

High School Students Evaluate Sectioning

*Various tests indicate
students' reactions
to sectioning
in school subjects.*

"IF YOU ran this high school, would you continue to section students according to the present arrangement?" Students in three high schools were asked this question. *High School S* enrolls 700, *High School M* 1013, and *High School L* 2160 in grades 9 through 12. All three are comprehensive high schools. The question was asked selected seniors in the first two schools and selected juniors in the third. It was a small part of a project¹ to evaluate sectioning.

In High School S there were high, middle, and low sections in most of the required courses in English, social studies, science, and mathematics, starting in the ninth grade. Students were assigned to sections on the basis of teacher judgments, a standardized reading test,

¹The evaluation was a joint project of the University of Wisconsin's Cooperative Educational Research and Services and the three school districts involved.

and standardized group intelligence test results.

High School M sectioned in most of the required subjects, largely on the basis of group IQ test results and teacher judgments. Neither S nor M assigned the same high ability students to the same sections in all subject fields. For example, many lower ability students did not take ninth-grade algebra or tenth-grade biology; nor were all higher ability students together in both a high tenth-grade English and a high tenth-grade biology class.

In High School L, group intelligence test scores, standardized achievement tests, and teacher judgments were used in assigning students to sections. The high ability students were assigned to the same sections in English, science, mathematics and social studies as tenth-graders. As eleventh-graders they were in the same sections in English and social studies. All those who pursued advanced mathematics and science as eleventh-graders were also in the same

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Table 1

Mean Grade-Point Averages of High, Middle, and Low Ability Students in Three High Schools

High School	Grade-Point Averages								
	N	High Ability		N	Middle Ability		N	Low Ability	
		Mean	Range		Mean	Range		Mean	Range
S	18	3.50	3.0-3.9	18	2.30	2.0-3.0	18	1.40	.9-1.7
M	17	3.50	3.0-4.0	17	2.30	2.2-2.5	17	1.36	1.0-1.6
L	19	3.76	3.5-4.0	19	2.69	2.5-3.0	19	1.69	1.5-2.0

sections. Thus, the high ability students were kept together for most of their instruction in the required courses; the middle and low ability students were not.

Table 1 shows the mean grade-point averages and the range of a sample of the high, middle and low-ability students in the three schools. For the high and middle ability students, mean grade-point averages in the three schools are much alike, being highest in School L. The higher mean grade-point average of low-ability students in School L is attributable in part to a slightly different selection procedure. The total numbers of students (N's) in the sample are 54 for School S, 51 for School M, and 57 for School L. Extensive information was

gathered on each student and only those students upon whom complete information was available were used for this part of the evaluation; the N's for high, middle, and low groups within each school were kept equal.

The affirmative and negative responses of the students and of the teachers to continuing the present procedures for assigning students to sections are given in Table 2. These responses were gathered by the evaluative team; both teachers and students when responding were assured that each individual's responses would remain unidentified. In all three schools, the large majority of students favored continuing the present sectioning arrangements. The high ability pu-

Table 2

Students' and Teachers' Responses Toward Continuing the Present Sectioning Arrangements in Three High Schools

School	Students' Responses						Teachers' Responses		
	High Ability		Middle Ability		Low Ability		Yes	No	No Response
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No			
S	18	0	17	1	17	1	18	1	3
M	15	2	11	6	14	3	30	3	7
L*	17	2	17	2	13	4**	25	2	2
Total	50	4	45	9	44	8	73	6	12

* Only teachers of eleventh-grade classes were invited to respond.

** Two students did not respond.

Table 3

Reasons or Conditions in Per Cents Leading to Choice of Friends and Neighbors
Among Students in Three High Schools

Reason for Choice	School								
	S			M			L		
	Ability			Ability			Ability		
	High	Middle	Low	High	Middle	Low	High	Middle	Low
1. Name your five best friends of your own sex from among all those now in high school.									
Same Classes	35	34	26	40	36	35	36	28	25
Same School Activities	47	51	51	50	44	40	50	47	43
Same Neighborhood or Church	18	15	23	10	20	25	14	25	32
2. Name your five best friends of the opposite sex from among all those now in high school.									
Same Classes	34	29	17	28	34	27	35	30	23
Same School Activities	56	62	64	60	57	60	58	52	60
Same Neighborhood or Church	10	9	19	12	9	13	7	18	17
3. Suppose that ten years from now, everyone now in the high school is married, as are you. Which five persons now in high school of the same sex as yourself would you most like to have living in the same neighborhood with you?									
Same Classes	34	31	24	37	39	30	35	28	26
Same School Activities	54	57	56	57	50	58	52	44	43
Same Neighborhood or Church	12	12	19	7	11	12	13	28	31
4. Suppose that ten years from now everyone in the high school is married, as are you. Which five persons now in high school of the opposite sex from yourself would you most like to have living in the neighborhood with you?									
Same Classes	33	33	19	27	38	27	32	30	24
Same School Activities	61	60	63	65	50	60	58	56	56
Same Neighborhood or Church	6	7	18	8	12	13	10	14	19

pils were most favorable and the middle group least favorable, although the low ability students responded much like the middle group in the three schools. The middle group apparently desired to be in the high sections. The tendency for students to react much the same as the teachers is shown in Table 2, with School M having the smallest proportion of students and of teachers favorable to continuing the sectioning arrangements and School S having the largest proportion.

Each student responded to six socio-

metric items² by listing for each item the names of five friends. Then he indicated

² Items 1-4 are shown in Table 3. Items 5 and 6 are as follows:

(5) Suppose that ten (10) years from now, no one now in *senior high school* is married but all are working, as are you. Which five (5) persons now in senior high school of the same sex as yourself would you most like to be working with?

(6) Suppose that ten (10) years from now, no one now in *senior high school* is married but all are working, as are you. Which five (5) persons now in senior high school of the opposite sex from yourself would you most like to be working with?

which two of seven listed conditions or reasons were most important in leading to each choice given. The seven conditions or reasons from which the student could choose were:

- a. Being in the same English, science, mathematics, and/or social studies classes.
- b. Being in the same elective classes.
- c. Being in the same co-curricular activities.
- d. Informal meetings at school.
- e. Informal meetings at school activities.
- f. Being in the same neighborhood or neighborhood activities.
- g. Going to the same church or church activities.

The reasons given by the students as the basis of each choice for each item, according to the three ability groups, were tabulated, summed, and subsequently the percent of total choices based on each reason was found. Table 3 gives the responses to four of six items in percents with conditions (a) and (b) combined and categorized as *Same Classes*; (c), (d) and (e) combined as *Same School Activities*; and (f) and (g) as *Same Neighborhood or Church*. Responses to items 5 and 6 were very similar to those for items 3 and 4 and thus are not reported. In responding, the students revealed some present and possible future social effects of the sectioning which operated directly in most of their required classes and indirectly in their elective classes. Four conclusions were:

1. Being in the same school activities was given far more prominence by students as the basis of friendships than were being in the same classes or being in the same neighborhood or church. Furthermore, boys and girls in all three schools considered the same school activities more important in choosing friends of the opposite sex than all other conditions or reasons combined.

2. The high ability students gave more weight relatively to being in the same classes as the basis for friendships than did the low ability students; the low ability students gave more weight relatively to being in the same neighborhood and church activities, particularly in choosing friends of own sex. Apparently, neighborhood and church are social outlets more frequently used by the low than the high ability students.

3. The students' bases for friendships 10 years hence were much the same as at present, with a slight tendency to give even more prominence to being in the same school activities as the basis for future friendships.

4. The students' responses in Schools S and L were more alike than in School M. In School M the low ability students gave about the same prominence to being in the same classes as did the high ability students; and except for choosing present friends of own sex, the high and low ability students were more alike in valuing same neighborhood and church activities as the basis of friendship than were the high and low students in the other two schools. It was noted previously that students in School M and their teachers were also the least favorable to continuing the present sectioning arrangements.

What do the students' opinions about sectioning and their responses to the sociometric test mean? In the light of this and other evidence from achievement test results, teacher and parent opinions, and observations in many classrooms, the continuance of the sectioning in these schools was recommended. It was also pointed out that the low ability students seem to be getting less from school in terms of their social and academic needs than do those of high abil-

ity. Since the large majority of students and teachers favored continuing the sectioning and since non-class activities were considered far more important by all the students than classes as the basis for forming friendships, the sectioning is not considered likely to produce any more undesirable social effects than would non-sectioned classes in which possibly a larger number of low ability students might fail, quit school, and not have the opportunity to form friendships at school in non-class activities.

Size of school and community within the limits of the study is unrelated to students' direct and indirect judgments

about sectioning. Three somewhat different bases for sectioning were used in the three schools, but none assigned students to heterogeneous classes in all subject fields. Entrusting social and intellectual development only to arrangements within heterogeneous classes appears unwise. Apparently when students and teachers feel that learning opportunities are improved for students of all abilities and when many non-class activities are available for friendship formation, sectioning in most of the subjects required for graduation does not produce appreciable undesirable social effects in the comprehensive high school.

Homework

(Continued from page 220)

class study and which can be tailored to individual needs.

Another avenue to independent study that is important to those concerned about homework is the use of the extended school day. Shops, libraries, science and language laboratories, work space and equipment for the use of tapes, television kinescopes and the like under the care of a para-professional teacher or a laboratory assistant are already available in some schools during out-of-class study time. Such facilities with proper provision for their use create excellent study conditions and do not involve the taxation of teacher time. This kind of activity meets many of the objections to homework held by parents and teachers. These activities could be incorporated with leisure time pursuits, relieve the home of the burden of providing materials and equipment, enrich and extend classroom experiences and promote the development of independent study.

In an opinion poll of school adminis-

trators conducted by *The Nation's Schools*, 96 percent of the administrators polled favored scheduled study during the school day; 95 percent favored homework assignments for junior and senior high school pupils; 79 percent favored homework at the upper elementary school level; and 31 percent favored homework for pupils in the lower elementary grades. According to reports from the administrators involved in this poll, the average time spent doing homework was about three hours per week for elementary pupils and from four to six hours per week for high school pupils. If these reactions represent homework conditions generally, there is wide acceptance of the practice of assigning homework; and at least at the high school level, the average time spent doing assigned homework is the equivalent of one school day each week. If this time is to be employed effectively and if it can be invested to produce independent, self directing students, the effort by teachers to improve the quality of homework becomes one of education's most compelling tasks.

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