

# Does Classroom Composition Matter? Tracking and Within School Diversity



---

**Roslyn Arlin Mickelson, Ph.D.**  
**UNC Charlotte**

This research is supported by grants to the author from the American Sociological Association, the National Science Foundation, and the Poverty and Race Research Action Council.



## If diversity is a goal, we must

---

- Identify policies and practices that undermine diversity
- Key culprits:
  - ability grouping in primary grades
  - tracking in secondary grades



## Why key culprits?

---

- **Diverse schools resegregated by ability grouping and tracking:**
  - **African American, Latino, working class students more likely in lower tracks**
  - **White, Asian American, middle class students more likely in high tracks**



# Negatives of low tracks

---

- **Separate and unequal education**
- **Long-lasting negative effects because each year students further behind**
- **Tracks reproduce social inequality in larger society**



# How tracking resegregates

---

- **Early identification for gifted program, special education**
  - **Note: Black males in special education**
- **Savvy parents ‘work’ the system**
- **Track placements correlated more with race and class than with ability**



# Ability grouping and tracking

---

- Weaken the positive effects of attending diverse a school
- Undermine a school's capacity for
  - Equity
  - Excellence

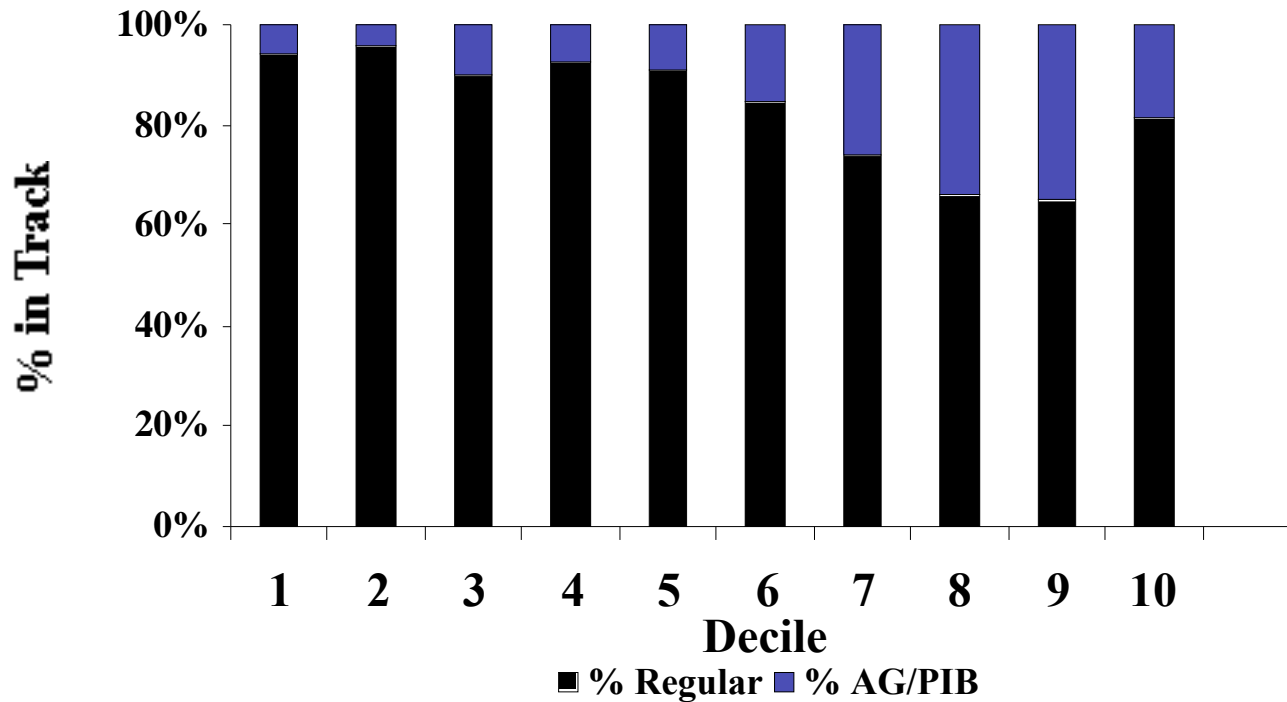


# Example: The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (NC)

---

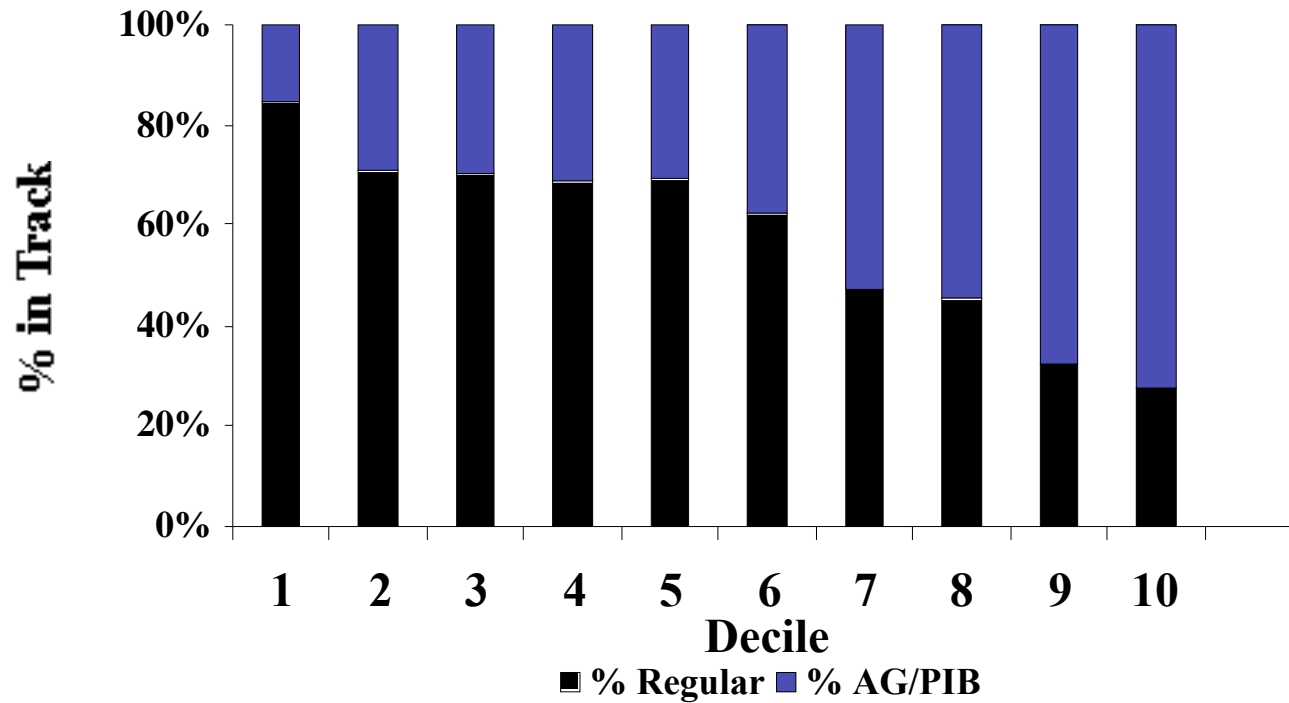
- From 1971-2002 CMS desegregating under *Swann*
- From 1970s to present, CMS tracks
- Tracking racially correlated
- Tracking undermined CMS's ability to meet *Swann's* mandate to provide equity and excellence for all students.

# 2nd Grade Language Battery and English Track Grade 8: Black Students





# 2nd Grade Language Battery and English Track Grade 8: White Students

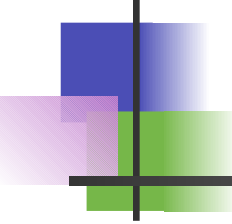




# Figures 1 & 2 show

---

- **CMS middle school tracks highly heterogeneous by “ability”**
- **Track placements racially correlated**
  - **20% of top decile Blacks in gifted English**
  - **75% of top decile Whites in gifted English**



# Evidence on the Benefits of Heterogeneous Classrooms

---

## Benefits for

- English
- Social Studies
- Mathematics
- Science
- Elementary & secondary schools



# Example # 1: Preuss School

---

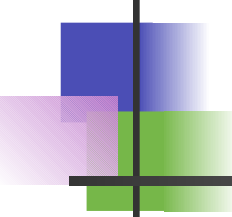
- Charter School on UCSD campus
- All college prep curriculum
- 700 students 6-12th grade
- All low income families
  - 57% Latino    6% White    3% Other
  - 14% Black    20% Asian



# Preuss School [con't]

---

- Only rigorous courses
- Personalized learning environment
- For those without academic preparation
  - Intense academic support
  - Social support
- First graduating class
  - 80% 4 year college
  - 20% 2 year college



# Example # 2: South Side High, New York

---

- 1987 Superintendent acknowledges tracking contributes to gap
- Goal: 2000= 75% Regents diploma
- Steps
  - Over 4 years, exclusive gifted program blended into each elementary classroom
  - Middle school English & social studies detracked
  - Middle school science & math reduced to 2 levels



## **Example # 2: South Side High [con't]**

---

- **Multiyear plan to detrack the high school**
- **Results in South South High**
  - **By 2000 97% of students receive Regents diploma**
  - **76% of Special Education students receive Regents diploma**
  - **45% of graduates IB diploma candidates**



**Thank you!**

---