

## North Star College Preparatory Academy For Boys

To: **Scott Pearson**  
Executive Director, DC Public Charter School Board  
**PCSB Staff and Charter Review Committee Members**  
DC Public Charter School Board  
**Board of Trustees Members**  
DC Public Charter School Board

From: **Shawn Hardnett**  
Application Lead and Founder, North Star College Preparatory School for Boys

Re: Research to Support Single Gender Schools

Date: April 30, 2017

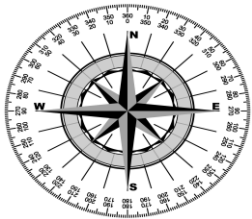
I would like to begin by thanking you all for the awesome opportunity to submit an application for a unique school option for the families of Washington DC. This process has been rigorous and the PCSB staff has been consummately professional in dealing with me as this process has continued to progress. Even with the support of a grassroots community of kids and families as well as broad support from the DC education equity and reform community, we have never once taken for granted that this is indeed an application process. In considering the educational landscape and the many landmines that come with it, it is appropriate that the PCSB be deliberate in the way that it makes the consequential decision to approve or deny a new school proposal. My hope is that our work is worthy.

It just so happens that the day after the Public Hearing, I boarded a plane to Austin to present at and participate in the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color (COSEBOC) conference. I was a founding member of this network when there were only 30 of us in the room, half whom were still planning schools. We are now thousands of members strong. On the first day of the conference, I had the pleasure of spending the day at Gus Garcia Young Men's Leadership Academy, an Austin Independent School District single gender middle school ranked Exemplary by AISD. Once a coeducational campus and a persistently struggling school, the teachers and leaders petitioned the district to reconstitute the campus as the male component of two single gender academies that have continued to improve since the programs started. While I was there, I had the opportunity to interview an additional 6 gentlemen about their school and the experience they had at Garcia as opposed to the coeducational environments they came from. They all talked about relationships with their teachers, belonging to a community/brotherhood, being on a team and having fewer distractions - completely aligned with what we have been hearing in our conversations with other young male scholars across the country.

The keynote speaker at the opening reception and banquet that evening was a 13 year-old dynamo. This young man is a motivational speaker who has met a former president and delivered keynote speeches at local and national conferences. After his keynote, he joined a panel hosted by COSEBOC on the subject of K12 education reform. I was lucky enough to be called upon to ask the only question that a 300-member audience was given. Asked to suggest 3 things that must happen at North Star if it is going to be a powerful program for young men like him in DC, he immediately replied, "Brotherhood, Relationships and Values."

A long introduction, but necessary for the progression of the argument that I intend to make.

The morning after the Public Hearing, I received call of support from the lead on a separate school application. We had spoken on a couple of occasions throughout the application process and have remained generally supportive of one another. This leader explained that they had been deeply impacted by our presentation and thought that the program that we have designed was critical. This leader expressed an interest in seeing the application of North Star progress as much



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as their own application and did not want me to engage in a debate that might distract from its progression. This leader has done extensive research at a major university on the topic of single gender education. Even without the gender-specific expression of pedagogy, this leader was certain that the North Star program as it is designed is more than enough to change the life trajectories of the many deserving young male scholars of Wards 7 and 8 who need something different. As much as possible, this applicant wanted to dissuade me from allowing the deeply contentious, divisive and even salacious topic of gender brain research to distract from the progression of a program with so much potential. I was simply floored.

The lead on another application that was submitted this year has also commented on the quality of the North Star application, the strength of the Founding Group and the solidity of our presentation at the Public Hearing. This leader also commented on the intentional work that we did to involve the community and match the program to the community that we intend to serve. I was again reminded me that the subject of single gender education is difficult for many, even in the face of the abject failure of institutions to serve boys of color. As the person who has worked on the national scene supporting new school investments, this leader wanted me to know that all of the elements of the strongest programs that have been awarded under their organization's purview are comfortably seated within the North Star application.

This continued to weigh heavy on me. While at the conference, I took the opportunity to briefly broach this topic with mentors, elders and several cofounders of COSEBOC. Some of those individuals included the CEO and Founder of a national organization focusing on the study of this work, the CEO and Founder of a high performing network of schools serving boys of color, the author of a book detailing the foundation of a high performing boys academy, an educational advisor to both Cory Booker and Hillary Clinton, a person formerly associated with the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans and several other leaders of high performing schools for boys.

To the person, their advice was exact – stay away from this argument. In summation, I was advised that there are a group of people who are opposed to single gender education at its core, people who would rather see nothing change for failing boys than to allow the progression of a program that upsets their personal sensibilities and beliefs about education. For them, there is no amount of research that will be able to validate this approach. They will attack the credibility of the argument, the credibility of the research, the credibility of the researchers, the credibility of the institutions from which the research is drawn and finally the credibility of my own observations, experience and record of results. Finally, they admonished me that I would most certainly exhaust myself arguing and re-arguing one point of the research against another with one person and then another and finally find myself worn-out and significantly distracted from the important work of building out the worthy elements of a program that will lead to outcomes for the children who deserve to have my focus be on them. A group that includes several of the researchers who designed the COSEBOC Standards and Promising Practices are sure that what we have designed in North Star is completely aligned to the programs of the single gender schools that are getting the greatest results. A link to those standards is provided below.

The succinct vote of confidence from so many key practitioners is encouraging and I have been humbled by their support. At the same time, I know and respect that no one of them will vote or influence the vote of any person who has the power to approve North Star. That responsibility falls to this group alone.

With regards to the question of whether or not there is research to support that single gender schools lead to better outcomes for boys of color, we have provided a series of studies below that certainly support this argument. For the purposes of our submission, we intentionally flooded the application with research to support the individual elements of the program, the components that we believe carry the essential strength of North Star Strategy. Thank you for rightly outlining that in all of the research that we provided in support of those elements, we never provided the specific citations regarding the value of single gender education. While certainly not exhaustive, please allow the citations below to serve as supporting documentation where the success of single gender education is concerned. That said, we respectfully ask that the question be reframed in a way that does not make North Star responsible for resolving a national and international debate that is rife



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with contention – contention that we deeply desire not to be a part of. Instead, we would ask that our application be considered with the following question in mind, “**Does the North Star application as it stands demonstrate that this school will produce better outcomes for boys of color in Washington DC?**”

Unlike the hundreds of national and international single gender private schools that have had hundreds of years to iterate their program models, single gender schools within the **public** sector of education in the United States of America have had only 10 years. And, the results **are** mixed, varying in success from state to state and campus to campus. Additionally, the research does not do enough to separate schools that merely split boys and girls and house and educate them separately from true single gender schools that intentionally build and implement programming to capitalize on the implications and mitigate the barriers. North Star is designed to be the latter. With the time and latitude that so many other program models have been given to iterate, we are sure that we too will build longitudinal data and best practice that can be shared and refined as well as exemplars to be held up as models.

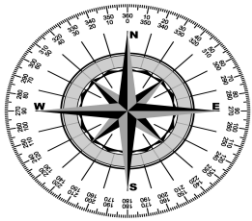
We certainly appreciate that we are asking for the PCSB to make the bold step of approving a school that is similar in focus to a school that the PCSB was recently burdened to shut down. That should definitely raise caution. At the same time, several of the schools that have been approved since Septima Clark PCS was closed have had a focus and a model still under development, some similar to school models that have needed to be shut down either here in DC and/or in other parts of the US. The research demonstrating the specific impact of Blended/Personalized Learning on the outcomes of male students experiencing urban poverty is certainly mixed. Still, schools espousing this model are being widely chartered and given the time and latitude necessary to iterate to strength. The research demonstrating the specific impact of Adult Reengagement Programs on the outcomes of male students experiencing urban poverty is certainly mixed. Still, schools espousing this model are being widely chartered and given the time and latitude necessary to iterate to strength. The research demonstrating the specific impact of Project Based/Experiential Learning on the outcomes of male students experiencing urban poverty is certainly mixed. Still, schools espousing this approach are being widely chartered and given the time and latitude necessary to iterate to strength. The research demonstrating the specific impact of Intentionally Integrated schools on the outcomes of male students experiencing urban poverty is certainly mixed. Still, schools espousing this approach are being widely chartered and given the time and latitude necessary to iterate to strength.

We are asking that North Star be given the opportunity that so many other programs have been given to iterate to strength – with the understanding that it is being founded and led by an individual with an unarguable track record of results with this very demographic that we intend to serve, using a proven program of implementation.

The relevant and appropriate school culture, rigorous and engaging content and curriculum, deliberate attention to relationships as well as acute strategy for academic intervention are all key elements of this program that make it more than adequate to address the academic and non-academic issues that these young male scholars face. In many schools that have failed boys – single gender and coeducational schools, these program components have very simple not been executed with fidelity.

Like many other unique school models within the equity and reform movement of Washington DC, we see North Star as an option. It is an option in direct response to a very clear need and a demand that exists within the community, but an option nonetheless. The foundational argument for the school and the model is established below:

1. **Community**: Our summation of comments from public forums, no less than 25 neighborhood association and education committee meetings and conversations with countless families in Wards 7 and 8 are as follows:
  - a. We need good schools
  - b. We need middle schools
  - c. We need something different for our boys
2. **Data**: Black and brown boys continue to be the lowest performing demographic of students in DC



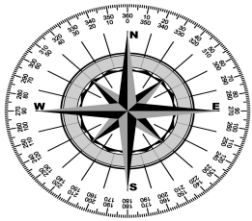
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- a. Boys of Color attending Ward 7 and 8 district schools underperformed the average for every other demographic of students citywide, even Students With Disabilities
- b. Boys of Color are several years behind in ELA and Math
- c. Boys of Color have outpaced engagement in discipline with the greatest expulsions, suspensions, in-school suspension, detentions and general disciplinary referrals
3. **Student and Family Input:** Boys of Color and their families have clearly stated that their experience in schools is not working:
  - a. Boys say that they are bored and unchallenged by the content and curriculum
  - b. Boys say that they are not connected to the school, the curriculum, the methods used to teach and the teachers who preside over them
  - c. Boy say that their teachers don't care and won't remove the distractions that get in the way of their learning

As the body responsible for progression of new schools, the PCSB has to make sure that even when there is both demand and need, that new schools are a match to the task before them, possessing the knowledge, experience and capacity to make good on the promise of their application. As a school proposal for a single gender academy, the North Star College Preparatory Academy for Boys rightly raises concerns that you want to investigate. While we do not think that North Star should be required to suffer for the clear execution failures of another school, we do appreciate that the recent closure of a school with a similar focus (***not a similar model***) has appropriately illuminated the due diligence process for us. We want to be sure to clearly assert the position that when a school serving boys fails, the bringing together of boys is not the problem. The problem lies in the deficits of the model being engaged or the inability of those implementing the model to execute with fidelity. The PCSB wants to be sure that we are not planning to move forward with a program with similar deficits. And, it is very clear that we are not.

Two underlying concerns have continued to drive questions about the viability of the North Star school model:

1. North Star College Preparatory Academy for Boys has to demonstrate the commitment to and the capacity to operationalize on an inclusive environment that is safe for every student who attends:
  - a. We have designed a trauma-informed social emotional learning for academics program that will build a community of brotherhood within a population of students who have experienced disproportionately high poverty and trauma.
  - b. We have designed a college-going academic school culture of efficacy with a focus on relationships, brotherhood and community - appreciative of and protective of difference in all forms, paying special attention to identity development including identity where non-conforming gender and sexual identity is concerned.
  - c. We have designed an academic and cultural program relevant to male students who have been impacted by urban poverty, paying special attention to content and program flexibility for young men of various backgrounds and male scholars who may come with a home language other than English.
2. North Star College Preparatory Academy for Boys has to demonstrate the commitment to and the capacity to operationalize on an effectual instructional program:
  - a. We have experienced leadership and a group of founding staff with a national and local track record of performance significantly increasing outcomes for the very students that the school intends to serve.
  - b. We have amassed a critical set of skills in a Founding Group and an Inaugural Board of Trustees with the skills, capacity, time and commitment to the goals established by the school and the willingness to hold the leadership accountable to those results.
  - c. We have designed and beta-tested elements of an instructional program with sound intervention strategy as a core component for immediately and regularly assessing instructional strengths and deficits and a school schedule that allows for the deliberate engagement of strengths and prescriptive remediation of gaps.



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- d. We have designed an instructional program that offers, as a foundation for every child, the level of intervention, instructional approach and support that a high quality SWD or ELL plan attempts to guarantee. Everybody gets this every day.
- e. We have designed a content and pedagogy model that is research supported, evidence-based and, more than anything, observed as best practice with many high performing partners.

As a Founding Group, we are absolutely sure that the application as is stands clearly demonstrates:

- a significant need and more than sufficient demand for the school,
- sufficient progress in the development of a strong academic and cultural program,
- consistent adherence to a driving set of core beliefs encapsulated within a clear vision, missions and values statement,
- a commitment to inclusion, and
- the commitment of a capable group of experienced founders.

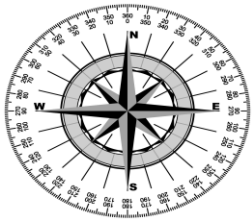
At the opening reception of COSEBOC, there was a second panel. During that panel, I met with the young panelist and his family outside the banquet hall. I quickly conducted portions of the same interview that I have been using with all of the young men that have contributed to the design of the school. I learned that he is indeed in the graduating class at the very Gus Garcia that we had visited that day. His sentiments were aligned with what others like him have been saying all along. I thanked him. Then, he thanked me – for getting other boys out of the bad places that he knows that they are in.

Please know that I am more than willing to speak with any individual or group to further address this issue. I know that there are traditions with regards to how schools in the application process communicate with board members and I do not want to violate that. Still, this is obviously a matter of great concern to me and if additional testimony is necessary, I am more than willing to stand in.

### Specific Research Citations on the Value of Single Gender Education:

1. Meta-Analysis Of Single Gender Education On Performance and Attitudes - <http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/bul-a0035740.pdf>
2. Meta-Analysis, Single Gender Schools Somewhat Helpful And Not Harmful - <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/other/single-sex/single-sex.pdf>
3. Single Gender Classes Create Results In Math And Reading - [http://www.ncgs.org/Pdfs/Resources/Single-sex\\_classes\\_abstracts.pdf](http://www.ncgs.org/Pdfs/Resources/Single-sex_classes_abstracts.pdf)
4. Single Gender Education Closes The Achievement Gap For Boys - <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Effects+of+single-sex+and+coeducational+schooling+on+the+gender+gap...-a0189289833>
5. Single Sex Education Benefits Students Of Poverty More - <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED492000.pdf>
6. Single Gender Education Can Be Better - [http://www.educationworld.com/a\\_curr/curr215.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/curr215.shtml)





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7. The Advantages Of Single Gender Schools - <https://www.thoughtco.com/advantages-of-single-sex-education-2773308>
8. Boys And Girls Achieve In Single Gender Schools - <http://www.ascd.org/ascd-express/vol5/512-newvoices.aspx>
9. Separation Without Gender Differentiated Instruction Training For Teachers Is Not Enough, Pros and Cons - <http://www.greatschools.org/gk/articles/single-sex-education-the-pros-and-cons/>
10. Greater Gains For Low Income Boys At Single Gender Schools - <http://www.ncgs.org/Pdfs/Resources/RF171-5.pdf>
11. Single Sex Schools for Girls With Male Teachers - <http://www.wiwiss.fu-berlin.de/forschung/veranstaltungen/rse/Ursprung.pdf?1353071429>
12. Greater Gains For Girls In Math In Single Gender Classes - <http://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2357&context=dissertations>

### Book Sources:

1. *"Why Gender Matters: What Parents and Teachers Need to Know about the Emerging Science of Sex Differences"*, Leonard Sax, M.D., Ph.D., Basic Books Publishing, February 14, 2006
2. *"Boys Adrift: The Five Factors Driving The Growing Epidemic Of Unmotivated Boys And Underachieving Young Men"*, Leonard Sax, M.D., Ph.D., Basic Books Publishing, 2007
3. *"The Minds Of Boys: Saving Our Boys From Falling Behind In School And Life"*, Michael Gurian and Kathey Stevens, Josse-Bass Publishing, August 6, 2007
4. *"The War Against Boys: How Misguided Feminism Is Harming Our Young Men"*, Cristina Hoff Sommers, Touchstone Publishing, 2001
5. *"Understanding Black Male Learning Styles"*, Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu, African American Images Publishing, 2011
6. *"Raising Cain: Protecting The Emotional Lives Of Boys"*, Dr. Michael Thompson, Random House Publishing Group, 2000
7. *"Teaching Reading To Black Adolescent Males: Closing The Achievement Gap"*, Alfred W. Tatum, Stenhouse Publishers, 2005
8. Coalition Of Schools Educating Boys Of Color Standards And Promising Practices - <http://www.coseboc.org/coseboc-standards>