I liked my experience working with children. I think it is important for men to be working in child care programs because as role models, we can teach young ones that men everywhere, not just women, can be a good influence in their lives. Also, race is not a factor in being a good role model; this is true not only in the classroom, but in the community and in the United States as well.

The one quarrel I had during my experience was it seemed that only the women were respected in the eyes of the parents for their hard work—not the men at all.

— Steve

I thought that working with kids would be an easy job. But when I started to work with children two years ago, I knew that there was more than just watching over them and playing with them. I found that I was a protector—I was responsible for these kids. I was to make sure that each one was safe and taken care of. Then I realized that this job—taking care of young children and making sure they are safe—made me feel good.

Then I thought, is this why men don’t want to work in child care, because it’s hard? Because when I grew up, I only saw women in early child care and men mostly in middle school or high school.”

— Jahai

Men matter to young children—this is one of the compelling lessons Steve and Jahai learned. Furthermore, we can see that men care about children. Steve and Jahai are 17-year-old male high school students who spent a summer working in preschool classrooms in the Boston area. They were two of 35 male students from Cambridge, Massachusetts, who signed on to work with young children as part of their city’s summer youth work program.

Men are, in fact, rare in early education and care settings. Nationally, men comprise 5 percent of the child care workforce and 2.2 percent of preschool and kindergarten teachers (BLS 2009). What message does society send to young children (and to young men like Steve and Jahai) when children are denied access to male role models and nurturing experiences with male teachers? How do we effectively counter the stereotypes and institutional biases that prevent men from entering the early education and care field?

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” (Piburn 2006, 18). Recruiting more male teachers into the early childhood workforce provides children with adults of both genders to whom they can relate and respond.

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Starting at the beginning: The belief that we can make a difference

The four authors of this article are 2008 CAYL Schott fellows. The CAYL (Community Advocates for Young Learners) Institute equips leaders in early education to be architects of change for all children. The Schott Fellowship (www.cayl.org/Schottfellowship) supports mid-career early childhood leaders in Massachusetts who are experienced in and committed to working in communities of color and economically underserved communities.

During the yearlong fellowship, we worked together on questions addressing the lack of gender diversity in the Massachusetts early childhood workforce, inspired by Steve and Jahai and our own experiences and observations in the field. We needed to identify policy gaps, such as why state laws about a diverse early childhood workforce did not include gender. We wanted to collect data to see how many male early education teachers were working in the state and where they were teaching. By coupling analysis of the data with the identified policy gaps and seeking input from early childhood leaders and community stakeholders in Massachusetts, we could make recommendations to the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC), an agency of the Massachusetts Department of Education.

What we learned was that the four of us—individuals active in different ways in the Massachusetts early childhood field—could mobilize and influence change on a state level. We hope that you will take our example and become involved and influence change on behalf of young children in your state.

Our advocacy process

Building a foundation. First, we needed foundational knowledge and background to inform our approach. We found two books to be especially helpful: Ready or Not: Leadership Choices in Early Care and Education (Goffin & Washington 2007) and Don’t Think of an Elephant: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate (Lakoff 2004). The first book oriented us to prevalent issues in the early education field and outlined recommendations to mobilize leaders to effect lasting change for children. The second provided guidelines on how to effectively frame our public policy arguments.

Conducting research. Next, we scoured print and online journals to learn how the field was faring in terms of recruiting men to the early childhood teaching profession. We gathered studies, data, and information from Internet sites and print publications and learned a good deal about current perceptions and stereotypes of men teachers in early education settings.

Gathering support from colleagues. After completing our research, it was time to share our findings with community members to get their reactions and input. We convened a community roundtable with over 60 participants from

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all over the state. Our colleagues shared their viewpoints about the shortage of male teachers in early education settings in Massachusetts. During thoughtful discussions, most agreed with our arguments for increasing gender diversity in the workforce and encouraged us to present our ideas to the state’s Department of Early Education and Care (EEC). We also learned about successful male teacher recruitment and support programs in other states. We combined the information we gathered from our initial research with what we learned at the roundtable to inform the policy paper.

**Writing the policy paper.** Our next step was to write a policy paper to communicate our ideas to state legislators, the Department of Early Education and Care, and the general public. The paper would help guide us in later presentations. It would be strategically framed, concise, to the point, appealing to read, and accessible to a variety of audiences so readers would understand our arguments and support our efforts.

**Meeting with the education department.** We met with senior managers of the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care to present the paper and, more important, to begin a dialogue about the need to increase the state’s gender diversity in the early education workforce. The managers were very receptive to our ideas. One staff member noted that the department would include gender in the workforce data collection project being designed and include gender diversity in the core competencies training program for early childhood teachers. We declared this an immediate win.

**Meeting with legislators.** In addition to making our case to the EEC, we wanted to meet with state representatives and senators to discuss the policy paper and solicit their support in specific ways—for example, targeting legislators on the Labor and Workforce Development committee to talk about a recommendation for summer youth programs. Others included legislators on the Education committee and on the Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities committee.

We found that legislators spoke with ease about the topic, regardless of their backgrounds, and we quickly gained their support. Some suggested approaches we had not considered, such as working directly with higher education institutions to bolster their recruitment of males in teacher preparation programs.

Overall, we were heartened by legislators’ warm receptions and pleasantly surprised and empowered by their support and the resources they shared.

**Supporting change: Our policy recommendations**

At the heart of our advocacy efforts are the recommendations to the Department of Early Education and Care for recruiting, retaining, and supporting high-quality men teachers. Change would begin with this department’s leadership, and it was important for EEC to take the initial steps in promoting gender equity in the early childhood field. We wanted our recommendations to apply to the state agency on multiple levels and also trickle down to influence teachers, school administrators, and programs statewide to work toward this goal.

One of the state laws governing the Massachusetts EEC department had a statement about hiring diverse staff, but the definition of *diversity* did not include *gender*, which we sought to include. In addition, as mentioned earlier, we recommended that the department include gender data in the workforce data collection project so the state could determine where it was successful in employing male teachers and how the early education field could learn and replicate effective recruitment practices in other areas of the state.
We also recommended that the department conduct field-leading and field-breaking studies to explore the influence of gender on young children’s school readiness, because there has been little research in this area.

Another pertinent issue was the lack of an open invitation to male teachers. We outlined key steps that the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care could take to actively invite men into the teaching profession—recommendations that did not involve drastic changes to current recruitment practices or additional funding. These are our recommendations to the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care for a proactive approach to recruiting and retaining high-quality male teachers:

- Include photos of men working with children in teacher recruitment and marketing materials to challenge negative stereotypes of men in the early childhood field. Set aside funds for an awareness campaign focused on the recruitment and support of male teachers.
- Include in teacher orientation and training programs an educational component on the importance of gender diversity in early childhood programs.
- Develop a recruitment database to share best practices in recruiting male teachers. Give database access to preschool program directors and principals to encourage gender-diverse hiring practices.
- Formulate and share information about successful early childhood teacher-mentoring programs that contribute to the retention and ongoing support of high-quality teachers, male and female, in early childhood education.
- Address the issue of early childhood teachers’ low salaries. Set aside 10 percent of state scholarship funds for male applicants.
- Partner with summer youth employment programs to actively recruit young men in early childhood settings. (Holm et al. 2008)

To date, the Department of Early Education and Care has begun collecting gender data on teachers statewide in order to monitor and assess geographic areas better at male teacher recruitment (and thereby learn successful regional practices). One city (Cambridge) has successfully recruited young men to work in preschools during summer youth employment programs for the two years since we wrote the policy paper. While these are small successes, they are nevertheless positive steps toward increasing the gender.

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You too can advocate for gender diversity and other early education and care policies that are important to you.

**Your Advocacy Process**

**Build a foundation.** Check your library for the two recommended books. Reach out to college faculty or to staff at non-profit organizations in your community; ask these experts to share their knowledge about your topic with you.

**Research facts and best practices.** Search online resources and public information to define your issue and recommendations.

**Build support for change.** Consider planning community roundtables, focus groups, forums, or meetings to gather interested community members to talk about your topic's issues and questions. These individuals are instrumental in gathering information so your policy recommendations will reflect the voices of your community.

**State your case.** Write a policy paper or develop a formal presentation using the research, information, and data collected.

**Find your voice: Advocate for policy change.** Consider your approach. Brainstorm ways for your group to discuss the policy issue with stakeholders in your state's department of education. (In Massachusetts, EEC holds public forums, inviting members of the public to speak formally to EEC board members for specified amounts of time.) Research public forums in your state.

**Visit legislators.** Find out when and where your local representatives hold office hours. (In Massachusetts, state senators and representatives hold public office hours at least once a week, either in the State House building or at a local business—for example, a diner, library, or café in their communities.) You are their constituents, and to represent you best, they need to hear from you!

**Keep the momentum going!** Continue to recruit stakeholders to the cause and push for your issue. Whenever possible, share your progress with different groups, and always ask for volunteers to help!

diversity in the state's early education workforce. (Read the full policy paper at http://www.cayl.org/files/Men.pdf.)

**You too can take action!**

Our group has vowed to continue to push forward our dialogue with the state Department of Early Education and Care and to identify additional organizations and legislators to enlist in our cause. The more stakeholders advocating on behalf of young children in informed, strategic, and effective ways, the better. We also took back to our respective organizations what we learned during the advocacy process. We each held formal discussions with our colleagues and presented our new knowledge to open a dialogue about how the agencies could become more involved in public policy advocacy.

Over our yearlong advocacy work, many people confirmed the idea that men do matter in the education of young children. We faced some initial reluctance from community members to embrace all of our ideas (for example, dedicating a specific percentage of state scholarship funds to male applicants). However, the majority of individuals we reached out to became convinced of the importance of inviting and supporting men in the early education and care workforce.

We identified ideas and tips others can apply in advancing an issue in their own communities (see "Your Advocacy Process"). Whether you are a teacher, center administrator, early childhood education specialist, or other type of practitioner, by following the process described or using it as a template to formulate your own strategies, you too can advocate for gender diversity and other early education and care policies that are important to you.

**References**


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