

Have studies proved that segregating students by sex leads them to do better in school?

No. Some studies find that students in coeducational schools do better than students in single-sex schools. Some studies find the opposite. Many studies show no difference between the two. The U.S. Department of Education recently undertook an extensive review of the data and concluded that the results were “equivocal”—in other words, there is no clear evidence that students are more likely to succeed in single-sex schools.¹

At the same time it was undertaking this review, the U.S. Department of Education was seeking to change federal rules to allow more schools to segregate students by sex. If the evidence showed sex segregation led to student success, the U.S. Department of Education would likely have been eager to publicize this information as part of this effort. But the evidence did not.

Even if single-sex education doesn't *always* lead to better student outcomes, isn't it a step in the right direction?

There's no reason to think so. Researchers have investigated why students do especially well in some sex-segregated programs, despite the fact that many studies show sex segregation has no effect on student achievement. They have concluded that those single-sex schools that foster high levels of achievement aren't successful *because* they are segregated. Instead, these particular schools are successful because they have small classes, qualified teachers, parental involvement, adequate funding, and a focus on core academics.² Of course, these factors foster success in coeducational classrooms too.

Because sex segregation doesn't itself promote student success, instead of spending the resources, time, and effort on the social experiment of segregating public schools by sex, the better educational approach is to focus on what we know works, including smaller classes, more parental involvement, and more funding. These are the keys to success for students.

How does coeducation benefit students?

When students socialize, compete, and collaborate with students of the other sex at school, they are more prepared to succeed in the world. Real life is not separated by gender, and young people need to learn, work, and play in all different kinds of situations, with all sorts of different people. One of the strengths of public schools is the opportunity they provide for students of different sexes, races, and religions to learn from each other. Indeed, these lessons are some of the most important that schools teach. Sex-segregated education goes in the wrong direction, by diminishing real diversity in education.

To improve public education, we should focus on what we know works—smaller classes, more parental involvement, and more funding—rather than making our kids part of a social experiment.

NOTES

¹ U.S. Department of Education, *Single-Sex Versus Coeducational Schooling: A Systematic Review* (2005).

² American Association of University Women, *Separated by Sex: A Critical Look at Single-Sex Education for Girls* (1998).

SEX-SEGREGATED SCHOOLS

Just The Facts

For more information about sex segregation in public schools,
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