



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

*Executive Summary*





## INTRODUCTION

As a global organization, the International Coalition of Girls' Schools (ICGS) explores data that extends beyond political and geographic boundaries, in order to evaluate and understand the unique learning environments of girls' schools. As such, ICGS commissioned a study with Macquarie Marketing Group in New South Wales, Australia, a firm that has previously worked with colleagues in Australasia, to dive into the experiences of girls participating in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). This study is undertaken by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and is considered the leading tool by which to analyze educational systems worldwide. The survey "measures 15 year olds' abilities to use their reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges." Typically conducted every three years, PISA 2021 was postponed due to the challenges schools faced because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The most recent study available was conducted in 2018—the data used in this report—while the 2022 survey results are being compiled in 2023 and will be available through ICGS in 2024.



## PARTICIPANTS

This research report compared data from girls enrolled in coeducational schools and girls' schools in 12 participating countries. **Of the 60,144 respondents, 46,352 (75%) of the participating schools were coed, while 13,792 (23%) were girls' schools.** Findings trended overwhelmingly positive across a number of measures for those students attending girls' schools, and the key differences are highlighted in this summary.

### KEY FINDINGS

#### 1. ENGAGING, EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

- **ENGAGEMENT:** **Fifty-four percent** of girls' school students noted higher teacher engagement than their coed counterparts. A greater proportion of students noted teacher engagement during class indicated a better class environment and more teacher attention being paid to individual students.
- **CLARITY:** Students at girls' schools replied positively **74% of the time** on questions about teacher clarity, higher than coed female student responses. Indicators of teacher clarity were well-developed lesson plans and an environment that is more conducive to students' learning.
- **ADAPTIVENESS:** Teachers at girls' schools employ alternative teaching strategies and lesson plans to **maximize the learning** of their students, according to study responses.
- **ENTHUSIASM AND ENCOURAGEMENT:** Overall, female students at girls' schools noted more frequently than their coed peers that their teachers were **enthusiastic**, displaying higher levels of teacher **encouragement** and **motivation**.

#### 2. READING COMPETENCIES

- **Sixty-seven percent** of girls' school students indicated that they enjoy reading, higher than girls at coed schools.
- More than three quarters of the students at girls' schools said that they **engage in leisure reading** time and also indicated that they **read more frequently** than their coed peers.
- Girls' school students noted a greater frequency of **engaging with digital media** than their coed counterparts, indicating their digital literacy skills and facility with technology.

#### 3. POSITIVE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENTS

*There are substantially fewer disruptions in girls' school classrooms.*

- **Forty-five percent** of girls' school students reported that they do not regularly experience disruptions in the classroom, while their coed peers reported significantly more classroom disruptions.
- Students at girls' schools noted slightly higher agreement with a correlation between **effort** (trying hard at school) and **future opportunities** (will get me into a good university and lead to a promising career) than coed female students.



#### 4. POSITIVE RISK-TAKING AND PERSISTENCE

- Seventy-five percent of the time, girls' school students agreed with statements involving **competition**, indicating that competition is enjoyable, important, and motivating to them, more so than to girls at coed schools.
- Students at girls' schools reported higher agreement with statements about **persistence** at school than girls at coed schools. They responded that they found satisfaction and enjoyment in working hard and in improving on past performances. They also agreed with the statement that they would prefer to continue working on a task until it is mastered, rather than moving on to something new.
- Students at girls' schools also noted that they were **less worried about failure** than their coed peers.
- Seventy-seven percent of girls' school students reported having **self-confidence**. They noted feeling a sense of accomplishment, identifying that when they are in a difficult situation, they can usually find a way out of it, and that they can handle many things at a time. Coed students agreed with this statement less often.



#### 5. HIGHER ASPIRATIONS

- Seventy-five percent of students at girls' schools say that they have developed a sense of **purpose and meaning**, and that they have a clear sense of what gives meaning to their life, compared to 69% of coed students.
- A notable majority of girls' school students indicated that they have strong **learning goals**; they are intent to learn as much as possible, to completely master the material, and to understand the content of their classes as thoroughly as possible. Just over half of coed female students reported the same.

#### 6. SCHOOL WELLBEING

- Students at girls' schools indicated more frequently than girls at coed schools that they made **friends easily**, felt like they **belonged**, and that other students seem to like them.
- In responding to negative aspects of school life, girls' school students noted higher disagreement scores than coed students. They were **less likely to feel like an outsider** at school or feel awkward or lonely.
- Across all statements, students at girls' schools noted significantly **fewer incidences of bullying** or teasing.

### CONCLUSIONS

It is evident in this broad study that girls' school students are experiencing many common benefits to the girls' school experience. In particular, **engaging teachers** who are drawn to and supported by girls' schools contribute to **positive classroom experiences** and school life. At girls' schools, girls' **reading competencies**, habits of mind, and overall **aspirations** are enhanced. While many of the challenges that our schools face are unique, these shared threads, highlighting the profound and positive impact of girls' schools on the healthy educational and social development of girls, are to be celebrated.

## PISA STUDY

### KEY HIGHLIGHTS

*Significant differences reported between students at girls' schools and girls at coed schools including these notable areas:*

Teachers at girls' schools are engaged, **FLEXIBLE, ENTHUSIASTIC,** and **ENCOURAGING.**

---

Classrooms at girls' schools are **less disruptive** and students see a clearer correlation between **effort** and **future opportunities.**

---

Girls' school students enjoy reading, **READ MORE** frequently, and **ENGAGE MORE** with a variety of digital media.

---

**Higher aspirations** are more common at girls' schools and together with stronger learning goals, they report a clear sense of **purpose** and **meaning** in their lives.

**COMPETITION IS VALUED** more by students at girls' schools, with respondents noting that they **WORRIED LESS** about failure and have higher self-confidence.

---

Students at girls' schools found greater **satisfaction** and **enjoyment** in working hard towards a goal, preferring to persist until mastered.

---

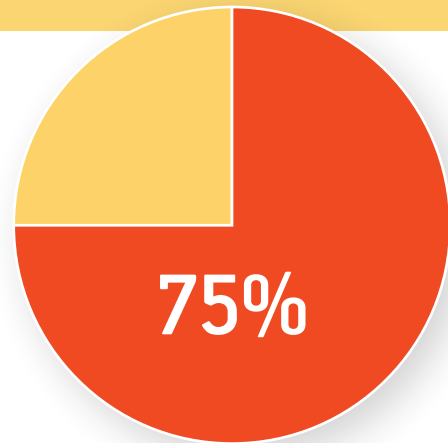
**WELLBEING** was noted as a **STRENGTH** at girls' schools, with fewer incidences of bullying; that students were less likely to feel like an outsider and that they belonged, **MAKING FRIENDS EASILY.**

# The Girls' School Advantage

*By the Numbers*



Students at girls' schools indicated more frequently than girls at coed schools that **THEY MADE FRIENDS EASILY**, felt like they belonged, and that other students seem to like them.



**SEVENTY-FIVE PERCENT** of students at girls' schools say that they have developed a sense of purpose and meaning, and that they have a clear sense of what gives meaning to their life, compared to 69% of coed students.



Seventy-five percent of the time, girls' school students agreed with statements involving competition, **INDICATING THAT COMPETITION IS ENJOYABLE, IMPORTANT, AND MOTIVATING TO THEM**, more so than to girls at coed schools.

## 54%

**OF GIRLS' SCHOOL STUDENTS NOTED HIGHER TEACHER ENGAGEMENT THAN THEIR COED COUNTERPARTS.**

A greater proportion of students noted teacher engagement during class indicated a better class environment and more teacher attention being paid to individual students.



Girls' school students reported experiencing fewer classroom disruptions than their coed peers.