

# Best Practices in Single Gender Education

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### Contents

Introduction	.1
Reasons for Single-gender Education	.1
Single-gender Education and Grade Level	2
Single-gender Education Best PracticesoT5TJ0 Tc 0 T3Tj()Tn BDC /CS0.cs.Q.scn/TTT0 1 Tf6(	t)5 630.84 T4

#### Introduction

Single-gender education in the United States has existed for a long time; however, it was found mostly in private and parochial schools. Public school single-gender education did not fully emerge until 2001, under The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. This change in federal legislation allowed for the opening of various single-gender public schools and single-gender programs in recent years. According to the National Association for Single Sex Public Education (NASSPE), in 2002, only about a dozen public schools offered single-gender education; in the 2011–2012 school year at least 506 public schools were registered as offering single-gender educational opportunities.

Single-gender public education has adopted several different operational models. One is the classic model, which serves either boys or girls only; another is the dual academy model, in which boys and girls are in a coeducational school but attend classes separately (Riordan, 2008). In 2011, NASSPE reported that out of the 506 public schools registered to offer single-gender education, 116 operated under the classic model, and 306 geer ASAPE rep(-t1( th)3(a)2(t ou)-3(t of)10(

1.1 Select a strong school leader. This leader and the rest of senior management within the school must embrace and be well versed in the single-gender approach to education. Leaders must offer clear and valid arguments for a single-gender setting and keep parents, students, and staff informed about the rationale behind the school's approach.

1. 2 Select teachers who match the school's ethos. When hiring new teachers, the principal should consider the candidates' awareness and commitment to gender-based learning.

1.3 Provide professional development opportunities. Research has shown consistently that teachers who are well trained in the reform they will implement are more successful and consistent than are untrained teachers (Rogers, 2008). It is vital for teachers to understand the benefits and challenges of a single-gender setting and be trained to apply innovative techniques for the students with whom they are working.

1.4 Bring parents into the initiative. Bringing parents into the leadership team (especially parents who are powerful community members) helps make the case for single-gender education to the community.

## 2. Four strategies to consider when implementing single-gender programs (Younger et al., 2005)

### 2.1 Pedagogic strategies

Pedagogic strategies refer to classroom-based approaches centered on teaching and learning. Because boys tend to perform below girls in reading and writing, the main pedagogic approach followed by some single-gender schools is on literacy (Younger Gains can be made in secondary literacy when:

Teachers and students have an understanding of different learning styles.

Teachers receive support so they can plan lessons that

posters and charts in an organized way, and use flexible seating positions according to the types of learning activities.

3.3 Engage boys' competitive spirit. Healthy competition not only engages students to learn but also promotes their spirit and motivation in the classroom. However, this can create unnecessary conflict for the youngest students, who might still not understand the concept of competition (3rd grade and below).

### 4. Best practices for teaching core curricula to boys (Gurian et al., 2009)

4.1 Give instructions and directions. Because boys learn best using their strongest sense, which is vision, they benefit most from seeing information (Gurian et al., 2009; Sax, 2006). Teachers should visually share in advance examples of what good work looks like (i.e., in terms of quantity and presentation). Some teachers suggest limiting verbal instruction to 10 minutes or less and instead focus on presenting visual cues and allow boys to learn through investigation and exploration.

4.2 Help boys transition between learning tasks. Most boys struggle more than girls when they have to stop what they are doing, clean up, and get ready for the next task. Teachers should develop strategies that ease these transitions.

4.3 Enhance math curricula. Boys tend to be better than girls with spatial tasks (Gurian et al., 2009); thus, they might enjoy working with symbols, diagrams, maps, and abstractions. Teachers and educators suggest using the blackboard rather than textbooks. Some specific strategies for math learning are to use competition, sports, and physical games to explain math.

4.4 Enhance science curricula. Boys build their science knowledge not as much from reading as from experiencing. Therefore, teachers suggest providing boys with the opportunity to do hands-on and interactive work.

4.5 Enhance learning of literacy skills. It is important to develop an awareness of what boys enjoy reading and allow them to find and read those books. Some resources that list books boys like are *Books for* Boys, by Michael Sullivan; *Great Books for Boys*, by Kathleen Odean; *What Stories Does My Son Need*? by Michael Gurian and Terry Trueman; and *Guys Read*, by Jon Scieska. Helping boys become better writers is another important aspect of literacy. Experts suggest using technology and allowing boys to write about high-interest topics.

### Recommended Resources for Professional Development Opportunities

- 1. NASSPE (http://www.singlesexschools.org)
- 2. Gurian Institute (http://www.gurianinstitute.com)
- 3.

- Spielhagen, R. (2008). Having it our way: Students speak out on single-sex classes. In R. Spielhagen, (Ed.), *Debating single-sex education: Separate and equal*? (pp. 32-46). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2008). Early implementation of single-sex schools: Perceptions and characteristics. Washington, DC: RMC Research Corporation.
- Younger, M., & Warrington, M. (2006). Would Harry and Hermione have done better in single-sex classes? A review of single-sex teaching in coeducational secondary schools in the United Kingdom. *American Educational Research Journal*, 43(4), 579-620.
- Younger, M., Warrington, M., Gray, J., Rudduck, J., McLellan, R., Bearne, E., Kershner, R., & Bricheno, P. (2005). *Raising boys' achievement* (Research Report RR636). Cambridge, UK: University of Cambridge, Department for Education and Skills.