

SECTION ONE – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Gender Differences in Learning Subcommittee of the Community Review Committee (CRC) investigated whether the gender similarities and differences in learning, development and performance suggested in recent literature actually exist in District 39 and, if so, where, how much, why, and what can be done. This report summarizes the work of the subcommittee and recommends next steps.

Research:

The subcommittee used a multi-pronged approach to build a baseline of knowledge assessing these issues. First, the CRC surveyed District 39 teachers to assess their knowledge of, experiences with and attitudes toward gender differences in learning. Second, the subcommittee compiled District K-8 tables of GPA, IEP, ITBS, ISAT, CogAT and other data to compare gender differences in learning and achievement. Third, the subcommittee reviewed School Impact Plans (SIP's), and met with the Administrative Council. Finally, the subcommittee reviewed recent literature on this topic and compared benchmark districts' data and perceptions to District 39.

Findings:

The CRC was surprised at the consistent evidence of girls outperforming boys in District 39, both in the classroom and on standardized test scores. Our findings suggest there are significant gender differences in learning within the district. These differences begin early and increase in higher grades. The evidence points to the need for a paradigm shift in the perception of gender within our district. As in other benchmark districts, District 39 had little realistic perception of the gender gaps. These gaps go well beyond the language arts test scores (the most well known difference, with boys achieving statistically significantly below girls). Below are highlights of the subcommittee's findings.

Grades:

- In grades 5-8, girls' grades were higher than boys across all four core subjects (reading, writing, science and math). It appears that girls have figured out how to get good grades, and as they experience success, continue to be rewarded for behaviors that are valued.
- The performance gap increased over the past few years across all subjects.
- The gap is greatest in reading and writing, but exists in other subjects also.
- Boys are significantly more likely to receive a C or lower, and girls are 30-35% more likely to get an A.
- In every level of Junior High math, girls have outperformed boys, across 4 years of data and 4 levels of math.

Standardized Tests:

- **Language Arts** – Girls outperform boys across seven ITBS Language Arts scores (Total Reading, Reading Comprehension, Language Arts Aggregate, Total Language, Punctuation, Capitalization, Usage and Expression), across all 5 grades (even when excluding IEP students) with only one exception (3rd grade Reading). Only Vocabulary and Spelling skills were not statistically significantly different by gender. Girls also perform significantly better on ISAT Reading and Writing. On the CogAT,

a test of academic aptitude, girls tend toward higher verbal and non-verbal scores across the grades surveyed: grades 3, 5 and 7.

- **Math** - Boys outperform girls in ITBS mathematical concept and estimation, problem-solving and data interpretation and less so on computation scores, with the largest differences in the earlier grades. These gaps narrow as students get older. These math differences by gender were statistically smaller than language arts differences (even with IEP students excluded). Boys also exceed girls on CogAT quantitative ability in grades 3, 5 & 7. On the ISAT, there are no consistent gender differences in math scores, across years (2004, 2005) and grades (3, 5, 8).

Academic Placement:

- 71% of IEP students in D39 are male
- IEP students do not do as well on standardized tests in D39
- No significant gender differences seen in assignment to Early Reading Intervention program in grades K – 4 (does not include IEP)
- More boys are identified as Gifted & Talented in 3rd and 4th grade, more boys are identified for enriched language arts in 6th, 7th and 8th grades, more boys are identified for accelerated math (these differences decline by 8th grade, with more girls participating), and 66% of students enrolled in New Trier mathematics are boys.

Teacher Perception (Survey Results):

- 87% of D39 teachers (272) completed the survey
- The teachers surveyed reflect a general district-wide misperception that gender differences are not relevant. 85% teachers were NOT aware of existing gender differences in GPA.
- Only three teachers opined girls were outperforming boys.
- The general perception was that boys are less organized, more likely to do the minimum, more tired, and a greater behavioral challenge than girls
- There was moderate concern about appropriate classroom and reading materials for boys
- There was some concern about peer dynamics and influences for girls, which serve to undervalue academic achievement
- 60% of teachers are interested in professional development on gender differences in learning
- 88% of the District's classroom teachers are female in D39 (97% in the earlier grades), with percentage of males becoming less since 2002. The evaluation criteria for selecting teachers may reinforce the finding that the number of teachers interviewed vs. hired is lower for men than women.

Behavioral Issues:

- Across grade levels, boys represent the overwhelming majority of discipline referrals and suspensions

Recommendations:

To better address gender differences in learning, the Community Review Committee recommends that the District:

- (1) Adopt a mission statement regarding gender differences in learning. Educational literature states how boys and girls learn differently and our educational practice should reflect this belief.
- (2) Build a database that would be a single repository for data on all tests and grades and that would permit longitudinal study.
- (3) Review teacher hiring practices to ensure they are not biased against male applicants.
- (4) Provide professional development as a means to encourage awareness of and support for the similarities and differences between genders across each area of development.
- (5) Educate the community on gender differences in learning.
- (6) Collaborate with New Trier on a K-12 study.
- (7) Explore innovative classroom arrangements designed to support gender differences to learning and to increase classroom participation. Teachers need the information, freedom and support to make classroom adaptations that address gender. Changes that need to be made should assure teachers that flexibility, creativity, and unique methodology is encouraged to support both boys and girls in the classroom.
- (8) We recommend that School Impact Plan (SIP) teams continue to address gender differences in learning in each school and compile hard data every year to measure progress. A team of SIP key persons might meet from all schools to share ideas and issues.
- (9) The D39 curriculum, and its delivery of instruction, should be carefully analyzed to see if gender differences are acknowledged and supported.

Other recommendations are contained in the full report.

A paradigm shift in D39 would make addressing gender differences an ongoing issue. Of course, gender does not exist in a vacuum. Consequently, the district's Strategic Plan commitment to fostering creativity and respect can and should include a realistic approach to gender.