

_EDUCATION

Boys Perform Better in Schools That Have More Girls

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Boys seem to have so many advantages in society, but when it comes to school performance boys do better when there are more girls around, according to a [new study](#) published in *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*. One of the most important decisions we will make as parents is the school our children attend. Not everyone has an opportunity to choose a school, but if you do, there is now another consideration if you are deciding between an all boys' school or a school that enrolls both girls and boys.

For years, the trend has held that girls outperform boys in many subjects, particularly in reading. Why is this the case? What factors influence these outcomes? To figure this out, a group of sociologists looked at how different school resources affect girls' and boys' reading performance. They specifically chose to evaluate reading comprehension because it is a main component in a person's educational career – reading skills affect students' performance in other subjects like math and science. Additionally, gender inequalities in reading skills varied more between schools than in math and science, suggesting that schools have an influence over how well girls and boys do on reading tests.

To perform the study, researchers reviewed reading test scores of more than 200,000 15-year-olds from over 8,000 mixed-sex schools around the world. They also looked at resources in the schools including socioeconomic aspects of the student body, the percentage of girls at the school, and the number of highly educated teachers on staff. Finally, they assessed the effectiveness of a variety of teaching methods such as projects, homework, and other student assignments.

The analysis found that schools with more than 60 percent girls, a large proportion of students with highly educated parents, and a large number of college-educated teachers had higher reading scores overall. In addition, boys' performance was significantly better in those schools where more than 60 percent of the students were girls.

What is it about girls that could have a positive impact on the boys' academic performance? The research team thinks that one main reason boys do better around girls is because girls tend to have higher levels of concentration and motivation in the classroom that can rub off on the boys. This premise has been tested at various educational levels over the years. As highlighted in The Atlantic, Claire Cameron, an expert from the University of Virginia on kindergarten readiness in children, found that children who are able to self-regulate end up being most successful throughout their lives. Self-regulation involves disciplined behaviors like raising one's hand in class, paying attention, waiting one's turn, following teachers' instructions, and not shouting out answers. She found that girls in kindergarten have better self-regulation than boys. In fact, the boys are typically an entire year behind girls in developing these skills.

Girls continue to have stronger self-discipline characteristics in middle school and beyond. A 2006 study by Martin Seligman and Angela Lee Duckworth of the University of Pennsylvania noted that middle school girls are better at self-discipline than boys, which contributes to their higher grades in all subjects. Specifically, girls are more likely to read test instructions before answering the questions, pay attention to a teacher rather than daydream, choose homework over television, and focus on long-term assignments without getting frustrated.

Finally, Gwen Kenney-Benson, a psychology professor at Allegheny College, told The Atlantic that girls are more successful than boys in school because they tend to be more mastery-oriented in their schoolwork habits. In other words, they plan ahead, set academic goals, and work hard towards achieving those goals. They also are more likely than boys to feel satisfied by organizing their work and completing tasks.

The fact that boys tend to be more successful around girls is especially important for parents and educators because it provides an opportunity to re-evaluate the gender distribution of schools and the pluses and minuses of all boys' schools. As this study indicates, all boys' schools may not be beneficial to boys' ability to learn and be successful. Boys' poorer reading performance is quite widespread, and is only being reinforced when boys attend schools with a predominantly male student population.

The research team that conducted this study hopes that schools will use this information to build learning environments in which there is a more equal gender distribution in schools, and where both boys and girls are encouraged to develop their full reading potential.



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