

Report on Single Gender Classrooms



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Saltzman and Molho Consulting

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Executive Summary

Focused on creating the best learning environment possible for future students, the founders of Hennepin Elementary School (HES) modeled it on aspects of other schools that were achieving strong academic results. Since opening its doors in 2012, HES has offered single gender options for every grade for which there are enough students to fill three classrooms – one girls, one boys and one mixed gender. Due to both successes and challenges, HES’s board and administration has questioned single gender classrooms as a long-term strategy; to address this issue they contracted with Saltzman and Molho Consulting to conduct a study to serve as a basis for the board to determine the future of single gender classrooms at the school.

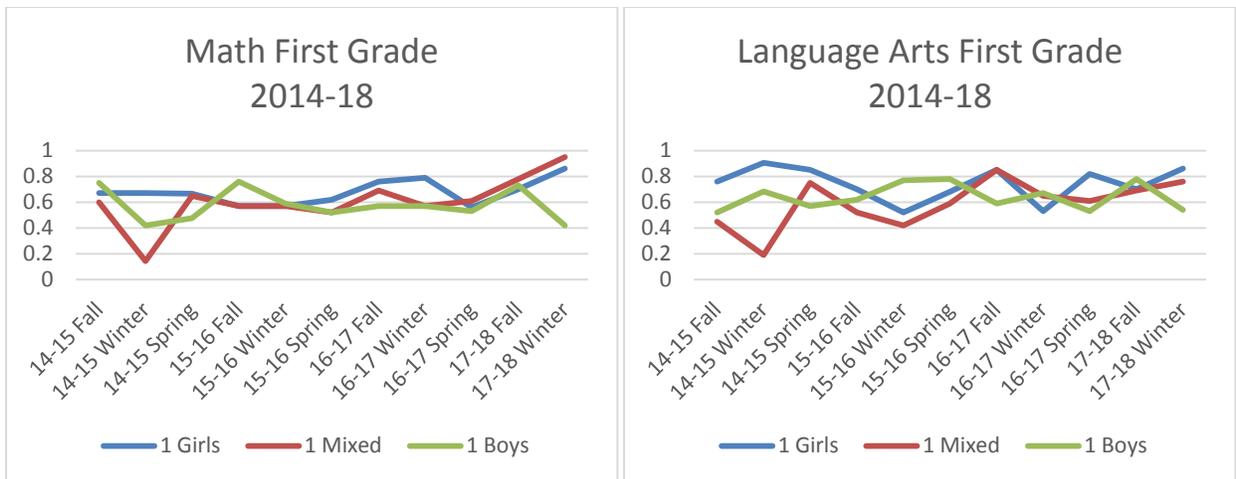
This report addresses three primary questions of interest to the board: Does the academic literature support using single gender classrooms as an effective academic strategy? Do the academic results at HES indicate that single gender classrooms are having a positive impact on students? What are the perceptions of stakeholders regarding single gender classrooms?

The literature review (pages 6-8) determined that academic research finds marginal to no positive impact of single gender classrooms on student achievement. As one scholar wrote, “When one looks at the results for the controlled studies (i.e., those that used the best research methods), Single Sex schooling generally produced only trivial advantages over Co-Educational with most weighted effect sizes smaller than 0.10. There is little evidence of an advantage of S(ingle) S(ex) schooling for girls or boys for any of the outcomes.¹”

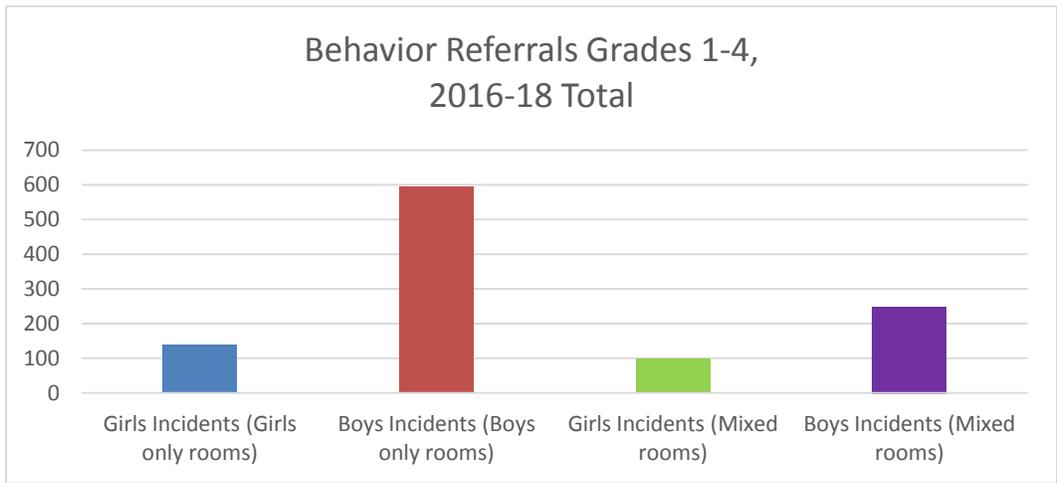
The review of academic results (pages 9-10) for HES students found no consistent advantage in student assessments for single gender classrooms vs mixed gender classrooms between 2014 and 2018. HES has carefully monitored student achievement data for several years and the data consistently show variability about single gender and multi-gender classrooms. Single gender classrooms rarely outperform the mixed gender classrooms. There is also a lack of a clear correlation or pattern across grade-levels, subject and year suggesting the single gender strategy is having little to no impact on student achievement at HES.

The charts below are representative of the variability seen in HES between single gender and mixed gender classrooms.

¹ Pahlke, Erin et al. “The Effects of Single-Sex Compared With Coeducational Schooling on Students’ Performance and Attitudes: A Meta-Analysis.” *Psychological Bulletin* 2014, Vol. 140, No. 4, 1042–1072



In addition to academic results, referrals by classroom teachers to the school’s administrative team for student behavioral incidents (pages 13-14) were also reviewed. These referrals include behaviors such as defiance, inappropriate language, aggression, fighting and bullying, among others. **It is striking to see that behavioral referrals for boys in single gender classrooms are more than double the referrals of any other student group, which includes boys in mixed classrooms, girls in single gender classrooms and girls in mixed classrooms.**



Finally, **the stakeholder analysis found strong support among some parents for single gender classrooms, while there was unanimous agreement among teachers, school leaders and students that mixed gender classrooms would best serve the school’s scholars.** Overall, board members indicated a desire to learn from the evidence presented in this report and a desire to effectively prepare for any transition or changes in the school’s strategy.

There was common agreement that communication is going to be crucial to future success. Specifically, each of the key stakeholder groups need communication on what the data says, and based on the data, why the HES board made the decision to either continue with single gender classrooms, or move to all mixed gender classrooms.

Background

Based on observations of other schools that were achieving high academic results, the founders of Hennepin Elementary School (HES) identified single gender classrooms as a best practice that they wanted to institute. Consequentially, since inception in 2012, HES has offered single gender options for every grade for which there are enough students to fill three classrooms – one girls, one boys and one mixed gender. Due to both successes and challenges, HES’s board and administration has questioned single gender classrooms as a long-term strategy. In the winter of 2018, the HES Board of Directors contracted with Saltzman and Molho Consulting to review relevant data and prepare a report to serve as a basis for the board to determine the future of single gender classrooms at the school.

HES has grown by adding a grade level a year; for the current 2017 – 2018 school year, HES is serving 385 students in kindergarten through 6th grade. With recent approval for expansion to a middle school program (grades 5 – 8), HES will start serving 7th graders during the 2018 – 2019 school year and will expand to 8th grade the following year. Single gender classrooms will not be an option for middle school students, but single gender alternatives, such as physical education and health classes, may be offered.

Recognized as one of the top charter schools in the state, HES has been named a “Beating the Odds” school in 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017. This designation identifies schools where low-income students performed better than expected on statewide assessments². Additionally in 2015, HES was named a Celebration School by the Minnesota Department of Education, recognition based in part on proficiency and growth rates for low-income students and English learners. Following is demographic information related to HES scholars in 2017-2018:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 68% Somali 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 80% English Learners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 17% Latino 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10% Special Education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15% African American 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 95% Free/Reduced Cost Lunch

In addition to single gender classrooms, other key strategies of the school include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended school day (8:45am - 4:15 pm) • All Day Kindergarten • Saturday School • Summer School • School uniforms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small class sizes • Double sessions of reading and math daily • “Second Step” social-emotional curriculum • Free transportation • Breakfast, lunch, and snacks provided
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When this study was commissioned, the board and school leadership identified three primary goals to inform their decision-making about the future of single gender classrooms at HES:

- Goal I: Summarize current research and best practices related to single gender classrooms.

² Raghavendran, Beena. “These Minnesota Schools with Low-Income Students Are Beating the Odds.” Star Tribune. www.startribune.com/these-minnesota-schools-with-low-income-students-are-beating-the-odds/460615913/

- Goal II: Analyze academic results at HES to measure the impact of single gender classrooms on HES students.
- Goal III: Articulate the perceptions of single gender classrooms among key HES stakeholders – board members, administrative leaders, teachers, parents and students.

The decision about whether or not to continue to provide single gender classrooms is significant and it impacts all of the key stakeholders of the school. The remainder of this report addresses the above goals to inform this decision.

Literature Review

Historical Perspective

Prior to 2002, single gender education in the United States was associated exclusively with private or parochial schools. Public schools viewed both the Constitution and the landmark 1972 Title IX amendment to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as requiring mixed gender classrooms and schools to avoid discrimination and inequitable treatment of boys or girls. In 2002, the No Child Left Behind Law (NCLB) brought significant changes to federal education policies. In an effort to reduce regulations and policies that some saw as limiting the flexibility of local schools or districts to meet the needs of their students, NCLB explicitly encouraged local education agencies to create new programs and opportunities that were previously not permitted.

Single gender classrooms were legally supported under NCLB as a viable option for public schools to learn from and for families to consider. Proponents of the single gender strategy pointed to research indicating differences in the development of boys and girls. Many also pointed to the nation's dramatic achievement gap, particularly among African American boys for whom traditional models of school have not been consistently successful. Schools and districts immediately began experimenting with single gender classrooms and individual classes in the hopes of supporting higher student achievement for all students.

Research Findings

As with many educational interventions, the research around single gender classrooms and their effect on academic achievement is murky. Proponents of the practice have studies and research that supports their claims and those who oppose the practice also have studies and research that supports their claims. Often, these studies are difficult for the practitioner to compare because the research questions and study methodologies differ. To add to the confusion in the single gender literature, many studies are founded on assertions about neuroscience which are also debated.

Based on references from practitioner resources of national standing, a combination of three current meta-analyses which collectively analyze multiple research studies were used for this report. Together, this literature tells a consistent story that in many ways explains the confusing results of individual research studies described above.

We focused our analysis on three key studies:

1. *The Effects of Single-Sex Compared with Coeducational Schooling on Students' Performance and Attitudes: A Meta-Analysis*; Erin Pahlke, Janet Shibley Hyde and Carlie M. Allison. This 2014 meta-analysis reviewed data from 184 studies, representing the testing of 1.6 million students in Grades K–12 from 21 nations. The report explored multiple outcomes (e.g., mathematics performance, mathematics attitudes, science performance, educational aspirations, self-concept, and gender stereotyping) and looked at both controlled and uncontrolled experiments.
2. *Do Schools Affect Girls' and Boys' Reading Performance Differently? A Multilevel Study on the Gendered Effects of School Resources and School Practices*; Margriet van Hek, Gerbert Kraaykamp & Ben Pelzer. This 2018 multilevel study analyzed a dataset containing 216,117 students, 8,306 schools, and 33 countries. The study used results of the 2009 PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) to research the question, "To what extent do school resources and school assessment methods affect girls' and boys' reading performance differently?"
3. *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement*; Dr. John Hattie. In this landmark 2008 book, Hattie compared 195 educational interventions, strategies and conditions to determine which have the greatest impact on student achievement.

Although the underlying research is inconsistent and sometimes confusing and other educational strategies were also explored, these three broad studies analyzed the impact of single gender education on student achievement. **The conclusions of each of these studies are consistent in finding limited to no advantages of single gender classrooms when measuring student achievement.**

Simply stated, "When one looks at the results for the controlled studies (i.e., those that used the best research methods), Single Sex schooling generally produced only trivial advantages over Co-Educational with most weighted effect sizes smaller than 0.10. There is little evidence of an advantage of S(ingle) S(ex) schooling for girls or boys for any of the outcomes."³

The authors of the PISA study found "all students scored better when girls made up at least 60 percent of students in the school"⁴ identifying a benefit of mixed gender classrooms. Supporting these conclusions, Hattie's analysis showed a very slight positive effect of "gender on achievement," but one that is near the bottom of the list of potential impacts on student success.⁵

In addition to these academic studies, we reviewed what practitioners in the United States are using and advocating for closing the achievement gap and supporting school improvement. While single gender

³ Pahlke, Erin et al. "The Effects of Single-Sex Compared With Coeducational Schooling on Students' Performance and Attitudes: A Meta-Analysis." *Psychological Bulletin* 2014, Vol. 140, No. 4, 1042–1072

⁴ van Hek, Margriet, Kraaykamp, Gerbert & Pelzer, Gerbert. "Do Schools Affect Girls' and Boys' Reading Performance Differently? A Multilevel Study on the Gendered Effects of School Resources and School Practices." *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 29:1, 1-21, 2018

⁵ "Hattie Ranking - Interactive Visualization." Visible Learning. www.visible-learning.org/nvd3/visualize/hattie-ranking-interactive-2009-2011-2015.html

classrooms received some political and public support at the outset of the NCLB era, that support has not grown significantly and in some cases has waned. For example, the state of South Carolina publicly advocated for single gender classrooms as a school choice option that could lead to improved academic results for students. In 2008-09, more than 200 South Carolina schools had single gender programs. By 2012-13 that number had fallen to 68⁶. Practitioners in South Carolina pointed to the additional costs and administrative challenges of the practice as well as the lack of significant results in improving academic achievement.

A rich resource for practitioners is the federal *What Works Clearinghouse*⁷ which reviews research and academic literature to facilitate meaningful decision making for school leaders. Single gender classrooms are not listed on the *Clearinghouse*, additionally they are largely absent from school turnaround strategies and do not have a consistent track record of being implemented at schools that have made significant strides in closing the achievement gap. Together, **these data indicate practitioners have not been convinced that single gender classrooms are a strategy that garners significant academic improvement for all students.**

To be sure, there are numerous studies and individual examples of schools and classrooms which have seen success leveraging single gender strategies to improve academic achievement. As Pathke et al point out, many of these studies do not have robust, randomized methodologies that allow researchers to effectively isolate the effect of the gender make-up of a classroom on the academic results. In addition to separating students by gender, it is possible a number of positive practices are in place within these classrooms and schools to support effective instruction.

Even advocates for single gender classrooms clearly state that merely separating genders does not result in a positive impact on student achievement. Dr. Leonard Sax, a leading proponent of single gender strategies wrote in 2005, “Merely adopting the single-sex format, without appropriate professional development for teachers, is no guarantee of success. On the contrary, it often leads to failure.”⁸ Like many educational interventions, successful single gender classrooms require strong implementation which includes highly engaging teaching strategies that are informed by gender differences.

Literature Review Conclusion

In conclusion the literature review indicates no strong evidence to claim the use of single gender classrooms as a strategy to close the achievement gap or significantly improve academic results for all students. Overall, practitioners have not embraced single-gender education as a viable school improvement strategy.

⁶ Meder, Ellen. “Schools Battling Courts, Costs of Single -Gender Education.” SCNow. www.scnow.com/news/local/article_bb4dbc75-5465-5a28-94be-91fb75a0ca17.html

⁷ What Works Clearinghouse. www.ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/FWW

⁸ Sax, Leonard. “The Promise and Peril of Single-Sex Public Education.” Education Week, March 2, 2005

HES Academic Results

Overview

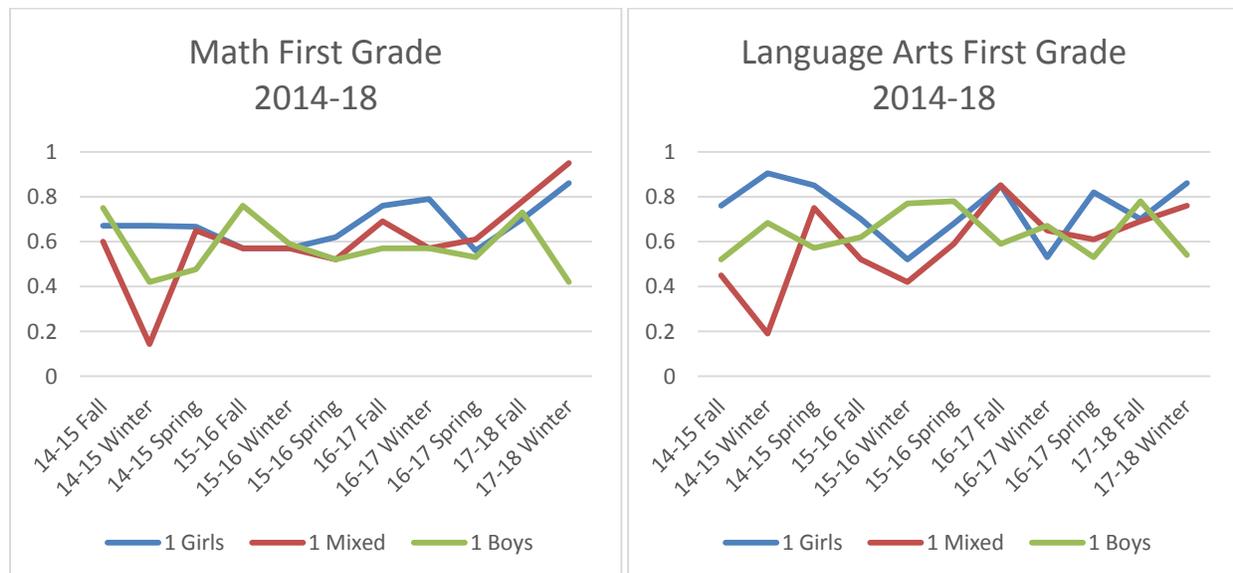
Hennepin Elementary school has taken care to monitor the academic achievement of their students consistently and track performance of single gender classrooms over time. This data allows for analysis of how the single gender strategy is impacting HES students specifically.

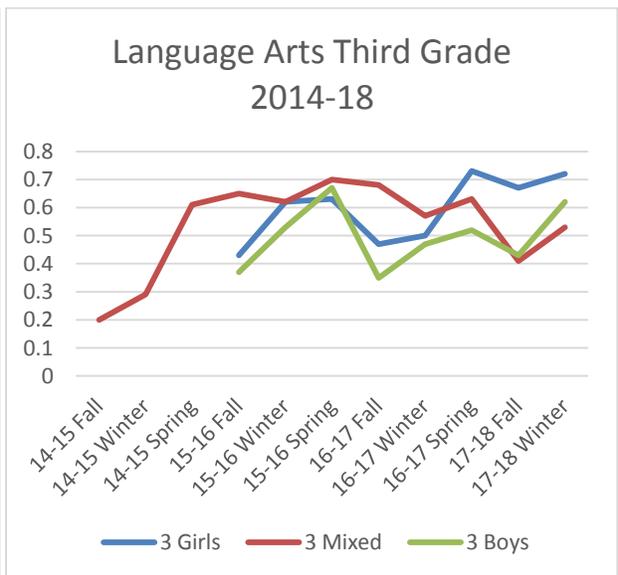
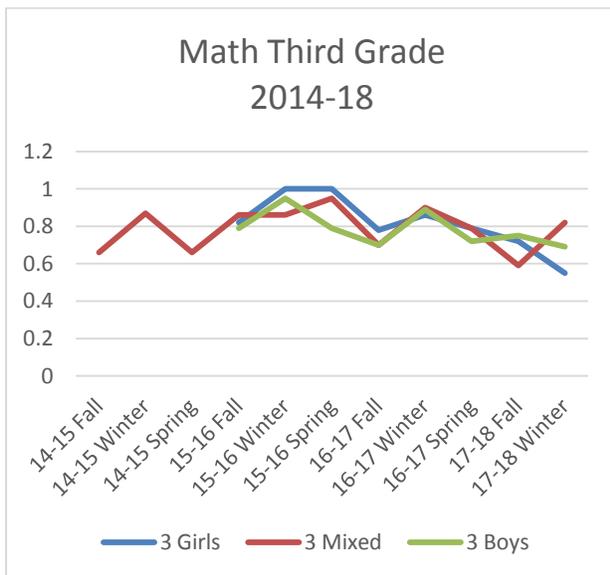
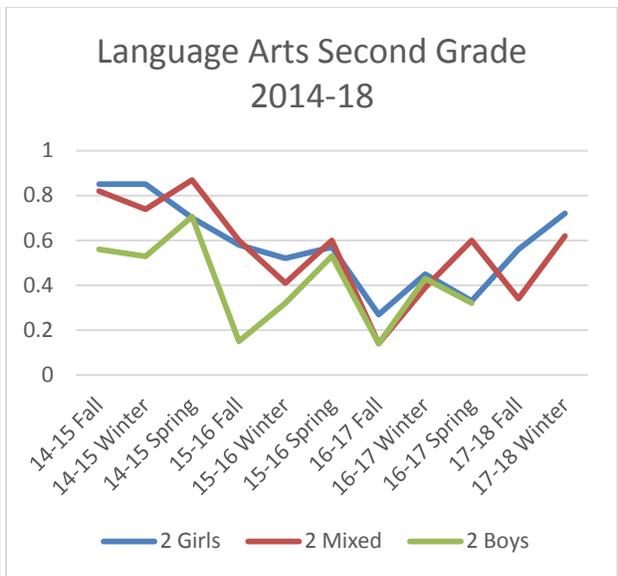
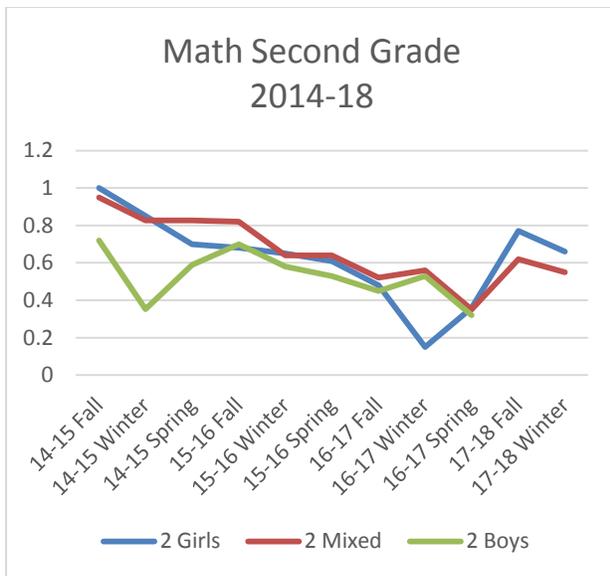
It is important to note that academic achievement at HES is a culmination of many strategies and supports given to students. While we are analyzing the results based on single gender classrooms vs. mixed gender classrooms, these results cannot be used to directly claim an effect of single gender vs mixed gender classrooms. Rather, these data help us understand if the single gender strategy—within the context of many factors at Hennepin Elementary School—is correlated to significant differences in student achievement.

Hennepin Elementary School uses benchmark assessment tools throughout the year to monitor student achievement. These assessments are given three times a year and results can be reviewed at the classroom level. We compared the results of the single gender classrooms to the mixed gender classrooms at each grade level.

Results

Since 2014, three grade levels, 1st, 2nd and 3rd, have most consistently maintained boys-only, girls-only and mixed gendered classrooms. If single gender classrooms were having a positive impact on student achievement, we would generally expect to see assessments of the single gender classrooms to be above the mixed gender classrooms. Below are the math and language arts results for these three grades.





Academic Results Summary

These charts represent the percent of students who are achieving proficiency on HES’s ongoing assessments. The data consistently show variability about single gender and multi-gender classrooms. Single gender classrooms rarely outperform the mixed gender classrooms. **There is also a lack of a clear correlation or pattern across grade-levels, subject and year suggesting the single gender strategy is having little to no impact on student achievement at HES.** However, the results also indicate the single gender classrooms are not significantly underperforming their comparison cohorts either.

Stakeholder Perceptions

Overview

Interviews and focus groups were conducted with each of the key stakeholder groups at HES to gain insight into their perceptions of single gender classrooms at the school. Specifically, these were comprised of:

- Top three members of the HES leadership team – individual interviews
- Teacher/Staff focus group – 8 attendees
- Student focus group – 8 attendees, all members of the HES student leadership council
- Parent focus groups – 3 groups; 40 attendees in total
 - Somali mothers' group – 20 attendees
 - Somali fathers' group – 12 attendees
 - Spanish and English speaking focus group – 8 attendees
- Board participation
 - Five individual interviews
 - One member participated in the parent's focus group

In addition to attaining key stakeholder input from the individual interviews and focus groups, we reviewed other major sources of key stakeholder information collected by HES to compare and contrast results; these sources are:

- Parent survey results for 2015 – 2017
- 2017 4th grade experiment – post experiment data
- Hamline University capstone thesis by a HES teacher. Phillips, Jade, "Factors To Consider Before Choosing A Single Gender Classroom In An Elementary School Setting" (2017). *School of Education Student Capstone Theses and Dissertations*. 4302.
- Behavior Referrals

Overall, the HES leadership team, teachers/staff and students were aligned in articulating their belief that mixed-gender classrooms best serve students at the school. It was acknowledged that academic results do not clearly favor mixed gender vs single gender classrooms or vice-versa. The point of view shared by all three of these groups is that being in a mixed rather than a single gender group provides greater opportunity to learn how to behave and get along with people of both genders, more time focused on teaching and learning, and an environment more conducive to creating a culture that in sync with the school's values. While these three groups were aligned in favoring mixed gender classrooms, both the parents and the board were split on which approach they believe is in the best interests of the school's students. Further detail on the perspectives of each of the five stakeholder groups follows.

Results

Below are the key themes identified by each of the stakeholder groups.

School Leadership, Teachers and Staff

The greatest benefit of single gender classrooms cited by this group was that “a lot of camaraderie has been built – the kids are really close, like a family.” On the other hand, following are the concerns expressed about the single gender strategy:

- Behavior
 - There is aggressive, physical contact (hitting) in the boys’ classrooms.
 - Boys get into disrespectful, defiant behavior, one upping each other and reinforcing negative behavior. There is a lot of “king of the mountain” conduct, where the boys will try to show off to their friends with how “bad” they can be.
 - It’s a scary role to be a “good kid” in the all boys’ classrooms.
 - Boys get more support because their negative behavior is more observable.
 - The all boys’ classrooms have more referrals for behavior than the all girls and mixed gender rooms.
 - Often the students in both the boys’ and girls’ single gender classrooms come from the same neighborhoods and bring neighborhood issues with them; they rarely have a chance to get away from the ethos of the environment where they live. In the mixed classrooms there is more diversity and greater opportunity to get to know students from other parts of the metro area and other backgrounds.
- Teaching/Learning Time
 - A greater amount of time is spent on teaching/learning in mixed gender classrooms rather than on dealing with behavior issues which are prevalent in the all boys’ classes.
 - When there is a substitute teacher in an all boys’ classroom, the day is a “disaster.”
- School Culture
 - Developing social-emotional skills and creating a strong school culture based on the cross-cultural good manners needed in a civil society are key areas of focus for HES. “The all boys classes take a toll on the culture and on the teachers.”
- Impact on Teachers
 - HES is fortunate to have a strong group of relatively experienced, committed teachers, who in large part are responsible for the solid results at the school. HES had an 85% teacher retention rate from 2016 – 2017 to 2017 – 2018, and many of the faculty have several years of experience teaching at HES as well as at other schools.
 - Due to the behavioral issues cited above, teachers have asked for a change to mixed classrooms throughout the school.
 - There is burnout amongst teachers who have been in the all boys classrooms, and retention may be an issue.
 - It is challenging to find teachers who voluntarily teach boy’s single gender classrooms, “it’s a rare breed of teacher who wants to teach all boys’ classrooms.”
- Administrative Challenge
 - It is challenging and time consuming to get students in the right classes based on parent requests for either a single gender or mixed gender classroom, as parents have to opt-in

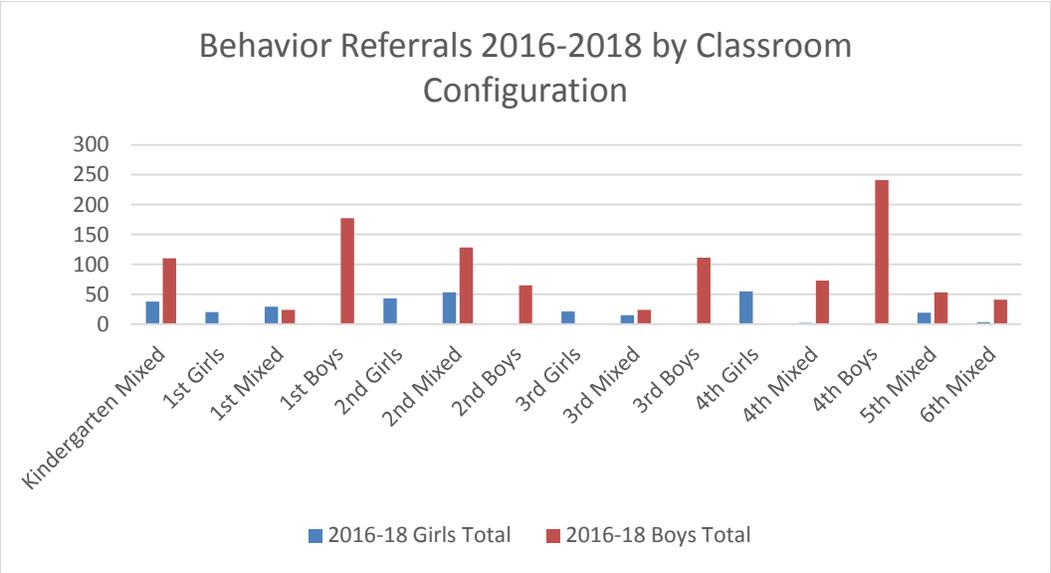
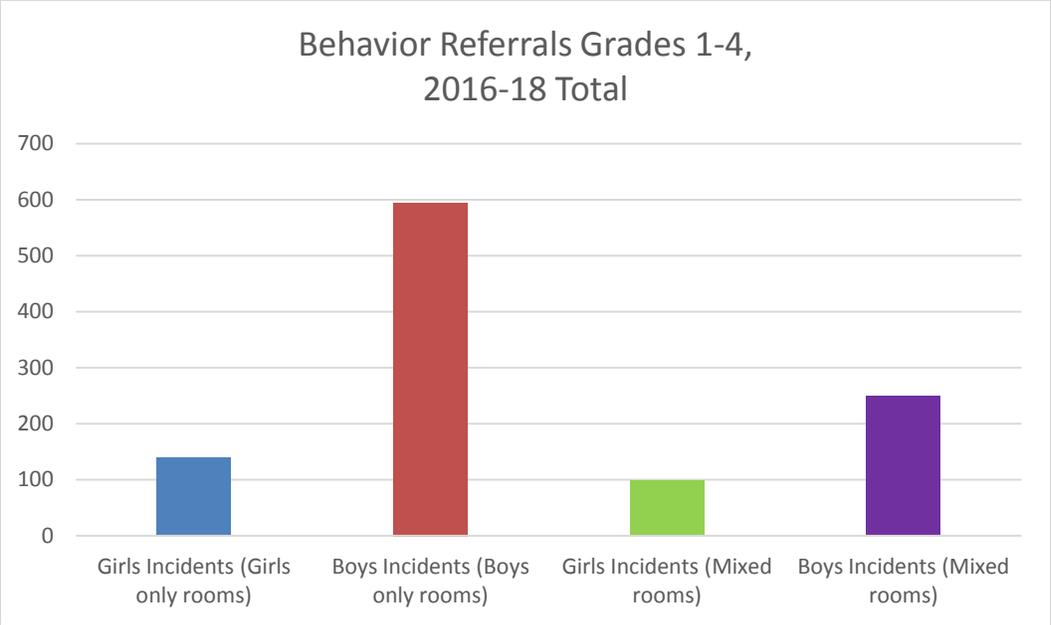
to the single gender classes and often change their minds, which negatively impacts class numbers.

While the behavior challenges of the all boys' classrooms are primarily aggressiveness, in all girls' classrooms the challenging behavior is described as "sneaky" and "catty." Interestingly, there were no references to girls doing better in single gender classrooms, rather, the comment was made that "the girls are still quiet in the mixed gender and the single gender classrooms."

In contrast, mixed gender classrooms were described as calmer and more balanced with students prepared to work with the other gender. While acknowledged that there are behavioral issues and referrals in the mixed gender classrooms, they are not nearly to the degree found in the boys' single gender classrooms.

In addition to their academic data, HES has monitored behavioral data as well. Specifically, the school records each behavioral incident when a classroom teacher writes a referral requesting further support from the school's administrative team. The behaviors that warrant such referrals include defiance, inappropriate language, aggression, fighting and bullying, among others. The school has tracked behavioral data at the classroom level which allows analysis of the single gender strategy. Boys only classrooms generate significantly more referrals than mixed gender classrooms. During the 2016-17 and 2017-18 (partial) school years, girls-only classrooms generated 1.4 the number of referrals compared to the mixed gender classrooms of the same grade. Boys only classrooms generated more than twice (2.3) the number of referrals than mixed gender classrooms.

The charts below show the number of referrals made for "major" behavior issues. As indicated in the charts, **the number of referrals for the boys in the single gender classrooms is significantly higher than referrals for girls in single gender classrooms, and most notable is the dramatic difference in the incidence of referrals for boys in the single gender classrooms compared to the number of referrals for boys in the mixed gender classrooms.**



Our individual interview and focus group results were absolutely corroborated by the 4th grade experiment and the work of Jade Phillips. The teachers involved in the 2017 4th grade experiment (where students from two single gender classrooms were combined to comprise two mixed gender classrooms for one week) concluded that there were substantially less behavior write-ups, they were able to provide greater attention to academic needs, and that behavior problems were more manageable in a mixed setting. All-in-all, the teachers felt that the mixed classrooms were “more balanced and healthier for all involved.” Similarly, in a survey she conducted with a small group of teachers at HES, Phillips found “teachers unanimously agree that mixed gender settings are far more favorable than single gender.”

Students

HES' student leadership council is comprised of nine fifth and sixth grade students. On the day we interviewed the group, there were three girls and five boys in attendance – all thoughtful, articulate and engaging. Among this group, six have been in both mixed and single gender classrooms. Seven stated that they preferred mixed gender classrooms, and one boy said he favored single gender classrooms. Following are some of the comments provided to support their choices:

- “Mixed gender gets you ready for life. If you want to have a partner it will help to have experience with the other gender.”
- “If we aren't careful we will go back to where one gender can't do things.”
- “In mixed gender rooms you get used to working with people of the other gender – like when you get older.”
- “There are fewer problems in a mixed gender room.”
- “I refused to be in a single gender classroom because I didn't want to get involved in all the drama in the girls' room.”
- “In single gender rooms the boys have a lot of things in common and you don't have to worry about boys and girls in the line ups.”

The results of the student focus group were strongly supported by the two other data points. First in the 4th grade experiment, 88% of the students polled said they preferred their mixed gender class. Their comments included that they “felt they learned more and were able to make new friends.” Phillips also found in a survey that she conducted with a limited number of HES students that they “overwhelmingly agree that a mixed gender setting is preferred over a single gender setting. “

Parents

To facilitate communication, three translators were in attendance at the parents' focus group evening: two Somali- and one Spanish-speaking. Upon arrival, the Somali men and Somali women naturally congregated in two distinct groups, so that is how the focus groups were conducted. Following are the numbers in each group:

- Somali Mother's group – 20 attendees
- Somali Father's group – 12 attendees
- Spanish and English speaking focus group – 8 attendees

When asked for their top reasons for selecting HES as a school for their child(ren) all three groups identified (1) focus on character development, (2) academics, and (3) strong behavior management processes. Additionally, all of the Somali fathers, half of the Spanish/English speaking group, and 40% of the Somali mothers identified single gender classrooms as a top reason for selecting HES. On the other hand, 60% of the Somali mothers and half of the Spanish/English speaking group asserted that they want their children in mixed gender classrooms. Following were the reasons provided for favoring either single or mixed gender classrooms:

Reasons for Favoring Single Gender Classrooms	Reasons for Favoring Mixed Gender Classrooms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsive to Somali culture of separating males and females in many aspects of daily life. • Important not to touch or shake hands with the other gender. • “We want to raise our boys to honor and protect women.” • Culturally girls are shyer, single gender classrooms allow them to be more comfortable and ask more questions. • No distractions for girls. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Son wants to be in mixed so he will be challenged and do well. • Boys don’t challenge each other. • Son needs to get used to relating to females (13)*. “I want my son to learn about all people.” • “When my daughter moved to a mix gender classroom, she became more involved.” • Want boys and girls to have the same opportunities. • Single gender classrooms may put doubt in boys and girls minds – see differences as a negative. • My children need to know how to behave in the future – when they go to other schools and out into the world. (14)* • “I do not like that a school is more inclined to one culture than others.”

*Number in parentheses indicates the number of parents who agreed with the statement.

Each year at the parent conferences in early March, HES conducts a survey with the school’s parents/guardians to get input on the overall level of satisfaction. For the last three years, approximately 144 parents completed the survey; this number takes into account that only one survey was generally completed per family, regardless of how many students were in the family. Two questions on the survey, as seen below, address the issue of single gender classrooms.

Question 1: The single gender classrooms are very important to me and my family.

Question 2: I would send my child(ren) to H.E.S. even if all classes were mixed gender classes.

Question	2015 Strongly Agree/Agree	2015 Disagree/Strongly Disagree	2016 Strongly Agree/Agree	2016 Disagree/Strongly Disagree	2017 Strongly Agree/Agree	2017 Disagree/Strongly Disagree
#1	66%	24%	72%	22%	74%	15%
#2	86%	10%	88%	11%	87%	9%

It is interesting to note that while 66 – 74% of parents agreed that “single gender classrooms are important to me and my family,” an average of 87% of parents indicated “I would send my child(ren) to H.E.S. even if all classes were mixed gender classes.” The latter seems to corroborate the findings from the focus groups that a significant percentage of parents rate other factors, e.g., character development, academics and strong behavior management as the top reasons that have chosen to send their children to HES. Further, significant numbers of those who highly rate single gender classrooms as being important would continue to send their child(ren) to HES regardless of whether the single gender classroom strategy is continued.

Board Members

Results from this group of seven members were also mixed, ranging from being strongly in favor of single gender classroom to being strongly against them, and those who do not have a clear viewpoint currently, but rather are waiting for the results of this study to make a decision based on the data. It is noteworthy that the latter viewpoint was predominant amongst this small group.

Stakeholder Summary

In summary, **the school leadership, faculty, staff and students favored mixed gender classrooms.** Their rationale was basically threefold. First, more time is spent on teaching and learning in mixed gender classrooms, rather than on dealing with behavior issues which are particularly time consuming in the all boys' classrooms. Second, is the belief that it is important for both males and females to learn how to interact effectively with the other gender and the best way to do this is by interrelating with them in the classroom. Third is the difficulty of building and sustaining a school culture that is based on respect and the good manners that are needed in a civil society, when these norms are continuously challenged in the boys' classrooms.

Clearly 50% of the parents who participated in a focus group favored single gender classrooms and the other 50% preferred all mixed gender classrooms. While strong opinions were expressed in the parent groups and it is apparent that single gender classrooms attracts students, one individual who has worked with families commented "once they are there (at HES) it is more about the curriculum and people and the teachers." This sentiment was reinforced by the school survey results for the last three years which indicates that an average of 87% of those taking the survey would return to HES regardless of the decision made. While the board was also mixed in their viewpoints about single gender classrooms, the predominant stance was to wait to see the results of this study prior to making a decision.

Report Conclusions and Next Steps

Based on the purpose of this report, there is little reason to recommend that Hennepin Elementary School continue to invest limited time and resources in support of the single gender classroom strategy.

The literature review determined the academic research finds marginal to no positive impact of single gender classrooms on student achievement. It also found the practice is not widely supported by practitioners in the United States. The review of academic results for HES students found no consistent advantage in student assessments for single gender classrooms vs mixed gender classrooms between 2014 and 2018. Finally, the stakeholder analysis found strong support among some parents, but also a desire by teachers, school leaders and students to move away from the single gender approach. Board members indicated a desire to learn from the evidence presented in this report and a desire to effectively prepare for any transition or changes in the school's strategy.

All of the key stakeholders were asked what will be necessary to make the decision successful, whether it be to continue with single gender classrooms, or to institute all mixed gender classrooms. There was unanimous agreement that communication is going to be crucial to future success. Specifically, each of

the key stakeholder groups need communication on what the data says, and based on the data, why the HES board made the decision to either continue with single gender classrooms, or move to all mixed gender classrooms.

If the decision is to continue the single gender classroom strategy, it was proposed that additional staff be provided for all boys' classrooms, and that the teachers be given additional training. If on the other hand, HES implements all mixed gender classrooms, several stakeholders suggested conducting some classes, specifically health and physical education, with single gender groups. The school may also choose to transition away from the single-gender strategy over time. This process would honor the requests of existing families as their children move through the single gender set up in grades 1-4 but not establish any new single-gender classrooms. Finally, the school may choose to support enrichment programs to meet gender-specific needs and interests. For example, book clubs may cater to the different interests of boys and girls, and after school programs may support topics to encourage participation, such as a girls' robotics team or a boys' service club. These gender specific programs may help to address the needs of those families who value the single gender approach while moving the school's academic program toward mixed gender classrooms.

Appendix I: Bibliography

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Appendix II: Interview Guide for Stakeholder Focus Groups/Interviews

Questions for School Leaders:

1. Tell us about your role and history with Hennepin Elementary School.
2. What are your personal perceptions of what is working and what isn't about single gender classrooms at HES?
3. What do you perceive are the perception of single gender classrooms among different groups such as:
 - a. Board
 - b. Teachers
 - c. Parents
 - d. Students
 - e. Administration
 - f. Funders
4. What do you notice is different between single gender classrooms and mixed gender classrooms at HES?
5. What are your greatest hopes and worst fears: greatest hopes if HES continues to support single gender classrooms and what are your fears if the school moves away from this strategy?
6. What role does the single gender classrooms play in marketing, differentiating and promoting the school?
7. We don't know what the outcome of this review will be. However, it's possible the school may choose to change the existing strategy regarding single gender classrooms or may affirm the existing strategy. We're curious what you think would be required to make either outcome most effective. If HES were to make a change to the current single gender classroom strategy, what do you think would need to happen to make that change successful?
Similarly, what would need to happen if the school stays the course with the existing strategy?
8. Are there political challenges that need to be addressed in contemplating a change?
9. What are you learning so far in the strategic planning process that may impact this strategy?
(Julie)

Questions for Parents:

1. Welcome. Please share your name.
If you have one student raise your hand:
If you have two students here raise your hand
If you have three or more students raise your hand
How many of you have children in single gender classrooms? (raise your hand)
2. When you talk to other families or parents about HES, what do you say? How do you describe the school and what makes it unique? A simple way to say that is: What do you like best about the school.
3. What are your personal perceptions of what is working and what isn't about single gender classrooms at HES?
4. What role does the single gender classrooms play in marketing, differentiating and promoting the school?

5. We don't know what the outcome of this review will be. However, it's possible the school may choose to change the existing strategy regarding single gender classrooms or may affirm the existing strategy. We're curious what you think would be required to make either outcome most effective. If HES were to make a change to the current single gender classroom strategy, what do you think would need to happen to make that change successful? Similarly, what would need to happen if the school stays the course with the existing strategy? How could that be made more effective?

Questions for Teachers

1. Introductions: Names, position and what your experience is with single gender classrooms at HES (10 min)
2. Individual time to answer these questions. Put your post-its on the easel pad. Four Easel pads: (10 min)
 - a. What's working
 - b. What's not working/challenge
 - c. Perception of students about the single classrooms
 - d. Perception of parents about the single gender classrooms
 - e. What do you notice is different between single gender classrooms and mixed gender classrooms.
3. Debrief as a whole on these questions identify key themes. (10 min)
4. Part two: In groups of three or four explore the possibility of change: (15 min)
 - a. What are your greatest hope if HES continues to support single gender classrooms
 - b. What are your fears I the school moves away from this strategy
 - c. What would need to happen to make a change away from single classrooms successful
5. Groups report out (10 min)
6. Close (5 min)

Questions for Students

1. What grade are you in now. How long have you been at HES?
2. What do you like best about your school? (Use some 8.5 x 11 paper, flip chart, names, markers, construction paper etc.)
3. Have you been in a single gender classroom? If so, what grade(s)
4. What did you like best about the single gender classroom?
5. Do you know why your parents picked that? Did you talk about it? What did your family think would be good about that room?
6. If you've been in both did you notice anything different about the mixed classrooms and the single gender classrooms?
7. If you've never been in one what do you see or what do you hear from your friends about the single gender rooms?
8. If you could choose, would you choose to be in a single gender classroom or a mixed gender room and why?