol Corbett Burris is the Principal of South Side High School, Rockville Centre, New York.

Correspondence should be addressed to Kevin Welner, School of Education, Campus Box 249, University of Colorado, Boulder CO 80309. E-mail: kevin.welner@colorado.edu

THROUGHOUT THIS ISSUE, researchers and practitioners describe the benefits of detracking. Yet, as also noted, schools that implement this reform encounter challenging obstacles. For instance, educators are not immune to the human tendency to continue doing things the way they have always been done. If a teacher was tracked when she attended school and if she has been teaching tracked classes for her entire career, the idea of detracking is likely to be foreign and forbidding (Watanabe, this issue). The same holds true for principals, parents, and students (Yonezawa & Jones, this issue). One of the reasons reform is difficult is due to this inertia—people tend to do things the way they have been done, using preexisting skills and resources. To assist in overcoming inertia, reformers often make curricular changes, add new resources, and initiate other structural reforms (Welner, 2001a). They may reorganize departments or student schedules, provide students with additional instructional resources, and reform curriculum and instructional strategies (Alvarez & Mehan, this issue; Boaler, this issue; Herrenkohl, this issue; Horn, this issue).

Inertial, organizational, and structural obstacles can be expected to appear in almost all

90

schools considering detracking. Just as common, however, are oft-overlooked political and normative obstacles to detracking. We present two alternative strategies for reformers seeking to move forward with detracking in the face of potential or actual political resistance that is tied to beliefs and values (known as normative resistance). These alternatives, which we have named *winning them over* and *taking them on,* offer potential reformers the strategies and insights necessary to keep detracking reforms on track. Our focus on politics and norms should not, however, be understood to minimize the importance of instructional and organizational obstacles. In fact, the winning them over approach described here makes great use of instructional strategies, which pay off greatly in political and normative realms.

Values, Beliefs, and Politics as Obstacles to Detracking

Tracking remains widespread throughout the nation, and it usually consigns children to substantially unequal educational opportunities (Oakes, 1985; Oakes, Gamoran, & Page, 1992). The modern debate regarding tracking began with Oakes's (1985) *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality.* Since then, many districts have engaged in detracking, but often with limited and short-lived success (Oakes, 2005; Oakes, Wells, & Associates, 1996). This is in large part because detracking reforms are often undermined if they fail to prepare for resistance tied to the beliefs and values of educators and parents (Welner, 2001a).

Tracking's supporters, whether teachers, students, or parents, usually focus their attention on preserving the quality of high-track classes; they cannot defend and thus rarely address the poor-quality education routinely taking place in low-track classes (Welner, 2001a). In fact, most parents who denounce their local schools' efforts to detrack would no doubt fight ferociously to keep their own children out of low-track classes— a reasonable struggle given that research has established such a strong association between these classes and subsequent lower achievement (Heubert & Hauser, 1999). Interestingly, these

same parents often fail to distinguish between placement of their children in low-track classes and placement in heterogeneous classes (Welner, 2001a). Both options raise fears that their children will be deprived of perceived academic, social, and status advantages associated with high-track placement (Kerckhoff, 1986; Wells & Serna, 1996). In short, detracking is seen by many teachers, students, and parents as a policy that takes away from some children to give to others. From this perspective, detracking is not a neutral organizational change; it poses a threat to valued aspects of a child's education.

Yet every year, educators engage in detracking reforms. In today's environment of accountability systems with disaggregated test scores, the recognition that low-track classes produce lower achievement ties this reform to practical, as well as social justice, concerns (Welner, 2001b). Lesser opportunities to learn logically translate into lower test scores and, therefore, lesser likelihood that the school and district will meet the adequate yearly progress targets required by the No Child Left Behind Act.

Whatever the underlying motives for detracking, moving forward successfully with the reform requires direct and conscious confrontation of the normative and political opposition likely to arise. At the outset, schools must respond to legitimate educational concerns about detracking by making a concerted effort to inform parents and teachers of research documenting tracking's educational harms and detracking's educational benefits. However, these initial steps are rarely enough.

Reformers are likely to encounter considerable opposition tied to unspoken concerns (Oakes, Wells, Jones, & Datnow, 1997). As Welner (2001a) described, many teachers of high- and low-track classes are apprehensive about detracking; they often feel unprepared to engage their new heterogeneous classes in more challenging instructional methods and curriculum. Many simply do not believe that underperforming students will respond positively to greater academic challenges. Similar hurdles must be overcome in connection with parental opposition to detracking. Some parental concerns are understandable and motivated by a sincere desire to ensure the best ed-

ucational opportunities and the finest preparation for college for their children. Other concerns go beyond legitimate educational issues, particularly in communities with socioeconomically and racially diverse student bodies. They are based on the belief that not all children can or should learn challenging curriculum and that lower achieving students will disrupt the classroom (Wells & Serna, 1996; Welner, 2001a).

A related parental fear—one that exists even in racially and socioeconomically homogeneous schools—is that the low-track students will expose their children to undesirable culture, in such forms as drugs and deemphasized academics (Oakes et al., 1997; Welner, 2001a). Often these objections are felt and expressed very much from the gut. They are honest expressions of deeply held cultural prejudices.

Next, we describe two alternative ways of diffusing and overcoming political and normative forces with the potential to undermine detracking reforms. The first alternative, winning them over, is presented as a case study of a school district in Long Island, New York. The second, taking them on, builds on a broader set of research but is illustrated using data from a case study of a school district near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. These two approaches are not meant to be mutually exclusive, nor are they meant to exclude other approaches. Indeed, as the reform experience in Long Island demonstrates, when detracking is accompanied by successful instructional and structural changes, normative and political opposition from the community is more readily diffused.

Winning Them Over

The process of detracking South Side High School, a racially diverse suburban school, was a gradual one. In the early 1990s, there were three tracks—school-level, Regents, and honors. Regents classes were linked to qualification by students for the New York State Regents diploma. School leaders realized that the tracks were racially and socioeconomically stratified, and more important, that the school-level (lowest) track was not effectively educating students. The goal of detracking was first and foremost to raise the achievement of all students.

Detracking began as a response to an ambitious goal set by Rockville Centre School District Superintendent William H. Johnson and the Rockville Centre Board of Education in 1993: By the year 2000, 75% of all graduates would earn a Regents diploma. At that time, the respective rates for the district and the state were 58% and 38%. As a first step, school leaders decided that those courses not leading to the Regents diploma should be eliminated. At the same time, the honors classes, which were international baccalaureate (IB) or advanced placement (AP) classes in the junior and senior years, were opened up to anyone who chose to take them.

Open enrollment for honors classes proved to be an important strategy in the detracking of the high school. Parents who were afraid of an influx of low-track students in the Regents classes had the option of choosing a higher level course for their child. This helped diffuse what could have been a political battle with the potential to derail the detracking effort.

Opening up enrollment in the honors classes also increased the heterogeneity of prior measured achievement of the students in those classes, so the teachers began to adopt strategies to help diverse learners to succeed. Teachers developed rubrics for grading that rewarded process as well as product. The school built resource duty periods into the teachers' day, as well as before-school extra help sessions to provide time for individual student–teacher conversations and academic support.

Another consequence of open enrollment, unintended but positive, was that it removed from counselors and teachers the responsibility and power to recommend students for enrollment in the honors classes. Similarly, it removed some of the status that students and parents felt in earlier years, when honors students were considered a more elite, selective group.

Perhaps most important, the movement of students from a low track into the Regents course and of many Regents students into the honors courses demonstrated to the school community that higher expectations result in increased achievement. Al-

though more students earned a Regents diploma, mean performance on the Regents exams remained stable and the passing rate remained high. Indeed, by the year 2000, the district exceeded its 75% goal: 82% of the class graduated with a New York State Regents diploma.

South Side High School began its second phase of detracking in 1998. By that point, the district had solid achievement data demonstrating that more students could be successful in demanding courses once they are given the opportunity and support. In addition to the high school data, the district had data showing success in its detracked classes in the middle school (Garrity, 2004). Building on these successes and at the urging of high school faculty and administrators, South Side detracked ninth-grade English and social studies during the period from 1998 to 1999, with all students enrolled in heterogeneous classes.

This reform coincided with the appointment in the fall of 1999 of a new principal (coauthor Carol Burris) who was deeply committed to detracking and equity. With the strong support of Superintendent Johnson and Assistant Superintendent Garrity, Burris leveraged changes in the state curriculum and Regents program to continue the detracking. She introduced a new, heterogeneous-track ninth-grade curriculum in math and science as well.

Data were continually and carefully collected to monitor achievement in detracked classes, and their analysis showed time and again the following effects of detracking: (a) achievement improved, (b) curriculum was not watered down, and (c) the performance of high achievers did not decline (Burris, Heubert, & Levin, 2004; Burris & Welner, 2005). The culture of the building began to change. Ninth graders became more successful. The aspirations and performance of minority students increased. The achievement gap began to close between the school's White or Asian American students and its African American or Latino students. It seemed logical that further detracking should take place.

However, when the district moved to detrack 10th-grade English and social studies, some parents opposed the reform. The concerns expressed

by these parents generally reflected traditional beliefs about the efficacy of tracking, with a few parents expressing thinly disguised racial and social-class prejudices. In response, school leaders and teachers spent considerable time explaining the new, heterogeneous classes that would be taught using a pre-IB curriculum. Perhaps more important, these educators had clear data documenting the success of the district's previous detracking efforts.

The detracking moved forward and, again, was a success. Data collected at the end of the year showed higher scores on the New York State 10th-grade Regents exam for students with initial achievement levels across the board: low, average, and high. When the next school year started, no parents questioned the detracked classes. In addition, 75% of all 11th graders chose to study either IB English or IB History. Now, in the 2005–2006 school year, Regents diploma goals are being raised to IB diploma goals as the school continues to detrack and level up curriculum.

Why has South Side High School, a racially and socioeconomically diverse high school, been able to detrack when so many other schools have failed? We identify the following as essential components of its detracking success.

Stable and committed district leadership. School district leadership was stable and committed to achieving excellence and equity. One without the other was unacceptable. The reform greatly benefited from the support, encouragement, and leadership of a 20-year veteran superintendent who has deeply believed that all students are entitled to the best curriculum that a school has to offer. He hired administrators who shared these core beliefs.

Elimination of the lowest track first. The process began with the elimination of the lowest track. Low-track classes depress student achievement, causing students to fall further and further behind. Their elimination results in an immediate improvement in school culture and higher achievement.

93

Teachers eased into heterogeneous classes. Because there was already open enrollment in high-track classes, teachers had adjusted to teaching a more heterogeneous group of students, making for a smoother transition when the ninth and tenth grades later moved to only heterogeneous classes with high-track curriculum.

Support for struggling learners. Whenever tracks were eliminated, the district adopted the high-track curriculum and provided support for struggling learners in heterogeneous classes. Such support is a key component to this strategy's success (Rubin & Noguera, 2004).

Steady, determined progress. The school did not fall into the trap of waiting for everyone to get on board. Although the process was gradual and paced, administrators did not wait until all teachers and all parents agreed.

Collection and dissemination of achievement data. School and district leaders consistently collected, analyzed, and communicated data. The collection and dissemination of achievement results moves the discussion from opinion to fact. Large studies of tracking that do not control for the effects of curriculum, school, and community are not as helpful when communicating with a particular school's parents and teachers.

Careful selection and evaluation of staff. The principal carefully chose staff and was not afraid to let go of teachers who did not believe that all students could be high achievers. Although beliefs can change and be shaped by experience, teachers who refuse to buy into a detracking school's philosophy will not internalize and practice the strategies needed to make heterogeneous grouping successful. Carefully choosing staff made school culture even more favorable to the reform.

Methodical creation of truly heterogeneous classes. School administrators ensured that classes were truly heterogeneous and did not allow de facto tracking to occur. Classes were carefully constructed so that equal numbers of high achievers were in each class. Music programs, research programs, and special education support classes can cause clusters of high or low achievers to follow the same schedule. Only careful creation of class rosters can ensure true heterogeneity.

Earnest response to parental concerns about learning and achievement. Parent concerns were never dismissed. Although issues of both achievement and equity were paramount in school leaders' minds, they clearly understood that achievement stood alone as the paramount concern for the most vocal parents. When parents objected to the move to create heterogeneously grouped 10th-grade classes, district educators ensured that the curriculum developed for the course was a true, pre-IB curriculum with support classes that would pre- and post-teach content to struggling learners.

Support and praise for, and engagement of, school staff. The district provided generous support to teachers. The assistant superintendent provided continuous staff development (Garrity, 2004). School leaders praised teacher efforts and communicated and celebrated student achievement with the staff. All achievement gaps were discussed, and strategies for closing them were developed.

Increasing the achievement of all students through leveling up continues to be an ongoing goal of the district. During the decade of detracking reform, the school became a U.S. Department of Education Blue Ribbon School of Excellence, and one of *Newsweek's* 100 best high schools in the United States; South Side was recently recognized by *Newsweek* as 45th best in the nation. The Regents diploma rate increased to 96% in June 2005, with 34% of the graduating class also earning the IB diploma. At the same time, increasing numbers of students have been recognized as Intel finalists and National Merit fi-

nalists and winners. In sum, detracking has brought substantial academic benefits to students of color and poverty, without adversely affecting the achievement of any student group (Burris et al., 2004).

Through a gradual but determined process of detracking, steady positive results have muted the usual resistance as described by researchers such as Oakes, Wells, and Associates (1996), allowing the reformers at South Side High School to successfully win over the school's community of students, parents, and teachers. One of the key beliefs that guides detracking is that students who had, in the past assigned to low-track classes will be more, not less, successful if given greater challenges (Oakes, 1992); the educators at South Side demonstrated this success to their community using carefully collected and analyzed data. In short, they created the conditions for initial success and then used each achievement as part of the framework for building further reform.

Taking Them On

Given the choice, educators and others would certainly opt for the less confrontational approach that has been so successful at South Side High School. However, educators and policymakers are not always given such choices. As described by Wells and Serna (1996), the political majority in many communities will defend inequalities, even in the face of powerful evidence of unfairness that would sway an unbiased observer (see also Anyon, 1997; Lipman, 1998). Left unopposed, they will exercise political power sufficient to end or undermine the reform. Equity-minded reforms like detracking often implicate core values and self-interests and therefore give rise to overt political action. For a detracking reform to move forward in such an environment, its backers must recognize and respond to politics, values, and beliefs—the political and normative elements of reform.

If winning them over appears undoable, those who see tracking as an equity issue may then be presented with the choice of either abandoning the reform or moving toward the alternative approach:

taking them on. This was what occurred in Woodland Hills, Pennsylvania. A court mandated detracking after it was determined that tracking in the district was used to racially segregate students.[1] The push for detracking came from a group of committed parents and community members who recognized that not all students had access to the best educational opportunities the school offered. These reformers were particularly upset that the tracks served to create and perpetuate racial segregation.

Woodland Hills is a midsized, mixed-race, mixed-socioeconomic school district located near Pittsburgh. The following discussion and analysis is based on data gathered during the 1996–1997 school year.[2] At the time, the district enrolled approximately 6,000 students in nine schools. It was approximately 27% African American and 70% White. The African American population lived primarily near the district's center, with little racial integration in the surrounding communities. Composition of the small communities making up the school district ranged in 1996 from 20% to 43% low-income families, with a high correlation between poverty and race. The district integrated its schools in the early- to mid-1980s. However, White and African American students were often resegregated into hierarchically tracked courses within the school sites, with the African Americans placed in the lower tracks.

In Woodland Hills, winning them over to detracking did not seem possible. The district's contentious history, the community's adversarial political and racial dynamics, an older and largely resistant teaching staff, and historically weak district leadership all acted as powerful forces keeping the context quite unreceptive to detracking (Welner, 2001a). Summing up this context, one community leader concluded about the possibility of voluntary detracking, "Nothing would have bubbled up in this district."

Reformers' initial efforts to influence school leaders and boards of education were to little or no avail. Parents of high-achieving children had strong control over the political institutions. And, in contrast to the situation at South Side High School in New York, the school district itself initially lacked a critical mass of reformers. More-

over, tracking's (overwhelmingly White) support-
ers were much more politically skilled and engag-
ed than were tracking's (overwhelmingly African
American) opponents. As an alternative to a politi-
cal decision-making arena where little progress
seemed possible, those who opposed tracking
turned to the courts for help.

The detracking reform thus arose out of ongo-
ing desegregation litigation. The federal district
court ordered the elimination of discriminatory
tracking, which prompted the superintendent to
require that English courses be detracked, starting
with the 1995–1996 school year. From seventh
through tenth grades, the English courses trans-
itioned to a heterogeneous, one-track system.

The result of this court order was mixed. The
district engaged in a detracking reform that
would have otherwise not have been viable. The
court order helped to counteract a stark imbal-
ance of political power, allowing the reform to
move forward even in the face of strong oppo-
sitional forces. However, the reform's context
was tenuous; the opposition made gains, water-
ing down the reform's scale and effectiveness. In
particular, some additional higher track classes
were quickly added back giving resistant parents
an escape from the main (heterogeneous) classes.
In a nutshell, the district did away with the low-
est tracks, recruited students of color into the
higher tracked classes, and even pushed many
high-achieving students into more challenging
classes. These changes had the primary benefit
of moving students out of uneducative environ-
ments and into classes with higher expectations
and greater learning opportunities—and it imme-
diately halted the academic descent of many
students.

Although the strategy of taking them on with
litigation was necessary and effective in Wood-
land Hills—a place with a documented and largely
unremediated history of racial discrimination—it
entailed considerable cost and effort. Further,
court orders will eventually be lifted, and reforms
will then have to survive on their own. What then
are the components of a successful detracking re-
form that begins with taking on powerful political
forces that seek to preserve the status quo? How

can reformers sustain detracking after forceful le-
gal or political action puts it in place?

Given the need for detracked classes to acquire
support among political and educational constitu-
encies, the long-term success of taking them on
shares a great deal in common with winning them
over. Each of the essential components of the lat-
ter, in fact, should be incorporated into the former
strategy. The key difference lies not in reform it-
self, but rather in the level of confrontational poli-
tics surrounding the reform's initiation. The edu-
cators at South Side High School who initiated
their detracking reform were skillfully able to
minimize adversarial politics. The high school
principal was acutely aware of the arguments of
those who opposed the reform. She anticipated
them, and prepared responses to them prior to all
public presentations. Others who have pushed
detracking, such as those in Woodland Hills, have
not been so fortunate. Accordingly, the essential
components of a taking them on strategy also in-
clude two items designed to overcome political
and normative resistance. This advice, as opposed
to the list generated from the South Side High
School experience, is less descriptive and more
prescriptive. That is, it does not merely describe
the approach taken by Woodland Hills, as that dis-
trict's experience was not a complete success. In-
stead, we offer two lessons learned from the
Woodland Hills experience and from other dis-
tricts that have been studied.

Cultivation of Political Support

For deliberative democracy to work, represen-
tatives should be heard from all relevant groups,
including those who may benefit from the policy
and those who might be harmed by it. A school
district's policies affect all of its students; true
democratic deliberation requires responsiveness
to all people, not just those with the loudest voices
(Fraser, 1992; Young, 1990). In communities
where power is concentrated in the hands of par-
ents supporting tracking, a detracking reform will
survive only if a rough balance of power is estab-
lished. Therefore, reformers should build a politi-
cal base for the detracking.

An incident in Woodland Hills illustrates why this is necessary. Even though the court had ordered detracking, the parents of high-achieving students were exerting considerable protracking pressure on the district administration and school board. During one board meeting, however, a group of approximately 25 African American parents who supported the reform came to the district office. As reported by a district official, the African American parents simply sat there and listened to what was being said by the other parents. Then, "one of the [African American] parents got up and said, 'we just wanted the board to know that the things that these parents ... want for their children, we want for our children.' And that was it. The rest of the people just ... waived their time at the podium" (Welner, 2001a, p. 108). This obvious and simple, yet powerful, point is surprisingly absent from many tracking debates; when parents of low-track students are politically invisible, they are too easily ignored.

Beliefs and Values Grounded in Low Expectations Must Be Challenged

Political action is often not enough; detracking efforts may need to confront normative resistance as well. Tracking is sustained by traditional beliefs regarding intelligence and the capacity for learning; therefore, staff development should be focused on critical inquiry (Oakes et al., 1997), while grounding the detracking efforts in democratic values and irreproachable educational principles (Welner, 2001a; Welner & Oakes, 2000). Teachers, parents, and students mistake labels such as *gifted, average,* and *remedial* for certification of overall ability or worth. Students (and their parents) acquire status through the better labels. In contrast, students lack status if they are placed in low-track classes. "The result of all this is that most students have needlessly low self-concepts and schools have low expectations. Few students or teachers can defy those identities and expectations" (Oakes & Lipton, 2001, p. 22). For detracking to work, such beliefs should be openly discussed and challenged.

Navigating the Politics of Detracking

Several years ago, Welner and Oakes (2000) published a short book outlining specific strategies for navigating the politics of detracking.[3] These recommendations, reproduced here in part, are grouped according to who should take the lead in implementing them.

Among the strategies that should be considered by the school board are the following:

- Commit to the principles underlying the reforms.
- Set clear expectations for change, including detracking.
- Develop a comprehensive reform plan and guard against losing sight of its goals.
- Engage the community in participation and discussion designed to ensure that all constituents have an effective political voice.
- Foster constructive public engagement by establishing ongoing community forums on excellence and equity in the schools.
- Hold detracking reform to a rigorous but reasonable standard.

Among the strategies that should be considered by the central administration are the following:

- Emphasize the educational high ground on which detracking rests: All children can learn, and all children should receive a high-quality education.
- Ensure that each school has the support necessary for detracking reforms to succeed.
- Move beyond technically minded professional development.
- Provide incentives for teachers working successfully with heterogeneous classes.
- Replace departing faculty with a reform-minded, diverse group of teachers.
- Work systematically with local media.
- Augment the public relations office with an office of parent and community relations with responsibility for improving parent involvement from the district's low-income and minority neighborhoods.

97

Among the strategies that should be considered by schools are the following:

- Develop faculty study groups.
- Create a diverse, multicultural parent–faculty task force to monitor school practices for academic excellence and equity.
- Disseminate relevant information about the reform.
- Ensure that parent advisory groups reflect all of the parents in each school.

Among the strategies that should be considered by secondary schools in particular are the following:

- Create smaller, more personalized learning environments.
- Phase out all low-level courses.
- Make ninth-grade enrollment in college preparatory Algebra 1 a minimal benchmark for all students.
- Provide additional academic support for students not prepared for rigorous academics.
- Provide ample opportunities for academic enrichment.
- Provide challenging academic support and college counseling.

Conclusion

The two approaches described here are not mutually exclusive. In fact, they overlap greatly in their basic principles and strategies for implementation. However, the two approaches do differ markedly in terms of the steps needed to initiate and sustain the reform effort. The winning them over approach finds sustenance in a school community willing to engage with the reformers about legitimate educational concerns, willing to trust educators to ensure a high-quality education even during times of change, and willing to suspend opposition pending the results of pilot reforms. Taking them on becomes necessary in school communities that are more resistant to change and where educational opportunities are generally viewed from a more competitive perspective. When such educational opportunities are perceived as a zero-sum game, the haves

are less willing to acknowledge needs and desires of the have nots, and winning them over becomes more difficult.

The hard work of detracking requires thoughtful instructional changes, but that is not enough to ensure meaningful reform. The two approaches outlined are offered as models of how reformers may build on instructional changes to successfully initiate and implement detracking. More and more educators are recognizing that low-track classes offer a watered-down set of educational opportunities and that denial of educational opportunity is an unacceptable abandonment of core American values. Some of these reformers will be able to convince their communities that equity and excellence are possible. Yet tracking is no more just or educationally sound in those communities with resistant, protracking parents or teachers. In these communities, reformers may still move forward by ensuring that all voices are heard and all interests are considered—forcefully countering normative and political opposition and working to provide universal access to the best educational experiences that schools have to offer.

Notes

1. The story of this litigation and the resulting reform process is examined in detail by Welner (2001a), along with case studies of two other districts with similar reforms.
2. These data were gathered over four 1-week- long visits to the district, including classroom and meeting observations and the collection of school-specific documents, as well as 75 semistructured interviews with educators, parents, policymakers, and community members.
3. The publisher, Skylight, has graciously made this booklet available for free download online through UCLA's Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access (http://www. idea.gseis.ucla.edu/public-anions/detracking/index.html).

References

Anyon, J. (1997). *Ghetto schooling: A political economy of urban educational reform.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Burris, C., Heubert, J., & Levin, H. (2004). Math acceleration for all. *Educational Leadership, 61*(5), 68–71.

Burris, C., & Welner, K. (2005). Closing the achievement gap by detracking. *Phi Delta Kappan, 86,* 594–598.

Fraser, N. (1992). Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy. In C. Calhoun (Ed.), *Habermas and the public sphere* (pp. 109–142). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Garrity, D. (2004). Detracking with vigilance. *School Administrator, 61*(7), 24–27.

Heubert, J., & Hauser, R. (Eds.). (1999). *High stakes: Testing for tracking, promotion, and graduation.* Washington, DC: National Research Council.

Kerckhoff, A. (1986). Effects of ability grouping in British secondary schools. *American Sociological Review, 51,* 842–858.

Lipman, P. (1998). *Race, class and power in school restructuring.* New York: SUNY Press.

Oakes, J. (1985). *Keeping track: How schools structure inequality.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Oakes, J. (1992). Can tracking research inform practice? Technical, normative, and political considerations. *Educational Researcher, 21*(4), 12–22.

Oakes, J. (2005). *Keeping track: How schools structure inequality* (2nd ed.). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Oakes, J., Gamoran, A., & Page, R. (1992). Curriculum differentiation: Opportunities, outcomes, and meanings. In P. Jackson (Ed.), *Handbook of research on curriculum* (pp. 570–608). New York: Macmillan.

Oakes, J., & Lipton, M. (2001). Can unlike children learn together? A question that goes to the heart of democratic public schooling. *The CEIC Review, 10*(5), 9–10.

Oakes, J., Wells, A. S., & Associates. (1996). *Beyond the technicalities of school reform: Policy lessons from detracking schools.* Los Angeles: Author.

Oakes, J., Wells, A. S., Jones, M., & Datnow, A. (1997). Tracking: The social construction of ability, cultural politics and resistance to reform. *Teachers College Record, 98,* 482–510.

Rubin, B., & Noguera, P. (2004). Tracking detracking: Sorting through the dilemmas and possibilities of detracking in practice. *Equity and Excellence in Education, 37,* 92–101.

Wells, A. S., & Serna, I. (1996). The politics of culture: Understanding local political resistance to detracking in racially mixed schools. *Harvard Educational Review, 66,* 93–118.

Welner, K. (2001a). *Legal rights, local wrongs: When community control collides with educational equity.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Welner, K. (2001b). Tracking in an era of standards: Low-expectation classes meet high-expectation laws. *Hastings Constitutional Law Quarterly, 28,* 699–738.

Welner, K., & Oakes, J. (2000). *Navigating the politics of detracking.* Arlington Heights, IL: Skylight.

Young, I. M. (1990). *Justice and the politics of difference.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

TİP