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Innovative Scheduling, New Roles for Teachers, and Heterogeneous Grouping

The Organizational Factors Related to Student Success in Inclusive, Restructuring Schools

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Although the philosophy and values discussed in Chapter 3 form a strong foundation for school reform, there are a number of nuts-and-bolts practices that must also be changed in order for the vision of reform based on those values to become reality. These practices include the creative use of time through a restructured school schedule, new roles for general and special education teachers that reflect shared responsibility for all students, and the elimination of tracking and ability grouping. Not only does each of these practices affect student success and belonging, but all three are interrelated in their contribution to a positive school climate.

This interrelationship is evident in the following description of Heritage High School, a fictitious but representative school in which the philosophical and organizational separation of general and special education stands in the way of the achievement of equity and excellence. Heritage's schedule, teacher roles, and tracking are critiqued, followed by a discussion of how changes in these practices would promote educational improvement for all students.

A DESCRIPTION OF HERITAGE HIGH SCHOOL

Heritage High School's school year is 180 days long, and a 6-week summer session is offered for students who fail a class during the academic year. The school day is divided into 7 instructional periods, each about 50 minutes long. Each of Heritage's 1,800 students is enrolled in an academic path. These paths include honors, college prep, general, tech-prep, and special education. Class sizes in the honors and special education tracks are small—between 12 and 15 students. College preparation classes have about 25 students, and some general track classes have 30 students. The schedule is arranged in such a way that a student who wants to enroll in a course or two outside of his or her primary track often has difficulty scheduling it. The grading system ranges from F to A+; most teachers scale or curve their grades. In some honors classes, grades are given a premium weighting when it is time to calculate students' cumulative grade point averages. In an honors class, a B− is actually calculated as a B to acknowledge that a student in an honors class would probably get a higher grade if he or she had not taken on the challenge of honors work.

Behind the student parking lot is an alternative school housed in two modular units. Sixteen students, some from neighboring school

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districts, attend this school, which is staffed by two teachers and four teaching assistants.

Most teachers at Heritage High are organized into departments based on the subject area they teach (e.g., English, foreign languages, math, science, social studies, practical arts, fine arts, computer science). Each teacher has a classroom (although foreign language teachers rove), and there are offices for some of the department chairs. Teachers' rooms are located throughout the building. Curriculum planning is done on a departmental basis. None of the national professional organizations' standards (e.g., National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, National Council of Teachers of English) have been adopted; but curriculum committees are using the state curriculum frameworks to realign their curriculum, primarily in response to Heritage students' poor performance on the statewide tenth-grade assessment test.

One of the most exciting developments at Heritage High School is a result of the national school-to-work initiative. A local school-to-work council composed of students, teachers, and community members has developed community-based learning experiences for students at Heritage to better prepare them for the world of work after graduation.

Special education teachers at Heritage High have their own departmental office and teachers' lounge. There are four self-contained classrooms: one for students with emotional disabilities, one for students labeled trainably mentally retarded, one for students labeled educably mentally retarded, and one for students with language-learning disabilities. Students in these classes go outside of their classroom for physical education, music, lunch, and one or two lower-level mainstream classes; but most of their instruction is provided by special education teachers in their self-contained classrooms. There are two resource rooms in the building where English and math classes are taught throughout the day for students who are primarily enrolled in the general education track. In addition, many students come to the resource room for one-to-one tutorial or homework assistance.

Students with disabilities are included in mainstream classes in two different ways. First, some students with mild disabilities attend class unaccompanied because they are ready to handle the curriculum without any particular support or modification. The classroom teacher usually finds out that these students have an individualized education program (IEP) when they get their class roster at the beginning of the year. Teachers receive each student's modification sheet (describing seating preferences, the student's preferred learning style, and testing

accommodations); but if they wish to see the student's IEP, they must sign it out of the special education office. Meetings between the classroom teacher and special education teacher are held on an as-needed basis, and the classroom teacher is responsible for grading the student.

The second manner in which students are included is through support from a teaching assistant. These students (from the trainable or educable classes) usually have more significant disabilities than students with mild disabilities in mainstream classes and may attend classes in music, art, or science. Support is provided by a teaching assistant who is responsible for sitting with the student in the class, adapting tasks on the spot, and working with the student outside of class to complete an occasional homework assignment or project. The special education teacher who coordinates these students' programs meets with the classroom teacher once at the beginning of the year to tell the teacher about the goals of the students' participation and then once per month to see how things are going. At the end of each term, the special education teacher works with the classroom teacher to determine the students' grades. Pass/fail grading is often used; but if a student is assigned a letter grade, it is followed by an asterisk on the report card, signifying that modifications were made to expectations or instruction.

When staff development workshops are held, teachers usually attend sessions that deal with their own subject area—math teachers go to the math workshops, and English teachers go to the English workshops. Special education teachers and staff have their own workshops dealing with issues such as behavior management, writing IEPs, and transition after graduation.

As a result of parent advocacy and technical assistance from outside consultants, three students with severe disabilities are included in general education classes for most of their school day, although determining the academic level in which these students will be enrolled is a constant struggle. Although the smaller class size and teaching style of many honors classes might provide an accommodating learning environment, the norm is for the students to be included in business math, alternative English, and applied life sciences classes, where instruction is teacher directed and workbook based.

Assessing the Quality of Education at Heritage

If Heritage High School teachers and administrators were to critically examine their student outcomes and educational practices, what might they find? Certainly, they would have much to be proud of. Each year the top 10 graduating seniors are accepted by prestigious universities.

The school is, by and large, a safe environment for learning, and students who are enrolled in extracurricular activities are proud of their school. Many students would report that they have teachers who take a personal interest in them and that they like going to school.

However, they might also discover that too few students take on the challenge of honors work or attempt the advanced placement (AP) examinations. In comparison with many other schools in their state, the percentage of students going on to higher education might be low. A follow-up study of students who were enrolled in special education at Heritage might find that most students labeled emotionally disabled are unemployed, the majority of students labeled mentally retarded live in segregated housing, and many students labeled learning disabled who go on to college drop out during their first year.

A close look at the curriculum for Heritage students might show that though there are some teachers who require students to show what they know by exhibition, most teachers evaluate students by using methods that measure rote learning or factual understanding, not evaluation or synthesis. Few interdisciplinary links between subject areas are made explicit for students.

Although the teaching staff are caring and committed to their students, the climate in the school is not characterized by enthusiasm and innovation. Many teachers might report that they would like to try different instructional techniques to increase student motivation and engagement, but they would probably feel constrained by the short class periods as well as by the lack of time for planning.

Undoubtedly, special education teachers would feel particularly disenfranchised. Their classrooms and offices are in a separate wing of the building, they have no opportunity for collaborative planning with their general education colleagues that might result in a more accommodating curriculum for students with disabilities, and they know that many of their students miss out on a positive high school experience because of their isolation within the school.

If Heritage teachers and administrators delved into the educational literature for some guidance about what they might change to improve teaching and learning, they would discover that three of their current practices stand in the way. Like many other high schools, Heritage needs to create a school schedule that provides longer blocks of instructional and collaborative team planning time; they must restructure the roles of general and special education teachers to reflect shared responsibility for all students; and they need to eliminate tracking and ability grouping to facilitate higher expectations and performance of all students within the mainstream of general education. The

rationale for each of these changes is described in the remainder of this chapter and is illustrated by examples from schools engaged in unified school restructuring and inclusive education efforts.

CREATIVE USE OF TIME THROUGH IMPLEMENTATION OF INNOVATIVE SCHOOL SCHEDULES IS ESSENTIAL

The first organizational or structural barrier that impedes school reform efforts relative to equity and excellence is the daily schedule. Although data from one survey showed that 39% of high schools had changed to or were considering some form of block scheduling (Cawelti, 1994), students in most high schools are still ''prisoners of time,'' according to a national study on school restructuring conducted by the National Education Commission on Time and Learning (1994).

Disadvantages of the Traditional High School Schedule

The traditional high school schedule, typified by Heritage's 7-period day with students going from subject to subject after 50-minute classes, results in fragmented instruction and learning; a lack of common planning time for teachers; and an impersonal, hectic school climate.

Day after day, short class periods are not conducive to teachers' use of instructional methods that result in high levels of student engagement, active learning, interaction, or authentic work. By the time students settle down at their desks and teachers do daily housekeeping tasks such as taking attendance or collecting homework, there are barely 45 minutes remaining. Science teachers often must spread laboratory experiments over several days, resulting in a lack of cohesiveness. Social studies teachers find it difficult to engage students in in-depth dialogue because of the short amount of class time. In an English class, teachers rarely have time for students to read, discuss, and write in one class period, so they resort to lectures. Even those teachers who would like to structure active, authentic learning experiences (e.g., sampling from a nearby pond and conducting experiments to determine pollution levels) are prevented from doing so by the structure of the day. This lack of instructional creativity is caused as much by the inadequacy of the organization (i.e., the school schedule) as by the shortcomings of its members (i.e., teachers) (Bonstingl, 1992).

For students with disabilities, short, fragmented classes are usually ineffective learning environments. Students who need a bit of extra time to locate their homework and focus their attention often miss large chunks of information because of the pace at which most teach-

ers deliver information in an attempt to get through their material in the short period. Because of short class periods, teachers rarely utilize cooperative learning structures and students with disabilities miss out on valuable opportunities for social and academic interaction.

The typical high school structure also inhibits collaborative curriculum planning and teaching. General education teachers are isolated not only from their general education colleagues but also from special educators. Although most teachers have a period or two of preparation time every day, there is usually no attempt by administrators to schedule teachers' planning periods so that colleagues with whom they would like to collaborate are free at the same time. Even when colleagues *are* able to find a common planning period, 50 minutes is too short a time to fully develop an idea into a workable lesson or unit plan.

The third disadvantage of the traditional high school schedule is its contribution to a negative school climate. Walk through the halls of a large public high school that operates under a traditional schedule. Every 50 minutes, there is chaos in the halls as students rush from room to room with barely enough time to visit their lockers.

Block Scheduling Can Facilitate School Restructuring and Inclusion

The implementation of block scheduling is a tool that facilitates improved learning for all students and provides structural support for the inclusion of students with disabilities. It is a powerful albeit underutilized tool in achieving school reform (Canady & Rettig, 1995a).

Impact on Student Learning and Teaching Time

The creative use of time through restructuring of the typical high school schedule can lead to improvement in learning as well as more inclusive practices (Canady & Rettig, 1995b). The most commonly used block-scheduling format—the 4 × 4 plan—illustrates the advantages of most innovative schedules being used in the United States (Edwards, 1993). The school year is still divided into 2 semesters. Students enroll in four academic courses each semester that meet daily for approximately 90 minutes. Because twice as much instructional time is available each day, students complete a whole year's coursework in 1 semester. This block-scheduling plan acknowledges that the time required for learning varies greatly from student to student (Canady & Rettig, 1995b). Under this plan, both acceleration and relearning opportunities are possible for all students, without the stigma of makeup classes or pull-out services. Students who need more time to master course material are able to take the same course again during

the second semester of the year. Instead of dropping out at midterm in a traditional school because they feel that they will never catch up before the end of the year, students know that they have another whole semester in which to demonstrate their proficiency and achieve a passing grade. Students who are able to complete most course requirements in 1 semester then have the opportunity to enroll in advanced high school– or college-level courses during their senior year.

Santana High School's schedule is representative of a school with a mixed block schedule, which is depicted below:

Block 1	7:30–8:30
Block 2	8:36–10:10
Block 3	10:30–12:04
Block 4	12:45–2:19
Block 5	2:25–3:25

Block 1 is a traditional semester-long course that is mainly used for elective classes such as student council, AP exam preparation, music, and yearbook. Blocks 2–4 are 9-week-long classes in which a traditional semester's worth of material is covered. Block 5 is a common planning period for teachers and is used as a tutorial period for students who need to use the library, see their counselor, or make up some work. Thus, the majority of students attend three 94-minute academic classes per day for 9 weeks. As a result, teachers interact with approximately 90 students per week rather than more than 175 (as is typical in a traditional high school) and have time each day to collaborate with colleagues. The impact of block scheduling on students with disabilities is summarized in Table 1.

Block Scheduling Creates Common Planning Time

A second benefit of a restructured school schedule based on blocks of time is the natural creation of common planning time. Because teachers teach fewer classes per day and the preparation periods that they have are longer, the free periods that they have are longer, too. With half as many classes per day to schedule, it is twice as easy for administrators to align common planning periods for teachers who wish to work together. When special education teachers take part in the design of curriculum, accommodation for students with disabilities can be incorporated into the lesson plan right from the start. (Inclusive lesson design is addressed in Chapter 5.)

At Souhegan High School, common planning time for ninth- and tenth-grade teachers was provided by instituting a teaming structure within a block schedule. For a 3-hour block of time in the morning

Table 1. Characteristics of block schedules and impact on the inclusion of students with disabilities

Characteristics of block schedules	Impact on inclusion of students with disabilities
Each class period is longer.	There is more time for teachers to give individual attention to students.
	Teachers use more accommodating teaching strategies.
Teachers see fewer students every day.	Fewer students means more opportunity for teachers to get to know students personally.
Students can complete 1 year's coursework in less time.	Students can take a greater variety of courses or accelerate their education.
Teachers teach fewer classes each day.	There are fewer classes for special education teachers to support.
	Special education teachers need to become familiar with fewer content areas each semester.
Students take fewer classes per day.	Students with disabilities can register for a lighter course load.
Teachers have longer preparation periods.	More opportunities exist for meaningful collaborative planning with special education teachers.
Students pass classes fewer times each day.	There are fewer occasions for behavior problems to arise.
Students and teachers report feeling less rushed and more satisfied with school.	Teachers feel generally more positive about teaching.
	When teachers' basic classroom needs are met, they are more open to risk and innovation.
Students "encounter" less material in each class but master more (O'Neil, 1995).	With less material for students to master, it is easier to identify the most important learning goals for students with disabilities.

and a 1½-hour block of time in the afternoon, a team of four general education teachers, a special education teacher or teaching assistant, and approximately 100 students study English, math, social studies, and science. The use of each block of time is totally within the control of the teaching team. One week, the schedule may be adjusted so that students have a double period of each subject every other day. When interdisciplinary units are being taught, teachers can suspend the typical class schedule altogether and work with small groups of students throughout their wing of the building. If the math teacher needs extra time to introduce a new concept, then the science teacher might give up a period or two.

When students are off-team in their elective, arts, and modern language classes, the core academic teachers have daily common planning time. They are joined by the special education teacher who is a member of their team and, on 1 day each week, a guidance counselor. These common planning times also provide an opportunity for parents to meet with many of their children's teachers at one time. The typical ninth- or tenth-grade schedule at Souhegan is depicted next:

7:30–10:00	Academic Block
10:00–11:30	Electives, Arts, Languages (core teachers have planning time)
11:30–12:00	Lunch
12:00–12:30	Advisory
12:30–2:10	Academic Block

Even in schools that have not changed to a block schedule, common planning time can be found if it is a priority for staff and administration. The vignette that follows illustrates how time for planning can be provided for teachers within a school that utilizes a traditional schedule.

An Example of Common Planning Time within a Traditional Schedule

Even in districts that have not yet moved to a totally restructured school day, it is possible to create time for instructional planning to facilitate inclusion if the school community is ready for it. This was the situation in a school district in New Mexico. Of the 1,800 students in this rural district, approximately 69% were Latino, 15% were Native American, and 15% were Caucasian; the remaining 1% were African American or Asian American. The students with disabilities, who composed 17% of the total school population, had IEPs that addressed their needs within the context of general education classes. All of the teachers had received training, technical assistance, and support with regard to curricular adaptations, collaboration, and multilevel instruction (Collicott, 1991). Family members were involved in program development and had regular interaction with district administrators. School site-based decision-making teams had written action plans to revise their curriculum and instruction to include thematic and authentic units, cooperative groups, block scheduling, and essential questions. In addition, a number of community connections had been established with the local college,

businesses, health services, a tribal council, and social services agencies.

Based on the research literature, it seemed that the schools in this district were implementing the components necessary for creating inclusive, restructuring schools. However, as one teacher sighed, "Every kid is included, the curriculum is becoming more integrated, and the teachers are more empowered than ever, but our next staff development day isn't for 6 weeks. When do we develop plans to teach?" Obviously, one component that had not been adequately addressed was time for curriculum planning and reflection on practice.

In an effort to create more team planning time, teachers from several schools brainstormed solutions that would not sacrifice total instructional time. The need for consistent planning time within the school day was clear, and it appeared that the idea had districtwide support. The superintendent's only stipulation was that consistency be maintained across schools within the district; that is, a situation could not be allowed to develop in which one school dismissed early on Tuesday and another dismissed early on Wednesday. After many hours of focus groups and asking community members their preferences, it was determined that a late start every other Thursday was a solution that the entire community could accept. This schedule change would not interfere with sports or other after-school events; it would not result in large numbers of teenagers unsupervised on the streets at noon; and parents with younger children in the school system could plan their schedules for their children across grades. In addition, by giving up half of the staff development days allocated under the old system, the total amount of instructional time was not reduced.

Teachers were able to plan integrated lessons with a range of students in mind. As a result, they had fewer curriculum adaptations to make after lessons had been created. In fact, as teachers met and discussed instructional units, it was common to hear them think through the lesson aloud, taking on different student perspectives.

Block Scheduling Creates a More Positive School Climate

The third effect of restructuring the school day is its positive impact on the school climate. At Heritage High School, students and teachers rush from class to class; each teacher instructs more than 120 students per day; and there is little opportunity for teachers to get to know students individually. When teachers have fewer students to teach,

they are able to get to know each student more individually—a key to providing a supportive education to all students, including those with disabilities. When Santana High School converted to a block schedule, it experienced a dramatic reduction in disciplinary referrals during a year in which other schools within the same district saw increases (see Table 2).

GENERAL AND SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS WITH NEW JOB DESCRIPTIONS THAT REFLECT SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALL STUDENTS MUST COLLABORATE TO DESIGN CURRICULUM, TEACH, AND EVALUATE STUDENTS

In traditional schools, general education and special education exist as two separate systems (Lipsky & Gartner, 1989). Curriculum and materials used in special education often do not parallel classroom materials, and the connection is weak between what occurs in the special education classroom and the general education classroom. Communication with parents is infrequent, and generally there is no collaboration between general education and special education teachers. Students leave the general education classroom or are permanently placed outside it to receive specialized instruction that is delivered in a manner different from typical classroom teaching. Responsibility for assessment of student progress is not clear, so parents sometimes receive a report card and a progress report that sometimes seem unrelated. The role of the special education service coordinator, though necessary to some extent, tends to absolve other faculty mem-

Table 2. Comparison of disciplinary referrals under block scheduling

	Number of referrals	
School	1993–1994	1994–1995
Grossmont	7,584	7,627
Helix	5,058	4,899
El Cajon Valley	6,994	9,293
Mount Miguel	8,423	9,059
El Capitan	8,286	9,830
Granite Hills	5,745	6,258
Monte Vista	9,875	10,612
Santana	**5,614**	**2,365**
Valhalla	4,338	5,253
West Hills	3,624	4,436

bers of their responsibilities for students who receive special education services. Communication between special and general education teachers occurs on the fly—during lunch, in the hallways, and before or after school.

According to Sarason (1982), schools tend to mirror the teacher preparation programs from which their teachers graduated. Thus, "is it any wonder that general and special education evolved as separate systems?" (Villa, Thousand, & Chappie, 1996, p. 43). Although there are some examples of college programs that communicate to teachers the expectation that they will educate all of the children in their classes, most are still organized according to categorical labels such as *learning disabilities, emotional and behavioral disabilities, severe disabilities, gifted and talented,* and *general education.*

As schools begin to include students with disabilities within the mainstream and at the same time change many of the traditional practices and structures within that general education environment, a closing of the great divide between special and general education is necessary (Stainback & Stainback, 1984), particularly with respect to teachers' roles. Teachers' roles and responsibilities should be based on a vision of inclusive education as a seamless system in which information is shared among special and general education teachers and parents, curriculum and materials are common, and all students receive the educational instruction and support they need in the same classroom. This new model will not only enhance education for students with disabilities but also benefit all students.

Until teacher education programs restructure their programs to reflect the demands on teachers in today's classrooms, local schools must take the lead in designing this new paradigm. A conversation about new roles for all teachers has been occurring at Souhegan High School since 1992. During the 1993–1994 school year, all faculty were surveyed regarding the roles and responsibilities of both general and special education teachers. After tabulating the results of the survey and talking with all faculty groups, it was clear that the majority of faculty saw a great deal of overlap in the two roles. Based on the survey results and taking Souhegan's mission statement into consideration, new job descriptions for special and general educators were written. Within the school's *Career Ladder* manual, which describes the roles and responsibilities of teachers, the use of teaching strategies for heterogeneous groups of students and collaboration with special education teachers were emphasized. A new special education job description for a learning specialist was also written (see Figure 1). The learning specialist job description reflects the collaborative nature of assessment, curriculum design, instruction, and communication

I. Job responsibilities relating to instruction
   1. Instruction is available to any student for whom the teaching team desires assistance.
   2. Identify and/or gather appropriate instructional materials.
   3. Assist in adapting materials and instruction.
   4. Provide small-group or individual instruction in or out of the classroom.
   5. Teach the whole class.
   6. Keep informed on and assist in utilizing strategies that promote inclusion.
   7. Supervise special education teaching assistants in the classroom.
   8. Monitor students' academic work.
   9. Develop and assist in implementation of behavior management plans.

II. Job responsibilities relating to assessment and evaluation
   1. Grade students' performance.
   2. Administer and interpret educational tests as necessary.
   3. Assist in developing appropriate exhibitions and demonstrations.
   4. Direct special education referrals through proper channels.
   5. Facilitate the prereferral process.

III. Job responsibilities relating to communication
   1. Attend team planning meetings.
   2. Communicate regularly with the parents of students for whom the learning specialist is case manager.
   3. Attend and facilitate update and problem-solving meetings. Keep all teachers informed of student needs and status. This includes elective and foreign language teachers, guidance counselors, and advisors.
   4. Provide support for additional personnel involved in meeting students' needs as specified in IEPs.
   5. Facilitate use of specialists from outside agencies.

IV. Job responsibilities relating to record keeping
   1. Develop and write IEPs with input from teaching teams.
   2. Keep necessary records: Annual Statement of Program, referrals, minutes of meetings, telephone logs.

Figure 1. Job description of Souhegan High School learning specialist.

among general and special educators and parents. The implications are far reaching for what effective Souhegan special educators must know and be able to do. They must have an in-depth knowledge of curriculum because they will be expected to work with general education teachers as the curriculum is being developed. They must know how to assess what students know relative to that curriculum and how to provide materials and instructional support to help students reach the rigorous standards to which all students at Souhegan are held. Special education teachers must be able to work with individual students and small groups and be able to manage large-group instruc-

tion. To ensure collaboration with their general education colleagues in all of these functions, special educators must have strong interpersonal skills.

Although the job description of the learning specialist relates primarily to curriculum and teaching, the learning specialist must also be willing and able to participate with his or her colleagues in broader school conversations and committees that deal with academic standards, curriculum design, disciplinary policy, school climate, and continuous quality improvement. There are a few tasks that remain the primary responsibility of the special educator, such as knowledge of special education regulations and procedures and associated record keeping.

TRACKING HAS BEEN ELIMINATED, AND MOST CLASSES ARE HETEROGENEOUSLY GROUPED

The third and perhaps most emotionally charged innovation that can be proposed by a school is the elimination of tracking and other ability-grouping practices. When tracking is challenged, objections are raised not only from teachers concerned about heterogeneous grouping but also from the parents of students who are in the higher academic tracks (George, 1988). Their concerns echo a number of common though inaccurate beliefs about ability grouping, including the following:

- Ability grouping promotes achievement within all tracks because students can learn at their own rates with students who are similar to them.
- Teachers can tailor instruction better when their students are homogeneous with respect to ability, learning style, and rate of learning.
- Less capable students will get lost and their self-esteem will suffer if they are in heterogeneous classes.
- More able students will be held back by being in heterogeneous classes.
- It is easier for teachers to teach homogeneous classes.
- It is easy to determine in which track or group a student ought to be.
- If tracking and ability grouping are eliminated, then the curriculum as a whole will be watered down because teachers will lower their expectations (i.e., curriculum standards) and slow the pace of instruction to reach the most challenged learners in the classroom.

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For students with disabilities, ability grouping and tracking have deleterious consequences. First, tracking within the general education mainstream legitimizes the existence of separate special education classes. In other words, if it is defensible to group students *without* disabilities by some perceived measure of potential or performance, then it is easy to argue that students *with* disabilities are also served well by being grouped with other students with disabilities. Second, when students with disabilities are mainstreamed or included in general education classes within a tracked school environment, teachers tend to place them in the lowest-track classes. They reason that putting students with disabilities in the mainstream will be difficult, so they ought to be placed in a class where they will face the least academic challenge. Even if the teaching style or the content of an upper-level class seems to be a better fit for a particular student with disabilities, placing him or her in a relatively higher track goes against the whole logic and organization of the tracking system. Thus, students with disabilities—who would benefit from the best teachers, the most interesting curriculum, and a more organized and focused classroom environment—are often mainstreamed into the roughest lower-track classes. Third, teachers of lower-level classes are understandably resistant to inclusion because they view students with disabilities as the "straw that breaks the camel's back"—that is, as very needy learners within a class of students who already pose learning and behavioral challenges.

Despite the emotional and political nature of the arguments surrounding tracking, there is a large body of research that is clear about the impact of tracking on student learning. Findings of this body of research, summarized in Table 3, indicate that tracking and ability grouping do not result in consistently higher academic achievement for most students, frequently lead to stigmatization of students in lower tracks, and have a negative impact on measures of student affect such as self-esteem and future aspirations. As long as schools track students without disabilities, inclusion for students with disabilities will be viewed as a challenge to the very foundations of educational philosophy and practice. Administrators will ask themselves, "If we include students with disabilities in higher-track classes, then how will I justify ability grouping to the parents of students in the lower tracks?" Teachers will ask, "If our school tracks the general education students, then how can it make sense to mainstream students whose abilities are so much lower than those of the typical students?" Teachers of lower-track classes will argue that their classes are already overloaded with students who have difficulty learning, so it would not be

Table 3. Summary of research on tracking and ability grouping

Research finding	Source
There is little evidence that ability grouping or tracking improves academic achievement, while there is overwhelming evidence that it retards the academic progress of students in low- and middle-ability groupings. A few studies have found that tracking the highest-achieving students increases their academic performance.	Cotton and Savard (1981) Featherstone (1987) Kulik and Kulik (1982) Oakes (1985) Rowan and Miracle (1983) Slavin (1987)
Expectations of students are higher and instructional practices more effective in higher-track classes.	Good and Brophy (1987) Oakes (1985) Rist (1970)
Ability grouping and tracking widens the achievement and knowledge gap between students.	Rist (1970) Weisendanger and Birlen (1981)
Ability grouping reduces expectations for students' future educational aspirations beyond high school.	Rosenbaum (1976) Schaefer and Olexa (1971)
Low-ability grouped students, including those in special education classes, have lower self-esteem and expectations as well as the social stigma of being less smart.	George (1988) Vanfossen, Jones, and Spade (1987)
Ability grouping and tracking have negative effects on student relationships.	Sorenson and Hallinan (1986)

fair to any of the students to mainstream students with disabilities; they would not get the attention they need, and their presence would detract from the needs of the other students in the class. We have even heard it argued that, if students with disabilities are included in lower-track classes, other students will be self-conscious in confronting "students who are in even worse shape than they are. They'll think that their class is just for students with disabilities, and they won't want to be identified that way."

Elimination of tracking requires a commitment to involving all stakeholders in the detracking process, the provision of time and support for teachers who are responsible for designing new course sequences, and a commitment to staff development to assist teachers with curriculum design and instruction that is effective for heterogeneous groups of students. Because it represents a change that has the potential to have a profound impact on the inclusion of students with disabilities, special educators must be involved in detracking discussions from the beginning. They have not only a vested interest in the success of the effort but also valuable skills and knowledge about learning styles, adaptive curriculum, and effective instruction for diverse learners.

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A RESTRUCTURED, INCLUSIVE HIGH SCHOOL

If Heritage High School were to embrace the philosophy and practices described in the previous chapters, how would the school be different? Within every subject area, classes would be detracked. Table 4 illustrates how five levels of ninth-grade English can be reorganized into four heterogeneously grouped classes. When the 12 students from the old special education class are included within the four restructured heterogeneous classes, the special education teacher and teaching assistant are available to teach with their general education colleagues and to provide support to every student in those classes, not just those with identified disabilities.

The change to a block schedule has provided common planning time for general and special education teachers, who meet every day to design curriculum and discuss students with extraordinary learning challenges. Longer class periods result in a number of changes in curriculum and instruction. Teachers use a greater variety of teaching techniques. Within most classes, students are engaged in group work more frequently. Laboratory experiments are started and finished in the same day. In a 90-minute period, teachers find more time to confer with individual students. Science teachers are able to design field experiments because there is enough time to leave the building, get to the field site, do some observations or collections, and get students back to school for their next class. Students with disabilities find it easier to stay organized because they have fewer notebooks of which to keep track. Many students report that they get more out of each class because the teacher seems less hurried and there is more time for questions or individual help.

Table 4. Conversion of tracked English classes to heterogeneously grouped classes

Old course title	Student enrollment	New course title	Student enrollment
Honors English (one teacher)	16	English 9	25
College prep English (one teacher)	24	English 9	25
General English (one teacher)	30	English 9	25
Tech-prep English (one teacher)	18	English 9	25
Special education English (one teacher and one paraprofessional)	12	N/A	N/A

When it is time to evaluate students' work, teachers assign more authentic tasks. They have not only half as many assignments to grade but also more in-class time for students to present their work and get feedback from their classmates or other observers. Classroom teachers feel more comfortable assigning a grade to the students with disabilities in their classes because they know them personally.

Finally, even though Heritage is a large high school, the atmosphere created by block scheduling would be calmer and quieter than the school experiences under its present schedule. With less movement of students in the hallways, disruptions would decrease and the overall behavioral climate of the school would improve.

CONCLUSIONS

Although the three structural changes described in this chapter provide opportunity and freedom for teachers to redesign curriculum and instruction for their newly diverse classrooms, a conceptual model and practical examples are needed to help teachers figure out, "What do I do Monday morning?" (Falvey, Givner, & Kimm, 1996, p. 117). The elements of an inclusive curriculum design model—the eighth and final practice that is essential for inclusive, restructuring schools—are presented in Chapter 5 and are followed by specific unit and lesson examples in Chapter 6.

Implementation Suggestions for Teachers

1. Compare your school's practices with those outlined in Chapters 3 and 4. Read the literature on innovative scheduling and tracking.
2. Identify one principle or practice that needs to be addressed and in which you would invest time and energy to change.
3. Find out which committee or planning group in your school addresses that issue. If you have a school safety and climate committee or a diversity committee, that is where social justice issues as they relate to students with disabilities should be discussed. Many schools have special education task forces composed of parents and teachers. Every member of that group should join a general education task force or committee.
4. After you identify an appropriate committee, join it! Even if you are the first special education teacher to become a member of that group, and even if the first reaction of people is "We don't deal with special ed issues in this committee," be willing to work on issues that affect the general school population.

5. Share chapters in this book (or other resources that make the connection between inclusion of students with disabilities and overall school improvement or reform) with the members of that group.
6. Ask the group to evaluate your school's practices in one particular area.
7. Gather reading materials to share with the group and propose that each member read one article or chapter and share its contents with the rest of the group at a future meeting.
8. Identify knowledgeable "outside" resource people (e.g., from another school, a nearby university or consulting firm, a professional association, your state department of education) and suggest that they attend a meeting of your group to present their viewpoints.
9. Enlist another teacher or two to work with you on addressing an issue you have targeted to change.

Leadership Suggestions for Administrators

1. Do some investigative work related to the participation and achievement of students with disabilities in your school.
2. Call your state department of education or a state-level professional association to find out the names of schools that are engaged in systemic reforms that include issues of diversity and disability. Talk to their administrators to find out how they have introduced innovative ideas and practices. Visit them and talk to teachers, students, and parents.
3. Locate some reference materials on the topic and share them with your administrative colleagues.
4. Bring up the topic of inclusion of students with disabilities at an administrative team meeting and propose that your school address the issue in a schoolwide, comprehensive manner.
5. If your school already has a school improvement team or some other group that addresses current educational issues, bring the issue of inclusion, tracking, or block scheduling to that group. If such a group does not exist, establish one with an inclusive mission such as investigating how your school makes all students feel a sense of belonging, evaluating achievement of students enrolled in low-track classes, or moving students with disabilities from separate classes into general education classes.
6. Identify a critical friend for your school—an outside person from a local university, a professional association, or your state department of education—whose role is not to evaluate your school but to be a reflective listener and a facilitator of change.

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