



Office of Civil Rights Enforcement Points to Need for Tracking Reform

Key Takeaway: Research shows benefits of challenging and engaging all students with high-level classes

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BOULDER, Colo. and TEMPE, Ariz. (March 8, 2010) -- Today, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) is announcing a new initiative to verify that school districts are providing students with equal access to college preparatory curricula, starting with compliance reviews in about 32 school districts across the U.S.

The problem of so-called racial tracking is well documented through decades of research, and it was addressed most recently in a policy brief released less than three months ago by the Education and the Public Interest Center at the University of Colorado at Boulder and the Education Policy Research Unit at Arizona State University. The brief, "Universal Access to a Quality Education: Research and Recommendations for the Elimination of Curricular Stratification," offers a way forward for school districts wanting to heed the OCR concerns and engage in meaningful reform of their tracking practices.

Authored by Dr. Carol Corbett Burris, the principal of South Side High School in New York, and Professor Kevin Welner of the University of Colorado at Boulder, the brief draws on three case studies: a school (a San Diego charter), a school district (in Long Island, NY), and a nation (Finland) that have promoted high levels of student achievement by abolishing curricular stratification. The brief also provides concrete recommendations for reform, followed by model statutory language to implement the report's recommendations, written by attorney Jennifer Weiser Bezosa, the Director of Legal and Policy Analysis at Children's Voices, a non-profit law firm in Colorado.

"The educational leaders described in this brief rejected curricular stratification because it has been shown to exacerbate the societal or natural disadvantages suffered by many children," Burris and Welner say. "These leaders realized that when students who experience difficulty are provided with an inferior curriculum, they are certain to fall farther behind. In contrast, the high-quality heterogeneously grouped schools they created give all students access to the best curriculum and an academic support system that helps ensure that they take advantage of it. These schools hold clear lessons for leaders of other schools, where students are still stratified into tracks. Detracking provides a realistic and proven pathway to academic excellence grounded in true equity."



Burris and Welner recommend a clear process for the phasing out of curricular stratification from grades K through 10, beginning with the lowest track and granting meaningful access to Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses to all students throughout the reform process. They also describe the supports needed for schools, educators, and students as they create non-tracked schools. The recommendations are spelled out in specific model legislative provisions.

Find the brief, “Universal Access to a Quality Education: Research and Recommendations for the Elimination of Curricular Stratification” at: <http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/universal-access>

The Education and the Public Interest Center (EPIC) at the University of Colorado at Boulder and the Education Policy Research Unit (EPRU) at Arizona State University collaborate to produce policy briefs and think tank reviews. Our goal is to promote well-informed democratic deliberation about education policy by providing academic as well as non-academic audiences with useful information and high quality analyses. This legislative brief was made possible in part by the generous support of the Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice.