



Foundation for the Education of Young Women

Editorial: Single-sex school experiment pays off

Dallas Morning News

01:01 PM CDT on Friday, May 22, 2009

Five years after the Dallas ISD embarked on a controversial experiment in single-sex education, the all-girl Irma Lerma Rangel Leadership School is about to graduate its first senior class. Judge for yourself whether the experiment has paid off:

- Last year's TAKS score averages for this class ranged from a low of 94.1 percent, in science, to 100 percent, in writing.
- One hundred percent of the senior class, 21 girls, will receive diplomas.
- All 21 graduates are college-bound.
- The total value of scholarships they've received will exceed \$1 million.

Such results have failed to halt a national debate over the merits of educating boys and girls in separate schools, but they nonetheless suggest this South Dallas magnet school has a success formula worth emulating.

The diverse student body of 400-plus girls is drawn from all over the city, including more than 60 percent from low-income households. Each student had to meet rigid academic standards to be accepted at Rangel. In any setting, these girls probably would excel. But the absence of distractions posed by boys is definitely a factor in Rangel's success, administrators and students say.

"As smart as these young ladies are, they could've attended a mixed school and been just as successful. But they might not have been quite as focused," says Principal Vivian Taylor-Samudio. "Boys do have a spark. They have the magic. But we don't need that in the classroom."

The National Organization for Women and the American Association of University Women are skeptical about single-sex education and argue that girls do not need a separate environment to thrive academically. But some studies indicate that boys as well as girls often do better in the classroom when the distractions of the opposite sex aren't present.

DISD and other North Texas districts are undeterred by the skeptics and are working to expand the option of single-sex classes within existing coed schools. A DISD all-boys' school is scheduled to open in two years. Districts in Austin, Houston and San Antonio also have single-sex public schools.

Laura Payne, 18, a graduating senior from Pleasant Grove, credits the single-sex learning environment for the focus, confidence and leadership skills she's acquired. "I learned to ... be responsible for my own goals, as well as my own mistakes," she says.

Rangel's first graduating class now prepares to enter a world full of tough academic competitors, male and female. It could be years before we know where the experiment in single-sex education will lead. But at a time when DISD faces so many challenges, the Rangel school is a success story whose praises deserve to be sung.