

# Needed in School Teaching: A Few Good Men

A Massachusetts institute aims to close teaching gender gap

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There is a definitive gender gap in our institutions of higher education, with female students making up significant majorities of undergraduate enrollments nationally—more than 60% at many colleges and universities. In addition, U.S. Department of Education statistics show that male students (no matter their race or socioeconomic group) are less likely than female students to fulfill the requirements to earn their bachelor's degrees. Among those who do, fewer men complete their degrees in four or five years.

With fewer men enrolling in and completing college, our campuses are out of balance. This leads inevitably to a lack of men in college and university education departments, which impacts the availability of men as role models in elementary and secondary schools.

The number of male school teachers is at a 40-year low. According to MenTeach.org, an advocacy organization for the recruitment of men in education, men comprise fewer than 3% of preschool and kindergarten teachers and just 19% of elementary and middle school teachers. For male teachers of color, the statistics are even more uneven. Teachers of color (women and men) make up 16% of the total teaching population, and nearly 42% of public schools have no teachers of color employed at all, according to the National Education Association.

At the CAYL Institute in Cambridge, Mass., we released a report once again confirming that male teachers are an “endangered species.” The report, *Where Are the Men? Promoting Gender Diversity in the Massachusetts Early Childhood Workforce*, details some of the reasons men are not becoming teachers and what Massachusetts can do to help solve this problem.

There was a time in our country's history when the majority of elementary school teachers were men. In the mid-19th century, men took over the realms of industry and business, and left the teaching profession in droves.

It is easy to see why they left:

**Gender stereotypes are still rampant.** Images of “women's work” and “men's work” continue into the 21st century. To some, men who work with children, especially young children, are not seen as “real men.”

**Economics.** According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, median annual earnings of kindergarten, elementary, middle and secondary school teachers ranged

from \$43,580 to \$48,690 in May 2006; the lowest 10% earned \$28,590 to \$33,070; the top 10% earned \$67,490 to \$76,100. Median annual earnings for preschool teachers were \$22,680, while median annual earnings for someone with a bachelor's degree were \$65,198.

In 2005, the Wellesley Centers for Women released the *Massachusetts Capacity Study Research Brief: Characteristics of the Current Early Education and Care Workforce*. The report found, unsurprisingly, that within most workforce sectors, higher-qualified individuals received increased compensation, but that is not

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the case for all early childhood teachers. A teacher at a private “preschool center” who has a bachelor's degree in the field is paid less than a comparably educated public school preschool teacher. The report found that in 2005, preschool center teachers with a degree earned an average of \$11.91 per hour compared to the lowest paid, full-time public school preschool teachers, who earned an average of \$28 per hour.

**Fear of abuse allegations.** Men who take care of young children may be perceived to be pedophiles or sex offenders. This is incredibly hurtful to men who have established themselves in the field, and compromises efforts to recruit new young men to teaching.

## What Needs To Be Done

We encourage proactive measures to recruit and retain male teachers. This effort must begin in elementary school and extend through the college years. We can do this by:

**Personally inviting middle school and high school males to “teach for a day” or shadow a teacher.** Young men today need to know that teaching and caring for our youngest learners is a viable career choice. A great example of this is the work of Just Holm, preschool manager for the city of Cambridge and 2008 CAYL Schott Fellow. In January 2008, Holm approached the Massachusetts Office of Workforce Development about designing a special program to recruit and hire young men to work in preschool programs offered in the city during the summer. At the end of the summer, 131

male students applied to work in preschool programs and 35 were placed. All the male students successfully finished their placement and the evaluation from the centers was overwhelmingly positive. Year-round placement was offered to two male students who continue to work in recruiting new students for the 2009 summer program. Efforts like this help in two ways: they raise the awareness among young men about a potential career path and they prepare early educators to better work with men under their employ, an issue that men have expressed concerns about in focus groups.

**Increasing the intellectual content of teacher education.** A recent report from eight national partners on higher education and the field of early childhood concluded that early childhood higher education programs are facing adaptive pressures and dynamics for which they are unprepared. While advocacy is growing to mandate bachelor's degrees for teachers and administrators of pre-kindergarten children, schools, colleges and departments of education are finding they do not have the capacity to meet growing community needs as they are understaffed and under-resourced at all levels. While innovations continually emerge from individual

institutions and some state governments, much of the dialogue is occurring among early educators and the college units that support them. This discourages the best and the brightest men and women in the field.

**Generating broad-based, bipartisan support for a "GI Bill for Teaching," involving scholarships and other financial incentives.** What discourages many potential teachers is the prospect of accumulating tens of thousands of dollars in loans and debt, only to make less than \$30,000 a year as a preschool teacher.

Recruiting and retaining more men in the field of early care and education is vital to the future success of our children. When boys and girls lack the first-hand experience and knowledge of men who are caring and nurturing, the message they receive is that it is not an important trait for men. It is an unfortunate truth that men commit the majority of violence in our country, often toward each other. Until we demonstrate that men can teach, be productive and help our children succeed, everyone will lose.

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