

Single Gender Education--Administrators, take a lesson

Let's take a lesson from the results of the single sex California Pilot program or even from the ill-fated attempt by Georgia's Greene County to implement a single sex initiative. Single sex implementation without knowledge of legal mandates, without full buy-in from educators involved and with adequate professional development is doomed to failure.

Institutions and districts that jump on the bandwagon without the careful consideration of legal and other aspects essential to implementation will no doubt unwittingly contribute to the camp of skeptics that claim single sex education does not represent a viable educational strategy with the potential to facilitate the learning of students. Overly eager and enthusiastic proponents of single gender education then are tempted to act without sagacious consideration of consequences (Bradley, 2007). Simply altering the gender make-up alone, will not necessarily offer proposed benefits stated in the literature. More, much more, must be done in preparation for implementation. These well-intending administrators, educators and policy makers then are responsible for negative publicity or findings against single gender education due to the "implementation without planning" approach. This inadvertent increase in the school of thought against single sex education is unnecessary and counterproductive at best. Take for instance, California's Pilot single sex education program. This program initially was implemented with the aim aiding low achieving students and simply did not address gender equity issues nor empower students (Datnow, et al, 2001). The program started without prior consideration of vital concerns related to program implementation and without buy-in or training of educators directly involved.

The educational leaders of Greene County Georgia obviously did not receive expert and legal counsel or either chose to ignore counsel. Their intent at initiating a single gender district was blatantly illegal. The relaxation of Title IX that allowed single sex education did not just open the flood gates for arbitrary implementation of single sex education, but rather included set mandates governing implementation. Ironically, there are only three mandates, an uncharacteristically simple government guide. The three mandates are clearly and concisely stated, requiring no legal training for their comprehension or interpretation (retrieved April 2, 2008 from <http://www.singlesexschools.org/legal.html>).

These three provisions are: **1**) provide a rationale for offering a single-gender class in that subject. A variety of rationales are acceptable, e.g. if very few girls have taken computer science in the past, the school could offer a girls-only computer science class;

2) provide a coeducational class in the same subject at a geographically accessible location. That location may be at the same school, but the school or school district may also elect to offer the coeducational alternative at a different school which is geographically accessible. The term "geographically accessible" is not explicitly defined in the regulations.

3) conduct a review every two years to determine whether single-sex classes are still necessary to remedy whatever inequity prompted the school to offer the single-sex class in the first place. Greene County administrators and policy makers totally ignored the second provision listed. If the entire district goes to a single gender format, parents who prefer coeducational schooling are then given no choice within the district, a clear violation of provision number two. That is also in sharp contrast to the parental choice provisions of NCLB. There are many potential benefits listed in the literature and so many potential student populations that might benefit from single sex education that to fail to research it properly or to implement faulty pilot programs amounts to educational suicide for a society in desperate need of promising innovative instructional strategies. Educators are struggling to meet the needs of many populations: special education, girls, boys, black males and a wide variety of other minority populations. How can we ignore the potential benefits of single sex education?! Consider some of the proposed outcomes in the literature: increased academic achievement, enhancement of career aspirations, improved attendance, increased diversity in course selection, reduction in discipline referral rate, reduced risk of instilling gender stereotypes, improved self-esteem and self-confidence, increased opportunity for leadership, improved attitudes about school and lower sexual distraction (Bradley, 2008). Implementation that brought about any one of these proposed outcomes is worthy.

As of April 2008, there are approximately 366 single gender schools or schools offering single gender classes in the United States (Sax, 2008). With the increased emphasis on accountability the success or failure of these schools will no doubt hinge upon standardized test scores. However, failure due to improper implementation, poor planning or the lack of training may squash this instruction strategy that has unbelievable potential for many populations.

Rehearsing the proposed benefits of single gender education in the ears of administrators and educators is not enough. As a matter of fact doing so may simply encourage over-zealous administrators, desperate for any innovative intervention touted as "the answer" to "the problem" to jump at implementation without preparation. I once again call for very careful investigation, planning, and training before the implementation of any single gender program. I urge that you as administrators visit the literature, both the scholarly research and

casual writing of anecdotal accounts of program implementation and success—or even failure. Learn of potential pitfalls and potential positive outcomes. **As an administrator—BEFORE you decide and BEFORE you implement** Read current research and current writing on single gender education—it’s everywhere. Recognize the motive behind single gender implementation at your school (increased funds via government incentives, a tool for raising test scores, or to provide the optimal learning environment for all)—it does make a difference. Investigate possible training resources for your teachers who will be involved. Just changing the ratio of males and females in the class will not provide proposed results. Inquire about the instructional strategies (how are they different and why) (Bradley, 2008) Bradley, K. (2007). Don’t just do it. Montessori Leadership On Line. Retrieved March 22, 2008 from www.montessori.org/sitefiles/MLOL_March_08/MLOL_03_08.pdf Bradley, K. (2008). Single gender education—why? Retrieved April 2, 2008 from http://www.education.com/reference/topic/ChoosingSchool_Public/ Datnow, A., Hubbard, L, and Conchas, G. (2001) How context mediates policy; the implementation of single gender public schooling in California. Teachers College Record. (103), 184-206 Sax, L. (2008). Georgia school system forgets going single sex. Retrieved April 22, 2008 from http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/2008-03-26-ga-school-segregation_N.htm?POE=click-refer National Association for Single Sex Public Education. Retrieved April 2, 2008 from <http://www.singlesexschools.org/legal.htm>

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Source: <http://www.edarticle.com>