

Tracking—What Should Schools Do?

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Welner and Burris, “Alternative Approaches to the Politics of Detracking” (2006)

1. **Winning Them Over**—in communities willing to detrack. Carol’s school.
2. **Taking Them On**— in resistant communities. PA district law suit.

Criteria for Deciding Tracking Policy

1. Research
2. Views of parents, teachers, and students
3. Equity—for all students

Impact of Grouping on Achievement Effect Sizes of Kulik and Slavin Meta-Analyses

Type of Grouping	Level	Subject	Kulik	Slavin
Within-Class Ability Grouping	Elementary	Reading, math	+0.25 $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{H } +.30 \\ \text{M } +.18 \\ \text{L } +.16 \end{array} \right.$	+0.34 $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{H } +.41 \\ \text{M } +.27 \\ \text{L } +.65 \end{array} \right.$
Cross-Grade Ability Grouping (Joplin)	Elementary	Reading	+0.30	+0.45
Between-Class Tracking (XYZ)	Secondary	All academic	+0.03 $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{H } +.10 \\ \text{M } -.02 \\ \text{L } -.01 \end{array} \right.$	+0.00 $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{H } +.01 \\ \text{M } -.08 \\ \text{L } -.02 \end{array} \right.$
Enriched Gifted & Talented	Both	All academic	+0.41	NA
Accelerated Gifted & Talented	Both	All academic	+0.87	NA

Average Performance of Skill-Grouped Students in 10 Experiments

<i>Study</i>	<i>Effect Size*</i>	<i>No. of Students</i>
Barton (1964)	.11	204
Bicak (1962)	-.33	75
Drews (1963)	-.04	432
Fick (1962)	.02	162
Ford (1974)	.29	82
Lovell (1960)	.14**	500
Marascuilo & McSweeney (1972)	-.16**	603
Peterson (1966)	-.10	317
Vakos (1969)	.09	184
Wardrop et al. (1967)	.28	82
Sample size weighted average	.00	2641 (total)

*Positive effect size favors skill grouping.

**Source: Mosteller, Light, & Sachs, "Sustained Inquiry in Education: Lessons from Skill Grouping and Class Size," *Harvard Educational Review*, 66 (Winter 1996), pp. 797-842.

Study in Kenya

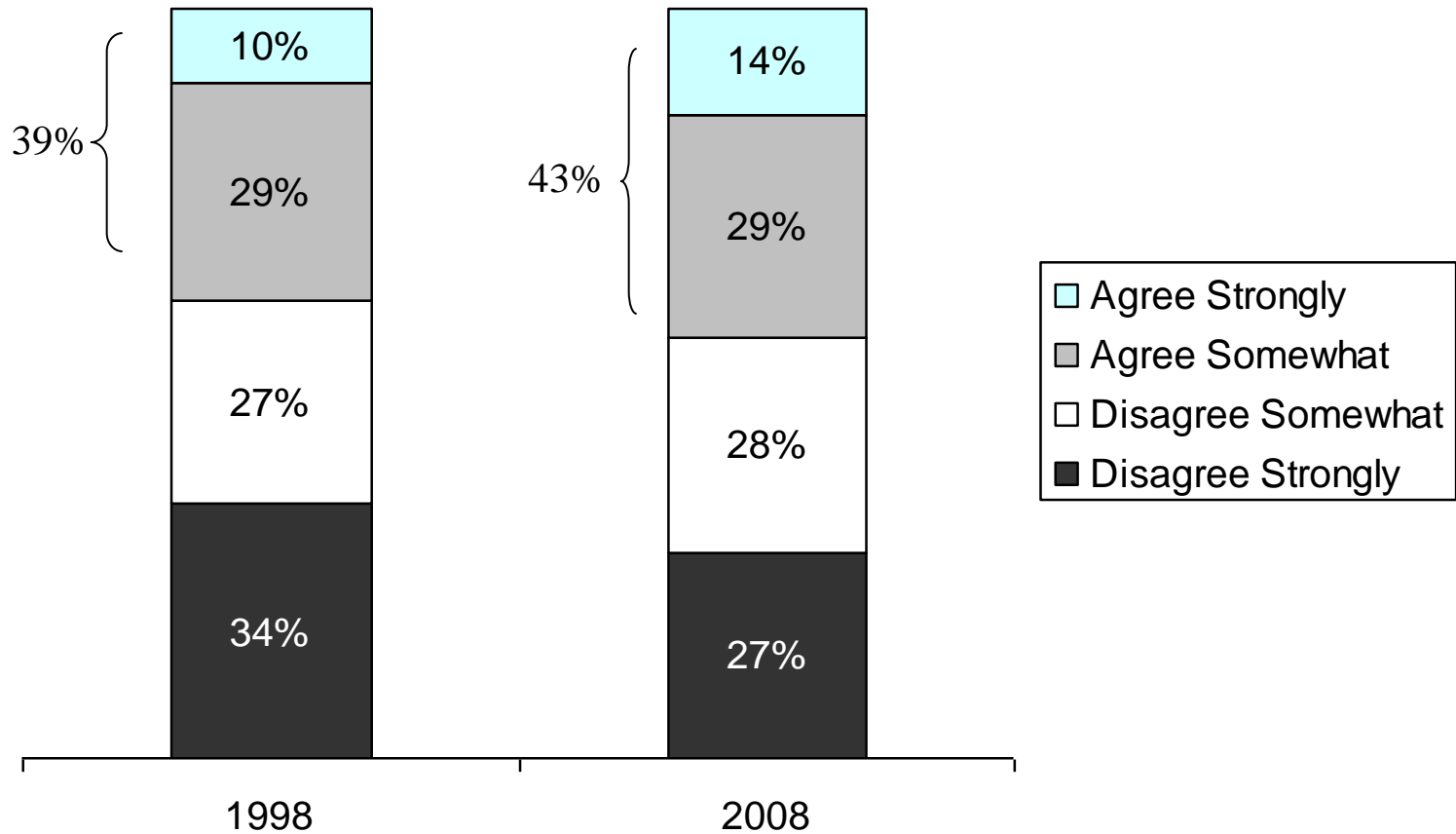
Duflo, Dupas, & Kremer (2008)

“After 18 months, students in tracking schools scored 0.14 standard deviations higher than students in non-tracking schools, and this effect persisted one year after the program ended. Furthermore, students at all levels of the distribution benefited from tracking.”

Views of Students, Parents, and Teachers

- Students support tracking:
 - Public Agenda (1997)
- Parents support tracking:
 - Barton (1964); Public Agenda (1994)
- Teachers have mixed views on tracking
 - (next slide)

“My classes have become so mixed in terms of students’ learning abilities that I can’t teach them effectively”



Source: MetLife, Inc, *The MetLife Survey of The American Teacher* (MetLife, 2008).

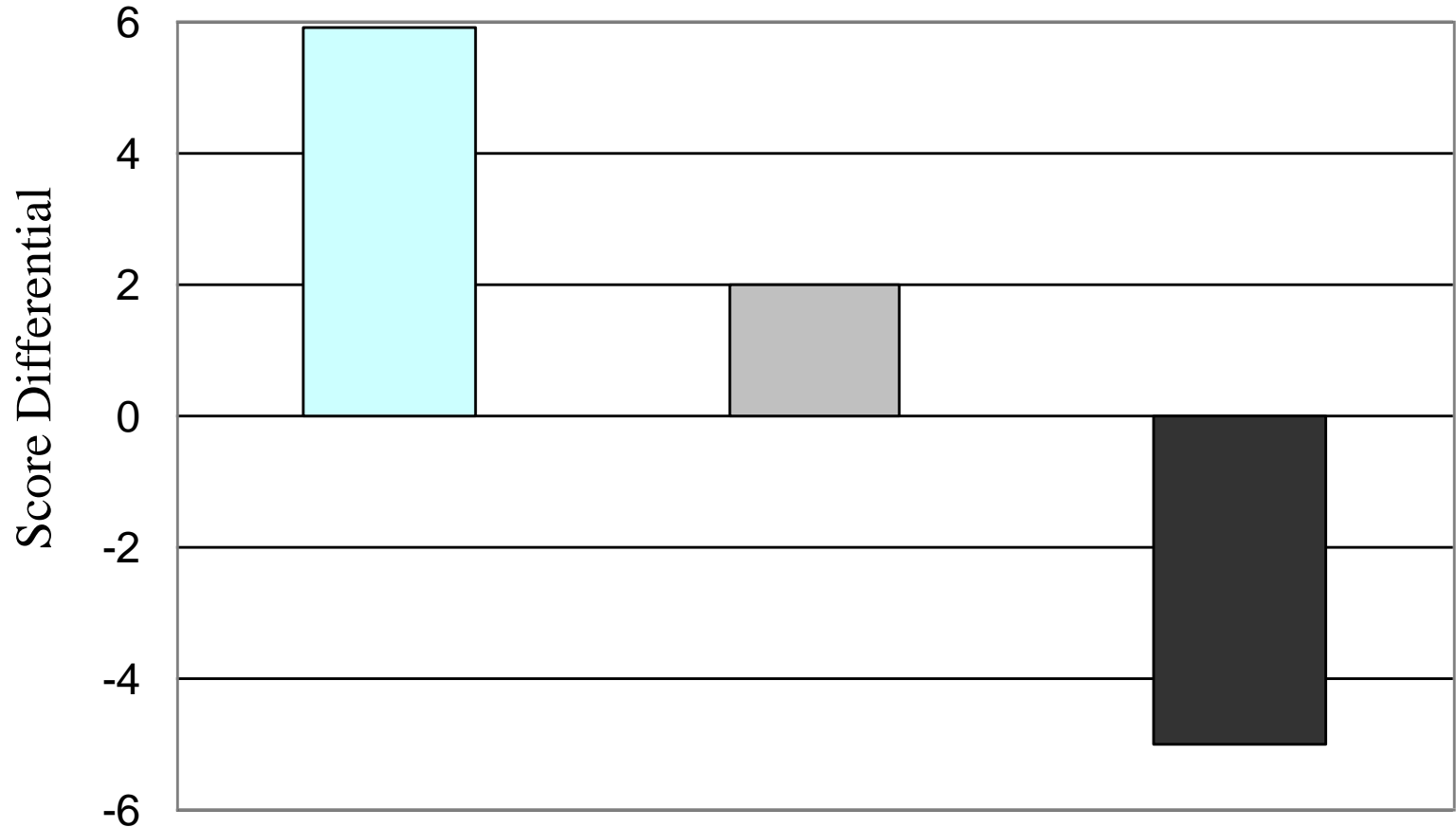
What About Equity?

Assume this Goal: Equity for all students, meaning high achievement for all in classes with an ambitious curriculum.

1. How Do Low Performing Students Fare in Heterogeneously-grouped, High Level Classes?
2. How Do High Performing Students Fare in the same classes?

Predicted Achievement Gains From Tracking

(Expressed as Percentage, By Track)



■ Above vs. Heterogeneous ■ Average vs. Heterogeneous ■ Below vs. Heterogeneous

Source: Argys, Rees, & Brewer, "Detracking America's Schools: Equity at Zero Cost?" *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 15 (Autumn 1996), pp. 623-645.

Chicago's 9th Grade Detracking Experience

“Here we evaluate a policy in Chicago that ended remedial classes and mandated college-preparatory coursework for all students. Using an interrupted time series cohort design with multiple comparisons, we found that the policy reduced inequities in ninth grade coursework by entering ability, race/ethnicity, and special education status.

Although more students completed ninth grade with credits in Algebra and English I, failure rates increased, grades declined slightly, test scores did not improve, and students were no more likely to enter college.” (from the Abstract).

Source: Allensworth, Nomi, Montgomery, & Lee, *College Preparatory Curriculum for All: Consequences of Ninth Grade Course taking on Academic Outcomes in Chicago* (Chicago: Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2008).

Conclusion: Let Schools Decide

1. Quasi-experimental research is neutral.
2. Experimental research is neutral.
3. Parents, students, and teachers generally support tracking.
4. Detracking involves trade-offs that some communities may not be willing to make
5. Detracking may not help the students it is intended to help