

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: TRACKING DELIBERATE SEX SEGREGATION IN U.S. K-12 PUBLIC SCHOOLS, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

By

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www.feminist.org/education/sexsegregation.asp

Based on our Feminist Majority Foundation [\(FMF\) 2014 research](#) on identifying public schools with sex segregation and this 2018 update, we estimate there are over 1000 K-12 U.S. public schools with deliberate sex-segregated education. For this 2018 report, we used the 2013-14 [Civil Rights Data Collection](#) (CRDC) responses to identify by name 794 K-12 coed public schools that indicated establishing all-girl or all-boy academic classes in areas such as math, science, and English. We also identified 133 single-sex all-girl or all-boy K-12 public schools with some help from the CRDC enrollment information which provided percentages of girls and boys in each school.

As we started to verify the lists of these schools in this report, we learned about some additional coed schools with single-sex classes and some new single-sex public schools. We also learned that some of these schools have stopped their deliberate sex segregation. To see how the 927 named schools initially identified in this report are distributed by state, see our U.S. map of coed public schools with single-sex academic classes and the map of single-sex public schools and four lists of named public schools with sex segregation.

It is important to learn which K-12 public schools use deliberate sex segregation so they can be examined to learn if any of their single-sex instruction is legally, educationally, or economically justifiable.

Our initial list of 927 public K-12 schools with sex segregation has already changed with new verification and update information from state and school district Title IX Coordinators and related civil rights experts. For example, thanks to help by Title IX offices in South Carolina and Washington State, we have learned that 44 of the 2014 listed coed schools in South Carolina and 14 schools in Washington State do not have single-sex classes in the 2017-18 school year. We hope many of the remaining 736 coed schools that reported single-sex academic classes in 2013-14 have now received the message that these classes are not justifiable on legal, educational, or economic grounds and that they have also stopped this practice. This change is especially encouraging in South Carolina (SC) which had been an early leader in advocating all-girl and all-boy classes. In [FMF's 2012 report](#), South Carolina had 216 coed schools with single-sex classes as of 2010. In 2017-18 they only confirmed that 10 schools are continuing this deliberate sex segregation.

We also hope that educators and stakeholders are learning that single-sex public schools are not an effective way to spend scarce resources especially as they try to help students of color. Finally, if it hasn't happened yet, we hope that Title IX Coordinators and others will do more to identify and stop deliberate sex-segregated public education because it leads to increased sex discrimination as well as sex and race stereotyping. There is no evidence that it is any more effective than gender equitable coeducation.

Ten key findings and [recommendations](#)¹:

- 1. This report contains the only national public listings of named U.S. K-12 public schools with deliberate sex segregation, but this information needs to be updated so that it will be increasingly useful to identify and stop unjustified public school sex segregation.**

Although the 2014 single-sex guidance from the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in the U.S. Department of Education (ED) says that schools and school district websites should include information on single-sex

¹ [Recommendations](#) following a discussion of the 10 findings are [in purple](#).

academic classes, this information is rarely available and we could not find any comprehensive national, state, or district lists of schools with deliberate sex segregation. So far, we found that only South Carolina had a practice of listing public schools with a single gender focus on their state education agency website. Their recent lists were helpful but not totally congruent with CRDC results. Previous national web listings by the National Association for Single Sex Public Education (NASSPE) ended when the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and others found these schools out of compliance with Title IX and other laws prohibiting sex discrimination in education. We have also failed to find other web lists of public schools with deliberate single-sex education although an internal list of special focus charter schools from the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools helped us identify two additional dual academies. Dual academies are coed schools that send their girls and boys to separate academic classes. This public charter schools list also helped us identify a boys-only charter high school. The only small public web lists we found are from groups of allied single-sex schools such as the Young Women’s Leadership Academies or the Eagle or Urban Prep Academies for boys. Some states and most school districts list their schools, but these web lists rarely identify schools with single-sex classes or even public K-12 schools that only serve girls or boys.

Most of the schools identified in this report were based on responses to the 2013-14 CRDC. Based on subsequent data from ACLU and South Carolina, we found under-reporting on the CRDC. Some schools that used deliberate sex segregation in 2013-14 were not included in the CRDC responses so we continued to estimate that instead of 927, the total number of schools with sex segregation in those years was over 1000. We hope Title IX Coordinators will provide leadership in helping to update our lists of schools with sex segregation.

R-1 We recommend that our FMF lists be updated and used to end unjustifiable sex segregation in public schools and that lists of schools with sex segregation be easily accessible on national, state, and school district websites.

- In doing so we are asking states and large school district Title IX Coordinators and other equity experts who have responsibility to stop illegal sex segregation to help FMF verify and update our current lists of both public K-12 coed schools with single-sex academic classes (List 1) and of single-sex public schools (Lists 3&4). (See our FMF cover letter in Appendix B.)
- Stakeholders, such as parents, equity advocates, Title IX Coordinators, OCR, and other governmental officials should help update and use our FMF lists to understand the status of sex-segregated public education at the local, state, and national levels. Parents especially need timely, detailed, information on the nature of single-sex education in their local public schools. This FMF report will help concerned stakeholders start their efforts to learn about the nature of, and justifications for, existing sex segregation in public K-12 schools.
- Updated national, state, and local listings of public schools with deliberate sex segregation should be posted on appropriate websites. Other general lists of public schools in named locations should be easily searchable so that a stakeholder can identify coed schools with single-sex academic classes or single-sex public schools. Schools’ web pages as well as school rating web pages by Great Schools and others should include enrollment by sex, race, and other equity characteristics as well as information on deliberate sex segregation in the school.

2. There is increased knowledge about the legal, educational, and economic reasons to stop deliberate sex-segregated K-12 public education.

Legal objections point out that exclusionary sex discrimination generally violates Title IX, the U.S. Constitution, and some state Constitutions or statutes, as well as specific laws that protect against race and sex segregation and discrimination related to sexual orientation and gender identity. The helpful 2014 OCR guidance, [Questions and Answers on Title IX and Single-Sex Elementary and Secondary Classes and Extracurricular Activities](#), describes how schools with single-sex programs and activities should comply with a variety of equity standards to prohibit sex discrimination under Title IX, the U.S. Constitution, and other federal civil rights laws.

It is reinforced by the [2015 OCR guidance on the roles of Title IX Coordinators](#) and the OCR [Title IX Resource Guide](#).

Educational objections are very congruent with the legal objections. There is no high quality credible evidence that sex-segregated education improves the educational achievement of girls or boys. Instead, there is growing evidence that deliberate sex segregation is detrimental to students' achievement and self-esteem. And it often increases sex-stereotypes that limit learning and proper acknowledgement of abilities and achievement as shown in the recent "Hidden Figures" movie. Similarly, there is no evidence that sex segregation of students of color is better than comparable coeducation. In fact, there is no evidence that girls and boys (as a group) learn differently, need to be taught differently, or need to be educated in separate classes because of sex related brain differences or learning styles. Similarly, there is no evidence that separating girls and boys decreases distractions and harassment from the other sex. In fact, sex segregation may increase some undesired behavior including fighting and homophobia. Finally, students in sex-segregated classes do not have better educational outcomes than comparable students in equitably resourced co-educational classes. See the [Pseudoscience of Single-Sex Schooling](#) article.

Economic concerns should also be addressed when considering any sex separation that has overcome the legal and educational objections. Sex separated education is more expensive in money and staff time than similar gender equitable coeducation. Deliberate sex separation requires additional administrative procedures to oversee equitable treatment; duplicate services, facilities and staff; specialized teacher training; increased evaluation requirements and often legal services to help with the approval or defense of the discriminatory exclusion of students based solely on their sex or gender identity.

R-2 We recommend that high quality research and evaluation be continued to increase this knowledge and that it be shared by reliable sources to inform more policy makers, educators, and other stakeholders about these findings. These findings should be delivered so they convincingly counteract low-quality evidence that supports unwise sex segregation in public education.

- In addressing **legal concerns**, policy-makers and stakeholders need to understand that unlike many other types of sex discrimination, sex-segregated public education is deliberate and under the control of educators. Thus, educators should ensure that any education programs or activities that exclude participation based on sex (including sexual orientation and gender identity) must provide an evidence-based justification that this segregation will improve the students' educational outcomes better than gender equitable coed alternatives. Additionally, during the delivery of the sex separated education, there must be: full equality for girls and boys, no sex or race stereotyping, and all participation by both students and staff must be completely voluntary.
- To prove claims of **educational effectiveness** of any type of sex-segregated public education, it is critically important to use high quality credible evaluations that also provide information to show that the process of using segregation does not increase sex discrimination or stereotyping. Appendix F details some comprehensive evaluation criteria that should be used to determine if the sex segregation is both educationally and legally effective compared to gender equitable coeducation receiving comparable quality resources.
- When considering public funds it is especially important to learn more about **economic comparisons**. In many cases the single-sex school or class needs and receives additional resources from public and private funds because of its "unique" focus or population. While affirmative action in public education is sometimes justified, students with similar needs should not be excluded because of their sex or race.

3. **As in previous FMF research on public school sex segregation, there is little easily accessible information on the nature of, or justifications for, sex segregation on school or school district websites or on the role of the Title IX Coordinator or others in assuring compliance with Title IX or other equity policies that prohibit sex discrimination in public education.**

Schools with deliberate sex segregation rarely used their websites to inform parents and students that single-sex classes were available or any justification for them. At the most, we found a few websites, usually of dual academies that said the school had a gender focus. Similarly, few single-sex public school websites bothered to justify their focus on girls or boys and rarely provided any information on single-sex admissions policies or policies related to sexual identity. Occasionally the websites of the single-sex school would indicate that their justifications were based on sex-based brain differences and learning styles (which experts agree is pseudoscience). Relatedly, most of their mission statements were based on sex stereotyped assumptions of student needs and on general goals which would be beneficial to both girls and boys.

This lack of web information on the nature of, and justifications for, public school sex segregation should be reversed as schools and school districts attend to the 2014 guidance on single-sex education.

R-3 We recommend that all public schools with deliberate sex segregation should post detailed information about this option and its full justification and evaluations on their websites as recommended in the 2014 single-sex OCR guidance and below. Title IX Coordinators and others should ensure that all unjustifiable sex segregation is reported on school and school district websites and ended.

- School websites should explain in detail and provide evidence of how they comply with the 2014 Single-sex guidance from OCR. This information should include evaluation plans and reports. In doing so, responsible authorities should make information on public schools that practice sex segregation transparent and available to all stakeholders in multiple ways, including mandatory reporting on school and school district websites. This public information should describe the nature and extent of the single-sex education in the school and the evidence-based justification for why each use is likely to improve student outcomes better than similarly well-resourced coeducation. These justifications should also describe how potential inequities in the distribution of education resources or in reinforcing sex and race stereotypes are avoided. Reliable information and all detailed evaluations and local review decisions on approval or disapproval, should include the full justifications and specific evidence of effectiveness as required by the ED “What Works Clearinghouse”.
- Title IX Coordinators and others should follow up to ensure that all the schools with sex segregation justify it according to 2014 single-sex guidance from OCR or end it. If it has been justified, the specific sex segregation should be described and posted on the school and school district websites along with evaluations and review decisions signed by organizational leaders with responsibility for civil rights compliance.
- Information on reviews and approvals (or disapprovals) of the single-sex focus by appropriate “authorizers” such as charter authorizer boards, school boards, district leadership and Title IX Coordinators also should be posted on the school’s website along with procedures for subsequent review and approvals.
- If a coed school provides single-sex academic classes they should be completely voluntary and students and parents should be fully informed of their options and evidence-based justifications before they decide if they will comply with informed consent procedures.
- If a school has a single-gender focus for a class or the entire school, the school website should indicate if there is, or is not, a sex exclusionary admissions policy. For example, we understand that Girls High in Philadelphia would allow boys and that many schools developed to serve pregnant and

parenting students encourage attendance by fathers and other students who would benefit from their services. However, few boys may know this is an option.

4. **This “Tracking Deliberate Sex Segregation in K-12 U.S. Public Schools” report shows continuous national increases in the numbers of public schools with deliberate sex segregation since FMF’s first report on sex segregation in public education in 2012.**

As shown in Table 1, in our first [FMF 2012 report](#) on public schools with sex segregation we found 645 schools based mainly on responses to the 2007-10 Civil Rights Data Collection surveys. In this 2018 report we found 927 schools and after verification help from a couple of states are happy to report that the current total is down to 869. In recent years, there have only been a few states, such as in North and South Carolina where there has been a large decrease in numbers of coed K-12 public schools with sex-segregated classes. For example, in South Carolina 216 coed schools with single-sex classes were reported in 2007-10, 84 in 2011-12, 54 in 2013-14 and only 10 in 2017-18.

R-4 We recommend that with the help of the 2014 OCR guidance on single-sex education and the 2015 OCR guidance on Title IX Coordinators that Title IX Coordinators, educators, equity experts and other stakeholders work to decrease the number of public preK-12 schools with deliberate unlawful sex segregation. In doing so, it is important to continue to publicly track, list, and monitor public schools with deliberate sex segregation.

- Title IX Coordinators and other responsible authorities such as state education agencies, school boards, leaders of school districts, authorizing agencies, and schools should play a major role in identifying schools with sex segregation and in ending it if it is unjustified and increases sex discrimination and stereotyping. In the process of identifying and verifying schools with sex segregation, Title IX Coordinators and others should ask for and publish justifications and evaluations on appropriate web sites that show evidence of compliance or noncompliance with the 2014 OCR single-sex guidance.
- As in other areas of civil rights, it may be increasingly necessary for states and school districts to formally adopt and codify helpful federal guidance such as the 2014 OCR single-sex guidance and the 2015 OCR Title IX Coordinator guidance into their own laws and policies in case the current federal administration withdraws or weakens previous guidance.
- States and school districts as well as authorizing organizations such as those for charter schools should use review and accountability procedures to identify and stop any plans for unjustified single-sex education before it starts. If allowed to continue, the sex segregation should be closely monitored for continued evidence of compliance with all justifications. For example, the California Department of Education reviewed the Los Angeles Young Oaks Kim Academy which had been sex segregating its academic classes for many years using a dual academy approach with no adequate justification that the single-sex classes were needed to benefit either girls or boys. Based on this state level review and disapproval which was initiated by complaints from ACLU, this school returned to coed classes in 2017-18. (See Appendix G).

5. **This 2018 report and previous FMF reports on deliberate sex segregation In U.S. public K-12 schools rely heavily on the 2013-14 universal mandated CRDC responses to single-sex questions and to related CRDC responses. While the CRDC questions about these single- sex classes have been clarified over the years, more guidance and encouragement of survey responders to answer correctly would improve the accuracy and validity of the results.**

R-5 We recommend continuing use of the CRDC with some improvements to help with the identification of both public coed schools with single-sex academic classes and single-sex schools as well as related and more in-depth research on this questionable practice.

- Future CRDC's should include more detailed questions on the types of academic and other deliberate single-sex classes such as physical education (See discussion of Methodology and Appendix A.) It would also be helpful to have questions about sex segregated school related extra-curricular activities. These additional questions would be a way to remind authorizers, reviewers, and schools, themselves, that all types of unjustifiable deliberate sex segregation should be avoided in public education.
- It would be helpful to have additional research such as identification and analyses of justifications and evaluations of public schools with single-sex education.

6. FMF continues to find more single-sex K-12 public schools were for girls (75) than boys (58), (See Lists 3 and 4 and single-sex schools map) but more of the listed single-sex academic classes in coed K-12 public schools were for boys (52%) than girls (48%) (See List 2).

A possible explanation for our research finding of more single-sex schools for girls than boys is that we included some all-girls schools for pregnant and parenting students but our study explicitly eliminated juvenile justice schools which are more numerous for boys than girls. The higher number of single-sex academic classes for boys than girls may be that more boys need extra help in courses such as algebra and "other math", even though boys still score higher in mathematics on tests such as the SAT.

R-6 We recommend that proponents of single-sex public schools stop trying to justify them on the basis that they will be an affirmative action strategy for either girls or boys. We have found no evidence that any single-sex public school or academic class can be adequately justified on legal, educational, or economic grounds. Thus, we urge that they be ended. We do not recommend parity in providing equal numbers of schools or classes to girls and boys. Instead, we recommend parity in services and opportunities to both girls and boys especially related to addressing the needs of low-income youth of color in deliberate gender equitable coed schools and classes. Gender equitable coeducational schools and classes also eliminate opportunities to discriminate in relation to sexual identity.

7. FMF continues to find most single-sex public schools serve African American and Latinx students especially in urban areas. This is similar to our findings for a high proportion of coed public schools with single-sex academic classes. We do not know the racial characteristics of students attending the single-sex academic classes but it is probably similar to the school composition.

Research on low-income youth of color by Goodkind and her colleagues (2013) indicates that some vulnerable students of color and their families do not want coed schools to become single-sex or to offer single-sex classes because they see these as punitive options since sex segregation is often used in the justice system. Many others note that when schools are sex segregated, equal opportunities are decreased while sex and race stereotypes are increased. Evidence of this is described in the ACLU 2016 report on [Leaving Girls Behind: An Analysis of Washington, D.C.'s "Empowering Males of Color" Initiative](#).

R-7 We recommend that additional educational resources be provided to underserved students of color, but that they be provided to girls and boys equally and together in ways that decrease sex stereotyping and foster gender equity both in and through education. Follow-ups to President Obama's My Brother's Keeper initiative should ensure that the programs stop segregating and discriminating against girls. Efforts to establish or implement state laws such as in California and New Jersey which allow single-sex public charter schools to serve disadvantaged students should be stopped or closely monitored for compliance required justifications.²

² See Appendix G for information on CA AB-23 and see 7-6-17 article by Adam Clark on NJ allowing single-sex charter schools.

8. There are some promising trends and indicators of decreases in sex-segregated education including unexpected changes in named public schools from recent FMF work.

The following trends support the feasibility of decreasing deliberate publicly supported sex-segregated education.

In the past decade there have been steady decreases in sex-segregated private education and in voluntary social clubs associated with education institutions that exclude participants based on their sex, sexual orientation or gender identity. Even private single-sex colleges are facilitating more coeducation especially since Title IX prohibits sex discrimination in admissions to graduate schools. Thus, it is common for students in single-sex private undergraduate colleges to take coed graduate level classes on their own campus. It is also common for these students to take classes in other nearby coed colleges and for students in “brother” and “sister” private single-sex high schools and colleges to take many classes together. Some colleges are also discouraging single-sex fraternities, sororities and social clubs.

In tracking K-12 public schools with sex segregation over the past decade, we were surprised to find substantial turnover or lack of continuity in the names of many schools on our lists despite the continued increase in total numbers of these schools. Although a few of these different schools were simply changes in school locations and related new names, such as the boys Urban Preparatory Academy-West Campus, most changes were due to the school ending their single-sex education or closing -- which was especially common for charter schools when they were not reauthorized. Some other changes were due to additional schools starting single-sex instruction. Of the 794 coed schools with single-sex classes identified in the 2013-14 CRDC, only 124 were the same schools listed in the FMF report on the 2011-12 CRDC. This lack of continuity may indicate, lack of success, changes in school leaders supportive of single-sex education, or the realization that the sex segregation could not be adequately justified on legal, educational, or economic grounds. For example, changes in leadership of the South Carolina Education Department have led to a de-emphasis on single gender education as a viable school choice in S.C. and a decrease from 216 coed schools with single-sex classes in 2007-10 to ten in 2017-18.

R-8 We recommend that knowledge of these trends in decreased private and public sex-segregated education be shared more broadly to help influence supporters of sex-segregated public education to reconsider and to increase the influence of individuals supporting gender equitable public coeducation. We also recommend more research on why schools decrease the rigidity of, or stop, their deliberate sex segregation and on why and how schools have been allowed to start sex segregation.

9. We are gaining insights on some reasons and strategies to explain why some public schools end their sex segregation. More adequate implementation of Title IX especially related to the OCR 2014 Single-sex Guidance and 2015 Title IX Coordinator Guidance is a key to ending unjustifiable sex segregation.

We are starting to see some potential impact from the Dec. 2014 OCR single-sex guidance and from the 2015 Title IX Coordinator guidance, but most of the listed coed schools with single-sex classes are from responses to the earlier 2013-14 mandatory CRDC responses. In List 1 on coed schools with single-sex academic classes, we have started to receive information that some of the schools in our current counts have agreed to stop their single-sex classes. These schools are highlighted in yellow and are mostly from post 2014 information from South Carolina and from ACLU information requests and complaints against deliberate sex separation. In future lists we hope to indicate many more yellow highlighted schools that stopped their single-sex classes when we receive updated verification results from state and large city Title IX Coordinators and other experts and when the next 2015-16 CRDC data is released. (See the update/verification letter in Appendix B.)

Many of the schools that stopped their deliberate sex segregation did so because ACLU made it clear by letters, Title IX complaints, or lawsuits, that the single-sex classes were illegal. (See *Preliminary Findings of ACLU “Teach Kids, Not Stereotypes” Campaign* (2012). This was especially easy in the coed schools (or dual academies) that separated the girls and boys for most of their classes as in Middleton Heights Elementary

School in Idaho or the Young Oak Kim Academy in Los Angeles. The [OCR 2014 single-sex guidance](#) makes it clear that each single-sex academic class must be justified, and this is exceedingly difficult to do.

Publicizing these ACLU victories which often include stopping sex segregation in whole school districts, has helped discourage other schools from deliberate sex segregation. ACLU and others have also publicized the inappropriateness of instructing students using deliberate sex stereotypes such as gentle, quiet, and warm classes for girls and active, competitive and cool classes for boys.

Proactive, well informed Title IX Coordinators and others responsible for complying with federal and state laws against sex discrimination are helping schools learn about their responsibilities and legal liabilities in starting or continuing unjustifiable deliberate sex-segregated public education.

R-9 We recommend increased use of effective national, state, and local education and enforcement strategies to implement this Title IX prohibition of any sex segregated publicly supported education that increases sex discrimination.

- We encourage increased education about, and use of, the 2014 OCR single-sex and the 2015 OCR Title IX Coordinator guidance. This guidance should also be incorporated into state and local laws and policies with additional details that will facilitate implementation. It should be augmented by increased awareness of legal, educational and economic reasons to stop sex-segregated public education. State leadership in increasing the numbers of schools with single-sex classes was demonstrated in South Carolina starting in 2007 but it's ending of this focus is reflected in many schools stopping this practice now.
- Specifically, Title IX Coordinators should be appointed and empowered to provide leadership on ending illegal sex segregation in each state, district, and K-12 school. Title IX Coordinators responsible for each school that is identified as possibly continuing its deliberate sex segregation in the 2017-18 school year or beyond should be contacted by their state or district Title IX Coordinator and asked to collect information to learn if that sex separation is justifiable. If not, Title IX Coordinators should work with other authorities as needed to end the sex segregation. They should also be encouraged to work with gender equity experts to help their schools implement gender equitable coeducation in academic and non-academic areas including school clubs instead of sex segregation.
- Many states and school districts have consolidated or equity specific review policies. These policies should be explicit enough to improve accountability and ensure that no unjustifiable sex segregation will be allowed in the public schools. Even if previously allowed, sex segregation should not be continued unless there are high quality evaluations that show that it is more effective than comparable gender equitable co-education. (Ideas on review procedures and criteria are included in Appendix G.)
- States and Districts that authorize public schools including public charter schools should have specific policies and review procedures that stop unjustified sex segregation in public schools or other entities that receive federal financial assistance for education programs or activities. Additionally, the National Association of Charter School Authorizers which has a general non- discrimination standard should have explicit standards forbidding unjustifiable sex segregation in schools covered by Title IX.

10. FMF research has shown that to end unjustified sex segregation in our public schools we need: increased public understanding of the problems and prohibitions; the identification, review, and monitoring of public schools with deliberate sex segregation by internal governing organizations and their Title IX Coordinators.

There are some initial effective strategies such as the ACLU "Teach Kids, Not Stereotypes" Campaign and state equity review and waiver systems that provide potential models for ending specific unjustifiable sex segregation in public schools. The first FMF sex segregation report on the "State of Public School Sex Segregation in the U.S." (2012) found that Iowa had a good equity review process that identified and questioned schools with sex segregation. However, FMF learned that both equity policies and leadership are essential.

Map of All-Boy and All-Girl Public Schools 2017

