



Where Are the Men? Promoting Gender Diversity in the Massachusetts Early Childhood Workforce

The Challenge: Men Are Rare in Early Education and Care Settings

Women are the majority in the early childhood teaching workforce.¹ Recent Massachusetts workforce development policy recommendations for the early childhood field suggest² that program staff reflect the diverse composition of communities served, yet men comprise less than 6% of that workforce. (Such data is not currently tracked in the Commonwealth, but nationally they constitute about 5.4%.³) These numbers are disturbing and have critical classroom and societal implications.

“The problem is not that boys need men for academic achievement – little data supports that. The lack of men in the lower grades reinforces an endless cycle of inequality in men’s and women’s roles.”⁴

—Bryan Nelson, Men Teach

What Are the Major Barriers to Male Involvement?

There are a number of reasons why so few men are entering the early childhood field:

1. Stereotypes

Men are often portrayed as unable to be nurturing, caring, or patient with young children.⁵ Men who express a desire to work with young children are stereotyped as sexual predators, and this is a major impediment to men who want to enter the field.⁶

2. Low Salaries

Given that early childhood education is viewed as “women’s work” and lacks the perception of professionalism, early childhood educators are not paid on a par with their elementary, middle, and secondary teaching peers.⁷ The salaries of early childhood teachers in Massachusetts follow this trend,⁸ discouraging many qualified teachers of both genders from entering or remaining in the profession.

3. Lack of Support

There is currently a lack of invitation and ongoing support for men to teach. In a field where women represent the majority of teaching staff, men are often stereotyped as to which roles and functions they will have in the field. As a result, men in early education tend to experience isolation and sexism. “It has also not been unusual for many male teachers to be coerced out of the classroom and into administration. The tendency for women to teach and men to manage is a deeply rooted form of sexism in education.”⁹



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Why Men Are Essential to High Quality Early Education and Care Programs

As Massachusetts creates a shared vision of quality education for young children,¹⁰ we must be clear about what constitutes that quality. A representative, diverse workforce that promotes professional opportunities regardless of gender can help children develop “an expectation that both women and men are expected to fulfill a full range of adult roles and responsibilities.”¹¹ Recruiting more male teachers into the Massachusetts early childhood workforce provides children with adults of both genders to whom they can relate and respond. We propose that gender diversity, the presence of both females and males in the workplace, must be included in the state’s concept of diversity, as well as in its definition of high quality.

Massachusetts Needs to Act

Massachusetts needs to address these barriers because we believe in the importance of recruiting, retaining, and supporting high quality male teachers into the field in order to improve:

Diversity

Massachusetts and its Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) must commit to ensuring diversity within the workforce, curriculum, and classroom environments by including gender in its current definition of diversity.

Social Development

Boys and girls should have positive interactions with adults of both genders in their daily lives and develop social expectations as a matter of healthy social development.

Equity in compensation

The compensation of early childhood educators should be on a par with all teachers. Low wages deter high quality teachers of both genders from entering the EEC workforce.

Models of Success in Other States¹³

The significant lack of male teachers in the lives of young children continues to be a systemic problem in American culture. Many great initiatives are already in place to address this dilemma:

- In South Carolina, Clemson University offers “Call Me Mister” - a teaching and recruitment scholarship program which offers tuition assistance (loan forgiveness programs), and academic, cultural, and social support to male students enrolled in participating colleges.
- The University of Missouri-Columbia offers “Mizzou Men for Excellence in Elementary Education” – a program that includes a teaching fellowship, certification assistance, and support structures to men pursuing their master’s degree in elementary education.
- In Maryland, Bowie State University’s School of Education offers “Men Equipped to Nurture” - a specialized teacher education program aimed at recruiting and certifying males as teachers.

Strategies to Improve Gender Diversity in the Massachusetts Early Childhood Workforce

In April 2008, we convened a roundtable that brought together over 60 participants representing a wide spectrum of Massachusetts early childhood leaders concerned about the lack of men in the Massachusetts early childhood workforce. Three guiding recommendations arose from these discussions:

1. **Include the term “gender” in all definitions of diversity.**
 - a. To combat discrimination, include the term “gender” in the current General Laws of Massachusetts where it is currently omitted in the definition of diversity (as it relates to the EEC workforce).¹²
 - b. This addition would be in line with the definition of diversity included in House Bill 4706, which was signed into law by July 2008.¹⁴

2. Collect data on gender in EEC workforce.

- a. To better understand the state of gender diversity in the Massachusetts EEC workforce, EEC needs to add information on gender to the workforce data it currently collects. Adding this crucial data on gender will allow us to see how our state is faring in terms of attracting male teachers into and retaining them in the field.

3. Actively invite males into the EEC workforce.

- a. In order to challenge negative stereotypes, teacher recruitment and marketing materials produced by EEC should include photos of men working with children. In addition, EEC should set aside specific funds for an awareness campaign focused solely on the recruitment and support of male teachers.
- b. EEC teacher orientation and training programs should include an educational component on the importance of gender diversity.
- c. EEC needs to develop a recruitment database to share best practices with administrators in order to encourage gender-diverse hiring practices.
- d. EEC needs to formulate and share information surrounding successful early childhood mentor programs that would contribute to the retention and ongoing support of high quality male and female teachers.
- e. EEC needs to address the issues of low salaries earned by early childhood teachers. The department should also set aside 10% of its scholarship fund for male applicants.
- f. EEC should partner with city summer youth employment programs to actively recruit young men in early childhood settings.

4. Commission research studies.

- a. There is little research available that explores the effect that male teachers have on the development of young children or best practices to retain male teachers in the field. We recommend that EEC commission research studies on these two topics to strategically examine the data collected in recommendation 2(a).

CONCLUSION

By implementing these steps, Massachusetts and the Department of Early Education and Care will be moving in the right direction to recruit, retain, and actively support high quality male teachers into the state EEC workforce. New attitudes and higher standards are needed. We must recognize and challenge institutional bias towards men and transform current recruitment and hiring patterns. In doing so, our state's youngest children will be given greater access to competent, nurturing, and qualified adults, both male and female, who are representative of the diversity reflected in their own communities. "Early care and education is being afforded a historically unique opportunity to revolutionize the value that the next generation places on male nurturing behavior, provided the field can recognize the opportunity, overcome any obstacles, and come to expect male involvement as a natural course toward gender equality for all the worlds' children."¹⁵

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Endnotes

1. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2007). *Employed persons by detailed occupation, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity*.
2. Kershaw, A., Sprague, P., & Washington, V. (2008, July). *Steps forward: Recommendations of the 2007-2008 Massachusetts Early Education and Care and Out-of-School-Time Workforce Development Task Force*.
3. See endnote 1. Bureau of Labor Statistics.
4. Jackson, D. (2008, April 22). The value of the male schoolteacher. *The Boston Globe*. Retrieved from http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2008/04/22/the_value_of_the_male_schoolteacher/
5. Kennedy, N.M. (1991). Policy issues in teacher education. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 72; Neugebauer R. (1994, May-June). Recruiting and retaining men in your center. *Child Care Information Exchange*, 97, 5-11.
6. Johnson, S. (2008, Winter). The status of male teachers in public education today. Education Policy Brief. *Center for Evaluation & Education Policy*, 6 (4), 5.
7. Marshall, N.L., Dennehy, J., Starr, E., & Wagner Robeson, W. (2005). Preparing the early education and care workforce: The capacity of Massachusetts institutions of higher education. Center for Research on Women, Wellesley College.
8. See endnote 7. Marshall, Dennehy, Starr, & Wagner Robeson.
9. See endnote 6. Johnson.
10. See endnote 2. Kershaw, Sprague, & Washington.
11. Piburn, D.E. (2006, March/April). Gender equality for a new generation: Expect male involvement in ECE. *Exchange*, 168, 18.
12. <http://www.mass.gov/legis/laws/mgl/15d-5.htm>
13. Models of Success in Other States websites: <http://www.callmemister.clemson.edu>; <http://education.missouri.edu/LTC/mmeet>; <http://www.menequippedtonurture.org/>
14. House 4706: An act relative to early education and care. (2008, April 24). Sponsored by Representative Patricia Haddad.
15. See endnote 11. Piburn.

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