I’m a once math major, now working in tech/healthcare, and I credit that largely to the high quality, high expectations math education I had access to as a child in California. However, since 2012, the fraction of 13 year olds taking algebra has declined from 34% to 24%. The proposed framework is a step backwards, and poorly researched.

I’m pleased with some of the changes – some culture war language was removed, explicit support for San Francisco’s de-tracking experiments was removed and the recommendations to de-track without acceleration were softened, following debunking of the research that initially prompted them, and after the authors of research that was misrepresented spoke out. However, the fixes are very ad hoc and leave the framework inconsistent.

The language around tracking is especially incoherent. The framework favors “grouping” in which students are assigned to classes of their skill level, but it’s not considered tracking as it’s not permanent. But authors seem to have reservation about this, as the framework pushes to delay grouping as late as possible – see “Productive Strategies for Teaching Diverse Students”. This is justified on the basis that “engagement can fluctuate significantly during adolescent years”; but that would suggest grouping should be delayed until adulthood. Bizarrely, immediately after this remark, it suggests that high achieving students should be able to “to accelerate at any time” but doesn’t distinguish that from grouping.

The framework also discourages tracking compared to pathways because tracking locks in students to a certain set of courses in their future. Later, it recommends that students be placed into “pathways”, which are sets of courses students plan to take in the future based on ability and interest.

The recommendations around this topic, simply put, are very confused.

Students are individuals who vary from one another, and any kind of one size fits all approach is silly, and will fail some of the children. Grouping should begin as soon as they show any differences in educational needs.