

Keep boys and girls together, research suggests

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Boys and girls may learn differently, but American parents should think twice before moving their children to sex-segregated schools. A new Tel Aviv University study has found that girls improve boys' grades markedly at school.

“Being with more girls is good for everybody,” says Prof. Analia Schlosser, an economist from the Eitan Berglas School of Economics at Tel Aviv University. “We find that both boys and girls do better when there are more girls in the class.” She investigated girls and boys in mixed classrooms in the elementary, middle, and high-school grades of the Israeli school system.

In an unpublished paper, Prof. Schlosser concluded that classes with more than 55 percent of girls resulted in better exam results and less violent outbursts overall. “It appears that this effect is due to the positive influence the girls are adding to the classroom environment,” says Prof. Schlosser. She carried out the study while on a post-doctoral fellowship at Princeton University, and will study the effects of gender in higher education lecture halls next.

This is one of few studies of its kind to use scientific data to address the question of gender effects in school.

The Report Card

Boys with more female peers in their classes show higher enrollment rates in both advanced math and science classes, but overall benefits were found in all grades for both sexes.

Prof. Schlosser found that primary-school classrooms with a female majority showed increased academic success for both boys and girls, along with a notable improvement in subjects like science and math. In the middle schools, girls were found to have better academic achievement in English, languages and math. And in high school, the classrooms which had the best academic achievements overall were consistently those that had a higher proportion of girls enrolled.

An Educated Guess

A higher percentage of girls lowers the amount of classroom disruption and fosters a better relationship between pupils and their teacher, a study of the data suggests. Teachers are less tired in classrooms with more girls, and pupils overall seem to be more satisfied when a high female-to-male ratio persists.

Prof. Schlosser was inspired to the study by a “renewed interest on the effects of classroom gender composition on students’ learning, since a new amendment to America’s Title IX regulations gives communities more flexibility in providing single-sex classes and schools.”

Prof. Schlosser concludes that American educators should reconsider the effects of the new trend of same-sex segregation on different sectors of society. Gains for girls from classroom gender segregation could be offset by the loss of boys.

Source: American Friends of Tel Aviv University

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