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# Girls 'held back' by schools

## PV trustees asked to study effects locally

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There is little doubt that Pajaro Valley schools are fostering stereotypes, even if unintentionally, that place girls at a disadvantage in the schools, a representative of the Watsonville chapter of the American Association of University Women told district trustees last night.

Just how prevalent and entrenched those stereotypes are is what the women's group wants to know.

Pamela Peterson, an AAUW rep-

resentative, asked the board last night to conduct a survey in the district to see how gender inequalities, wittingly or unwittingly created, may be having a detrimental effect on girls' self-esteem and their academic performance in the classroom. The board agreed to look into the matter but passed on conducting the survey, saying the issue of gender inequality is something the district's Strategic Planning Committee will investigate as part of its long-range plan.

By placing the matter on the

committee's long list of items, the issue of gender inequality could get lost and not receive the attention it requires, some commented to the board. Trustees Kristen Cozad and Janet Mayou, the only two women on the seven-member board, voted against the move, saying the issue deserves looking at sooner rather than later.

The AAUW commissioned a study conducted last fall by Greenberg & Associates, The Analysis Group, a polling agency based in Washington, D.C., that determined that schools, wittingly or unwittingly,

create gender stereotypes that have a detrimental effect on girls' self-esteem, cause them to fall behind boys academically and choose careers such as nurses or teachers instead of aiming at being doctors or lawyers.

The report, released in January, was drawn from interviews of 3,000 students across the country, boys and girls in grades 4 to 10 from 12 cities in 10 states. What it found was disconcerting for school officials and sounded an alarm about the future of America, un-

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less schools address the issue of gender inequality.

"Gender inequality in our schools systemically, if unintentionally, drives girls away from advanced study and careers in a wide range of academic pursuits — particularly math and science. In the next 10 years the fastest growing occupational fields in the county will be those requiring strong educational backgrounds in these fields," a summary to the AAUW report said.

"The crucial importance of educational equity becomes apparent when you realize that by the year 2000, two out of three entrants to the labor force will be women. Discouraging two-thirds of our future work force from pursuing fields that require backgrounds in math and science threatens our ability

to meet the needs of our future," the report added.

Boys, the report said, tend to be more self-confident and more likely to assert themselves in class. Girls, on the other hand, tend to place more importance on physical appearance, particularly in middle school, when the biggest drop of their self-esteem occurs. The report encourages teachers and school officials to reinforce academic excellence for girls, especially in math and science, since performing well in these areas has the most positive effect on the both girls' and boys' self-esteem.

Peterson said the AAUW would be monitoring how the district will be investigating the issue of gender equity. She said the district needs "an on-going consideration of this issue."

She added, "You need to keep the community informed; you need to keep the (school) staff informed on this issue."