**Single-sex schools help children thrive**

Bleaching out gender differences hampers the education of both girls and boys.

**By** **Michael Gilbert SEPTEMBER 20, 2007**

LOS ANGELES — The educational performance of boys has generated much notice of late. They are falling behind girls at just about every grade level and dropping out of school in ever greater numbers. Young men who manage to get to college find themselves in the minority, outnumbered almost three to two by women. As school doors swing open again, thoughtful educators – as well as the nation's concerned parents – want to know why.

One answer may lie in a **fundamental** [basic] **assumption** [belief] dear to the hearts of academic planners and school superintendents in the 1960s. Fearing that separate meant unequal, and seeking to break down sexual stereotypes, they decided to mix the sexes together at the earliest possible age. In 1965, a majority of America's public school classrooms were single sex; by 2000 barely a handful survived.

Co-ed schooling **imposes** [forces] the need for sex-blind instruction material and uniform testing and standards of behavior. As a result, on the way to a perfectly balanced sexual universe in our schools, "equal to" was turned into "the same as." But there's a problem when you bleach out gender differences: boys and girls are not the same. They do not develop in the same way or at the same time. For example, most parents who have them know boys develop more slowly in everything from vocabulary to penmanship, even the simple ability to sit still.

When young boys arrive at school today they enter a world dominated by women teachers and administrators as the percentage of male teachers in the nation's public schools is at the lowest level in 40 years. The girls around them read faster, control their emotions better, and are more comfortable with today's educational emphasis on cooperative study and expressing feelings. Boys favor visual processing and do not have the hand-motor control that girls readily achieve in early grades. There's hardly any of the physical action, competition, or structure boys so often crave. And they'd rather do just about anything than express their feelings.

For these and other reasons, boys have trouble paying attention in class. They often ignore instructions and generate sloppy work. They are three to four times more likely to suffer from developmental disorders, and twice as likely as girls to be classified as learning-disabled. Many are punished for physical outbursts, controlled and medicated simply for behaving like boys. They may not even be allowed to run during recess. This means that boys often get off to a bad start, fail to catch up, and frequently develop an **aversion to** [dislike of] school.

According to a comprehensive report by the Education Department, elementary school boys are 50 percent more likely than girls to repeat a grade and they drop out of high school a third more often. Boys from minority and lower-income families **fare** [do] the worst. In the end, America's K-12 educational system turns out **legions** [large amounts] of young men ill-prepared or disinterested in advancing their education, even though its dramatic impact on future earnings is well documented. This is bad for men, women, the country's economic future, and all of society.

[There are many practices that past cultures have used to teach and prepare youth that might be helpful to us today.] Margaret Mead, among other anthropologists, informed us that nearly all thriving cultures have trained and prepared boys and girls separately. Contemporary research regularly confirms these intuitive gender assumptions prompting the National Academy of Sciences to recommend the study of sex differences.

There are more than 90,000 co-ed schools in America. While the single-sex option has long been popular in **parochial** [religious] and private schools, until last autumn less than 250 public schools, scattered across 33 states, provided it. Taking note of the **deteriorating**[                      ] situation of boys, the Department of Education last fall finally gave school districts the flexibility to introduce single-sex classes. While initial experiments have yet to deliver **conclusive** [clear] results, there is growing anecdotal evidence and initial findings suggesting broad benefits for both sexes.

Reports from educators who took early advantage of [having single sex classrooms] are mostly enthusiastic. **Proponents** [                                 ] point to experiments like those among fourth graders in a Florida elementary school where single-sex classroom students – girls as well as boys – achieved whopping increases in pass rates on statewide writing tests. Other promising experiments have taken place in many states, including Alabama, Louisiana, and New York, as well as Canada and Ireland. Boys and girls appear to thrive when spared the competition and social pressures in co-ed classrooms, and discipline problems clearly **diminished** [reduced].

A policy update from the National Association of State Boards of Education in 2002 ... points to "positive outcomes from single-sex education for both boys and girls, including higher reading and foreign language achievement, less sex-stereotyped course taking patterns [such as girls taking cooking and boys taking woodshop], more time spent on homework, higher educational aspirations, and decreased sex-role stereotyping."  The report points out that "positive effects are greatest among girls and among minority students of both sexes."

The time has come to support experimental options like single-sex schooling, training teachers and educators in the different ways that girls and boys learn, and [making people aware of the differences] between the sexes.

Our schools are entrusted with the preparation and training of young **impressionable minds** [minds that are capable of being molded]. America can continue to [sexist roles] or it can celebrate the [exciting differences] between the sexes by developing ... educational approaches that treat young boys and girls as the delightful, demanding, and wondrously different creatures they are.

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