



# DISRUPT TRACKING IN MATH CLASSROOMS

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We are sorting, separating, and segregating students in the name of support services and differentiation in our education systems. Just consider all the ways students have been sorted into some version of “low, middle, and high” groups this school year.

Tracking systems tend to make us label our students. The language we use can either lift up a student or strip them of their potential. We don’t have low students. There is truly no such thing as a low-low group of kids. We also don’t have high students. We know that the label “gifted” continues to favor a student’s access to privilege. The term pull-out kid should be eradicated from our vocabulary if we believe in inclusion.

In reality, we’re still tracking and separating our students. The language we use to describe students helps reveal some of the harmful beliefs at play. In an article in Educational Leadership, “How Our Language Feeds Inequity”, the authors explain, “We can legislate policy, but we cannot force people to change their belief systems about students. Thus, the “Wallpaper Effect” is at play in many U.S. schools (Johnson & Avelar L. Sallee, 2010). Mandated structural changes mask underlying biases that perpetuate long-standing gaps. One way to bring those biases to light however is to reflect deeply on the language we use to describe students” (Johnson & Avelar L. Salle, 2019). Listen to the ways we talk about a student who is struggling in school. The language of tracking still shows up in the way we talk about our students.

We’re sorting and separating in an attempt to support differentiation. Dylan Wiliam explains, “In many high schools, those involved in academic programs treat the school as a talent refinery. Their job is to deliver the curriculum to the students. Some students will get it and thrive, and others will not” (Wiliam, 2011). The way most high schools approach



access to algebra is often a very clear example of the sorting and separating that is still embedded in our systems.

All Learners Network (ALN) is an organization completely dedicated to promoting math equity and inclusion for all students. We provide math instructional support, coaching, and workshops to ensure that every single student has access to high-quality math instruction. We do all of this so every single student believes that they are a math person. The All Learners Lesson Structure is our approach to a balanced math block. Inclusion and differentiation are both key parts of the lesson structure. While implementing the lesson structure, it is critical to utilize Math Menu time for intervention. This action can reduce segregation and separation, and increase inclusion.

I'm on a mission to disrupt tracking in education. Our kids deserve better. Our society is already too fragmented. Join me in spending the year 2024 disrupting as many systems in our schools that function like an oil refinery, sorting students into different layers (William, 2011).

### **WAYS WE CAN ACTIVELY DISRUPT TRACKING:**

- Challenge the student labels that have become accepted in our practices
  - Low, middle, high
  - Gifted, pull-out, or sped
  - Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 3
- Try using only random groupings for the rest of the school year. Can we achieve more or less growth when we don't do any ability groupings?
- Implement Math Menu in your math block and insist that all special education services and math intervention services are built into a co-planned math menu time.
- Look at how students currently gain access to algebra in middle or high school. Propose a system that gives access to algebra for all students.

### **References**

Johnson & R. Avelar La Salle. (2019). How Our Language Feeds Inequity. Educational Leadership. 76(7).

William, D. (2011). Embedded Formative Assessment. Solution Tree Press.

**What Now?** Scan the QR code and scroll to the bottom of the post for links to next steps



1. Review the All Learners Lesson Structure and read more about its application.
2. Learn more about Math Menu and register for ALO Free today to start getting access to our platform right away.
3. Bring All Learners Network (ALN) into your school or district for embedded professional development.

