**Snapshots**

**Fast Fact:** Since 2008, teachers’ job

**Grouping Students by Ability**

**The Research**

Over the past 20 years, “ability grouping” has made a comeback in elementary schools. The practice—grouping students by ability for instruction—fell out of favor in the post-Civil Rights era, but has grown again since the 2000s, according to new research from the Brown Center on American Education at the Brookings Institution.

**Fast Fact:** Since 2008, teachers’ job

For “The Resurgence of Ability Grouping and Persistence of Tracking,” researchers examined National Assessment of Educational Progress data from 1990 to 2011, finding that the percentage of fourth-grade students placed into ability groups for reading instruction skyrocketed from 1998 to 2009, growing from 28 percent to 71 percent. In the early 90s, 48 percent of fourth graders were

**MYTWOCENTS**

How do you maintain communication with families over the summer?

We visit the homes of all our incoming kindergarten students to deliver the packet we used to mail, and give a book to the child.

—René Kirkwood Nolan (via facebook)

Facebook and Twitter. We encourage students to email me over the summer. They ask questions, share pictures, and tell me what they are doing.

—Paul Stewart (via facebook)

Parent communication is a cinch with NAESP’s newly revamped Report to Parents. Visit naesp.org/report-parents for ready-to-distribute bulletins on family-friendly topics.
grouped for math instruction; by 2011, 61 percent were.

The researchers didn’t evaluate the effectiveness of ability grouping, and data on it is thoroughly split.

**What Principals Say**

On NAESP’s LinkedIn discussion group, educators, too, were divided on the practice. Most agreed, however, that if ability groups are used, they should be implemented with sensitivity. Here’s what a few had to say:

*There is a difference between ability grouping and differentiation. Ability grouping, in my experience, keeps the students at the level they are—it does not bridge the gap. When true differentiation happens in the classroom, struggling students benefit greatly from being placed with higher-achieving students.*

—Jennifer Meliton, principal

*Ability group for intervention. Group heterogeneously for core instruction. It works quite well.*

—Bonnie Houck, education consultant

*My own belief is that, since our students are headed into a life which, in most cases, will surround them with people of varying abilities, it makes sense for them to learn in a similarly diverse environment.*

—Jim Weller, doctoral student

*Flexible grouping that changes depending on students’ abilities in different subjects and where students move from group to group as they grasp concepts can be effective. But when students are ability grouped into classrooms for the entire school year, it is detrimental—not only to academic achievement but also to self-esteem.*

—Nancy Nettik, student teacher supervisor

Join the NAESP LinkedIn group to see the entire discussion and add your feedback.

**Body Language Buzzwords**

**Fidgeting in Staff Meetings?**

Better watch that body language, says Janine Driver, author and body language expert. When she presented at NAESP’s 2013 National Leaders Conference in Washington, D.C., she primed principals on these non-verbal communication concepts.

*Body leveraging* is being conscious of where your body is in relation to the person you’re talking to. Sympathizing with a teacher? Don’t tower over them—get on their level or below them.

*Pacifiers* are the tics people subconsciously display when they’re on edge, such as rubbing their neck or fidgeting with jewelry. Watch for these in meetings.

*Power zones* include the neck dimple and belly button. We leave these open—not crossing our arms across our bodies, for instance—when we’re confident.

*“The Steeple,”* perfected by Oprah, involves holding the tips of your fingers together in a triangle, and it exudes confidence and power. Try it when offering closing remarks in a meeting or interview.

**5 Tasks to Master in This Issue**

- **Working** with “panda parents” (Pedersen, pg. 40)
- **Incorporating** rigor at the preschool level (Brown and Mowry, pg. 52)
- **Strategizing** with formative and summative data (Wooleyhand, pg. 10)
- **Brainstorming** nutrition tactics unique to your school (Barnett, pg. 18)
- **Empowering** middle-schoolers to solve real-world problems (Sommers, pg. 50)

**Promising Practices: Parent Engagement**

*Whenever I do* a classroom observation, I make it a point to zero in on one or two children and observe them as well as the teacher and lesson. Afterwards, I send a quick email to the parents and share with them what I saw and heard—always a positive account that a parent would enjoy hearing. This email is easy and quick, but it builds such a positive working relationship with parents.

—Gail Kinsey, Principal, Fairfax Villa Elementary, Fairfax, Virginia

We view parents as critical allies, and we have an open-door policy regarding parent attendance. They are not only visible on our campus through their volunteer efforts (as cafeteria servers, library helpers, first aide assistants, absentees callers, etc.), but they also have an open invitation to attend our daily prayer assembly and join their children for lunch in our cafeteria. On any school day, between 60 and 120 parents visit our cafeteria to enjoy a meal together with their children and the rest of our students.

—John Bennett, Principal, St. Aloysius Catholic School, Baton Rouge, Louisiana

**Dissatisfaction has slid 23 percentage points.** Less satisfied teachers are more likely to teach in schools where time for colleague collaboration has been cut.

*Source: The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, 2013*