

Recruiting and retaining male teachers is critical for a truly diverse and effective NYC Universal Pre-K program.

As New York City continues its efforts to provide universal access to high-quality preschools, a new study from the Borough of Manhattan Community College at The City University of New York examines the factors that influence men's decisions to pursue a career in early childhood education (ECE) and how to increase male participation in the early childhood workforce.

“Currently, only 3% of all preschool and kindergarten teachers in the U.S. are men, **and this situation calls for change** during a critical time when gender expectations are modeled,” said Jean-Yves Plaisir, one of the study's principal investigators. “It is critical to ensure children have exposure to and interactions with a mixed-gender workforce to model the different roles men can play in children's lives.”

Recruiting and retaining more men to the ECE workforce allows children to experience greater gender diversity, leading to richer intellectual, socio-emotional, and cultural experiences that create better outcomes for all children.

“As young children come into their identities, it's important for them to be in settings where they experience that men and women have an important role to play in nurturing and educating young children,” added Kirsten Cole, one of the study's researchers. “This modeling ultimately helps the child have a better understanding of their own identity.”

In fact, male early childhood educators join the field because they feel a moral commitment to make an impact in children's lives. Several referred back to their own experiences as motivating factors, whether assisting their mothers who worked in the field or by being fathers themselves and spending time raising and nurturing their own children.

Men who join the ECE field take **up the mantle** of being “role models,” challenging gender stereotypes and negative social biases while gaining appreciation for their efforts. Over two thirds of male respondents working in the profession reported that friends and family are overwhelmingly supportive of their decision to work in early childhood. Only about 10% of the respondents reported that they faced negative judgment.

Male underrepresentation in the field is linked to traditional recruitment approaches that show gender bias. For example, women are frequently recruited through their experiences in raising young children and interacting with center-based caregivers. Many men play similar roles and are receptive to careers in early childhood education, but they are not actively recruited by early childhood educators or administrators. Furthermore, low pay becomes a retention issue across the ECE workforce, but the problem is especially acute with males where there are cultural expectations for them to be higher wage earners.

The study also illuminates the importance of providing professional development that focuses on the gender-specific experiences and challenges of male educators. For example, researchers recommend affinity groups that bring together male educators for meetings to overcome isolation in settings in which they are often the only male educators. ECE programs and settings should also provide workshops for male educators and administrators that provide a safe, judgment-free zone in which to unpack biases male professionals face.

“There is a need for professional development and support for retaining men in the ECE workforce at all levels,” states Mindi Reich-Shapiro, another of the study’s researchers. “Retention can become an issue if a man gets a job in an ECE setting and does not have an administrator with the training and ability to support his needs and professional advancement.”

NYC’s efforts to attract and retain a qualified, culturally diverse workforce must focus resources creating male-teacher pipelines and build upon existing strategies such as NYC Teaching Fellows and NYC Men Teach, which recruit in places where men of diverse backgrounds tend to volunteer and work with children and families; implementing pay equity with secondary education across settings and improving professional development to increase retention and address challenges specific to male early educators **are among the study’s chief recommendations.**

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