SELECTING AN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL

The Benefits of the Co-educational Environment
Choosing the right school for your child is a complex decision. “What type of learning environment will offer my child quality educational standards? What school will offer enriched academic experiences? Does the school have a reputation for academic excellence? Will my child thrive in a single-gender or co-educational setting?” These are all questions you may ask yourself.

Current research shows that parents of students attending independent co-educational schools believe that a co-ed learning environment offers many benefits. In a national survey conducted in 2005 – 2006, 79% of Canadian parents heartily agreed that independent co-ed schools better reflect the diversity of our society and 79% said these schools better prepare students to eventually enter the workforce. In addition, 71% also agreed students are better prepared to succeed in post-secondary education.

Canadian research reveals that students at independent co-ed schools feel comfortable about who they are and have a healthy and positive attitude towards their self-image. In fact, 71% of students indicate, “It is easy for students at my school to find a group that they fit it with.” The self confidence expressed around fitting in enables students in a co-ed environment to perform to the best of their ability and get the most out of their educational experience.

The environment and atmosphere fostered also has an impact in other ways. Students of independent co-ed schools in Canada (88%) are more likely than other types of students to feel safe in their school environment. Not only did independent co-ed schools rank the highest, when students were asked generally about safety for all students, but their responses also suggest that some reports of harassment and bullying are lower.
The good news for Canadian parents is that research has revealed that most motivated students enjoy attending school regardless of the type of school that they attend, and most would recommend their school to others. Students, however, recognize that a co-ed environment is one that is reflected in the world around them once they get beyond the classroom. In the same research study, 84% of students attending independent co-ed schools responded that they felt confident expressing their views in the presence of members of the opposite sex. Collaboration between the sexes in the classroom helps to develop confidence in students so they feel comfortable sharing their ideas and opinions in any situation, and excel at university and beyond as leaders.
Recognizing that gender differences in learning do exist, the application of
this knowledge in the classroom by teachers ensures that all students benefit
from the latest techniques and approaches. Canadian students reported that
their level of confidence in academic ability is high and this perception
is not altered by the type of school a student attends. In fact, contrary
to popular myth, both boys and girls reported nearly the same level of
academic confidence no matter the school environment (co-ed or single-sex).

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<td>Co-ed</td>
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<td>“I am a quick learner”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“When I really try,</td>
<td>92%</td>
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<td>I can do almost everything</td>
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In choosing a school, there is often confusion about which environment offers the best for each child. There are new compelling arguments for co-education. Consider that:

**CONFIDENCE**

Students attending a co-ed school in Canada (both independent and public) feel more confident expressing their views in the presence of opposite-sex peers.

**RESPECT**

Co-ed school students are more likely than students of single-sex schools to agree that their peers respect members of the opposite sex.

**MAKING FRIENDS**

Students at co-ed schools indicate that they make friends easily with members of their own sex (80%) and members of the opposite sex (72%). For these students there is a stark contrast with their peers attending independent single-sex schools, of whom only 58% report making friends easily with students of the other gender.

**“BEST OF BOTH WORLDS” OPPORTUNITIES**

Students at co-ed schools agree that there are opportunities to participate in activities with opposite-sex peers and 62% agree they have the chance to participate in activities without opposite-sex peers. Conversely, only 32% of students at single-sex independent schools report occasions to participate in activities with members of the opposite-sex.

**STRONG PARTICIPATION OF GIRLS**

Girls at single-sex schools are no more likely than those at co-ed schools to participate in class discussions.

- 89% of girls in independent co-ed schools ask questions or contribute to class discussions compared with 87% of their counterparts attending single-sex schools.
- Girls in co-ed and single-sex schools report that they voiced an opinion regardless of peer approval in both environments almost equally (66% co-ed, 67% single-sex).

**ABILITIES IN MATH AND SCIENCE**

Girls’ perceptions of their abilities in math and science are not affected by the gender composition of their schools. Girls attending independent schools (co-ed and single-sex) both agree with the statements, “I get good marks in science” and “math is one of my best subjects.” Their perceptions were nearly identical on these points.

**BOY ENGAGEMENT**

Research indicates that boys in a co-ed environment are as likely to be engaged in learning as boys in a single-sex environment. However, studying in a mixed peer setting allows boys to become comfortable voicing opinions and ideas where girls are present. In this environment, they learn how to interact with and gain respect for female classmates. Each gender has a perspective to offer the other. Working together in the classroom and on homework assignments provides boys and girls the opportunity to learn from each other intellectually as well as socially.
Both girls and boys at co-ed schools have positive self-images; are socially well adjusted; and enjoy being challenged.

Students at co-ed schools responded in the survey that they make friends easily with members of the opposite sex and their peers are more likely to respect members of the opposite sex. Again, student responses confirm that independent co-ed schools foster an environment that prepares students for real-world experiences and situations.

In addition, students at independent co-ed schools overwhelmingly agreed (88%) that they believe their school is a safe environment for all students. Research shows that students attending co-ed schools are much more likely to discuss ideas from their homework with opposite-sex friends (83%) than students in other school environments. This interaction results in exposure to a greater diversity of views and opinions as they share ideas with their peers.

### CANADIAN STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS GENDER ROLES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Enriched Academic & Social Environment

A gender-rich environment allows for diverse opinions and viewpoints to be expressed in classes, which, in turn, is important in creating a good learning and social environment.

Independent co-educational schools offer students the opportunity to exchange a broad range of opinions and viewpoints with their peers since the schools comprise a mixed gender student body. In a co-educational learning environment, students are exposed to both male and female role models.

Strong foundation for future success
Preparing students in the twenty-first century demands an educational environment that is reflective of today’s society.

Independent co-ed schools offer:
~ A diverse student body that reflects both genders
~ Preparation for real-world experiences and situations
~ Exposure to male and female role models
~ Exposure to different leadership styles
~ Exposure to diverse values and lifestyles
~ A rich academic experience
~ Encouragement of wide-ranging opinions and ideas
~ Preparation of boys and girls to become leaders
~ Creation of a good learning and social environment in the classroom
~ Nurturing of confidence in boys and girls
ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Data included in this document is based on the comprehensive study, “Perceptions and Attitudes of Students toward their Academic and Social Experiences in Canadian High Schools”. The study examines the merits of co-education and provides context for the benefits of the ‘real world’ learning experience based on Canadian student experiences.

The Strategic Counsel, a leading Canadian research firm, conducted a ground-breaking study on co-education in Canada. The study involved administering an online survey to 17,798 students who attend or recently graduated from a Canadian high school. The students surveyed are primarily university or college-bound, and attend or attended one of four different types of high schools: independent co-ed, independent single-sex, public co-ed and public single-sex (girls only). The questions administered asked students to reflect upon their most recent school experiences, and centered on five key areas: overall attitudes toward attending school, experiences in the classroom, involvement in extra-curricular activities and school life, self-image and friendships, and preparing for life after high school. All data is weighted to reflect equally the responses of boys and girls for each of the four school types.

A report examining student perspectives as well as additional research with select Canadian parents and faculty of independent co-ed schools was compiled in 2006. All research was supported by 32 Canadian independent co-ed schools and was led by a steering committee comprised of: Guy McLean (Appleby College); David Howie (St John’s-Ravenscourt School); and Catherine Raafluab (Strathcona-Tweedsmuir School).

The following schools can provide more information about the benefits of co-education:

APPLEBY COLLEGE  
www.appleby.on.ca

ASHBURY COLLEGE  
www.ashbury.on.ca

BAYVIEW GLEN  
www.bvg.on.ca

BISHOP’S COLLEGE SCHOOL  
www.bishopscollegeschool.com

BRENTWOOD COLLEGE SCHOOLS  
www.brentwood.bc.ca

CENTENNIAL ACADEMY  
www.centennial.qc.ca

FERN HILL SCHOOL  
www.fernhillschool.com

GLENLYON NORFOLK SCHOOL  
www.glenlyonnorfolk.bc.ca

GREENWOOD COLLEGE SCHOOL  
www.greenwoodcollege.com

GREENVILLE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL  
www.greenvillecc.ca

HALIFAX GRAMMAR SCHOOL  
www.hgs.ns.ca

HILLFIELD STRATHALLAN COLLEGE  
www.hillstrath.on.ca

HOLY TRINITY SCHOOL  
www.hts.on.ca

KINGSWAY COLLEGE SCHOOL  
www.kcs.on.ca

LAKEFIELD COLLEGE SCHOOL  
www.lakefieldcs.on.ca

LOWER CANADA COLLEGE  
www.lcc.ca

MEADOWRIDGE SCHOOL  
www.meadowridge.bc.ca

RIDLEY COLLEGE  
www.ridley.on.ca

ROTHESEAY NETHERWOOD SCHOOL  
www.tns.ca

RUNDLE COLLEGE  
www.rundle.ab.ca

SEDBERGH SCHOOL  
www.sedbergh.com

ST. GEORGE’S SCHOOL OF MONTREAL  
www.stgeorges.qc.ca

ST. JOHN’S-KILMARNOCK SCHOOL  
www.sjkscschool.org

ST. JOHN’S-RAVENSCOURT SCHOOL  
www.sjr.mb.ca

ST. MICHAELS UNIVERSITY SCHOOL  
www.smus.bc.ca

STANSTEAD COLLEGE  
www.stansteadcollege.com

STRATHCONA-TWEEDSMUIR SCHOOL  
www.sts.ab.ca

TORONTO FRENCH SCHOOL  
www.tfs.ca

TRINITY COLLEGE SCHOOL  
www.tcs.on.ca

WEST ISLAND COLLEGE  
www.westislandcollege.ab.ca

WEST POINT GREY ACADEMY  
www.wpga.ca

THE YORK SCHOOL  
www.yorkschool.com

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