



Problems with Sex-Segregated Public Education

Increased Sex Segregation Is More Likely to Increase Sex Discrimination and Sex Stereotyping in Public K-12 Education than to Reduce It

This is from the Feminist Majority Foundation Education Equality Sex Segregation web page. All links on this page can be found at the following: <http://feminist.org/education/SexSegregation.asp>

After Title IX was passed in 1972, there was a decline in single-sex education even in private K-12 schools and colleges. Instead, the focus was on creating non-sexist coeducational classes and schools.

But there was an increase in intentional sex segregation in K-12 non-vocational public education since 2002, when the Department of Education signaled its intent to be more flexible in allowing the expansion of sex-segregated education. [In 2006 the Department of Education issued a Title IX regulation](#) that weakened safeguards against sex discrimination, the sole purpose of Title IX. The Feminist Majority Foundation multi-year studies concluded that there were over 1000 public K-12 US schools with deliberate single-sex academic classes during 2007-10 and 2011-14.

Individuals concerned with sex segregated instruction should be aware of the following:

- **Separate is not equal or fair to all.** It is very difficult to provide even "substantial" equality in sex-segregated schools, classes, or activities, whether we are talking about facilities, quality of instruction, levels of expectations, treatment of students, or preference for a particular teacher.
- **Sex segregation (allowed under the 2006 regulation changes) is absolute and not totally voluntary.** Even advocates of single-sex education agree that there is more variation within groups of girls and boys than between them, but they ignore this important truth when excluding everyone of one sex from a class intended for all boys or all girls, even if the excluded girls or boys want to enroll.
- **Many assumptions about benefits of sex segregation are educationally unsound.** Many of the post 2006 sex-segregated classes and schools are based on inaccurate claims of innate student differences by sex and related myths that male and female students learn differently and should receive dissimilar instruction. Good educational practices can and do meet the needs of both girls and boys in a coeducational setting by addressing individual needs and by consciously striving for gender equity in curriculum and instruction.
- **Research results do not support the superiority of sex segregation in advancing student learning or in decreasing sex discrimination.** It is difficult to conduct fully equitable comparisons of single-sex and coeducational programs or schools to learn what is better, as many other factors may influence the results. Although it is possible that both coeducational and single-sex classes may help either eliminate or increase sex stereotyping, increased sex stereotyping is likely to be more of a problem in sex-segregated classes. Research to date has not done much to control for other explanations of differences, and the patterns of results from various single studies of sex-segregated education do not show consistent superiority on any outcome measures. Additionally, few of these studies examined outcome measures related to decreasing sex discrimination or sex stereotyping. (See [Handbook for Achieving Gender Equity through Education](#), 2007, especially [Chapters 9](#) and [31](#))
- **Costs are higher.** The separate operation and facilities for single-sex education are more costly than comparable coeducation. It takes more time and money to assure that all facilities and resources are equitable for both girls and boys in segregated and mixed sex options. Also, additional resources are needed for staff training and program evaluation and for responding to public information requests and litigation to defend potentially discriminatory practices.

- **Evaluations are critically important, but costly.** The monitoring and evaluations needed to assure continued parity with equivalent coeducational opportunities and avoidance of increased stereotyping in single-sex education “experiments” need to be done carefully and rigorously to meet the Department of Education’s own What Works Clearinghouse standards of effectiveness, which are designed for all educational programs and certainly should apply to single-sex instruction as well. This is difficult, time-consuming, and expensive. [See Feminist Majority Foundation suggested evaluation guidelines \(PDF\)](#). (The [December 2014 Office for Civil Rights Single-sex Guidance](#) (PDF) does specify the need to meet the What Works Clearinghouse standards of effectiveness.)

- **The institutions responsible for the single-sex education may face lawsuits and Title IX complaints.** The ACLU web page [“Sex-Segregated Schools: Separate and Unequal”](#) and their campaign [“Teach Kids, Not Stereotypes”](#) document many of their successful and ongoing efforts to use the US Constitution’s Fourteenth Amendment Equal Protection Clause, Title IX, the Equal Educational Opportunities Act, and state laws to end sex discrimination associated with this sex segregation.

In summary, most efforts to provide sex-segregated education are detrimental and waste resources that instead should be used to end sex stereotyping and discrimination in coeducational environments, especially for the most vulnerable students who face multiple types of discrimination related to poverty, race, ethnicity, disabilities, and sexual identity or orientation.

Title IX has been a highly effective and popular law. It has withstood many challenges. The 2006 Department of Education regulation that encourages sex segregation deliberately undermines the intent of Title IX and will continually threaten the advancement of gender equity in U.S. schools until it is rescinded or otherwise invalidated. There is no right to discriminate on the basis of sex using federal financial assistance to education.