



HANOVER
RESEARCH

PROPOSED EXPANSION OF MIXED-ABILITY GROUPINGS

Grosse Pointe Public School System

INTRODUCTION

- During the 2019-20 academic year, Grosse Pointe Public School System (GPPSS) moved to a model of **mixed-ability classes in Grade 7 Science and Social Studies** instead of offering both regular and honors classes.
- Based on the success of this model, GPPSS seeks to **expand mixed-ability classes to include Grade 8 Science and Social Studies** in the 2020-2021 academic year.
- This presentation discusses the **research and rationale** behind the proposed expansion.

Prior Years

Grade 7-8 Mixed-Ability

**Mid-2000s
- 2019**

Grade 7-8 Ability
Grouping

(regular and honors classes)

2019-20

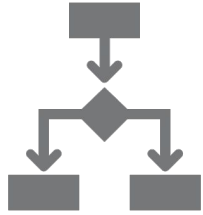
Grade 7 Mixed-Ability
Science and Social Studies

Proposed
2020-21

Grades 7-8 Mixed-Ability
Science and Social Studies

ABILITY GROUPING AND TRACKING

Academic Achievement



- The majority of research on ability groupings finds that tracking has little impact on overall average student achievement.
 - Students in higher-level courses marginally benefit from tracking.
 - Middle- and low-track students generally benefit from a heterogeneous learning environment (i.e., mixed-ability).

Academic Equity



- Studies show that **tracking can exacerbate inequities** between low- and high-tracked students.
 - Low-track classes often have lower quality instruction and rigor compared to high-track classes.
 - Minority and low-socioeconomic status students are often overrepresented in low-track classes, thus placing these students at a disadvantage for future course enrollment and educational opportunities.

METHODOLOGY

As part of the 2019-20 implementation of mixed-ability groupings in Grade 7 Science and Social Studies, GPPSS enlisted Hanover Research to gather stakeholder feedback on the new model.

Stakeholder Survey

January 2020

287

Total Respondents

- 58 Grade 7 Students
- 229 Grade 7 Parents
- Brownell, Parcels, and Pierce Middle Schools

In-Depth Interviews

February 2020

11

Total Participants

- 5 Grade 7 Social Studies Teachers
- 6 Grade 7 Science Teachers

STAKEHOLDER SURVEY

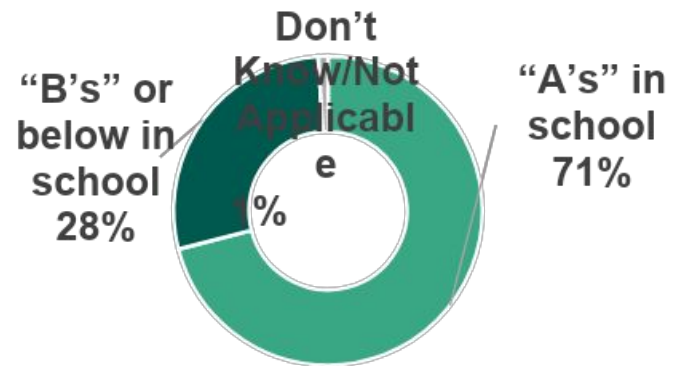
Core Survey Questions



- Are parents aware of the new mixed-ability model in Grade 7 Science and Social Studies?
- What is parents' general satisfaction with the new instructional model?
- Do parents and students feel that the new instructional model is effective?

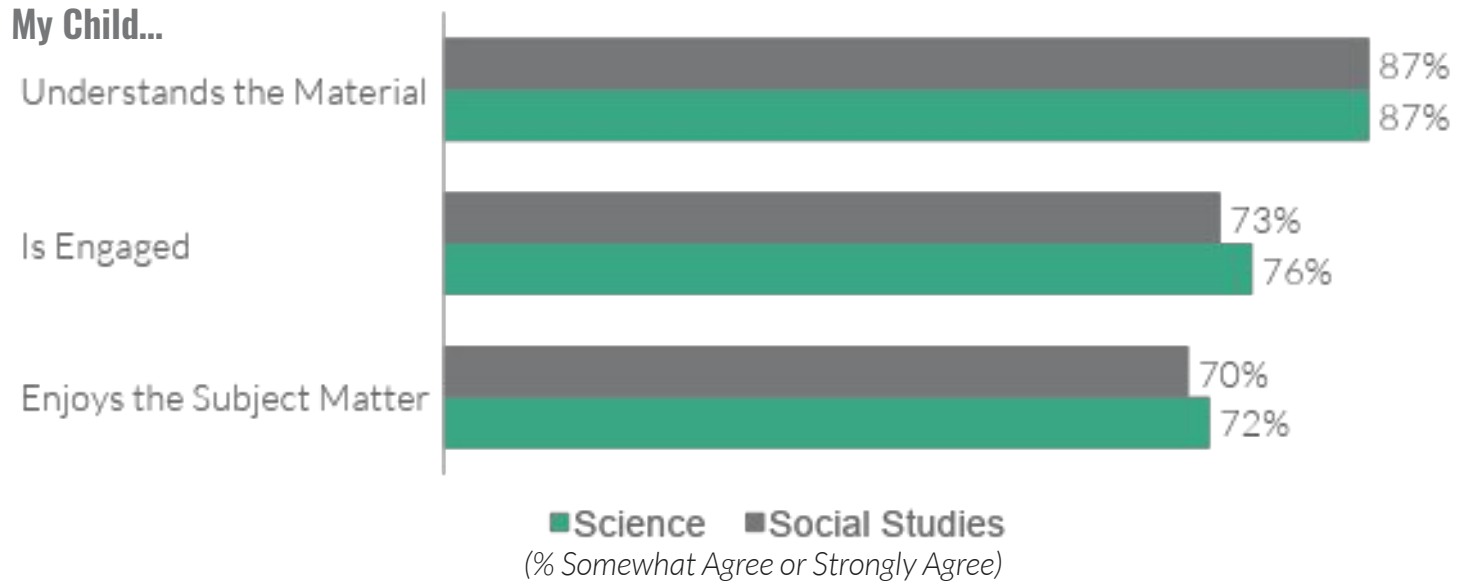
Survey Respondents

- Notably, nearly three-fourths of **parent respondents** report having high-achieving students, classified as receiving “As” in school.

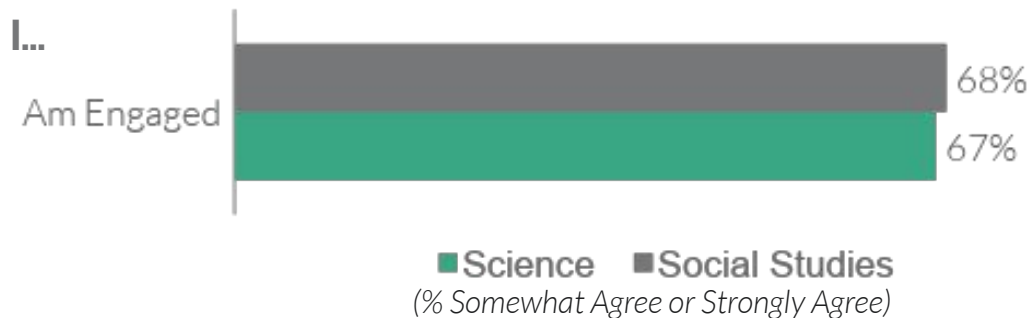


STAKEHOLDER SURVEY

Most parents perceive their child's experiences in Grade 7 Science and Social Studies as positive.

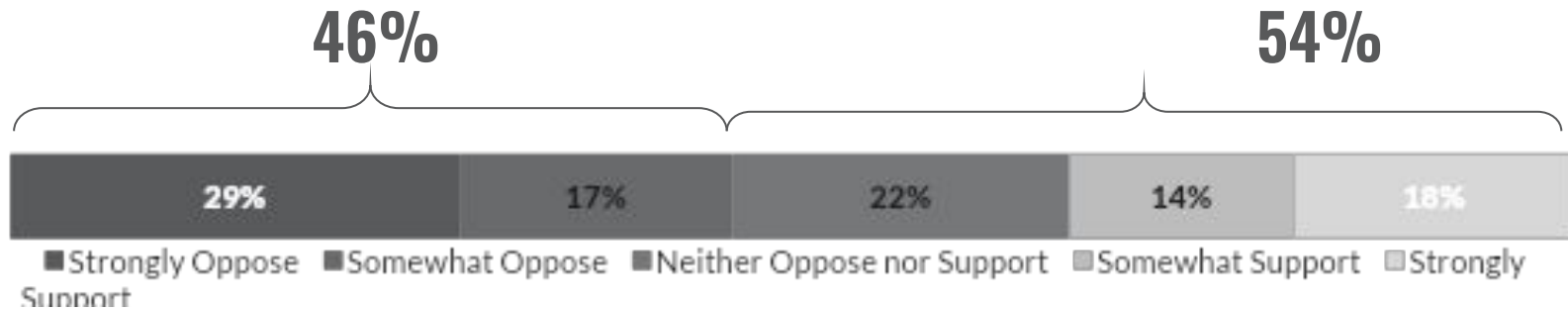


Most students are also engaged in their Grade 7 Science and Social Studies courses.

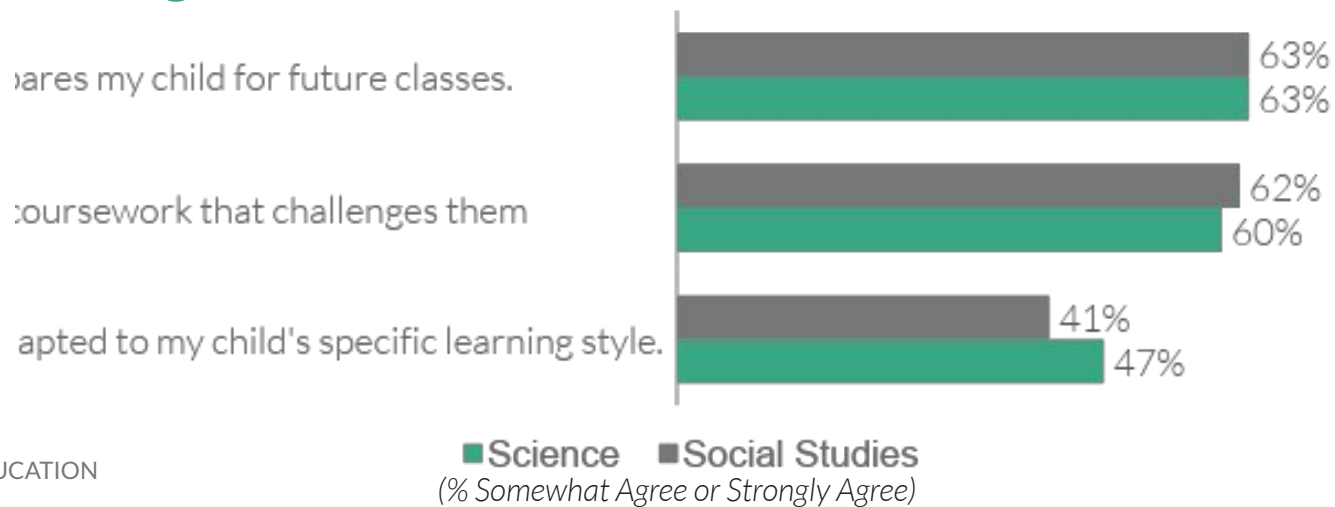


STAKEHOLDER SURVEY

Half of parents support (32%) or feel neutral (22%) about the change to mixed-ability groupings.



A majority of parents (over 60%) agree that these mixed-ability classes are challenging and prepare their children for future coursework. Parents express concerns, though, about the extent to which these courses are adapted to their children's learning styles.



IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Core Interview Goals



- Understand teachers' ability to challenge, engage, and teach in mixed-ability groupings.
- Identify the impact teachers believe the model has on learning outcomes.
- Explore professional development opportunities related to teaching mixed-ability groupings.

Qualitative Approach

- In-depth interviews are exploratory and designed to add insight and depth of understanding to a particular topic. Findings provide commonalities and trends but are not intended to provide generalizable conclusions.



IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Nearly all teachers believe that the switch to mixed-ability grouping resulted in positive changes in Grade 7 Science and Social Studies.

- ✓ Encourages collaboration and cooperation
- ✓ Increases peer accountability
- ✓ Improves student grades
- ✓ Enables greater demographic diversity in classes
- ✓ Improves student behavior

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Most teachers are in favor of the change to mixed-ability groupings.



“It's been a shot of adrenaline. I've had a great year this year, and the reason why is with the mixed groups, with all the co-teaching that's [going on], the upper end is getting their chance [and] the lower end who's struggling is getting their chance. [From] the enrichment [perspective], my classes have become much more of a learning setting, [...]the knowledge that the different groupings of kids bring, even these kids that struggle...they have a voice. And between them, it's just enriched the class...because **the focus is more about the curriculum** [...]. I've had nothing but a positive experience with it.”

Teachers report that the curriculum is inherently more engaging and naturally supports mixed-ability groupings.

“With the program that we're using right now, **differentiation is so easy** because the students themselves actually differentiate it. They take it to the next level. **They ask more questions, or they want to look up more information.** So those that are ahead of the game are going and looking for more information [...] and **the ones that are falling behind a little bit, they [...]**have a little bit more free time to work with someone[...].”

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Some teachers believe that mixed-ability groupings benefit struggling students more than advanced students.

“I would definitely say my **struggling learners benefit more**. Because having those leaders to kind of look up to and bring them out of their shell a little bit. [...] It's easier for my struggling learners to grab on to that. Not be so afraid of, ‘Oh my God my teacher knows I'm struggling,’ versus ‘**My peers are helping me and I get this.**’”

Nonetheless, teachers consistently identify and implement ways to challenge advanced students.

Provide Curricular Challenges

- End-of-chapter challenge problems
- Differentiated assignments
- Collaborative projects

Provide Assessment Challenges

- Differentiated writing rubrics
- Differentiated exams
- Challenging journaling prompts and labs

LOOKING AHEAD TO **GRADE 8 EXPANSION IN 2020-2021**

Supporting Teachers

- Provide **targeted professional development and training** for:
 - Differentiation
 - Interventions
 - Evidenced-Based Strategies for Supporting Students
- Create **opportunities for collaboration between Grade 7 and 8 teachers** during the expansion of mixed-ability classes

Supporting Students

- Improve **Tier 2 academic and behavioral supports** for struggling students
- Identify opportunities for **enrichment** in and out of the classroom for advanced students

Supporting Families

- Educate families about the **benefits** of mixed-ability groupings
- Ensure families understand that mixed-ability groupings **do not preclude advanced coursework** in high school

SOURCES

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Thank you.

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