

Tracking and Math

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Educational Writers Association

Types of Grouping

- Ability Grouping—within-class, typically in reading and elementary grades
- Tracking—between class, typically in middle and high school.
- European/Asian tracking is typically between-school, with admissions exams or early testing determining placement.

History of Tracking

Early 20th century, XYZ groups. Groups used the same curriculum but the pace of instruction varied. No effect. XYZ with curriculum adjustment generally favored high achieving groups and disadvantaged the low achievers.

For most of the 20th century, until the 1970s, high schools assigned students to three tracks: academic, general, and vocational. Junior highs (middle schools) featured high, middle, and remedial tracks.

By the mid-1990s, most high schools had morphed into tracking by subject, with academic tests determining placement. High tracks culminated in AP classes.

Math Pathways for Grades 7-12 (percent of grade enrolled)

7 th Grade	8 th Grade	9 th Grade	10 th Grade	11 th Grade	12 th Grade
CCSS7+8 Compacted	Algebra I (27%)	Geometry (25%)	Algebra II (29%)	Pre-Calc (21%)/Calc (4%)	AP Calc AB (12%) BC
Math7	Math8 (61%)	Algebra I (49%)	Geometry (45%)	Algebra II (39%)	Pre-Calc (17%)/AP Stats (9%)
Math7	Math8	Integrated I (7%)	Integrated I (6%)	Integrated III (6%)	Integrated IV (3%)

Source: 2019 Transcript Studies. NCES, <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/hst/>

Note: On 2022 NAEP, 24% of 8th graders reported taking an Alg I course.

“All school districts should ensure that all prepared students have access to an authentic algebra course—and should prepare more students than at present to enroll in such a course by Grade 8. The word *authentic* is used here as a descriptor of a course that addresses algebra consistently with the Major Topics of School Algebra (Table 1, page 16). Students must be prepared with the mathematical prerequisites for this course according to the Critical Foundations of Algebra (page 17) and the Benchmarks for the Critical Foundations (Table 2, page 20).”