

## The Status of Male Teachers in Public Education Today

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### UPCOMING POLICY BRIEFS . .

- ✓ *The Accuracies and Fallacies of Graduation Rate Calculation Methodologies*
- ✓ *Perspectives on the Key K-12 Legislation of 2008*
- ✓ *Breaking the Mold: Virtual Education in the Digital Age*

### INTRODUCTION

Current statistics show that roughly one-quarter of all classroom teachers are male and the proportion plummets to approximately ten percent in the elementary grades. A paucity of men in teaching is certainly not a new phenomenon and has remained relatively constant despite a century or more of various educational reforms. Before presenting current statistics on the lack of male teachers, this brief will establish the necessary historical context of the issue so that teaching's dubious classification as 'women's work' is adequately understood. Many men cite several common reasons why they do not choose teaching as a career, and several empirical studies will be reviewed in this report outlining the unique experiences of male teachers.

Conclusions and recommendations will focus on the recruitment and retention of men in education, but will avoid arguments based on a perceived crisis in the underachievement of male students and the need for male role models, which are prevalent in popular media representations. This brief departs from conventional wisdom and old-fashioned stereotypical thinking when it comes to gender, arguing instead that the lack of male teachers undermines gender equity and social justice in schools. Encouraging men to teach and care for children is one essential front in the struggle against restrictive gender roles and may ultimately support the expected promotion of democratic and egalitarian values in public schools.

### STARTING OUT: THE CURRENT STATUS OF MEN IN EDUCATION

#### Teacher Demographics

It is widely reported that the proportion of male teachers in public schools is at its lowest in decades, hovering at just one quarter of the nation's approximately three million teachers.<sup>1</sup> According to national data illustrated in Table 1, Indiana ranked fourth in the nation during the 2005-06 school year, with 30.5 percent of public school teachers being men.<sup>2</sup> Available statistics dating back a century or more demonstrate the persistent gender disparity in the teacher workforce. As early as 1869, for instance, roughly 39 percent of all elementary and secondary public school teachers were men. The relatively low percentages of men in the classroom have persisted with 29 percent at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and a dismal 24 percent 50 years later.<sup>3</sup> Table 2 illustrates this decline in male teachers in the United States by decade. The American education system is thus left with a significant gender division in its teaching professionals. Male teachers are least common in elementary education; only 1 out of 10 elementary classroom teachers are men.<sup>4</sup> The lack of men in education, however, is not endemic to the United States. Even though the rising percentage of women teachers relative to men varies, the absence of men in teaching is more or less a universal trend.

A cursory examination of several major industrialized nations in Europe shows percentages of male primary teachers around 20 percent in 2005.<sup>5</sup> One interesting outlier

is Denmark, where in 2000 only 64 percent of all primary teachers were women.<sup>6</sup> In fact, the majority of Danish teacher trainees were men as late as 1960.<sup>7</sup> The so-called ‘feminization’ of the teaching profession is still a complicated issue despite its apparent ubiquity. International and even regional distinctions within the United States exist in terms of the rates of ‘feminization.’ As detailed later in this policy brief, however, an influx of women into teaching is closely related to periods of industrialization and urbanization when a wealth of new higher paying industrial jobs drew men away from teaching, leaving women to fill the void.

### The Call for Male Teachers

Reports discussing the need for more men in education typically cite two primary justifications. The first has to do with the pro-male backlash against feminist gains beginning in the early to middle 1990’s. This backlash resulted in what has been referred to as the ‘boy crisis’ or the ‘boy turn’ in educational reform movements.<sup>8</sup> Policies mitigating the educational inequi-

**TABLE 1. Top Ten States in the Proportion of Male Teachers**

State	Percentage of Male Public School Teachers, 2005-06
1. Kansas	33.3
2. Oregon	31.4
3. Alaska	30.9
<b>4. Indiana</b>	<b>30.5</b>
5. Washington	29.6
6. Wyoming	29.5
7. Pennsylvania	28.8
8. Minnesota	28.5
9. California	28.4
10. Montana	28.1
<b>United States</b>	<b>24.4</b>

Source: NEA Research, Estimates Database (2007)

ties led to gains in the overall achievement of female students, whereas the performance of male students remained stable overall. For instance, data from the National Association of Education Progress (NAEP) show that over the last several decades, the gender gap in student

achievement is narrowing, yet girls tend to outperform boys in key subjects such as reading and writing in greater margins than boys outperform girls in math and science.<sup>9</sup> To backlash proponents, however, increases in girls’ achievement and the narrowing gender gap are signs that boys are now at risk. To evoke a crisis, they cite a number of factual indicators, such as higher dropout rates or increases in problem behaviors, that under further scrutiny do not suggest that boys are the new educationally disadvantaged.<sup>10</sup> Other reports document gender differences in the brain to argue for boy-friendly teaching strategies as a way to compensate for the ‘feminized’ environment in public schools.<sup>11</sup>

Another widespread justification for more male teachers states that boys at a younger age must have strong male role models. In many of these accounts, authors note that it is difficult for boys to develop a healthy masculinity against a preponderance of women teachers and increasing rates of absent fathers. Additionally, it is important for male teachers to be stable academic role models for disaffected boys in order to counter negative attitudes towards schooling, which lead to higher dropout rates and poor achievement.<sup>12</sup> Male teachers themselves consider this a powerful justification for their presence in teaching and they often cite the desire to mentor young boys as a reason for choosing teaching.<sup>13</sup> There are two fundamental assumptions to the role modeling justification for more male

**TABLE 2. Proportion of Male Classroom Teachers By Decade: 1870 - 1990**

School Year	Total Teachers (in thousands) <sup>1,2</sup>	Male Teachers (in thousands) <sup>1,2,3</sup>	Percentage of Male Teachers
1870	220	90	40.9
1880	294	123	41.8
1890	368	123	33.4
1900	432	126	29.1
1910	534	110	20.5
1921 <sup>4</sup>	723	118	16.3
1931 <sup>4</sup>	872	154	17.6
1941 <sup>4</sup>	859	183	21.3
1951 <sup>4</sup>	963	235	24.4
1960	1,408	235	16.6
1970	2,059	676	32.8
1980	2,184	708	32.4
1990	3,051	669	21.9

<sup>1</sup> Select years prior to 1951 include small number of librarians and other non-supervisory instruction staff.  
<sup>2</sup> Censuses prior to 1938 cited number of different persons employed rather than number of positions.  
<sup>3</sup> Estimated, 1970-1990.  
<sup>4</sup> Data not available for starting year of decade

Source: Historical Statistics of the United States, 2006

teachers. First, a healthy type of masculinity exists that must be modeled for boys as early as possible in schools. Second, positive male role models are essential to improving a supposed decline in boys' school performance.

Thorough examination of numerous reports and relevant academic literature exposes the doubtful nature of these assumptions. Work on the socialization of gender identity in young people reports the lack of empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of male role modeling.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, it is noted in more recent work that male teachers reinforce rather than challenge the same restrictive gender roles that turn men away from teaching in the first place.<sup>15</sup> Proponents of the role modeling perspective are usually unaware of lack of support in the research literature and cannot adequately define the role to be modeled, let alone guarantee that education professionals are going to set the appropriate example. Thus, it is apparent that male teachers 'modeling masculinity' in the classroom is not an adequate justification for their increased participation based on the research literature.

In terms of the second assumption — male teachers mitigating the flagging achievement of boys — adequate empirical evidence does not exist that supports matching students and teachers by gender or that suggests the gender variable has any effect on a variety of student achievement and satisfaction measures.<sup>16</sup> International reports also reject the effects of teacher gender on the achievement of students from myriad racial and ethnic categories.<sup>17</sup> However, a study by Dee (2005) indicates that some gender interactions between teacher and student — classroom dynamics and teacher attitudes — comprise a notable 'environmental influence' on student performance.<sup>18</sup> Yet, isolating the effects of teacher gender amidst countless other school and classroom variables poses a Herculean task for educational researchers. On the whole, the lack of solid data and an inability to draw causal connections between numerous variables render it nearly impossible to determine how teacher gender factors into achievement gaps between girls and boys.<sup>19</sup>

## What is the Problem?

The lack of men in education is ultimately one very specific component of the general goal of school improvement; much of the rhetoric focuses on boys' underachievement derived from feminized teaching methods and few positive male role models.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, empirical evidence does not support the claims of the 'boy crisis' or, supposing a crisis exists, that male role modeling is an effective remedy. What is more, students are even uncertain if the gender of their teachers matters.<sup>21</sup> Important questions thus remain — is the paucity of male teachers a problem? Moreover, if it is a problem, then who is affected by it?

Despite the initial presentation of contradictory evidence, the lack of men in the classroom is an important problem for education. Deep gender divisions in the teaching profession go against the democratic and egalitarian values schools are expected to promote. As long as this disparity continues, new generations of children daily learn a form of sexist gender relations.<sup>22</sup> Such relations continue to feed a preponderance of women into teaching and men into administrative or managerial positions, reinforcing the powerfully corrupt idea that men rule women and women rule children.<sup>23</sup>

There is some historical precedent to the idea that women teach and men manage. The formalization of schooling and the standardization of teacher hiring practices throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries increased the regulation of schools and restricted the entry into teaching for men who were seeking respectable yet temporary employment.<sup>24</sup> Greater regulation necessitated the hiring of more administrators and supervisors, which favored the hiring of men. Conventional wisdom at the time stated that men were more effective managers and the lure of promotion could be used to keep them in the profession.<sup>25</sup> Despite the preponderance of women in teaching positions, the domination of men in supervision at all levels of public education persisted well into the 1990's.

However, statistical data reveal that between the late 1990's and 2004, the proportion of female elementary school principals increased nationally from 41 percent

to a majority of 56 percent.<sup>26</sup> In 2006, 63.9 percent of all education administrators were female.<sup>27</sup> Other statistics reveal that women are currently being granted education administration graduate degrees at twice the rate of men, which might be a sign that the upward trend of women in administration will continue.<sup>28</sup> Finally, a comprehensive analysis of three states confirmed such a positive trend in the numbers of female administrators at all levels of education.<sup>29</sup>

In light of this data, it appears that education, a venerable social institution responsible for transmitting culture and democratic values to future generations, is becoming uniformly female in its workforce. What seems at first glance like a resounding feminist victory over the misogynistic idea that women cannot hold supervisory positions, an overwhelming majority of women and a dearth of men in an entire social institution violates fundamental democratic principles of equal opportunity, access, and self-determination based on gender in a free and open society.<sup>30</sup> It is possible that restrictive gender roles limit equal opportunity by discouraging men from teaching who might otherwise be predisposed. Not that all career decisions are based on what is and is not appropriate to a particular gender, but the overwhelming majority of women in teaching and, more recently, in administrative posts suggests that one segment of the population is being disproportionately encouraged to choose careers in education. Even the idea that women are more suitable teachers is potentially restrictive as females who are not predisposed to teach could be encouraged within society to do so regardless.

The call for more men in education should avoid old-fashioned and simplistic notions of gender in favor of pro-feminist and democratic goals. As long as individual autonomy to choose one's rightful place in a free society is restricted by sexist gender policies, then the freedom to choose teaching or any other career is restricted. In contrast to the demand for male teachers based on male role modeling and 'boy crisis' paradigms, programs for more men in education should embrace goals of gender equity and social justice within the broader society.<sup>31</sup> An alliance with pro-feminist perspectives would shift the focus to the breakdown of the restrictive definitions of

gender that oppress both sexes and in turn discourage men from teaching.

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## LOOKING BACK: TEACHING AS WOMEN'S WORK

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### Caveats about 'Feminization'

Before giving a brief history of the current problem, a few specifics with regard to the so-called 'feminization' of teaching must be explained. The term 'feminization' is to a certain extent an inadequate and misleading concept. First, it is inadequate because a host of significant structural changes in teaching and education occurred simultaneously with the shift in teacher demographics, such as the standardization of hiring practices and stricter certification requirements. Additionally, the numerical ascendancy of women teachers was not an about face; it occurred rapidly in some cases but more gradually in others. Even within the teaching profession itself, discrepant rates of 'feminization' were observed between secondary and primary teaching.<sup>32</sup> Second, referring to teaching as 'feminized' is misleading because it implies that education is somehow infiltrated or biased by a particular ideology. This enables proponents of the 'boy crisis', who dubiously claim that schooling's 'feminized' environment hinders male achievement. Referring to teaching as a 'feminized' profession or stating that a process of 'feminization' occurred is still reminiscent of a stereotypical set of gender relations, which continually prevents a larger sense of anti-sexism in schools.

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### The Tale of Male Exodus

In a slight improvement over accounts of 'feminization,' historical factors will be presented from the perspective of men leaving the teaching profession in large numbers rather than as an invasion of women into the classroom. Men were, over time, less attracted to what teaching had to offer. Throughout the colonial period and into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, educational professions provided stable and fairly respectable jobs for middle-class men who were either in career transition or required a stepping-stone towards other occupations.<sup>33</sup> Sweep-

ing changes in American society transpired throughout the 1800's that fundamentally altered how people valued education and increased the demand for compulsory schooling. These changes led to numerous educational reforms, such as the standardization of extremely localized hiring practices and the specialization of teacher licensing based on grade levels and subject matter.<sup>34</sup> Stricter policies of recruitment and retention no longer accommodated those who saw teaching as transient work.

Rapid economic growth and industrialization flooded the market with new capital wealth and a multitude of highly paid industrial jobs. Despite more restrictive means of hiring and certifying teachers, teacher wages remained low relative to manufacturing, managerial, and other professional occupations.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the opportunity cost of choosing teaching may have been too high for many men, who ended up leaving the classroom in favor of well-paid industrial jobs. The male exodus from teaching hit its zenith around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century precisely when the demand for teachers was at a tipping point. Increased urbanization, exacerbated by an influx of immigrants and the continued proliferation of industry, led to a rapid surge in the school population.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, a number of reforms such as mandated school terms and compulsory attendance were implemented as the public increasingly valued universal education. The confluence of these factors put education in a historical bind: to meet the overwhelming demand for teachers while holding candidates to a higher standard and not having the funds to compensate for advanced credentials and longer terms.<sup>37</sup>

Defining teaching as women's work could be interpreted as a remarkably clever marketing tool used by educational reformers to meet the demand for teachers. The vacuum created by the exodus of men to the factory floor — complicated by the proliferation of new teaching positions — had to be filled by someone. Women in the middle to late 19<sup>th</sup> century attained greater access to educational opportunities, yet their career options were still relatively limited. Educated young women who sought upward mobility in society turned to teaching. Reformers slyly advocated for teaching as better suited to women's biological sensibilities, as female teachers could be

hired at roughly a third of the cost of their male counterparts.<sup>38</sup>

What began as a novel approach to meeting the demand for new teachers had profound long-term consequences. Over ensuing decades, teaching children became inextricably linked to domesticity, nurturance, and child rearing. Without suggesting that caring for children as a teacher is superfluous, it is inappropriate to conclude that teaching is more appropriate for women than men because it involves nurturing and caring for children. A century's worth of sexist gender policies gave teaching a contradictory status. Despite being critical to engendering democracy and egalitarianism in subsequent generations, teaching as intellectual work was marginalized relative to other professions requiring similar qualifications.<sup>39</sup> Sexist gender relations not only define teaching in a way that does not welcome men, these views also discourage males from seeing teaching as a viable career option. Why does the historical male exodus continue today?

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## REIGNING IN: WHY MEN DECIDE AGAINST TEACHING

The research literature on the lack of male teachers cites several common reasons for the gender disparity in the teacher workforce. Some empirical work, especially studies conducted in the United Kingdom, put an emphasis on gender and feminist perspectives. For instance, it is argued that a dominant form of masculinity exists in society that emphasizes characteristics like athletic prowess and excessive meat consumption. Teaching's association with care, nurturance, and domesticity firmly places the profession outside the normative boundaries of what are acceptable masculine practices. Challenging such boundaries leads to negative scrutiny within larger society, and many men are therefore reluctant to work with children.<sup>40</sup>

These gender issues are a result of very deeply rooted traditions spanning generations and form the fundamental core of the male teacher dilemma. Large-scale social changes necessary to significantly alter our current gender socialization practices have been profiled in several decades' worth of empirical research and countless other resources. As such, arguments from femi-

nist and gender social theory perspectives do not provide overall practical and actionable interventions in terms of policy. What follows is a focused discussion of three common explanations given in the research literature on the lack of male teachers that are most amenable to immediate policy interventions.<sup>41</sup>

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## Low Wages

Teaching is certainly not esteemed for its financial benefits. Table 3 compares earnings of men in education versus other occupations in various professional categories. Low salary relative to these occupations may be one important reason why the non-pecuniary rewards of teaching are emphasized, such as interpersonal relationships with children and connection to one's community.<sup>42</sup> Low salary may have a differential effect on men because of the perception that they need to be a family's primary wage earner. Additionally, the opportunity cost of choosing teaching may be higher for men since better paying jobs are disproportionately available to them. One way to mitigate this phenomenon is to extol teaching as a vessel for social mobility or provide ample opportunities for promotion and salary increases.<sup>43</sup> The unintended consequence could be what is called the 'glass escalator effect,' whereby keeping men in education leads to channeling them out of the most 'feminized' areas — the classrooms — and into administration.<sup>44</sup> Despite an overall consensus that teacher salaries are low, the wage issue is complicated and a simple solution to the problem is elusive. Not only would an across-the-board salary increase be prohibitively expensive, it would do little to increase the overall quality of teachers or target those most effective in their jobs.<sup>45</sup>

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## Lack of Prestige

Communicating teaching's low status in the professional world is difficult. It is at first unclear what it means to say that teaching lacks status or prestige. Few would disagree, however, that educational professions do not have the same cachet as, for example, medicine or law. If conventional definitions of status or reputation are taken for granted — that is, relative social standing of a profession — then the social

standing of teaching has suffered greatly throughout history due to its close association with two marginalized groups: women and children.<sup>46</sup> Teaching's low status resulted in a number of restrictive policies that took control of the profession away from educators and places it in the hands of middle-level administrators. For instance, it is argued that teaching underwent a process of intensification in recent decades, whereby teachers have become overloaded with non-teaching duties such as excessive paperwork and child and health care duties, subsequently cutting them off from professional growth in their fields. A preponderance of support on curriculum and pedagogy comes almost exclusively from administrators, who then achieve the higher status as educational experts.<sup>47</sup>

Processes like intensification dis-empower education professionals over time. Male educators are completely aware of teaching's low status relative to other professional occupations. Similar to the low wage issue, many who want to stay in education — which is now true for both men and women — compensate by taking better-paid and higher status administrative positions. It has also not been unusual for many male teachers to be coerced out of the classroom and into administration.<sup>48</sup> A traditional preponderance of men in managerial positions taps into the same well-spring of stereotypical gender roles. The tendency for women to teach and men to manage is a deeply rooted form of sexism in education, but figures reported earlier in this brief illustrate that a dearth of men in administrative roles is also an issue. Thus, trends demonstrate that the educational profession is becoming less diverse—particularly in terms of gender—the implications of which on student achievement and other measures must be critically evaluated.

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## Physical Contact with Children

Even while on the job, men experience undue pressures to avoid physical contact or to be alone with young children for fear of a perceived impropriety. Evidence from the research literature suggests that this suspicion is stressful for men who enjoy working with children and leads to greater scrutiny from peers or the school community.<sup>49</sup> Apprehension about caring for

young children is especially a problem for pre-service and new teachers. On the other hand, anxiety abates somewhat as teachers become more experienced.<sup>50</sup> Fear of caring for younger children is also argued to be a part of a pervasive homophobia or the avoidance of behaviors inconsistent with a stereotyped version of masculinity. Anxieties over being seen as gay or a 'soft male' continue to confront current male teachers and likely discourage others from teaching.<sup>51</sup>

Care is a problematic concept in education. Various definitions and applications of care abound. However, other professions that involve caring, such as nursing, tend to experience similar issues, such as an overwhelming preponderance of women. For example, only 7.7% of registered nurses were men in 2005.<sup>52</sup> Within education, caring for children professionally is for men a taboo that many are unwilling to challenge out of fear of social repercussions within the larger society.<sup>53</sup> The cycle perpetuates itself to some degree because children do not observe men in caring roles; an uncritical acceptance of the status quo by America's own public school teachers continues to teach children stereotypical views of gender.<sup>54</sup>

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## SIGNING UP: RECRUITING MEN TO TEACH

Interventions typically fall within two general categories: recruiting more men into teaching and supporting those who are already on the job. There is adequate justification for programs that support males who are already teaching. Male teachers often report a few negative experiences while in schools, such as isolation from colleagues, greater scrutiny from administrators, and disparaging comments from those who think working with children is unsuitable for men.<sup>55</sup> Reducing such experiences may decrease attrition. The retention of male teachers should be a policy goal concomitant to recruitment measures. But before specific policy recommendations are suggested, a few exemplary programs and resources are presented briefly. Their inclusion merely illustrates current initiatives; they are not per se indicative of the recommendations ultimately suggested by this policy brief.

# Policy Perspective



Most research confirms that teachers have a singular impact on student learning. Teachers are facilitators of learning and disseminators of information. They are also role models to their students. Today, too often, they are the student's only role model.

If we want students to grow up to be healthy, productive citizens and to be able to compete in this 21<sup>st</sup> century global economy and beyond, we must create an environment that is conducive to positive growth. This growth is greatly contingent on Indiana and the United States having the best public school teaching force possible. A teaching force of female and male teachers that includes a proportionate number of minority teachers is essential in providing to students a full complement of competent role models. There is a need for multiple literacy programs in every community. Focus must include communities, homes, businesses, and religious institutions.

This is especially true when examining the male population. There are a disproportionate number of males that have not acquired the skills that are necessary to compete.

According to a 2004 survey conducted by the National Education Association (NEA), just 21 percent of public school teachers in this country were men and the ratio of male to female teachers had steadily declined over the past 20 years to the point of reaching a 40-year low.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, Indiana's male teacher percentage was among the highest in the country at 31 percent.<sup>2</sup> The numbers of male teachers working in elementary schools are even more disappointing. According to the NEA, the percentage of male elementary teachers has fallen from a record high of 18 percent in 1981 to a record low of 9 percent today.<sup>3</sup>

## THE IMPORTANCE OF MALE TEACHERS IN THE CLASSROOM

Greg Porter

Last year, Indiana University's School of Education offered a new class developed by doctoral student Shaun Johnson entitled, "Men in Education and the Male Teacher." The class was designed to study the lack of male teachers in elementary schools and early childhood programs.<sup>4</sup>

So, while we have long known that we are facing shortages of teachers in certain geographic areas in this state and shortages of teachers teaching certain subject areas, should we now be concerned with the statistical under-representation of teachers based upon gender?

The answer is "Yes," since statistics prove that the male student population in institutions of learning is at a crucially high-risk level, we must be concerned with how to manipulate the environment in order to lower this risk and to increase this segment of the population. The most fundamental and essential element of any culture is to teach people the knowledge of themselves. We are not born with the knowledge of who we are, what we have accomplished, and what we can become. We only develop based upon information we receive about ourselves. What better way to disseminate information than by someone who is most like you and who can best understand your way of thinking?

There is no getting around the fact that the scarcity of males in teaching may be reaching crisis proportions in some schools. From my years of work in the Indiana General Assembly, I certainly understand the need for culturally competent curricula in schools. I can say with little doubt that the lack of males in teaching in general is exacerbated by the lack of minority teachers and minority male teachers in particular.

These teacher shortages can be traced to a variety of factors. An NEA study and the Indiana University course noted above include the following root causes:

1. Salaries are low for teachers when compared to other professions; the NEA report concluded that the states with the highest salaries also had the highest percentage of male teachers.
2. Historically, teaching has been a largely female-dominated profession.
3. For elementary education, there is a perceived stigma around men wanting to work with young children.

Regardless of the reasons for the shortages and because of state and federal academic achievement and school accountability mandates (No Child Left Behind and P.L. 221-1999), Indiana must view as urgent the development of policy initiatives to encourage teacher recruitment and retention, particularly in the areas of male and minority teachers. And in our thrust to achieve the highest academic standards, to lower the dropout rate of males in high school, and to eliminate the achievement gap we must have a diverse and culturally competent teaching force.

As a 16-year member of the Indiana's House Education Committee and as Chair of the Committee for the last eight years, I have introduced and heard several bills dealing with teacher recruitment and retention, many of which have been passed.

The bottom line is that a truly productive learning environment, enabling all students to have a full-range of positive role models in the classroom, includes a broad array of male, female, and minority teachers. This includes no male being "left behind."

Greg Porter is state Representative for House District 96 in Indiana and Chairman of Indiana's House Education Committee, which he has been a member of for 16 years.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nea.org/newsreleases/2004/nr040428.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nea.org/newsreleases/2004/nr040428.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nea.org/teachershortage/03malefactsheet.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.indiana.edu/~soenews/news/>

# Policy Perspective

## INCLUDING MALE TEACHERS IN OUR FUTURE EDUCATIONAL DIVERSITY

Bryan G. Nelson



Imagine walking into the ideal school that will prepare children for the future. The building would be modern, clean, and have all the up-to-date energy savings advances and the latest in technological equipment. The teachers would be the best and brightest, well trained and also well paid. And lastly, they would be representative of the children and families they serve — a diverse staff with equal numbers of men and women teachers.

But that isn't the way it is today.

Whenever I walk into a classroom, children come up to me wanting to know, “Who are you?”, “Are you someone’s dad?” or “Does wearing a tie hurt your neck?” They are hungry for a man’s attention. Most are fascinated by my arrival to their classroom that rarely has men and they all want to know all about who I am, what I do, and most importantly, why am I there.

Children want to understand the people in their world, yet when you look at our schools we see that there are few men in their school — particularly men from diverse cultures. From my years of working as a teacher, university faculty, and visiting classrooms to observe teachers, children want strong, caring and competent men in their daily lives. This need is obvious from their responses to the rare man who visits their learning environment.

When children see no men working in schools, the message is that schools are not a place for males. This may partially explain why more girls and women are completing high school, entering college, and going on to graduate school than boys and men.

That observation is not meant to imply that children don’t need or already have strong, caring, and competent women. My perspective is that recruiting more male teachers is not about men versus women — it is about offering children a diverse group of adults to whom they can relate and respond. If you consider that we make extra efforts to recruit girls and women to be doctors, lawyers, firefighters, athletes, and carpenters, it makes sense to recruit boys and men to be teachers, nurses, and dental hygienists.

A second important perspective is that our work to recruit and retain male teachers is not based on placing any man in schools. Children need competent and qualified adults teaching them; therefore our efforts seek only competent, qualified men.

### Getting Men into the Classrooms

The solution to recruiting more men to teaching requires both individual (parents, guidance counselors, and principals) and statewide effort. Individuals need to invite boys to become teachers and offer them opportunities to help to teach younger children. I know one principal in a school district that consistently has more male teachers than any other schools because she actively recruits them. She goes out to job fairs to recruit new teachers by bringing her existing male staff. By having men sitting at the tables, potential recruits take notice.

Another simple, cost effective method is to make schools male-friendly. Decorate halls and classrooms with images of men with children who are learning and engaged in activity. Create an environment that offers opportunities for boys (and girls) to burn off energy. Encourage teachers, when they call a student’s home, to talk to the father rather than always asking for the mother. Those actions will not only help make a school more welcoming to male teachers but also to boys and fathers.

If you don’t have a male teacher in your school, make it a priority to interview and hire one. My research shows that while men do apply to

teach, they just don’t get interviewed. And if they are interviewed, they are questioned about their motivation for teaching children. If you have male teachers, provide them with mentor support. With a staff that includes qualified male teachers, your school will have a new richness, and so will your students and their families.

There needs to be financial incentives for men to be teachers. We know from National Education Association data that states with the highest salaries have the most male teachers. Support a “GI Bill” specifically for recruiting more male teachers. After World War II the percentage of male teachers doubled. Why? Because soldiers returning from the war were rewarded with free college education; they wanted to contribute something significant to their community. Let’s provide men returning from Iraq and Afghanistan an opportunity to teach.

The Indiana legislature in collaboration with the corporate community, school districts, and university programs need to develop programs throughout the state where men are recruited from high school into a pre-service teaching program.

One outstanding program that has high school students mentoring middle school students is [www.BreakthroughCollaborative.org](http://www.BreakthroughCollaborative.org). It is an example of a growing movement to help middle school students attend college and many boys and men work in schools.

Many of us in teaching remember having a teacher that inspired us. Providing a diverse staff offers more options for children to find a teacher to relate to and be inspired by. When we hear the word diversity, let’s begin to include gender as part of that definition. Recruiting more men provides children an opportunity to be taught by a diverse workforce, satisfy a need for male teachers, and provide hope for the future.

Bryan G. Nelson is founder and director of [MenTeach.org](http://MenTeach.org).

**TABLE 3. Median Weekly Earnings by Men in Various Professional Occupations in 2006**

Occupation	Median Weekly Earnings
<b>Various Education Occupations</b>	
Elementary and Middle School Teachers	\$920
Secondary School Teachers	\$950
Education Administrators	\$1,275
<b>Other Professional Occupations*</b>	
Accountants and Auditors	\$1,160
Computer Software Engineers	\$1,410
Electrical and Electronics Engineers	\$1,409
Medical Scientists	\$1,162
Clergy	\$801
Lawyers	\$1,891
Designers	\$868
Physicians and Surgeons	\$1,847

\*Jobs chosen are those with highest numbers of men in nine categories of professional occupations

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Wage Data (2006)

diversity in teaching, especially with regard to teacher candidates from impoverished backgrounds. The assumption seems to be that teachers from meager circumstances are more effective at reaching youth who experience similar economic conditions. MISTER combines resources from a consortium of historically black colleges in South Carolina to provide scholarship opportunities, tuition assistance, and social and academic guidance to prospective students from low-income and educationally at-risk populations.

### **Troops-to-Teachers (TTT)<sup>60</sup>**

Similar to the MISTER initiative, the TTT program strives to recruit highly qualified teachers for schools that enroll a preponderance of at-risk students or are in low-income communities. However, one crucial difference between TTT and the other programs outlined above has to do with its fundamental mission, which is to support the transition of military personnel to civilian life as teachers in targeted public schools through certification assistance and other career services. Ameliorating the lack of diversity in the teaching profession is not really a part their mission. On the other hand, approximately 86% of active duty army personnel are men.<sup>61</sup> On the surface, this would seem like an accessible and appropriate pool from which to recruit male teacher candidates.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The concluding remarks and recommendations of this brief are based on the fundamental contention that the lack of male teachers is a significant problem in education worth solving. Conventional avenues of role modeling and 'boys crisis' perspectives are — in terms of the male teacher dilemma — theoretical dead ends. An alternative argument should be advanced, namely that the gender disparity in teaching is a poor example of democratic values and social justice in schools that are tasked to transmit such highly treasured cultural ideals. The numerical ascendancy of women in teaching in the United States continues after more than a century and certain trends now show that all levels of education are increasingly represented by

### **MenTeach<sup>56</sup>**

MenTeach is a non-profit organization striving to provide information and support to those who are interested in teaching or willing to encourage others to work with children. The organization officially began in 1979 in Minneapolis after its founder Bryan Nelson recognized a need for a more diverse educational workforce. Since then, MenTeach has provided a home on the Internet for information about teaching and a place for male teachers to share their unique experiences. A number of retreats and conference presentations for men in education initiated a variety of independent publications about fatherhood and other educational issues. The organization also conducted comprehensive research about the lack of male teachers which suggests a few policy interventions, such as male-specific recruitment programs or initiatives to combat sexism and gender bias in schools.<sup>57</sup>

### **Mizzou Men for Excellence in Elementary Teaching (MMEET)<sup>58</sup>**

The MMEET program is organized and directed by Dr. Roy F. Fox at the University of Missouri-Columbia, whose primary mission is to inform and support male teachers who are at various stages in their careers. MMEET consists of monthly seminar meetings in which participants discuss a variety of educational issues relevant to the male teacher dilemma. Those eligible for the program must either be teaching or on a path to certification and are required to go through a detailed application process. MMEET above all emphasizes collaboration amongst education professionals and provides an essential opportunity for young educators to be mentored by more experienced teachers in a rigorous and informed environment.

### **Call Me MISTER<sup>59</sup>**

The MISTER program is a recruitment initiative established at Clemson University in South Carolina with a main goal of promoting diversity in the teaching profession. The program does not specifically target men and is more interested in overall

only one gender. Few would agree that this is a social reality worth promoting. Schools should thus no longer be staffed in ways that condone inequality and sexist values.

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## Conclusion

The vast majority of men do not consider teaching a viable career option and many others, such as guidance counselors, steer them away from working with children. Adequate compensation is lacking in teaching compared to that of competing opportunities for many young people, especially for men who continue to face stereotypical pressures of becoming the primary wage earner. Additionally, traditional gender roles specifically restrict career options for men who are reluctant to challenge dominant definitions of masculinity. Various reports do not make specific suggestions on how to confront the male teacher problem, often resorting to simplistic solutions such as hiring male support staff or recruiting men as volunteers.<sup>62</sup>

## Recommendation

A collaborative relationship should be established between university-level teacher preparation programs and surrounding school districts in order to confront the lack of male teachers. At the university level, gender issues should be explicitly addressed in teacher preparation programs so that the chain of traditional gender relations is broken before new teachers reach the schools. It is often the case that teacher education programs do not adequately address gender in their curriculum.<sup>63</sup> In collaboration with local districts, colleges of education can work closely with K-12 teachers and administrators to place male pre-service teachers in classrooms with veteran male teachers. They could also conduct special chats or panel discussions so that new and veteran male teachers could share their experiences.

Local school districts must do their part in this collaborative arrangement by sending teachers and administrators to college campuses to meet with students, especially males, who are considering a major in education. Additionally, males considering education as a major could be flagged in a university database and subsequently contacted by an academic advisor or a practicing

male teacher to discuss their interest in education. This extensive relationship between the school district and colleges of education would likely require the assistance of a special “men in education” liaison, perhaps a graduate student or a team of students and education professors specifically dedicated to the male teacher problem. Tuition assistance or stipends should be made available to practicing teachers who participate in the collaboration.

The recommended collaboration between schools of education and local districts is essential to the effective and well-intentioned implementation of programs to attract and recruit male teachers. An ongoing relationship with the education research community specific to gender issues would ensure that recruitment measures adhere to a gender social justice paradigm. Additionally, collaboration would provide necessary professional development opportunities for teachers and even teacher educators to question their own biased assumptions and halt the promulgation of sexist policies.<sup>64</sup>

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## Conclusion

Empirical and anecdotal evidence demonstrates that male teachers experience unique problems on the job. Often one of the few or only adult males in a school, many report being isolated from colleagues or subject to greater scrutiny from administrators and parents.<sup>65</sup> Men must also deal with ridicule or misunderstandings from a society that does not reconcile traditional gender norms with males in a caring role. These stressors, in addition to those already expected as a professional educator, could in fact lead to greater attrition rates or discourage men from teaching in the first place.

## Recommendation

It is recommended that school districts or corporations adjust current programs to support and monitor on an ongoing basis new and veteran male teachers. Specific attention to gender issues would help men cope with the various negative experiences, such as greater scrutiny from school officials and isolation from colleagues. Moreover, the wheels of bureaucracy may be slow to turn at the level of university teacher preparation programs. It thus

behooves local districts to bear some responsibility for addressing the lack of men in education in their respective communities. If the collaborative relationships between teacher preparation programs and local districts were untenable, then particular programs would already address gender issues at the school level.

One significant benefit to a district-level program specifically dedicated to supporting male teachers is the ability to reach out to youth in local communities. Male high school students can be recruited to mentor young children to establish necessary practices of care essential to breaking down traditional definitions of masculinity that discourage them from working with children. Close collaboration between secondary and elementary schools within a local community would likely establish a greater sense of mutual responsibility for the nurturance and educational success of young children.

It is important for schools of education to work with veteran educators, but a large portion of their responsibilities goes to the training and preparation of new teachers. It has already been established that teacher preparation needs to more adequately address gender issues and set forth greater goals of gender social justice in teaching. Should preparation programs fail to do their part, local districts and individual schools need to prepare their currently practicing teachers to challenge the status quo and raze the path towards sexist politics. Furthermore, schools possess a tremendous capacity to confront traditional gender attitudes.<sup>66</sup> Teachers and other educational professionals need to adjust current mentoring programs to tackle gender issues and transmit a new set of values tailored to their individual communities, sending the message that teaching and working with children is an appropriate career option for men.

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## Conclusion

The male underachievement and role-modeling perspectives are largely idiomatic in their appeal and are not supported by evidence in the research literature. There are also no comprehensive reviews or empirical studies conducted on the effectiveness of the recruitment initiatives already in place, such as Call Me MISTER or the

MMEET program. Finally, evidence for the effects of teacher gender on student achievement and satisfaction measures has been disappointing or inconclusive.

## Recommendation

A new, well-informed, and comprehensive research agenda should be implemented in the United States with a focus on the subject of male teachers and the overall structural implications of gender in the teaching profession. The male teacher research program needs to accomplish two primary objectives. First, the debate on the lack of male teachers in the United States needs to shift away from role-modeling and the needs of boys, to a new agenda of gender social justice and egalitarian values. Such progress is already being made in many of the studies overseas, in areas such as the United Kingdom and Australia. Furthermore, some evidence suggests that the presence of figures in schools that are contrary to stereotypes — male teachers and female principals — promotes egalitarian views in some children.<sup>67</sup> People in contradictory roles have the potential to promote more progressive gender values in students. Longitudinal studies of the effects of male teachers and other contradictory role models on children's gender stereotyping could help clarify this issue.<sup>68</sup>

The second recommended objective of the male teacher research agenda should be the continual evaluation and monitoring of current and future men in education recruitment initiatives. It is essential to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of programs such as MMEET or Call Me MISTER as they continue. Without denigrating the efforts of these programs or their inherent social value to the teaching profession, if these programs thrive only in very local and limited ways, then there is no way to guarantee their effectiveness on the scale required to overhaul the gender stratification of teaching. A comprehensive research agenda on men in education should bring together the leaders of local programs and enable many others to share their ideas. The male teacher issue is a topic that gets many people talking and should be included in the overall conversation of social goals in schools so that gender in education issues remains on the educational policy agenda.<sup>69</sup>

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