

My name is Tom McDonald. I am a retired School Principal from NY. To put my comments in context, I respectfully state that I have a Ph. D. in distributive leadership and team building from NYU. I teach leadership theory to future school administrators. I moved to Raleigh in June.

I know that the Board is considering two concepts that are new to the district ... same-gender schools and leadership academies. With the leader academies on the agenda for a vote to allocate funding, I would like to offer some thoughts on these two concepts.

First, the research on same-gender schools shows mixed reviews on their specific value to student learning. However there is a clear social theme that emerges throughout this research, with such positives as:

- \* less peer pressure
- \* less distractions by opposite-sex interactions
- \* less gender-stereotyped restrictions such as girls looking more to math and science, and boys taking fine arts

With this research in mind, it is important to note that best practice research on learning environments, such as the studies done on professional learning communities by Richard DuFour, suggest teaching students to manage such challenges rather than avoiding them. DuFour discusses how good school cultures that carry genuine collaborative decision making and consensus building can create learning environments that support such management in a more natural co-ed environment.

Second, the concept of leadership academies is a quality idea. My own studies would confirm that there is great value to begin teaching students about leadership concepts and roles in society. Having said that, it is important to emphasize that leadership is a social phenomenon. Above all else, it is a social skill, where leaders seek to move others in a positive direction ... to motivate, coordinate and promote high performance. As a social endeavor, leaders will need to develop this skill in a setting the will best mimic the real world that they will lead in.

With this conversation on these two concepts in mind, I have the following questions for the Board:

- \* How do same-gender schools allow for real-world experience when we have removed and insulated these future leaders from the very social challenges they will face as leaders?
- \* What is your rationale for mixing these two new concepts together in one school setting?

\* What data was used to support a decision to create leadership academies in same-gender learning communities?

Thank you for your time.