

Single Gender Education: Does it Work?

—Lauren M. Bronson

Pros

Advantages of Single-Gender Schools

Proponents of single-gender education contend that teachers treat boys and girls differently, which can lead to boys receiving a disproportionate share of attention in coeducational classrooms.

In reviewing research on single-sex education, the National Education Association (NEA) noted that, “Girls who learn in all-girl environments are believed to be more comfortable responding to questions and sharing their opinions in class and more likely to explore more ‘nontraditional’ subjects such as math, science, and technology.”

Additionally, studies suggest that boys in single-gender classrooms “are more successful in school and more likely to pursue a wide range of interests and activities,” according to the NEA.

Among the other potential benefits of single-sex schools typically cited:

- Girls are more likely to take risks such as speaking in front of the class
- Girls may exhibit higher levels of self-confidence and self-esteem
- Boys tend to be less competitive and more cooperative and collaborative
- Boys feel less pressure as they mature and develop physically

Cons

Disadvantages of Single-Gender Schools

Arguments against single-gender education often revolve around factors such as stereotyping and diversity. The American Council for CoEducational Schooling (ACCES) contends single-sex schooling is harmful, in part, because it:

- Promotes gender stereotyping
- Doesn’t prepare students for work or family life
- Makes exclusion acceptable
- Doesn’t value diversity

A September 2011 article in the journal *Science* contends “there is evidence that sex segregation increases gender stereotyping and legitimizes institutional sexism.”

The article’s authors, who are founders of ACCES, argue that “sex-segregated education ... is deeply misguided, and often justified by weak, cherry-picked, or misconstrued scientific claims rather than by valid scientific evidence.”

Proponents of coed schools also contend that socialization is a major aspect of schooling and is a missed opportunity for single-gender schools.