Grouping for Instruction

Cooperative learning groups, in combination with preventative tutoring, within-class ability grouping, and other alternatives to traditional tracking, have been shown to result in higher achievement, little or no psychological harm, and less segregation (Slavin, 1987). In fact, ability grouping, when it is closely related to the purposes of instruction and is applied flexibly - grouping and regrouping based on the needs and interests of students - can be beneficial for students of diverse ability (Secada, 1992).

Flexible grouping practices that call for collaboration by diverse groups of students, when combined with high expectations and high-quality mathematics instruction, have great potential for ensuring equity and excellence for all students. These practices enable teachers to meet a wide range of individual needs. Consequently, they also may enable educators to be more responsive to the concerns of diverse parents and community members.

A thoughtful reexamination of grouping practices can bring the educational community closer to the vision for excellent schools in OERI's *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent* (Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1993 [Now Institute of Educational Sciences]). This report recommends that we create flexible schools - using flexible grouping and instructional opportunities both inside and outside of the classroom - that improve education for all students, including the most able.

For more information on grouping practices, see the issue of *Educational Leadership* (Dec. 1994/Jan. 1995) on "The Inclusive School" which discusses experiences with detracking and differing views on meeting the needs of both gifted and disabled students, and provides a wide range of visions, experiences, and commentary.