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Parents in a Massachusetts school district are expressing their disappointment over a years-old decision to eliminate advanced placement for math in middle school.

Cambridge Public Schools began phasing out advanced math courses in grades six through eight around 2017 when district officials noticed sharp racial disparities in the program.

Students who were being placed in the advanced math track were overwhelmingly white and Asian, while the lower-level courses were filled primarily with black and Latino students, the Boston Globe reported on Friday.

As a result of the change, and following further complications from the pandemic, none of the district's four middle schools offer Algebra I, which some parents say is

actually exacerbating inequality by limiting advanced math to those who can afford private tutors.

‘The students who are able to jump into a higher level math class [in high school] are students from better-resourced backgrounds,’ Jacob Barandes, a district parent and a Harvard physicist, told the Globe.

‘They’re shortchanging a significant number of students, overwhelmingly students from less-resourced backgrounds, which is deeply inequitable.’



Cambridge Public Schools Superintendent Victoria Greer (left) says she is working to bring back more advanced math in the middle school curriculum, but parents including Jacob Barandes (right) are frustrated after saying they had to seek out private tutors

Another parent, Martin Udengaard, told the outlet he is pulling his son out of the district and weighing whether to homeschool the child or send him to a private school offering Algebra 1 in the eighth grade.

The parents expressed concerns that, without Algebra 1 in middle school, their children would be forced to cram a compressed math course load in high school to reach advanced courses such as calculus.

The origin of the decision to remove advanced math is murky, with one former school board member saying that the original goal was for every eighth grader to take Algebra.

‘Algebra by eighth grade was voted upon many times over the past 30 years,’ wrote Patty Nolan, a current Cambridge city councilor and former school board member, in

a May letter to the Cambridge Day.

‘And unless I am mistaken, the School Committee has not rescinded its many votes that algebra for every eighth-grader is a goal.’

In 2019, Edutopia reported that district officials were concerned that students were being profiled and placed in advanced or lower-level courses on the basis of race.

‘Over time you end up with lower-level math courses filled with black and Latino children, and high-level math classes with white and Asian children,’ Manuel Fernandez, then the principal at Cambridge Street Upper School, told the outlet.

‘Students internalize it—they believe the smart kids are the white kids. Our staff said we cannot continue to divide our students this way.’

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Schools Superintendent Victoria Greer told the Globe that she and other district leaders are working on plans to add more elements of advanced math to the middle school curriculum

‘We have a huge focus on addressing both the academic achievement gaps and the opportunity gaps in our community,’ she said. ‘One thing the district is not interested in doing is perpetuating those gaps.’



Cambridge Street Upper School, one of the district’s four middle schools

Greer and the members of Cambridge’s school board, known as the School Committee, did not immediately respond to a request for comment from DailyMail.com on Saturday evening.

Cambridge is not the only school district to eliminate advanced courses in an attempt to address racial disparities.

Schools in San Francisco and Escondido, California have also eliminated math tracking or the practice of placing students on different course tracks of varying difficulty.

Critics of tracking argue that it promotes inequity, noting that because school performance is highly correlated with socioeconomic status, initial placement on a

track and subsequent performance could result in class rosters segregated by income and race.

They say that all students are better served when classrooms reflect a mix of both social backgrounds and academic ability levels.

It is not the first time that Cambridge Public Schools, located in a wealthy and left-leaning town that is home to Harvard University, has made headlines.

In 2017, a CPS librarian publicly rejected a donation of Dr. Seuss children's books from then-First Lady Melania Trump, calling the books 'racist' and 'cliched'.

The first lady had offered sets of books to one district in each state for National Read a Book Day.

In a blog post, the school librarian called Dr. Seuss a 'tired and worn ambassador for children's literature' and said his illustrations are 'steeped in racist propaganda, caricatures, and harmful stereotypes.'

At the time, the district said the post represented her personal opinions and 'was not a formal acceptance or rejection of donated books.'

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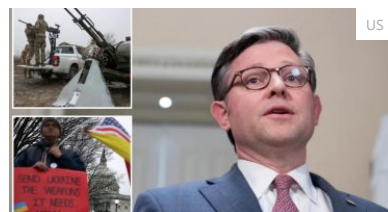
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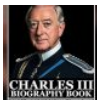
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