

Where Are the Men?

The closest I've ever gotten to winning the lottery was living two blocks from where the winning ticket was sold. But that didn't stop my imagination. If I won, I'd buy the car I'd always wanted. I'd give my family and friends money to make some of their dreams come true. And I'd build the ideal school.

The school would have the latest technology and be clean, with all the toilets working. It also would have highly qualified, well-paid teachers. But most importantly, there would be an equal number of male and female teachers, as diverse as the students enrolled in the school.

An equal number of male and female teachers? Now that's a dream!

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reveals that in 2004, 44.7 percent of secondary school teachers and 18.7 percent of elementary and middle school teachers were men. And in kindergarten and prekindergarten classes, we find that only 1.9 percent of the teachers are men.

Why Men Don't Teach

My research shows there are three primary reasons why men don't enter or remain in teaching:

Teaching is stereotyped as women's work. Some believe women make better teachers, that men are not nurturing, and that teaching is not work men are good at.

Some fear male teachers will harm children. Sadly, many in our society suspect a man who wants to work with children—particularly younger children—of being dangerous.

Teaching has low status and low pay. Many men can't or won't work for a teacher's salary.

Let's look at each of these reasons and see how they might be addressed:

Is teaching really only women's work? Studies show that male teachers are as patient and nurturing in their work as females. In fact, during colonial days teaching was primarily a male occupation. By the mid-1800s, the percentages began to change as women delayed

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marriage and their increasing level of education drew more of them into the classroom—where they were more acceptable because they could be paid lower wages than male teachers.

Do male teachers really pose a threat to our children? This is a myth that has no roots in child abuse statistics. In 90 percent of reported cases, the perpetrators were parents or other relatives—58 percent of them women—and not teachers. Of course principals must be

HERE'S YOUR CHANCE TO SPEAK OUT

Are there any male teachers in your school? If not, would you consider hiring one? Do you perceive your school to be male-friendly? Share your thoughts and opinions with other principals by going to www.naesp.org/speakingout/.

vigilant when hiring. But seeing men as a threat simply because of their gender does not protect children. When men are watched more than women, the teaching environment becomes hostile for them.

Are men not teaching because of low pay? Not necessarily. In unionized school districts where teachers have the same levels of experience and education, male and female salaries are similar. However, let's be clear. If teachers were paid higher salaries, more men would teach.

Getting Men into the Classrooms

Children learn from what they see. And when they see no men working in schools the message is that schools are not a place for males. Which may partially explain why more girls and women are completing high school, entering college, and going on to graduate school than boys and men.

How can principals increase the number of male teachers and retain those they already have? Here are two practical suggestions:

Make your school 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 to burn off energy. Encourage teachers, when they call a student's home, to talk to the father rather than ask for the mother.

Interview and hire more men. 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. 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. ■

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