

ORANGE COUNTY
BOARD OF EDUCATION

AGENDA ITEM ABSTRACT

Meeting Date October 3, 2011

AGENDA
ITEM No. 11-10-10

ACTION: (Y/N) N

SUBJECT: Single Gender Classes at Cedar Ridge High School

INFO. CONTACT: Dr. Denise Morton/John Wheeler PHONE: 919-732-8126

ATTACHMENTS: 1. Overview of World History Single Gender Classes Prepared by Cedar Ridge High School Staff
2. Article - The New Segregation Debate
3. Article - Single-Sex Schools Have Negative Impact on Kids, Says Study

PURPOSE: To provide the Board of Education information on the World History single gender classes that were scheduled for the 2011-2012 school year at Cedar Ridge High School (CRHS) and to provide an opportunity for further discussion among board members.

BACKGROUND: The Social Studies Department at Cedar Ridge High School has had an ongoing interest in the concept of single gender classes for high school students. They have initiated the idea of scheduling World History classes using this schedule configuration.

This past summer, the team of three World History teachers approached the CRHS principal with a request to offer such a single gender schedule configuration for all World History sections for the 2011-2012 school year. The principal agreed to the concept; a letter was sent to parents to inform them of this project before school began in August 2011.

Research on the effectiveness of single gender schools is mixed. Feedback from participating Cedar Ridge High School students, parents, and teachers has been very positive.

FINANCIAL IMPACT: None

RECOMMENDATION: The Superintendent recommends that the Board of Education receive information on and discuss single gender classes at Cedar Ridge High School.

Overview of World History Single Gender Classes Prepared by Cedar Ridge High School Staff

Rationale: In 2006 the DOE allowed coed public schools to introduce innovative teaching practices as long as there was academic justification. In 2009, the Social Studies Department at Cedar Ridge High School in partnership with Elon University and Arthur Davis Vinning Corporation, set up single gender classes in several World History classrooms. The rationale for implementation for this year (and in 2009) was to separate students by gender in order to foster increased student engagement and by extension, achievement. In the spring of 2011, teachers in the social studies department (Frank Felicelli, Roger Orstad, and Doug Buchacek) began having multiple conversations with CRHS Principal John Wheeler regarding the possible implementation of varied instructional strategies, including single gender instruction within the World History PLC. It is important to note that curriculum, pacing guides, curriculum mapping, assessments, etc. remain the same across all World History classes. In looking at single gender instruction across the country, it was discovered that in 2009, about 200 public schools in the United States were implementing some kind of single gender model. As of September 2011, that number has grown to over 500 public schools, including several schools in North Carolina.

If you changed the environment of the classroom, what impact would that have on student achievement? Teachers in 2009 reported an overwhelmingly significant increase in student engagement as compared to their mixed gender classrooms. Although this was not formally measured in the 2009 study, students were/are much more willing to ask questions, ask follow up questions, engage in classroom discussions, and more actively engage in classroom activities compared to mixed gender settings of other 9th graders. The results of anonymous surveys from 2009 are referenced below.

Summary of 2009 Results. Anonymous Surveys from 139 students

Girls:

- | | |
|--|------|
| 1. Felt freer to ask questions of teacher | 37 % |
| 2. Classroom discussions were more interesting | 22 % |
| 3. More work was accomplished w/o boys | 18 % |

Remaining responses were: **my grades went up, class was less boring, I liked it better, I got to know different girls, I liked the projects, class time went faster**

Boys:

- | | |
|---|------|
| 1. Was able to be myself in class compared to traditional classroom | 33% |
| 2. Classroom discussions were more fun w/o girls | 30 % |

Remaining responses were: **I liked this better than I thought I would, class was more about guy stuff, I did better this way**

The students were polled anonymously on ascertaining what they like and/or don't like about taking World History courses in this way. Again, the results are overwhelmingly positive. Excerpts from a selection in favor are: **"ability to express opinion freely", "not afraid to say the wrong answer", "no one will judge me", "no distractions whatsoever", "it's easier to concentrate", "I feel more comfortable"**. Students who expressed negative opinions were in the clear minority but some of their responses were: **"I would rather have boys/girls in my class", "too much drama", "gossip between girls is stopped when boys are around"**

From a child development perspective, the early to middle adolescent years are marked by students grappling with issues related to identity, physical changes brought on by puberty, and where they fit, if you will. Thus, we have discovered that mixed gender settings can often be an inhibiting factor in the learning process. Many students are often inhibited from 'standing out' or 'looking foolish' and when it comes to learning one needs to be engaged and feel free to inquire and even to fail. Thus, when a follow up question to the teacher may be all that is needed in order to clarify some confusion, many choose not take the risk.

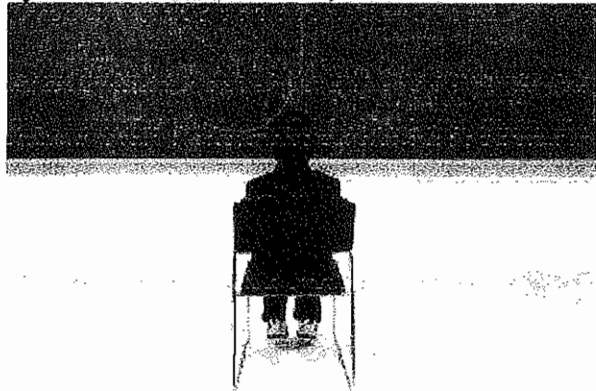
Again, it is imperative to note that content instruction across the classrooms does not vary from the state mandated curriculum. In fact, because of this implementation, the participating teachers are even more cognizant of unifying instruction between classrooms. It is the dominant weekly discussion in our PLC meetings. In other words, there is no boy specific content or girl specific content taught in each room. Do classroom discussions take on a different flavor as a result of gender separation? Of course they do. And in fact this allows for greater in depth discussions across the board. Again, student engagement is improved and this is the foundation for effective and measurable achievement.

The New Segregation Debate

Can educating girls and boys separately fix our public schools, or does it reinforce outmoded gender stereotypes?

by Jesse Ellison | June 22, 2010 4:18 PM EDT

Newsweek



Peter M. Fisher / Corbis

If you thought charter schools and ending teacher tenure were controversial fixes for the American school system, see what happens you bring up the idea of educating boys and girls separately. With male academic achievement declining by almost every measure, and their scores possibly dragging down national averages, administrators are taking a fresh look at same-sex classrooms and the concept that boys and girls might do better when they're apart. Why is it such a hot-button topic? Well, because it goes against 30 years of thinking, and smacks of "separate but equal" education.

The advocates of the single-sex approach are surprising, as are the foes. Among many liberal thinkers, gender segregation sounds like regressing to a time when girls were educated in finishing schools and had access to neither the number, nor caliber of schools available to boys. Plus, the notion that boys and girls learn differently—touted by some as the primary rationale for gender separation—goes against one of feminism's (at least the 1970s version) main messages. To say that there is something inherently different between boys and girls is, for many, tantamount to saying that women are the weaker sex.

For these reasons, Democratic politicians spent decades fighting vehemently against loosening legislation to allow public schools to offer same-sex classes. But in 2001, Sen. Hillary Clinton linked the issue to class—citing an unfairness in the fact that single-sex education is available as a choice only to those who can afford private-school tuition. Clinton, a graduate of all-women's Wellesley College,

joined forces with Republican Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison to successfully bring about legislative change. Since then, the number of public schools offering same-sex classes has grown from 11 to 540—still a relatively small figure in the big picture, but a jump of more than 4,000 percent nonetheless.

This number would be even bigger were it not for the ACLU, which has successfully convinced dozens of districts not to adopt single-gender classrooms. “Our concern is that once you separate boys and girls you are telling them that there is some inherent difference such that they need to be educated separately,” says Lenora Lapidus, head of the women’s-rights arm, which is spearheading the investigation. “When public schools do this, it’s the government reinforcing gender stereotypes.” Lapidus’s division also has open cases against districts they believe are violating the admittedly loose terms of the amended legislation—in those cases, their beef is that single-sex classes are being forced on children, and parents aren’t being given a legitimate coed option. But Lapidus says that she believes public schools shouldn’t offer single-sex classes under any circumstances—whether it’s a choice or not.

The ACLU’s opposition perplexes advocates of separate classrooms. “The ACLU has become increasingly deranged over the years,” says Leonard Sax, the head of the National Association for Single Sex Public Education. “And by deranged I mean out of touch with reality.” Sax also can’t understand why the National Organization of Women (NOW), which advocates choice in reproductive rights, would be against giving parents more options when it comes to education. “We are the pro-choice movement in this debate—we don’t believe that every child should be in same-sex classrooms, but every parent should have a choice.”

But what are parents choosing exactly? In some cases they’re getting not just separate rooms for girls and boys, they’re getting a modified curriculum and even classroom structure based on what proponents see as gender differences in learning. And that’s where things get thorny. According to Sax, some of the most successful all-boys classrooms have been those in which boys are allowed to move around. He cites one classroom that uses desks that can be raised or lowered, so boys can lie on the floor, sit, or stand up while they work. Girls’ classrooms, meanwhile can encourage quiet study, which some say is intrinsic to female behavior and caters to girls’ strengths. The question is whether this is catering to strengths or encouraging old-school stereotypes.

Sax and others will hasten to add that while the crisis among boys may have gotten the most media attention in recent years, there continue to be areas in which girls lag behind, particularly in math and science. In computer science, the divide has increased in the last few decades—only 18 percent of those taking the AP computer science test are female, down from 34 percent in 1987. According to Sax, separating boys and girls in those subject areas can be beneficial to both genders, and that’s, in part, the source of his frustration with the ACLU. “If the single-sex format offends her delicate political sensibilities, what would she recommend?” he says of Lapidus’s position. “Or is she content that boys outnumber girls four to one in this country in the sciences?”

Whether or not it works is a contentious issue—those in favor cite research supporting it, those opposed dismiss that evidence as junk science. Pedro Noguera, a professor at NYU’s Steinhardt School, recently completed a study on same-sex education for boys of color and found no evidence that separating them was better. Noguera is critical of advocates like Sax, saying that their theories are “far-fetched” since they rely more on observations of student behavior, than hard science proving that childrens’ brains work differently depending on their gender. “The schools that developed for girls had a clear theory: girls needed to be empowered, needed to express themselves,” he says. “There’s no theory about why [same-sex education] is good for boys ... It’s a lot of pseudoscience that is not rooted in anything.”

But Sax and others cite some compelling statistics: in one three-year pilot project in Florida, boys in a coed class scored 37 percent on the state standardized test, while those in a boys-only class scored 85

percent. The girls' scores jumped too: from 59 percent to 75 percent. And teachers, by and large, seem to love it. They say they spend less time on discipline, and are better able to engage their students. Lapidus argues that such studies can be attributed to other factors, like smaller classrooms and better teacher training, and that teachers who advocate for gender-segregation are just "parroting back" what they've learned from Sax and others.

Regardless of the mixed research, the interest in single-sex classrooms shows just how desperate teachers and administrators are to find a cure to the oft-lamented "problem with boys." By just about every metric, boys are, and have been for perhaps a decade, lagging tremendously behind girls in terms of academic achievement. They consistently score lower GPAs, college-admissions rates, and fare worse in reading and writing. And it's not just a problem for them; their scores aren't helping the country's plummeting academic ranking as compared to the rest of the developed world.

The gender gap goes far beyond high school. Today, women make up nearly 60 percent of college students and they're much more likely to go on to pursue advanced degrees. In fact, higher education has become so tipped in favor of females that in November, the U.S. Civil Rights Commission launched a probe into whether colleges and universities were discriminating against women in favor of men in order to even out the balance.

Some blame female success itself for boys' lagging achievement, arguing that girls have gotten ahead at the expense of boys. As the American Enterprise Institute's Christina Hoff Sommers recently put it, "feminists are constantly trying to knock down doors that are already open. And it's young men who pay the price." Others, of course, argue against this kind of zero-sum thinking. Where boys might be falling behind by academic metrics, girls are more likely to report high stress levels, eating disorders, and behaviors like cutting. "Boys have problems, girls have problems," Sax says. "Both are disadvantaged, but they're disadvantaged in different ways."

After seeing the same gender issues in Milford, Ohio, a suburb of Cincinnati, Gary Knell began looking into possible solutions for his school district—which has 6,200 students enrolled in kindergarten through high school. Last year, Knell organized a "gender survey" of students, teachers, and community members, measuring their feelings about how to treat the issue. Seventy percent of the 232 parents who responded agreed that gender differences should be addressed at the schools, but less than a quarter said that the district should consider single-sex classrooms. In contrast, 34 percent of the 232 middle-school students who responded said they would participate more and at a higher level in a single-sex classroom. That parents are less amenable than their kids isn't entirely surprising. "Whenever we talk about differences, there's a politically correct mode that differences mean someone is inferior and someone superior," Knell says. "[But] boys and girls are different. We should recognize that and modify our teaching approaches."

Ultimately, figuring out what method is best for boys and girls may mean identifying and tearing down gender stereotypes where they begin—with the kids themselves. And figuring out what a boy thinks it means to be a man, and what a girl thinks it means to be a woman, are questions that are probably too big for most public school to take on. But even if some adults are hesitant on the topic, the kids aren't afraid to speak bluntly. "Boys want attention," a sixth-grade boy in Milford says. "And they don't really want an education. They want a cool job when they grow up. Like being a rock star or a basketball player." His female classmate agrees. "For guys I think that if you're really smart and you get good grades, it'll be like, 'Oh you're a nerd!' But girls, you'll get like a pat on the back if you get all As. I dunno, guys just don't think it's that cool." Therein lies a problem for which there may be no quick fix.

Find the author on the Web at [The Equality Myth](#).



Single-Sex Schools Have Negative Impact on Kids, Says Study

All-Boys, All-Girls Schools Not in Best Interest of Child, Says Study

By MIKAELA CONLEY

Sept. 22, 2011—

Boys and girls may be opposites, but new research shows that in the classroom, separating the two sexes may not be the best way for either gender to learn and grow.

A new report, published in the journal *Science*, states that students who attend single-sex schools are no better educated than those who attend co-ed schools. Plus, children are more likely to accept gender stereotypes when they go to an all-boys or all-girls school.

"There's really no good evidence that single-sex schools are in any way academically superior, but there is evidence of a negative impact," said Lynn Liben, professor of psychology and education at Penn State and co-author of the study. "Kids' own occupational aspirations are going to be limited, and there could be long-term consequences where, for example, girls are used to being in roles only among other girls, then they have to face the real world where that's not the case."

Supporters of single-sex schools argue that boys' and girls' brains are wired differently, and therefore require different teaching styles to maximize education, but study authors note that neuroscientists have not found hard evidence that show differences in girls' and boys' different learning styles.

The report also cited a 2010 study which compared two preschool classes. In one class, the teacher used gender-specific language to address the children. The other teacher did not. After just two weeks, the researchers reported that children who had the teacher using sex-specific language played less with children of the other sex. The kids also showed an increase in gender-specific stereotypes (i.e. boys played with trucks, girls with dolls).

The study also noted that a review commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education found little overall difference in academic outcomes between children in single-sex schools versus those in coed schools.

Title IX of the U.S. Education Amendments outlawed discrimination on the basis of gender in educational programs that receive federal funds, meaning students were no longer allowed to be rejected from gender seemingly-specific classes, like home economics or metal shop. But Liben said several people still argue for gender separation in the classroom.

"We know from the history of our country that separate is not equal," said Liben. "There's no reason to divide along the lines of biological sex."

Copyright © 2011 ABC News Internet Ventures