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## Schools May Offer More Single-Sex Classes Under New U.S. Regulations

By Valerie Strauss  
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New federal regulations announced yesterday give school systems around the nation more flexibility in offering single-sex public education, even though the Department of Education concluded a year ago that there was not enough evidence to definitively evaluate single-sex classes.

Critics contended that the move was an invitation to schools to violate laws prohibiting sex discrimination in federally funded education programs.

The action, announced by Education Secretary Margaret Spellings, gives school systems more freedom to establish single-sex schools and classes, as well as extracurricular activities at the elementary and secondary education levels. The regulations will take effect Nov. 24.

"Research shows that some students may learn better in single-sex education environments," Spellings said in a news release. "The Department of Education is committed to giving communities more choices in how they go about offering varied learning environments to their students."

The agency made the change even though it reported a year ago that there was not enough evidence to say whether single-sex education is beneficial or harmful to students.

Stephanie Monroe, assistant secretary for civil rights in the Education Department, said the agency received more than 5,800 comments from the public about the change.

"We didn't receive comments saying that it in and of itself was wrong," she said. People "were more concerned about the way it was being implemented."

Monroe added, "Students in public schools deserve the same opportunity of other students whose parents can afford to send them to private schools."

Earlier regulations permitted school systems to provide single-sex public schools to students of one sex if there were single-sex public schools for the other. Now school systems may open a single-sex school to students of one sex if there is a substantially equal single-sex or coeducational school for students of the other sex.

The American Civil Liberties Union said the new regulations are an open invitation to schools to violate Title IX, the federal law that prohibits sex discrimination in educational programs that receive federal funding.

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"The regulations allow schools to separate girls and boys for virtually any reason they can dream up -- including outdated and dangerous gender stereotypes," Emily Martin, deputy director of the ACLU Women's Rights Project, said in a statement. "And although the administration's regulations claim to make these programs optional, sex segregation can never be truly voluntary."

*Staff writer Ian Shapira contributed to this report.*

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