

What the Research Tells Us: The Distinctive Impact of Girls' Schools

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ADVANCING GIRLS' EDUCATION GLOBALLY

MISSION

ICGS is united in elevating women's leadership worldwide by educating and empowering our students to be ethical globally minded changemakers.

As the leading advocate for girls' schools, ICGS connects and collaborates globally with individuals, schools, and mission-aligned entities dedicated to educating and empowering girls.

VALUES

Community & Collaboration: We engage the power of many voices to strengthen our schools, communities, and world.

Equity & Inclusion: We uplift learning communities committed to diversity, equity, justice, and belonging.

Leadership & Integrity: We inspire the next generation of informed global citizens to lead with courage, competence, and empathy.

Opportunity & Innovation: We challenge limits to imagine and explore new possibilities.

Self-efficacy & Agency: We prepare girls for lives of commitment, confidence, contribution, and fulfillment.

A POWERFUL NETWORK

580+ member girls' schools

28 countries

60,000 colleagues

350,000+ students



Research

*At ICGS, we **commission, curate, and conduct** research on girls and the outcomes of girls' education globally.*

ICGS maintains the largest research library dedicated to girls' school outcomes globally with nearly 1000 articles, reports, and summaries

Our commissioned studies — including partnerships with Stanford and the OECD — generate original evidence on the girls' school difference

The Global Action Research Collaborative (GARC) connects girls' school educators across the world to conduct research in their own classroom providing immediate actionable strategies for girls' school educators



The World Girls Live In

- 11% of Fortune 500 CEOs are women-->6.6% worldwide
- 28% of members of Congress are women-->15% worldwide
- 30% of University Presidents are women-->25% worldwide
- Women earn 25% of Engineering degrees, 21% of Computer Science degrees, 35% of physics degrees.
- Women make up less than 30% of the STEM workforce, and only 15% of the engineering workforce.
- Women earn 15% less than men.

What Girls Are Navigating

Girls face psychological challenges during key development stages



- One-third of girls are “doing school”—working hard but not finding learning joyful or meaningful
- Top stressors: grades, workload, time pressure, lack of sleep
- 79% report exhaustion; 65% trouble sleeping; 51% headaches from stress
- Girls average only 6.5–7.5 hours of sleep on school nights—well below recommendations
- About 35% say they’re not very confident in their coping skills
- Social media accelerates all of it: more screen time correlates to lower confidence and decreased mental health



Crisis of Confidence

Confidence is decreasing among girls

- Girls' confidence declines substantially between 5th and 8th grade.
 - 68% of girls in 6th grade feel confident-->only 50% do by 8th grade
- Confidence has declined since 2017
 - Only 68% of 5th and 6th graders feel confident, down from 86% in 2017
 - 54% of 7th graders feel confident, down from 76%
- 52% of 5th–6th grade girls are not sure they are smart enough for their dream career (up from 23% in 2017)

Girls' schools exist to give girls the tools to navigate — and ultimately reshape — that world.



What Makes the Biggest Difference

Belonging and trusted adults change everything.

- 88% have a peer to go to; 69% have an adult at school they trust
- Higher belonging → higher engagement and confidence coping with stress
- Girls with an adult they trust report significantly stronger coping skills
- Confidence in coping is linked to lower academic worry
- Flourishing rises sharply with engagement



PISA Survey

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a global study conducted every three years by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

- Taken by 15-year-olds in 80 countries
- Assesses the application of knowledge and skills in math, reading & science
- We analyzed data from 2015, 2018, and 2022 reports

Key Insights Across Reports:

- Girls in girls' schools score higher in reading, mathematics, and science than girls in coed schools, even after controlling for socioeconomic background.
- They report stronger sense of belonging and higher engagement in class.
- Students in girls' schools experience fewer classroom disruptions and more positive teacher relationships.



PISA Results: Academics and Classroom Environment

STRONGER ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE:

- Girls in girls' schools scored up to 29 points higher in PISA 2022.
- Even after adjusting for socioeconomic factors, they maintained a 10-11 point advantage.

POSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT:

- Fewer classroom disruptions: 27% in girls' schools vs. 37% in coed schools.
- Teachers adapt lessons more effectively: 59% in girls' schools vs. 48% in coed schools.

PISA Results: Keys to Thriving

- According to our analysis of the 2018 and 2022 PISA results, girls in girls' schools worried less about failure, enjoyed competition more and were more likely to keep working until they mastered a task.
- Girls in girls' schools were more confident with math tasks, such as solving equations (73% vs 65%) and reading graphs and diagrams (75% vs 66%) compared to their coed peers.



73%

of girls' students feel a sense of belonging vs. 64% in coed schools.



75%

of girls' school students report a strong sense of purpose (vs. 69 % in coed).



Academic Excellence in Single-Sex Schools

Superior Academic Outcomes:

- Girls in single-sex schools outperform those in co-ed schools in standardized tests, such as being 4.2 terms ahead in reading and 2.8 terms ahead in math (Dix, 2017).
- Research from Australia and New Zealand shows that girls from single-sex schools consistently score higher in science, literacy, and mathematics (MMG, 2020).

STEM Participation and Success:

- Single-sex schools see higher enrollment of girls in traditionally male-dominated subjects like advanced mathematics, physics, and engineering.
- The absence of boys in the classroom helps to reduce the pressure and social stereotypes that can deter girls from pursuing STEM.



Closing the Gender Gap: Evidence from South Korea

- In co-ed schools, girls' math and science scores drop below boys' on high-stakes exams, despite equal ability in earlier grades.
- In single-sex schools, girls' performance improves sharply, closing and sometimes reversing the gender gap.
- Attending a girls' school increases the likelihood that a girl will enroll in a non-biology STEM major by 10.6 percentage points — closing more than one-third of the gender gap in these fields.
- These gains occur without differences in teacher quality or resources; the change comes from reduced stereotype threat and stronger academic confidence.

"Gender gaps in performance are socially produced and can be mitigated by environments that remove stereotype pressure."

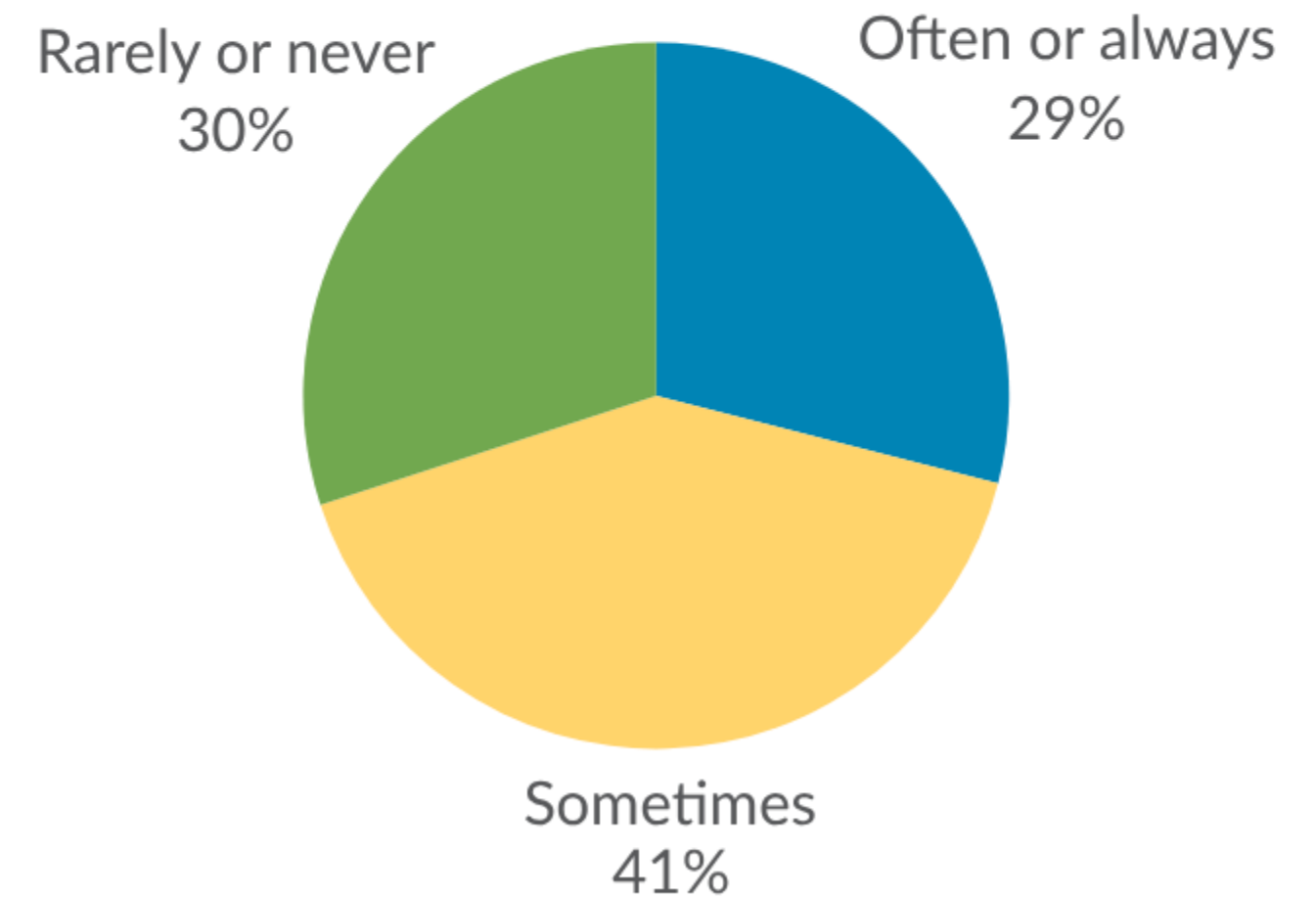
— Calsamiglia et al., 2025

Student Agency and Voice

Agency increases engagement and supports positive mental health.

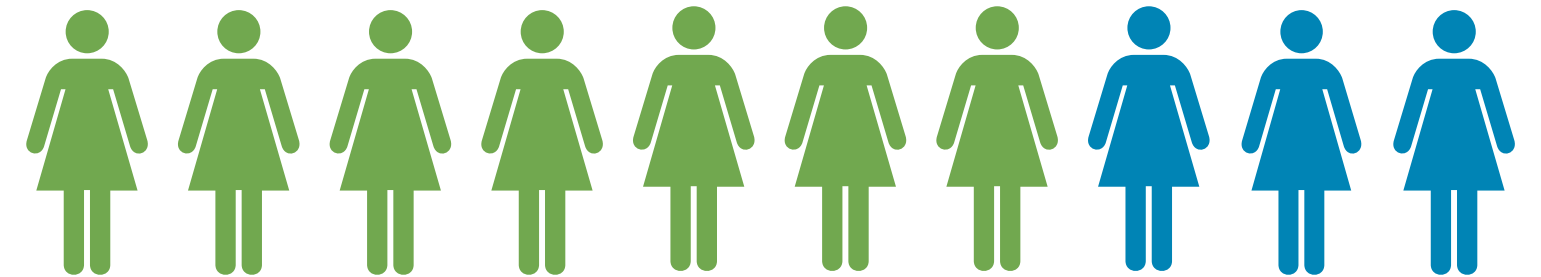
- Students who report exerting agency in their own learning are more likely to be fully engaged in school.
- Girls in girls' schools are more likely than girls in coed schools to have opportunities for agency, including leadership and choice in learning
- Research from our Global Action Research Collaboration shows that supporting student agency by providing choice or co-creating aspects of their learning leads to increased confidence and motivation and can improve collaboration.

How Often Students Exert Agency

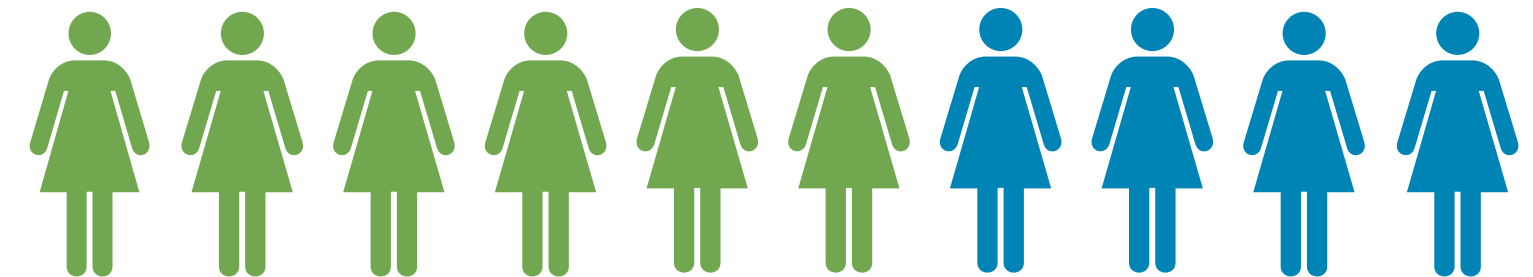


Leadership and Ambition

- 69% aspire to an advanced degree or doctorate vs. 62% in coed schools.
- Confidence in academic skills: 77% in girls' schools vs. 68% in coed schools.
- 68% of girls' students feel comfortable leading groups vs. 64% in coed schools.
- 58% like to be leaders in class vs. 54% in coed schools.
- Girls' school students were nearly 2x as likely to discuss civic and leadership engagement.
- Alumnae are 7.1% more likely to hold leadership roles as adults, even 30 years later



68% of girls in girls' schools say they are comfortable taking the lead role in a group*



58% like to be leaders in class*

*Compared to 64% and 54% in co-ed schools, respectively, PISA 2022



Girls' School Alumnae and Leadership

- Women from single-sex schools were nearly 3 percentage points more likely to have the confidence to lead
- Women from single-sex schools were 7.1 percentage points more likely to have held a leadership role in groups and organizations than women from coeducational schools
- These effects lasted decades — respondents were in their 30s to 50s when surveyed, years after graduating

Girls' Schools Provide the Conditions and Intentional Practices to Support Girls' Thriving

Reduced Stereotype Threat

- Stereotype threat is the psychological pressure girls feel about confirming negative stereotypes about girls, often that they're bad at math, science, or leadership
- Research suggests stereotype threat causes a loss in confidence and often lowers performance on standardized tests by as much as 10-20% worse
- The fewer boys/men in the room, the better women perform

Inzlicht, M., & Ben-Zeev, T. (2000). A threatening intellectual environment: Why females are susceptible to experiencing problem-solving deficits in the presence of males. *Psychological Science*, 11(5), 365–371.

Wu, S. J. (n.d.). Why do girls outperform boys in math early on, but fall behind later? Character & Context Blog, Society for Personality and Social Psychology.
<https://spsp.org/news/character-and-context-blog/wu-boys-girls-math-performance>



Less Teacher Bias

- In co-ed schools, teachers are pro-boy in male-dominated subjects
- Teacher biases reduce confidence and cause differences in performance years later
- Teacher bias can create a “discouragement effect”
- Teachers often call on boys more frequently and expect girls to be “quiet” which discourages risk-taking

Megalokonomou, Rigissa. "Teacher Gender Bias Is Real and Has Lasting Effects on Students' Marks and Study Choices." The Conversation, 13 Dec. 2021, theconversation.com/teacher-gender-bias-is-real-and-has-lasting-effects-on-students-marks-and-study-choices-171827.

Zheng, Julia. "How Gender Bias in the Education System Affects Girls." PopEd Blog, Population Education, 10 Oct. 2025, populationeducation.org/how-gender-bias-in-the-education-system-affects-girls/.



School Factors that Support Student Engagement

- Clear, purposeful decision making tied to school mission
- Culture of care and connection
- Clear expectations to create psychological safety
- Student-centered learning and opportunities for agency



Myth: Girls won't thrive or survive the future without boys

- Girls are prepared for leadership: alumnae lead at higher rates decades after graduation
- Girls' school grads have the confidence to speak up
- Research shows girls have more confidence and take more healthy risks when boys are not present
- Girls are more likely to enroll and persist in STEM classes without boys providing key preparation to enroll in STEM at the college level

Myth: Girls' Schools are full of “mean girls”

- Girls in girls' schools have a higher sense of belonging and sense of purpose than girls' in co-ed schools
- Girls in girls' schools experience less bullying
- 88% of girls' school girls feel they have a trusted peer they can turn to
- Less likely to feel like an outsider or lonely

Myth: Women have
achieved equal rights
so we don't need
girls' schools

6% of world leaders

11% of CEOs

28% of Congress

Less than $\frac{1}{3}$ of Tech and Engineering
workforce

WHERE CAN YOU FIND ICGS RESEARCH?

[ICGS MAIN SITE](#)[SPECIAL COLLECTIONS](#)[BROWSE BY TOPIC](#)[BROWSE BY GRADE LEVEL](#)[GLOBAL ACTION RESEARCH](#)[BROWSE ALL ITEMS](#)

Welcome to the ICGS Research Library

From its beginning, our Coalition was grounded in research and inspired by collaboration. The Coalition was founded with the understanding that girls' schools would only be strengthened by researching and promoting the qualitative and quantitative outcomes of all-girl learning environments. In this resource library, we share summaries of peer-reviewed articles, Coalition-commissioned studies, reports from our Global Action Research Collaborative, research guides, and much more.

FEATURED RESOURCES



ALL-GIRLS EDUCATION

The Positive Effects of the Girls' School Environment: An Analysis of PISA Data

(2023)



HEALTH & WELLBEING

Raising Her Voice: Strengthening Student Well-Being and Engagement Through Connection in Girls' Schools (Full Report)

(2024)



TEACHING AND LEARNING

History Belongs to Us: Year 9 Girls Use Historical Significance to Craft Their Curriculum

Holly Webb (2025)



TEACHING AND LEARNING

Empowering Environmental Guardians: Using Collaborative Systems Thinking to Solve Real-World Problems

Alex van der Loos (2024)

research.girlsschools.org



Questions?



Thank You!

Questions?

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You will be automatically added to the Girls’ School Alliance forum.

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