

SINGLE-SEX PUBLIC EDUCATION:
QUOTATIONS FROM CONFERENCE PANELISTS

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Benjamin Wright

Principal, Thurgood Elementary School (Seattle, Washington)

“When I arrived at Thurgood Marshall Elementary School about two and a half years ago, I went there with a mandate, and the mandate was ‘transform the school.’...I talked to two new teachers that had just arrived and said ‘Listen. Here’s what we need to do. I think we ought to split the boys and girls up just to see how it works in one class. Let’s take it to a staff meeting!’ So we took it to a staff meeting and everyone said, ‘Are you crazy! Thurgood Marshall would roll over in his grave. He fought for all this kind of equality stuff so why would you do something like that.’ I said ‘Well, we ought to think about it...let’s look at our referrals: they’re all about boys and girls, and they’re all about aggressive behavior verses non-aggressive behavior.’ We decided to split them up. So we tried this experiment and from day one, I never had one referral out of that class and these are all the kids that had been referred to me since I had arrived at the school. From day one, I never had another social referral.”

“Since I was there to transform the school, I had to write a transformation plan and in the transformation plan I wrote, ‘If this pilot program works, I will do it throughout the school. The plan worked. We outscored the entire state in writing and the entire district. We knew this was working. Plus, no one was coming into the office.”

“Once we changed it from just those two single-sex classes to the whole school, the environment in the school changed overnight.”

“Everyone was in the school wanting to know what we’re violating. So, we had to explain to them we’re not violating anything.”

“Here’s what we found when we did that [went single-sex school wide]. Kids really became kids. The girls participated in physical education like they had never participated before. When we split those classes, participation shot up. The name-calling, the social behavior completely changed. The focus on academics went way, way up...The parents in this school have finally got some piece of mind about their kids’ academic wherewithal. They know that they’re learning.”

“So what I’m telling you about single-sex education today, I guess is – I am not the researcher, I am not the legal beaver, but I’m telling you I’m the practitioner and I’ll tell you it works! It not only works in my opinion, it is the only way to fly in America right now when we have so many kids that are not making it.”

Marjorie Rush

Board Member, Brighter Choice Charter School for Girls & Brighter Choice Charter School for Boys (Albany, New York); former Director of Office of Civil Rights and Intercultural Relations for the New York State Education Department

“The coming of Brighter Choice Charter School for Girls and Boys is something that has been tremendously exciting in our part of the country.”

“The response to the lottery for Brighter Choice for only two grades levels in a school that has absolutely no track record was overwhelming. We only have ninety spots, but approximately 250 families responded to have their students in this school. So, the population in Albany has voted with it’s feet and said ‘Yes, we like the idea of this dual single-sex institution and we really want to send our children there.’”

Susan Rollins

Parent of kindergarten girl attending the Brighter Choice Charter School for Girls (Albany, New York)

“I’ve been dealing with the public school system in Albany, New York for about ten years -- I’ve never had a choice before. I am a single parent. I’ve not been privileged enough to send all of my children to private schools or to single-sex private schools.”

“Without Brighter Choice, I wouldn’t have any other choice... We prayed very hard for Kendra to get accepted and our prayers were answered.”

Maureen Grogan

Executive Director, Young Women’s Leadership Foundation (Harlem, New York)

“The vision for the school was to provide girls with the opportunity for a first-rate academic college prep program focusing on math, science, and tech -- and we have been successful in doing that. Last year we graduated our first senior class of 32 students. All of those girls were accepted to four year colleges and all of them went except for one student who joined the Air Force. We have thirty four students graduating this June and all of them have been accepted to college.”

“The importance about all of these [single-sex] schools is that they are an educational option for students and they are a choice that parents and students should have within the public school system.”

“After only five years in the school, we’ve had tremendous results with our Regents exams: 100 percent of the kids in English and history passing the Regents exams.”

“This year, we’ve had over 1,200 applications for fewer than five spots in our ninth grade class, so I think that’s a statistic that demonstrates that this is something that students and parents want.”

Tynisha Smalls

Student at Harlem Young Women’s Leadership School (Harlem, New York)

“The experiences I’ve had there [at the Young Women’s Leadership School] I can honestly say, I wouldn’t have been able to have at another public school...It’s all made us better people and I think we’ve all grown in the school.”

Rosemary C. Salomone

Professor of Law at St. John’s University School of Law; former Associate Professor at Harvard Graduate School of Education; and, author of Same, Different, Equal: Rethinking Single-Sex Schooling (Yale University Press, forthcoming)

“If we consider the large and scattered body of research from across the globe and combine it with a wealth of anecdotal evidence that seems to be coming from the small numbers of single-sex schools in this country and the larger number of single-sex classrooms in the country, and if we look at all these findings collectively, we do find recurrent and promising themes that inform programs design and research efforts.”

“It became clear to me that as I thought about the legal question [of the VMI case] that the answer to the law was really weighted down with a lot of baggage that needed to be unwrapped. So, as I started doing that, I realized that what seemed to be this old and anachronistic idea really was digging for a modern-day look in view of what we’ve learned over the past two and three decades about child development and education in general, and particularly about gender equity.”

“Now, the Supreme Court’s decision in the VMI case, despite what others might think or say, really does leave considerable room in the joints for well-designed programs with clearly stated and non-biased objections...The court in fact expressly recognized, expressly stated, that single-sex programs whose mission it is to break down traditional gender biases are permissible. I have little doubt, if you look at the new generation of single-sex programs that are cropping up, the program in New York City, the program in Chicago, the program that’s scheduled to open in Albany, I have little doubt that this new generation of programs that are aimed at empowering students and lifting them out of certain social restraints, can pass constitutional muster under the standard.”

“On the question of sex, the law recognizes no differences whatsoever. Whereas the court is clear in certain contexts, the court says we should celebrate sex differences, that they are cause for celebration.”

“The legality of single-sex programs also turns on Title IX. But with the new federal legislation, the No Child Left Behind Act that was signed into law earlier this year with enthusiastic and bipartisan support from Congress, Congress has now placed a green light, placed an imprimatur, on publicly-supported single-sex programs. The Department of Education is now about to issue guidelines within the coming week that will undoubtedly lead to very long, much needed overdue changes and clarification in the Title IX guidelines. That’s really where the problem has been for single-sex programs.”

Cornelius Riordan

Professor of Sociology at Providence College; author of Equality and Achievement (a textbook on the sociology of education) and the seminal Girls and Boys in School: Together or Separate? (based on his studies of the effects of single-sex and coeducational education at all levels of schooling)

“Coeducation was never put into effect because of any sound education research. It was put in place because of financial constraints...[It] has never been subjected to systematic research.”

“I believe the research is exceedingly persuasive in demonstrating that single-sex schools are effective in terms of providing both greater equality and greater achievement, especially for low and working class students, most particularly for African and Hispanic-American students for both boys and for girls.”

“Single-sex schools work to improve student achievement, they work for girls and boys, women and men, whites and non-whites. But this is limited to students of low social economic status and students who are disadvantaged historically.”

“Disadvantaged students in single-sex schools, compared to their counterparts in coeducational schools, have been shown to have higher achievement outcomes on standardized tests in mathematics, reading, science, and civics. They show higher levels of leadership behavior in the school. They do more home work, they take a stronger course load. They have higher educational expectations. They also manifest higher levels of environmental control, more favorable attitude towards school, less sex-role stereotyping...It’s important to know that the effects of single-sex schools are fairly robust.”