

NWEA guidance for student grouping

Grouping can be an effective strategy for improving student outcomes, but in some cases, it can cause more harm than good, having serious negative consequences on students (emotionally, socially, and academically). The following are basic principles that should be followed when considering grouping:

1. Groups should be both flexible and short term.
2. Groups should be built around a specific task or purpose (i.e., inquiry, practice, review, or enrichment).
3. Group participants must have clear roles that capitalize on students' strengths and provide opportunity for growth in weaker areas.
4. Groups need to be actively monitored, with constant formative assessment and feedback playing a vital role.
5. Groups should be formed based on multiple points of data, including formative assessment, rather than one single data point.

An additional principle specific to elementary literacy:

6. When grouping around foundational skills, groups should be formed based on skills such as phonological awareness (e.g., segmenting of sounds), decoding (e.g., analyzing word parts and connecting print to writing), and fluency (increasing rate and accuracy or checking for comprehension). These groups should be adjusted as students master skills and begin to focus on new learning acquisition.

Supporting research and articles

- [Instructional Grouping in the Classroom \(educationnorthwest.org\)](https://educationnorthwest.org)
- [On Influence of Grouping Practices on Classroom Teaching \(ed.gov\)](https://ed.gov)
- [The Negative Effects of Ability Grouping \(teachermagazine.com\)](https://teachermagazine.com)
- [The Effects of Pupil Grouping: Literature Review \(ioe.ac.uk\)](https://ioe.ac.uk)

Math specific

- [The Effects of Grouping and Curricular Practices on Intermediate Students' Math Achievement \(nrcgt.uconn.edu\)](https://nrcgt.uconn.edu)
- [An Examination of Grouping Strategies and Their Effect on Mathematics Achievement at the Elementary Level \(ed.gov\)](https://ed.gov)

Literacy specific

- [Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade \(ed.gov\)](https://ed.gov)

