

# IN THE HOUSE

SELWYN HOUSE  
DEPUIS 1908 SINCE 1908

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE SELWYN HOUSE COMMUNITY

## The Value and Importance of Boys' Schools

**B**oys are magical, exciting, energetic, caring, loving and smart. We need to understand this and create a setting that will allow our boys to develop their strengths and deal with their weaknesses. Many environments can accomplish these objectives, but none better than an all-boys school.

But, let's understand the reality: boys and girls behave differently and learn differently. The data is irrefutable. Of children on Ritalin, 80 per cent are boys. Sixty per cent of college students are female and the numbers are rising. The majority of children diagnosed with learning disabilities are boys, and 80 per cent of high-school dropouts are also boys. In 35 industrialized nations, including Canada, the girls are getting better grades than the boys.

“Eighty per cent of high-school dropouts are boys.”

The statistics can be alarming for parents. *Newsweek* magazine's article "The Trouble With Boys" claims that the widening achievement gap has profound implications for the economy, society, families, and democracy. The Gates Foundation is making boys a big priority. As Phyllis Diller once said, "We spend the first twelve months of our sons' lives teaching them to walk and talk and the next twelve years telling them to sit down and shut up."

Continued on following page



# The Value and Importance of Boys' Schools

## Continued from previous page

The case for all-boys education, with a focus on best practices for boys, can be the single most valuable investment in your son's education. Nobody is saying that an all-boys education is better than a co-educational one -- many boys flourish in such an environment. But the heart of the matter is that it appears an all-boys education is better for boys.

Groundbreaking brain research has shown the physical differences between the brains of boys and girls. Boys use more of their brain for spatial mechanical function, which is to say that an active boy is able to use more of his brain for learning than a sedentary one. The brains of boys are kinetic, messy, disorganized, and brilliant, and these dispositions are hard-wired, not learned, as was previously thought. Boys kick their lockers, use balled-up paper to throw imaginary basketballs, and yes, they punch each other for fun. Toe-tapping, tongue-clicking and goofing around raise blood pressure (of the teacher as well!!), but are thought to make the brain more absorbent. This normal boy behavior is labeled troublesome or disruptive in a coed classroom where the girls (not all, of course) are focusing, sitting quietly and getting all the A's. The boys have cornered the market for D's and F's. In large classrooms, teachers place a premium on sitting quietly and never speaking out of turn—inherent girl behavior—which goes on to become the gold standard, according to Michael Thompson, PhD child psychologist and co-author of *Raising Cain; Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys*.

In an all-boys environment, boys are not compared to girls, which helps preserve their self-esteem. The prefrontal cortex (the part of the brain that controls inhibitions, enables insight and problem solving, and provides the ability to have a conscience) is now known to be activated by experience. In other words, boys need to be taught how to access their feelings and emotions, whereas the current classroom setup in a coed environment is better suited to the neurodevelopment of girls. Boys' reading readiness, for example, is simply a matter of slower, normal brain development, but when compared to the girls it is often negatively labeled "delayed."

Cross-gender communication skills are an issue at the heart of coeducation. Life is coed, it is argued, so education should be as well. Some say that separating the boys from the girls only reinforces stereotyping. To be sure, cross-gender skills are essential in achieving a socially and emotionally effective adult life. Boys' schools have created partnerships with girls attending other schools, especially in areas such as community service and the arts, ensuring the necessary collaboration. Many boys' schools have also made gender equality a legitimate goal, and the presence of a large percentage of strong, talented women teaching at boys' schools have made the attainment of this goal realistic.

Without the presence of girls, the reality is that boys learn to bond with each other in their own unique way.



They learn how to become friends, the value of friendship, and they understand that the cultivation of lasting friends takes a great deal of effort. They develop their own personal empathy. Boys who attend all-boys schools tend to keep their high school friends for life. Programs like choral music, fine arts and drama (crucial in an all-male environment) can be pursued without fear of being perceived as being un-cool in front of the opposite sex.

It's not that one type of school is superior to the other. It never is. It will always be about great teachers, the development of relationships, building character and leadership, and providing creative and challenging opportunities within a caring and supportive environment. ■

# Why Choose a Boys' School?



There is much literature about the alarming fate of boys in the realm of education. Seventy per cent of women progress to university, but only fifty per cent of men are achieving the same success. There is little indication that those numbers are about to reverse. Sixty per cent of graduates across disciplines are girls. The gulf has reached record levels. One recent study out of England has made a correlation between the plummeting number of boys enrolling at university and the decrease in the number of single sex schools. The statistics are too alarming to ignore, however all-boys schools are slowly but surely making a comeback.

Education is a clear and proven road to success. Most people who choose the independent school route are cognizant of this fact. They want the best for their children across the spectrum of academics, athletics, the arts, literacy, bilingualism and biculturalism. Most also want their

children to be significant human beings. A tall order, given that boys seem to be highly susceptible to the myriad distraction of video games, Netflix, the Internet, online music, etc. An entire world is available through a cellphone. The digital word is exciting and interactive, and educators would be remiss if we didn't say that our curriculum must work in tandem with the ever-changing landscape of technology. So, back to the question.

Boys learn differently from girls. They think and process and absorb information at a different pace. They are no less intelligent—far from it. However, traditional coursework seems to favor the success of girls. A boy needs to be able to be a boy until he is ready to be a man. Teachers at an all-boys school are able to implement the gender-specific requirements that are essential tools for success. The literacy gap is an ever-widening gulf. At a boys' school the discrepancy is circumvented with

the likes of comic books, works of nonfiction and newspaper articles. A lower level of literacy simply means the boy is not engaged. That disengagement is the death knell to future prospects in any field of study.

Boys need to move. In a situation of prolonged confinement concentration diminishes. Many boys are messy and disorganized and have a harder time sitting still. Girls have an easier time in a structured, seated environment. I love to articulate the fact that most discipline issues occur in Kindergarten. Five-year-olds are inquisitive, probing, unsettled, imaginative, hilarious, creative, undisciplined, tactile and forgive mid-punch. We need to herald these traits but we need to harness them to channel that unbridled enthusiasm that occasionally ends in biting and kicking. And that's normal boy behaviour! There is no reason to underestimate their intellectual capabilities. Boys are brilliant. Simply put, regulating one's own impulsive behavior is a learned skill.

At a boys' school, students are less constrained by gender stereotypes. A boys-only environment ensures that every option is available, from Glee Club to rugby to knitting to public speaking. We want to provide an environment that caters to all boys, whether they are literate, artistic, athletic, mathematical, or any version in between. We need to make room for every chosen route. In a coed environment there is more peer pressure to bend to typical stereotypes. How unfortunate to abandon a passion because it isn't "cool."

At the same time, we have an arts-

**Continued on following page**

# Why Choose a Boys' School?

Continued from previous page

and science-based curriculum that provides the bedrock for all other intellectual pursuits. We are a university-preparatory school. Academics provide the framework for our ultimate goal of graduating a whole boy. What is our competitive advantage towards this end goal?

“At a boys' school, students are less constrained by gender stereotypes.”

Emotional intelligence. For centuries, raw intelligence has been the trump card in terms of predicting future success. Today the intertwining of both is front and center. Emotional intelligence cannot be taught. It must be absorbed in an environment where empathy, compassion and kindness are modeled. Studies have shown that students from an all-boys school environment keep their friends for life, have lower divorce rates, and forge stronger attachments. Boys need lasting friendships in order to communicate, an ability that comes naturally to girls but needs to be fostered in boys. It goes without saying that raw intelligence is an important building block. Add the tenets of hard work and the self-regulated ability to guide appropriate thinking and behavior, and a level of self-awareness becomes part of future greatness.

If we want our sons to flourish on their chosen paths, we must provide them with the ultimate weapon: an excellent all-boys education. ■

