

CHOOSING BETWEEN SINGLE SEX AND CO-ED SCHOOLS

By The Testing Mom

When it comes to choosing single sex over co-ed schools or vice versa, the evidence is not that clear. For every study that finds one approach better than the other, there is another study that says the opposite. Here are the arguments made for each. My suggestion is that you visit a single sex school and hear their pitch. You will have a sense of whether or not this environment would be right for your child, given her personality, interests and strengths.

Single Sex School Considerations

- Boys become more collaborative and less competitive in a single sex school.
- Girls become more outgoing and take more risks in a single sex school.
- When boys and girls don't have to worry about what the other sex thinks, they can be themselves. Boys can flourish in drama, poetry, and singing. Girls can embrace competitive sports, science and math.
- Studies actually show that girls attending single sex schools show a higher preference for "masculine" classes such as science and math and boys show a higher preference for "feminine" subjects such as music and art.
- Young boys have a harder time sitting still and focusing in the early grades. At a boys school, lesson plans can include more active ways of learning and more breaks for physical activity.
- In a single sex kindergarten class, girls don't have to wait while the boys settle down.
- In girls schools, girls are given the opportunity to develop leadership skills that they don't always get in co-ed schools. They don't have their drive and feistiness diminished as they start to worry about what boys think of them.
- Boys and girls have different learning styles. Girls do not like to be confronted by a teacher for the answer. They are more likely to be modest about their intelligence in front of boys, especially as they get older. Boys enjoy being

challenged by teachers. Research shows that in co-ed classrooms, teachers often direct the most challenging questions to boys, while giving girls less difficult ones.

- There is much evidence that teachers treat boys and girls differently in a co-ed class. Teachers listen to boys who blurt out answers, whereas girls are reminded to raise their hands. Teachers are more likely to praise intellectual contributions of boys while lauding socialization skills of girls. This makes girls feel unsure about their performance at school.

Co-ed School Considerations

- Co-ed schools say they are more reflective of the real world. Life is co-ed and children need to learn to excel in that real environment.
- Still, many co-ed schools are making efforts to insure that children are treated equally by gender. Some have gone so far as to videotape classes to analyze whether or not teachers show unconscious bias. In one such situation at Ethical Culture in New York City, a teacher who gave children a math problem and went around asking children for the answer allowed girls who demurred to pass while asking boys who wanted to pass, “Are you sure?”
- It is known that boys react more quickly than girls and are usually the first to raise their hands when asked a question. Teachers have to be trained to wait and not call on the first hand up.
- Co-ed schools that are conscious of the different ways boys and girls learn say that they use different approaches to teaching that work for both sexes. Many have created gender equity committees. Other schools go out of their way to hire women to teach math and science, to put boys and girls together in activities such as block play, and to get boys to appreciate activities girls usually prefer.
- When visiting co-ed schools, a good question to ask would be, “What do you do to ensure that there isn’t an unconscious bias against boys or girls in the classroom?”

For more information and a video of a mother whose child goes to a single-sex school talking about this subject, visit <http://testingforkindergarten.com/?p=230>.