

New education research shows graduates of all-girls schools are set-up for future success

A new study from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) found that graduates of single-sex girls' schools are more likely to have higher levels of science self-confidence, consider themselves critical thinkers, score higher on measures of academic habits of mind, and demonstrate stronger study habits than girls from co-ed schools.

The study of almost 6,000 girls' school graduates, *Fostering Academic and Social Engagement: An Investigation into the Effects of All-Girls Education in the Transition to University*, also found that students from single-sex girls' schools are more likely to be involved in volunteering and community activities, take part in political activities, and be supportive of societal improvements. These results were found even after controlling for students' personal and school characteristics, including race, ethnicity, parent education, family income, student-teacher ratios, and school size.

The study's lead author, Dr Tiffani Riggers-Piehl said girls from single-sex schools were more likely to have higher levels of science self-confidence and stronger academic habits than female graduates from co-ed schools.

'We found that graduates from all-girls schools are more likely to say they could explain the results of a study, collect appropriate data, understand scientific concepts and use their technical skills [than girls who graduated from a co-ed school],' said Dr Riggers-Piehl.

'Girls' school graduates are also more likely to say they are confident in their ability to do things like support their argument with logic, seek alternative solutions to a problem and they rate their critical thinking ability more highly than women from co-educational schools.

'When we take that academic engagement and science self-confidence together, I think we see a portrait of a young woman who is academically minded, who is confident in her skills and abilities and who is really set-up for success as she moves into the future,' she said.

The UCLA study identified several key areas in which all-girls schools are better preparing their students for success in university and beyond. Based on the reported data, the researchers concluded that when compared to their female peers at co-ed schools, girls' school graduates:

- Have stronger academic skills
- Are more academically engaged
- Demonstrate higher science self-confidence
- Display higher levels of cultural competency
- Express stronger community involvement
- Exhibit increased political engagement

Loren Bridge, Executive Officer of the Alliance of Girls' Schools Australasia said the UCLA findings demonstrate how girls' schools are preparing girls for the real world.

‘The results from this study highlight the life-long contribution of all-girls schooling towards women’s success in traditionally male-dominated fields,’ said Ms Bridge.

‘It’s promising to see yet another piece of research confirm that girls’ schools are leading the way when it comes to closing the gender gap in STEM.

‘This study also shows that girls’ schools provide an empowering and non-gender stereotyped environment for girls to become critical thinkers and leaders who are both politically aware and involved in community activities.

‘It’s no surprise that some of the world’s leading women were educated in all-girls environments,’ she said.

The UCLA data shows that girls’ school graduates rate themselves as more successful and engaged in areas where men have historically seen greater representation: science and politics. Reflecting on the totality of the findings, the researchers noted that ‘these statistically significant results demonstrate differences in areas of critical importance in the twenty-first century for women as they enter university and beyond, thus emphasizing the contribution of all-girls schooling for women’s success’.

About the study

In 2009, a study headed by Dr Linda Sax used data collected in 2005 by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA to show that, compared to their co-educated peers, graduates of girls’ schools demonstrated increased academic engagement, higher academic self-confidence (particularly in mathematics and science) and greater political engagement.

Dr Tiffany Riggers-Piehl, one of the original authors of the 2009 study, has followed up ten years later by collecting data using HERI’s 2016 Freshman Survey, a national survey of 5,888 students, including 1,134 female students who graduated from 105 independent all-girl high schools.

Riggers-Piehl, T., Lim, G., & King, K. (2018, December). *Fostering academic and social engagement: An investigation into the effects of all-girls education in the transition to university. Executive summary*. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute (HERI), University of California (UCLA).

About the Alliance of Girls’ Schools Australasia

The Alliance of Girls’ Schools Australasia is a leading voice for the advancement of girls’ education. We advocate for and support the distinctive work of girls’ schools in their provision of unparalleled opportunities for girls. We contribute to the development and promotion of education in Australasia and the empowerment of young women to reach their potential and become influential contributors to our complex and changing world. The Alliance connects educators from our 175 plus member schools across six countries.

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