

LAUSD opens girls-only leadership academy

By ANNE ARTLEY
Contributing Writer

LOS ANGELES — The first single-gender public school in the state's recent history opened its doors on Aug. 16 to its pilot classes of 100 sixth graders and 54 ninth graders.

The Girls Academic Leadership Academy aims to inspire interest in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM), subjects where girls start to lag in middle school, according to the Los Angeles Unified School District.

"Girls and boys are fairly equal in elementary school, but then girls' scores in math and science go down in middle school," Principal Elizabeth Hicks said. "When they get to high school, far fewer girls than boys take Ad-



Students at the new Girls Academic Leadership Academy raise their hands on the first day of school Aug. 16. The school is the first ever in the Los Angeles Unified School District devoted to all girls.

Photo by Anne Artley

vancement Placement classes in STEM [subjects], and they don't perform as well."

Hicks, a former LAUSD teacher, recognized the need for the type of school after she saw the education her own daughters were receiving at Marlborough School, a private, all-girls academy in nearby Hancock Park.

"I realized the education they were getting was so great, that it should be available to all, not just those who can pay tuition or receive a scholarship," Hicks said.

The school, which operates on the campus of Los Angeles High School, will start out with just the sixth and ninth grades this year, and then add the seventh and 10th grades for the 2017-18 academic year. It will continue in this way until it fills grades sixth through 12. The Boys Academic

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Leadership Academy, a school with a similar structure, plans to open next year on the campus of George Washington Preparatory High School in South Los Angeles.

The girls welcomed visitors such as LAUSD school board President Steve Zimmer, Vice President George McKenna III and Superintendent Michelle King, who stopped by two classrooms to give encouraging words for the first day.

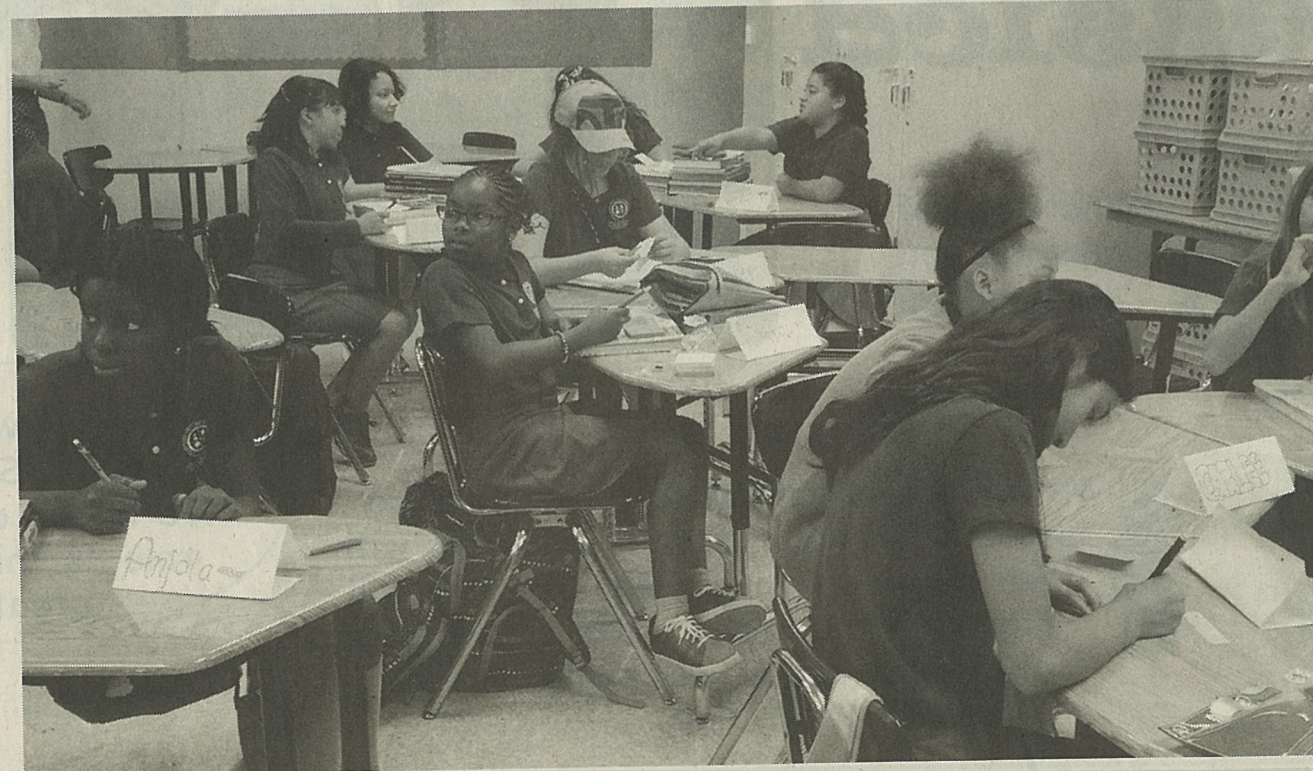
"When I was in high school, the girls were always smarter," McKenna said jokingly. "When I got to college, they were still smarter. Then when I was working as an engineer, there were no more girls."

Hicks said the reasons girls are still underrepresented are complicated and sometimes hard to determine.

"It can be societal, that it starts to be uncool to be a smart girl," she said. "It can also stem from not seeing any role models, so we're bringing in mentors from different industries to talk to them."

The girls themselves noticed at their former schools that the presence of boys could have an affect on their learning style.

"The boys tried overrule girls sometimes, especially during projects," said sixth grader Lauren Wright, who ex-



The new Girls Academic Leadership Academy, which opened on the campus of Los Angeles High School Aug. 16, has a student body of 154 girls — 100 sixth graders and 54 ninth graders. The school will add seventh and 10th graders next year, eighth and 11th graders the following year and will become sixth through 12th grade by the 2020-21 school year.

Photo by Anne Artley

pressed a desire to become an inventor.

"That's so true," added Niah Overstreet, a ninth grader.

"We were reading this book, 'Blood on the River', and this one boy kept talking," Wright said.

The pilot classes of girls hail from throughout the LAUSD, private and charter schools all over the city. The academy is ethnically mixed, with 30 percent Caucasian students, 30 percent Hispanic and 23 percent African-American.

"My middle school had boys, and honestly, I'm a little boy-crazy so I got distracted from my work," Overstreet said. "So my mom and I decided this school would be a good fit."

The academy's curriculum incorporates design, architecture and the arts. As well as the traditional extracurricular activities, students have the chance to participate in a flight club (with flight simulators), a maritime roving vehicle club and robotics.

In addition to STEM, the girls also expressed interest in singing and acting. Overstreet said she hopes to become a criminal defense attorney.

"My dad is a judge," Wright said in response. "I can help you with that. We can connect and I'll get you an internship."