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FALLING BEHIND

Can gender-separated classes help boys catch up in reading, writing?

BY CAROLINE GRECH
 Staff Writer

Girls are better at reading and writing than boys.

At least that's what some may believe if they glance at the latest round of provincial testing of grade 3 and 6 students in reading and writing.

The most recent EQAO tests show more girls are at or above the provincial standard compared to their male counterparts in reading and writing.

While the pattern isn't new, it is consistent, with the gap widening in writing.

Across the province, 68 per cent of female students are at the provincial standard compared with 50 per cent of male students.

In York Region, students at both boards mirror the pattern.

At the York Catholic District School Board, 80 per cent of Grade 6 girls were at the provincial standard in writing compared to 64 per cent of boys.

At the York Region District School Board, the gap was slightly wider, with 77 per cent of girls making the standard compared with 61 per cent of boys.

'If there's no girls, the boys don't flirt and we can concentrate more.'

Micky Wilbur
 Grade 7 student at
 Lake Wilcox Public School

While the numbers may scratch the surface of the story, research shows a variety of reasons why boys don't seem as proficient in reading and writing.

Shelley Peterson, an associate professor at the University of Toronto and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, cites several reasons for the widening gap.

"We should be allowing dif-

ferent texts. Boys are not necessarily interested in fiction," Ms Peterson explained.

Often boys appreciate reading magazines, comics or non-fiction, Ms Peterson said, noting that type of reading is often not considered "real reading".

The lack of male role models who emphasize reading is likely a factor stopping boys from thinking reading is something masculine, according to Ms Peterson.

At Lake Wilcox Public School in Richmond Hill, students in grades 7 and 8 have gender-separated classes for math and science and have, in the past, had gender separated classes for Grade 2 in reading and writing.

Students and teachers alike find the arrangement helps increase student participation and, ultimately, improves their grades.

See BOYS, page 23.







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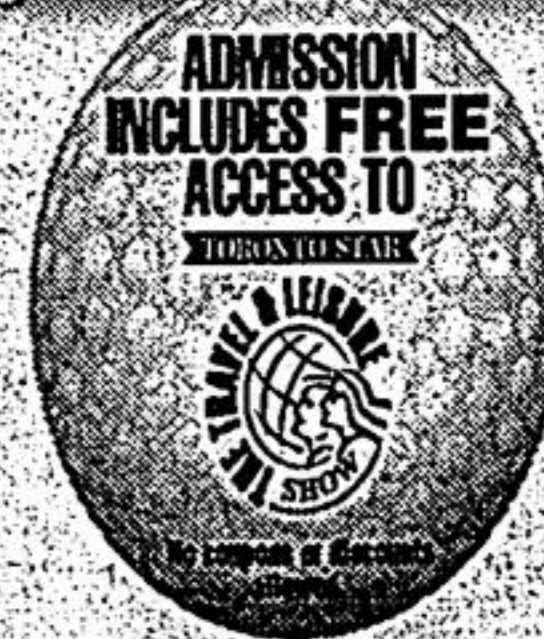
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