

Sex-segregated schooling ineffective and increases gender stereotyping, experts warn

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Sex-segregated schooling is not superior to coeducational schooling and carries the risk of exaggerating sexism and gender stereotyping, according to a new report co-authored by a University of Texas at Austin psychologist.

In an article in the current issue of [Science magazine](#), psychologist Rebecca Bigler, along with other members of the American Council for CoEducational Schooling (ACCES) call upon [policymakers](#) to take a close look at scientific evidence addressing the negative aspects of single-sex education.

Concerned with a Department of Education reinterpretation of Title IX that permits single-sex education within coeducational schools, the researchers cite evidence that it legitimizes institutional sexism without demonstrating actual improvement in [academic performance](#).

The research comes as the Austin Independent School District, which operates an all-girls middle school, is considering opening two additional single-sex school campuses. Nationally, the number of single-sex schools has climbed steadily in recent years despite a lack of consensus that such schools lead to academic or [psychological outcomes](#) superior to those of coeducational schools.

“Given the scientific research on the topic, a further investment in single-sex schools does not appear to be a wise use of public funds,” Bigler says.

According to the report, proponents of single-sex classrooms often misconstrue evidence from neurobehavioral science to justify different educational methods. For example, Leonard Sax, the executive director of the National Association for Single Sex Public Education, inferred from research conducted on adults' cardiovascular regulation in response to stress that boys respond best in the classroom with loud confrontation (“What’s your answer, Mr. Jackson? Give it to me!”), whereas girls should be approached much more gently (“Lisa, sweetie, it’s time to open your book.”).

Neuroscientists, however, have found very few differences in children’s brains tied to sex, and many believe that the perceived differences in the neural structure or function of adult brains are the result of a lifetime of sex-differentiated experiences rather than inherent differences.

Past research by Bigler and her colleagues has demonstrated that labeling and organizing children by social groups – even randomly assigned T-shirt colors — cause children to infer that the groups differ in important, meaningful ways and develop intergroup prejudices.

“Schools play a larger role in children’s lives beyond academic training—they prepare children for mixed-sex workplaces, families and citizenry,” Bigler says. “Institutionalizing gender-segregated classrooms limits children’s opportunities to interact with members of the opposite sex and to develop the skills necessary for positive and cooperative interaction.”

Provided by University of Texas at Austin

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