

# Fast Facts

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## Single-Sex Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

### What —

The CEEP Education Policy Brief, *Single-Sex Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, by Kelly Cable and Terry Spradlin, examines the prevailing arguments for and against single-sex education in elementary and secondary education today. The brief begins with the genesis, history, and legality of single-sex classrooms. It then considers the merits and critiques of single-sex education as well as the difficult questions which are prominent regarding the subject. Finally, the brief offers recommendations that reflect the current research on single-sex education and consequent steps to take regarding its future in American classrooms.

### Why —

The changes in legislation regarding single-sex classrooms are relatively new. Single-sex public education went from illegal in most situations to permissible in many classrooms on January 8, 2002, when the *No Child Left Behind Act* was signed into law. Single-sex education itself has historically been a controversial topic, and due to new research and media attention on a possible “boys’ crisis,” it is important for educators and parents to know the benefits, drawbacks, and legalities regarding this option for students.

### How —

Research on single-sex education encompasses a diverse range of situations, including private, public, or religious same-sex **schools** as well as single-sex **classrooms** within public schools. Therefore, it is not surprising that a clear consensus is lacking in the research on the topic. The limitations of the body of research include: the research may have only been done over a short period of time, contain bias, or be inextricably intertwined with other factors, particularly socioeconomic status, school size, and teacher motivation, that may have affected the outcomes.

### Recommendations —

- Research should be standardized through use of a randomized control trial so that there will be no question as to whether positive or negative results are due to single-sex education or other factors. Research should also be done in schools with a majority of minority students and/or in schools with a high rate of poverty to determine whether the structure of single-sex classes can improve academic achievement.
- Schools should track results over time during multiple school years to determine the success of the program, whether regarding affirmative action or in reaction to another specific issue. The review should also include making certain that stereotypes or faulty research are not influencing curriculum.
- Rather than focusing on either all males or all females, educators should work on promoting groups that are without question struggling in schools, such as African American, Hispanic, and low-income students, both male and female.
- If schools do choose to incorporate single-sex classrooms or move from coeducational to single-sex schooling, the changes must be reinforced by proper professional development for teachers, as well as support for students, teachers, and staff.

To read this Education Policy Brief, go to:  
<http://ceep.indiana.edu/>