

## **The Case for Girl Scouts: Research and Data**

### *The Benefits of Single-Sex Environments for Girls...and Boys*

#### **Summary**

Single-gender environments benefit both girls and boys. Compared to coeducational settings, single-gender settings:

- Help lessen the impact of gender stereotypes that can dictate the activities and subjects children choose to pursue
- Help children learn better
- Provide a more well-rounded and satisfying learning experience.

The result is a more confident, enthusiastic, and high-achieving young person.

#### **Benefits for Girls**

##### **1. Girls in single-gender schools have greater academic and life success.**

- Recent studies have shown the positive impact of attendance in all-girl schools on life success outcomes. One study showed that girls attending all-girl schools show greater gains on core academic and life skills, like reading and comprehension<sup>i</sup>.

##### **2. Single-gender environments provide more opportunities for girls to build confidence.**

- Landmark research by the American Association of University Women<sup>ii</sup> and American University<sup>iii</sup> has shown that pervasive gender stereotyping exists in the typical mixed-gender classroom, preventing girls from reaching their full potential. This research has shown that 1) boys receive more praise than girls when calling out in class, 2) teachers call on and respond more positively to boys than girls, and 3) teachers let boys problem solve on their own but help girls with problem-solving tasks.
- Advocates for single-gender education argue that when children learn with single-gender peers, they are more likely to thrive because the environment better supports their learning. Students are more likely to attend to their studies, speak more openly in the classroom, and feel more encouraged to pursue their interests and achieve their fullest potential.<sup>iv</sup>
- Recent research supports this, finding that girls in all-girl schools feel more comfortable expressing their ideas openly and feel more supported because they receive increased feedback on their assignments and other coursework.<sup>v</sup>
- Research suggests that single-gender environments are particularly beneficial for girls during transition periods of development (such as middle school) and in settings that have been traditionally dominated by boys or men, such as in STEM subjects and in physical education and sports.<sup>vi</sup>

##### **3. Single-gender environments create a “safe space” for girls.**

- Studies by the Girl Scout Research Institute<sup>vii</sup> and others show that girls value girls-only “safe spaces” where they can confide in trusting adults and other girls.
- In girl-only settings, girls feel free to talk about issues they wouldn’t necessarily talk about with boys, try out new activities without a fear of failure, and experience less pressure to look or act a certain way.

#### **4. Girls in single-gender environments are more likely to explore and pursue STEM subjects.**

- Several studies have pointed to the positive benefits of an all-girl environment on girls’ proclivity to pursue and explore STEM subjects.
- One study showed that girls from all-female computer science courses reported more academic interests in computer science than girls in mixed-gender classes. The girls from the study also reported higher levels of perceived teacher support, confidence, and future academic achievement and occupational intentions than did girls from mixed-gender classes.<sup>viii</sup>
- Research also shows that girls from all-girl schools are three times more likely to consider an engineering career compared to their peers,<sup>ix</sup> and more graduates from all-girl schools than their peers rate themselves “great” at math.<sup>x</sup>

### **Benefits for Boys**

#### **1. Single-gender environments can address boys’ learning needs and boost enthusiasm for learning.**

- Studies show that boys are less enthusiastic about school than girls. This difference is seen as early as elementary school, and this “enthusiasm gap” widens over time.
- One study found that compared to girls, boys have less interest, have less satisfaction, feel less challenged, and have less choice in their learning.<sup>xi</sup>
- An environment that addresses and responds to boys’ needs may be particularly beneficial and may help boost general levels of enthusiasm for learning in the early years and beyond. For example, boys may need a more dynamic style of teaching, with more interaction, physical activity, and structure than girls. These kinds of needs are best met in single-gender environments.
- Boys are also more likely to be visual learners and are more successful learning when they are focused on one activity at a time. When teachers can focus on these particular learning environments, they are more likely to have students who learn, cooperate, and pay attention.<sup>xii</sup>
- In a learning environment, boys tend to need more structure, and girls tend to need more connection. In a single-gender environment, the instructor can focus on

creating and maintaining structure for boys, which can help them achieve higher test scores.<sup>xiii</sup>

- Boys and girls differ with regard to vision and hearing. Changing certain factors, such as the decibel of a teacher's voice in a single-gender classroom, can have positive effects on boys' attention in class.<sup>xiv</sup>
- Sixty percent of boys reported higher self-confidence, motivation, participation, and desire to complete hard work upon entering single-gender classrooms in one school district in South Carolina.<sup>xv</sup>

## **2. Single-gender environments offer more well-rounded education for boys.**

- In coed settings, gender stereotypes tend to dictate the types of activities that boys and girls choose to do. This limits boys' learning opportunities and provides a narrow landscape for "acceptable" activities and choices at the school age and in the future.
- In a single-gender setting, boys can explore different subjects that, in a coed setting, would label them as geeky or not macho enough. In an all-boy setting, they can read, write, and explore the fine arts without stigma.
- Boys who attended single-gender schools were more than twice as likely to pursue interests in subjects such as art, music, drama, and foreign languages compared to boys of comparable ability who attended coed schools.<sup>xvi</sup>

## **3. Boys perform better in single-gender classrooms.**

- Research shows that boys in single-gender schools perform better on academic tests than boys in coed schools.
- In one school district in South Carolina, 13 schools showed higher achievement in math for single-gender classrooms than coed ones, while five schools showed the reverse. Eleven single-gender classes outperformed coed classes in reading and language arts, while seven schools showed the reverse.
- Similarly in Florida, 86 percent of boys in single-gender classes scored "proficient," while only 37 percent of boys in coed classes scored proficient on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test.<sup>xvii</sup>
- One school in Seattle chose to segregate all classes by gender while keeping all other factors the same. Reading comprehension increased for boys from 20 percent to 66 percent, and writing increased for boys from 20 percent to 53 percent. Discipline problems dropped, too—from 30 children a day (80 percent boys) sent to the principal's office to one or two per day.<sup>xviii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> *National Coalition for Girls' Schools: Steeped in Learning: The Student Experience at All Girls Schools (2013)*

<sup>ii</sup> *AAUW: How Schools Shortchange Girls (1995)*

<sup>iii</sup> *Sadker, M & D. Failing at Fairness: How Our Schools Cheat Girls (1994)*

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- <sup>iv</sup> *National Education Association: Research Spotlight on Single-Gender Education*
- <sup>v</sup> *National Coalition for Girls' Schools: Steeped in Learning: The Student Experience at All Girls Schools (2013)*
- <sup>vi</sup> *Dissertation: The Effects of Single Sex and Co-educational Environments on the Self-Efficacy of Middle School Girls (2006)*
- <sup>vii</sup> *GSRI: Exploring Girls Leadership (2007)*
- <sup>viii</sup> *Journal of Educational Computing Research: All-Female Classes in High School Computer Science: Positive Effects in Three Years of Data (2002)*
- <sup>ix</sup> *National Coalition for Girls' Schools: The Case for Girls*
- <sup>x</sup> *National Center for Women in Technology: Girls in IT: The Facts (2012)*
- <sup>xi</sup> *Journal of Educational Psychology: Students' Perceptions of Classroom Activities: Are There Grade-level and Gender Differences? (2002)*
- <sup>xii</sup> *Verywell.com: Are Single Sex Classrooms Better for Boys? (2017)*
- <sup>xiii</sup> *Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development: Single Gender Classrooms Can Respond to the Needs of Boys and Girls.*
- <sup>xiv</sup> *Sax, L.: Why Gender Matters (2005)*
- <sup>xv</sup> *Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development: Single Gender Classrooms Can Respond to the Needs of Boys and Girls.*
- <sup>xvi</sup> *Psychology of Men and Masculinity: Escaping Stereotypes: Education Attitudes of Male Alumni of Single-Sex and Co-Ed Schools (2003)*
- <sup>xvii</sup> *National Association for Single Sex Public Education: What's the Evidence? What Have Researchers Found When They Compare Single Sex Education with Co-Education? (2016)*
- <sup>xviii</sup> *National Association for Single Sex Public Education: Single Sex vs. Co-Ed: What's the Evidence? (2016)*