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Successes Of Single–Gender New York Schools Overshadowing Opposition

By Patricia Hawke

In the past, even the mention of creating a single–gender public school raised controversy with a wide array of opponents, including women's organizations. In 1996, the New York schools created the first all–girl school in the nation, and the controversy still rears its ugly head.

The Opponents

Opponents say that single–gender New York schools undercut the students' civil rights by denying them access to the schools. Michael Meyers, head of the New York Coalition, brought suit against the New York schools in 1996, challenging the legality of the Young Women's Leadership School, located in Harlem, but lost the suit. He continues to look for New York schools students denied access to the school because of gender in hopes of bringing another suit, despite the school's successes.

Opponents also contend that such schools return New York schools education to the past, where girls major in home economics, rather than mathematics or science. They even charge that if mixed–gender New York schools had the same quality of well–trained and motivated teachers, those children also would excel.

Even Sonia Ossorio, New York Chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW), believes such New York schools compromise women's past struggles that today allow women to attend once–single–gender schools, such as Harvard and Yale.

The Supporters

Single–gender schools, however, address the unique needs of boys and girls. They offer families options that were previously not available in the New York schools, such as small class sizes and dedicated teachers, specially trained to meet gender–specific needs.

Students from the Harlem girls school say that their teachers push them more to do their best, and there are no distractions with which to deal. The teachers say the success of the school is due to no boys being present to distract the girls from their studies. Students stay on focus.

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In year 2000, the National Coalition of Girls Schools studied 4,200 alumnae from an all–girls school and found the following:

- 93 percent — felt they were provided greater leadership opportunities during school,
- 91 percent — thought coursework was more relevant to their academic needs,
- 85 percent — received more encouragement in the areas of science, mathematics and technology than friends who attended coed schools,
- 71 percent — were more prepared to transition to college than friends who attended coed schools,
- 94 percent — had or were attending college, and
- 80 percent — held leadership positions since graduating from the school.

Additionally, the study found:

- They consistently scored as much as 20 percent higher on SAT tests, than both genders nationwide,

and

- They majored in science and mathematics at a higher rate than both genders nationwide (12 percent of alumnae compared to two percent for women and ten percent for men).

The Successes

The New York schools can be proud of the accomplishments made by the Young Women's Leadership School over that last decade. The Harlem school was rated first by

<http://Insideschools.org>

in their

"value–added" schools study. The parent–run assessment group rated schools based upon their ability to turn poor performing students with poor test scores into top grade–getters. The Harlem school has a record of 100 percent student graduation. Even Ossorio of the New York NOW chapter could not dismiss such success, stating that it is hard not to be excited about a school that boasts such a graduate rate!

Such success stories have sparked renewed interest in single–gender public education by the New York schools. There are currently five all–girl New York schools with plans to create three more in the next few years. The New York schools have three that are boys only and more planned.

With recent changes in state and federal laws, there are now 42 single–gender public schools across the United States. Another 151 schools offer specific classes to boys and girls separately.

It seems the New York schools used progressive and innovation thinking by reaching into the past of gender segregation to give both genders an opportunity to excel in a learning–focused environment.

Patricia Hawke is a staff writer for Schools K–12, providing free, in–depth reports on all U.S. public and

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<http://www.schoolsk–12.com/New–York/index.html>

Nea Gives New York Schools A Failing Grade

By Patricia Hawke

Though public schools across the nation are improving their school environments for students, the New York schools are falling behind, according to the National Education Association (NEA). In a recently posted web page, the NEA cited many failings of the New York schools. Here are some of the challenges that the New York schools continue to face during the 2006–2007 school year.

Average Sizes for Schools and Classes

The elementary and secondary New York schools continue to be among the largest schools in the nation. The average size of an elementary school within the New York schools system is 27 percent higher than the national average. With an average of 558 students per elementary school, the New York schools rank fifth to have the largest elementary schools on average in the United States. Their high schools are even larger, averaging 1004 students per school. That is 33 percent higher than the national average, making the New York schools system the eighth largest in average high school size.

The class sizes in the New York schools also are among the largest with an average of 22 students per class. The NEA ranked the New York schools as the tenth largest in average elementary class size nationally.

Poor Infrastructure

In addition to the overcrowding in the New York schools, their crumbling and aging infrastructure is in desperate disrepair with a third of the facilities in need of extensive repair or replacement. The costs to complete construction and repair needs on school buildings and facilities are estimated to be as high as \$15 billion. During the 2006–2007 school year, the New York schools will have literally tens of thousands of students attending class in mobile trailers, storage areas, and converted bathrooms — not the most conducive environment for learning.

The New York schools rank among the bottom ten states in the percentage of schools with at least one unsatisfactory environment condition. Seventy–six percent of the New York schools fall into this category. There are 36 percent with poor ventilation that is bad for children with respiratory ailments, such as asthma, and contributes to higher illness rates of children and staff from passing viruses back and forth through the stagnant air. Additionally, 28 percent of all New York schools have bad plumbing and 31 percent of the schools have roofs that are crumbling.

As important as computers have become to educational opportunities in the United States, more than a third of the New York schools lack adequate outlets and the necessary wiring for computer use in the classroom.

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Teacher Salaries

Teacher salaries in the New York schools continue to decline. While other public school systems across the nation have increased salaries over the past ten years, teacher salaries in the New York schools system have decreased in constant dollars by eight percent. This means that many of the

quality teachers are either moving out–of–state to teach or moving into new career fields that pay better. The NEA has designated the New York schools as one of the four worse states for allowing real teacher salaries to decline.

As the NEA points out, the New York schools have many challenges yet to face in order to provide a quality education to the youth within the state of New York.

Patricia Hawke is a staff writer for Schools K–12, providing free, in–depth reports on all U.S. public and private K–12 schools. Patricia has a nose for research and writes stimulating news and views on school issues. For more information on New York schools visit

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