


A male teacher with short dark hair, wearing a light purple button-down shirt, is smiling warmly at a young girl with curly hair. They are sitting at a desk with papers and a yellow pencil. The background is a blurred classroom setting.

Male *Models*

**Male teachers are still
a relative rarity in
K–8 schools, leaving
students without a
diverse educational
experience**



Research says that staffing a school to look like its student body can pay off by offering children a full range of educational experiences. And principals wishing to focus on diversity might do well to address the most obvious deficit: Long outnumbered, male teachers continue to be the exception in many elementary schools, even today.

Principal magazine asked six educators why schools need male teachers and how to attract more of them. Here's what they said:

Principal: Why is it important to have male teachers on staff?

Jason Fischer: Just as it is important for students of different races to see teachers like them, it is important for male students to see male educators. Furthermore, different students respond better to different types of people—some students respond better to a female adult, and some students respond to a male figure. A positive male role model can be beneficial to students, especially with students who might not have one outside the school setting.

Elizabeth Grimes: Students need to have access and exposure to a variety of individuals. This includes personality, race, gender, ethnicity, cultural backgrounds or experiences, strengths, etc. Some students might not have a male in their home or life; they might find it more comfortable to talk and problem-solve with a man. Female students also need to learn to trust and see males in the role of teacher. We need school employees who not only have a commonality with students, but also broaden their perspectives.

Kevin Fosburgh: Many of our students lack strong, positive males in their lives, and by having males on campus, we can provide those strong role models. We found that approximately 80 percent of our students have women complete education-related activities with them. Women are attending parent/teacher conferences; women are coming to family engagement nights; women are assisting with homework and other school-related activities.

Anthony L. James: Having male educators on staff can provide alternative perspectives and solutions when handling various situations involving students. Male educators are often seen by contemporaries as default disciplinarians or role models for fatherless boys. But looking at them through that lens makes it easy to miss the benefits of having gender diversity in schools. Schools benefit when teachers reflect the interests, needs, and cultures of their students.

Principal: What are some of the benefits to having more male teachers at the elementary level?

Ed Cosentino: Male teachers help colleagues understand how boys learn in a school setting; in some situations, the presence of a male teacher helps boys regulate their behaviors. Male teachers motivate and engage children differently. For example, one of my male classroom teachers was recently able to connect with a student about a common hobby. The student's perception, excitement, and engagement for school increased immeasurably [after that experience].

James: In an environment dominated by women, many rely on the notion that male teachers are primarily beneficial to boys. However, research has found that having access to diverse teachers is useful for *all* children. For young scholars, the presence of male educators exposes them to different types of activities, behaviors, and communication styles, and helps develop healthy ideas around gender.

Fosburgh: While we have a strong set of mentors to work with behaviorally challenging students who need Tier II interventions, sometimes a female staff member can't develop a strong check-in/check-out relationship. At times, a male mentor can provide the adult attention the student craves to curb negative behavior.

Principal: What factors contribute to the ongoing shortage of male teachers?

Cosentino: There is a perception that teaching at the elementary school level is more of a role for women. Male high school students don't often seek out colleges and universities with the foresight to get a degree in early childhood education or elementary education. I also believe that there is a perception that the field of education is not lucrative enough to make a living without working more than one job.

Fischer: There are several factors that have continued the lack of male teachers. One is salary—in some areas of the country, teacher pay is low compared to other jobs, and this has limited the number of males interested in becoming educators. Additionally, teaching children is not an easy job, and it requires a certain type of personality. Some males might think that they don't have what it takes to do the job of helping children develop. Finally, there is still a stigma that teaching, especially at the elementary level, is not a typical male profession.

Kourtney Ferrua: The antiquated message that women care for children gets in the way of progress. Men are critical partners in healthy childhood development. We need to disrupt this tradition by celebrating educators who break the mold.

Fosburgh: One of the major factors is not unlike the teacher shortage in general: compensation. While our country is evolving and many of our American families have two parents working, societal norms still dictate, in my opinion, that the male should be the breadwinner. Therefore, society looks at education as a career that is subpar. When I was an undergrad, I had associates razz me for wanting to pursue education. They would make comments like, "You'd be making a ton more money if you ..."

Grimes: Many men don't go into the profession because of the societal pressure to be the main wage-earner. And as a profession, we have not encouraged male students to become teachers. The male teachers and staff I have at my current elementary school are "all in." They didn't

THE PANELISTS



Ed Cosentino

Principal, Clemens Crossing Elementary School, Columbia, Maryland



Kourtney Ferrua

Director, Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, McMinnville (Oregon) School District



Jason Fischer

G&T resource teacher, Atholton Elementary School and Clemens Crossing, Ellicott City, Maryland



Kevin Fosburgh

Principal, Hulet and Park Elementary School, Holbrook, Arizona



Elizabeth Grimes

Principal, Margaret Elementary School, Odenville, Alabama



Anthony L. James

Director, Call Me MiSTER cohort at the College of Charleston (South Carolina)

allow barriers such as low wages and public perception to influence their destinies. They have a gift for teaching and leading, and they are not afraid to use it.

James: Also, due to the lack of diversity in the field, many men suffer from isolation. During my last year in the classroom, I was the lone male and person of color on a team of 16 educators. During staff meetings, no one would sit next to me. I was the odd man out. One of the worst feelings in the world is to be in a room full of people but feel alone.

Principal: What are some of the challenges male teachers typically face?

Ferrua: It is challenging to be in the minority. There are many formal and informal systems that can make it hard to break into established groups. Things as simple as teachers planning while eating lunch together or grabbing coffee on the weekend can be exclusive if they don't include the whole team. It is important for administrators to create time in the master schedule for meaningful collaboration.

Fischer: Male teachers are often stereotyped as a certain type of teacher. It's assumed we will not be as "warm" as a female teacher and that our students will not be as loved.

Principals need to remember that they set the tone for their schools.

Additionally, male teachers, especially at the middle and high school level, need to be careful how we address female students. I have had quite a few students and parents tell me they were nervous to have a male teacher, only to tell me later that they had a great year and were glad that they were in my class.

Grimes: Sometimes, parents are uncomfortable with a male teacher in the classroom because they are concerned that they are not nurturing or able to understand the needs of female students. [Ours] are champions for our students and our profession, and they work hard to gain the respect of parents who might have been apprehensive when they first encountered a male teacher.

James: Men must debunk negative stereotypes. Men are viewed as disciplinarians; [they] are often given the most challenging children, [which may prevent them from teaching] gifted courses and grow[ing] professionally.

Principal: What can principals do to recruit and retain more male teachers?

James: Principals need to remember that they set the tone for their schools. [They should] provide professional development trainings that focus on gender issues—especially in schools. Principals should debunk the notion that the male educators in their buildings are there to be disciplinarians. And there should be opportunities for men to exercise the full scope of practices available to all teachers, such as teaching honors or gifted courses.

After creating a welcoming environment, principals can focus on recruitment. One way is to hire male teachers as paraprofessionals or teacher assistants. I began my career as an assistant, which led me to get a degree in early childhood education. Also, principals can create in-school or afterschool programs that hire high school and college students. Establishing these relationships early on can pay huge dividends years later.

Cosentino: School districts need to collaborate with colleges and universities to help make elementary education more enticing for a wider range of students. I want the best possible available teacher for any position. In order to retain all teachers, I want to make sure that they have the professional development support they need to be successful. This includes a mentor, strong collaborative teams, and constant opportunities to check in.

Fosburgh: To support male teachers, I need to support them in their ability to stay in the classroom and not try to find avenues for them outside of the classroom. More than that, I need to ensure that classrooms continue to maintain heterogeneous groupings and make decisions at the student level, not push all of the “difficult” students into the male teacher’s classroom.

Grimes: I include staff in the interviewing process not only to provide meaningful input, but also to identify good partnerships and mentors. I also team some of the male staff together on committees or activities so that they are not completely isolated. We have several male aides whom we encouraged, mentored, and supported as they entered fifth-year programs or degrees in education.

Fischer: Just hire more male teachers. One of the challenges that male teachers face is not having other male teachers to work with or have casual conversations with. Having a higher number of male teachers might entice other male educators to join the staff. And give male teachers leadership opportunities that might encourage [them] to stay at a school. ●

MALE TEACHER TAKEAWAYS

- Male teachers can be role models for boys and girls alike by diversifying the learning experience and reflecting the makeup of the student body.
- Outmoded stereotypes often keep men from entering the field of education or growing in the role. Principals need to provide male teachers with opportunities to build their careers.
- It can be lonely to be in the minority as a male elementary school teacher. Principals should help them connect with colleagues and mentors.
- The career’s reputation for low pay is seen as a barrier to entering the field and staying in it. Recruitment efforts should target current high school students who might excel in education.