

Vail School District
6th Grade
Benchmark 2
Argumentative

DIRECTIONS: Read the information and writing prompt below. Then use scratch paper for your prewriting/planning and your draft.

Schools and school districts are always looking for ways to improve student outcome and encourage student growth. One suggestion is to have single gender classrooms or schools.

Write an argumentative essay to a community leader about whether or not single gender education would be beneficial to students. Make sure to state a claim, and support the claim with evidence from the provided articles. Use the writing guide as a tool to help you.

Your essay should include:

- an introduction, body, and conclusion
- an explanation of your reasons with supporting details from the text
- content and selected details that are appropriate to audience

Research Spotlight on Single-Gender Education

NEA Reviews of the Research on Best Practices in Education

If you walked into the average public school classroom in the United States, you'd find an equal number of boys and girls. But some experts suggest it may be time for a change. Single-gender education and the often-spirited dialogue surrounding it have raised a number of issues concerning the best manner to educate boys and girls.

In 1993, American University professors Myra Sadker and David Sadker published their research in *Failing in Fairness: How America's Schools Cheat Girls*, which describes striking discoveries about fairness in American schools. During a three-year study, trained observers visited more than 100 elementary school classrooms in Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, Virginia, and the District of Columbia and noted student-teacher interactions, including the following:

- Boys called out eight times as often as girls did. When a boy yelled out, the teacher ignored the "raise your hand" rule and usually praised his contribution. Girls who called out got reminders to raise their hands.
- Teachers valued boys' comments more than girls' comments. Teachers responded to girls with a simple nod or an OK, but they praised, corrected, helped, and criticized boys.
- Boys were encouraged to solve problems on their own, but teachers helped girls who were stuck on problems.

Male dominance in the classroom may come as no surprise to advocates of single-gender education who suggest that boys and girls are regularly treated differently in coeducational settings and that boys and girls could both benefit from single-gender classrooms. Studies suggest that when boys are in single-gender classrooms, they are more successful in school and more likely to pursue a wide range of interests and activities.

Girls who learn in all-girl environments are believed to be more comfortable responding to questions and sharing their opinions in class and more likely to explore more “nontraditional” subjects such as math, science, and technology. In addition, advocates believe that when children learn with single-gender peers, they 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.

Of course, these beliefs have been challenged as well. The American Association of University Women published *Separated by Gender: A Critical Look at Single-Gender Education for Girls (1998)*, which notes that single-gender education is not necessarily better than coeducation. According to the report, boys and girls thrive on a good education, regardless of whether the school is single-gender or coeducational. Some findings include:

- No evidence shows that single-gender education works or is better for girls than coeducation.
- When elements of a good education are present—such as small classes and schools, equitable teaching practices, and focused academic curriculum—girls and boys succeed.
- Some kinds of single-gender programs produce positive results for some students, including a preference for math and science among girls.

Additional research on the effectiveness of single-gender classrooms is necessary, but we all can agree that we need to construct an educational environment that meets the social and intellectual needs of boys and girls.

SINGLE-GENDER EDUCATION CHALLENGED

http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/curr215.shtml

In 1998, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) published *Separated by Gender: A Critical Look at Single-Gender Education for Girls*. Single-gender education is not necessarily better than coeducation, that report noted. The publication “challenges the popular idea that K-12 single gender education is better for girls than coeducation.”

According to the report, boys and girls thrive on a good education, regardless of whether the school is single-gender or coeducational.

- “There is no evidence in general that single-gender education works or is better for girls than coeducation.

- "When elements of a good education are present, girls and boys succeed. Elements include small classes and schools, equitable teaching practices, and focused academic curriculum.
- "Some kinds of single-gender programs produce positive results for some students, including a preference for math and science among girls. [Although] girls' achievement has improved in some single-gender schools, there is no significant improvement in girls' achievement in single-gender classes."

CLOSING THE GENDER GAP

In fact, recent research seems to show that the gender gap between boys and girls has closed. "All of this suggests that the broad nationwide efforts to raise female achievement in schools have been effective," said Cornelius Riordan, a professor of sociology at Providence College, in *The Silent Gender Gap*, a November 17, 1999, *Education Week* story.

"As a result of these trends, boys rather than girls are now on the short end of the gender gap in many secondary school outcomes. Currently, boys are less likely than girls to be in an academic (college-preparatory) curriculum. They have lower educational and occupational expectations, have lower reading and writing test scores, and expect to complete their schooling at an earlier age," Riordan explained.

William S. Pollack, an assistant clinical professor at Harvard Medical School and author of *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons From the Myths of Boyhood*, offered a similar opinion in "The Hidden Suffering of Boys in the Classroom," (*San Jose Mercury*, August 8, 1998). Noting that schools are "failing boys in at least four ways," Pollack wrote that

- Boys' reading and writing problems often go unnoticed. "One study found a correlation between boys' low reading skills and their association of reading with feminine skills," said Pollack.
- People often handle boys emotional and social needs inappropriately or inadequately. "When we observe boys' emotional worlds more closely, we discover much quiet suffering under their outward bravado."
- Educators tend to interpret "boy behavior" as a discipline problem without probing to discover emotional needs. "Boys generally prefer to learn by doing, by engaging in some action-oriented task. In learning environments biased against their strengths, boys may become frustrated and attempt to get their needs met by seeking negative attention."
- Teaching methods fail to take into account boys' unique learning styles. "Many classes simply aren't conducted in a way boys, with their naturally high energy levels, find captivating. When boys aren't engaged, they become discipline problems," Pollack concluded.

Pros and Cons of the Results of Splitting Up Girls & Boys in Schools by Maria Magher, studioD

Single-gender schools are becoming more common. According to *Teaching Tolerance*, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, only 11 U.S. public schools had gender-segregated classrooms in 2002, but that number rose to more than 550 in 2009. Though many

private schools separate genders based on conservative ideology, some public schools have done so to accommodate learning differences. Research has shown that there are advantages and disadvantages to such an arrangement.

Improved Academic Performance

Much of the research about gender segregation in classrooms has shown that students perform better academically when they are separated. GreatSchools.org cites research from psychologist Leonard Sax that shows that when boys and girls are separated, teaching styles can be adapted for the needs of each gender, which can result in better academic performance. But others say different factors can cause those stronger results. "The apparent edge girls' schools give pupils seems to stem from their initially superior performance when they entered these schools," John Gray, a Cambridge University education professor who analyzed the issue for England's education regulatory agency, told the Telegraph in 2002. Other advocates of single-gender classrooms say that even adjusting classroom temperature -- warmer for girls, cooler for boys -- can enhance learning, according to Teaching Tolerance. Teaching Tolerance also said that advocates of single-gender classrooms encourage teachers to use louder voices and plenty of movement when teaching boys, but a calming tone and less movement when working with girls.

Stronger Interpersonal Relations

One reason researchers think that separating classrooms by gender may promote learning is because of the influence the practice has on interpersonal relations. The Telegraph cites research from the Department for Skills and Education that boys are more assertive in the classroom, which can make girls shy away from speaking up in class. By separating the two, girls gain more confidence and have the ability to take on more leadership roles in the classroom. However, a disadvantage to separating the genders, the Telegraph says, is that girls have a calming influence on boys, and that this positive influence is removed.

Gender Stereotyping

The influence of single-gender classrooms has been cited as both a pro and a con as it relates to gender stereotyping. The Telegraph argues that by promoting girls' confidence, segregated classrooms allow them to act outside of gender stereotypes and to take on more leadership roles. However, Kim Gandy, the president of the National Organization for Women, told The New York Times that segregated classrooms can reinforce gender stereotypes because they are not challenged. For example, if a boy has not had to face a girl who has a strong personality -- or be beaten by a girl on a test or in a game -- he may not be able to handle working with a strong woman later in life.

Real-World Preparation

The biggest disadvantage that critics cite for gender-segregated classrooms is that they do not prepare students for the real world. The workplace will not be segregated by gender. Students must learn to adapt to the differences that gender creates, both in interpersonal relations and in situations where they are expected to perform, such as school and work.

