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The Impact of Tracking on Minority & Low-Income Students

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Academic tracking, the grouping of students according to ability level, is a widely employed educational practice in American elementary, middle, and secondary schools. There is a great deal of evidence to indicate that patterns of tracking in the United States are closely connected with issues of racial and social class inequalities. This paper is a review of the literature on the subject of academic tracking and the effect it has on low-income and minority students. Research indicates that tracking acts as a mechanism of segregation and discrimination in United States schools, and placement in the low track has devastating consequences for students. Minority and low-income students are consistently over-represented in the low track. Therefore, large proportions of these students suffer negative effects of low-track placement. Ending tracking practices is the first step toward creating an educational system in which all students have equal opportunities and equal chances for success.