

# A Framework for Action

Recruiting, supporting, and retaining men  
in education



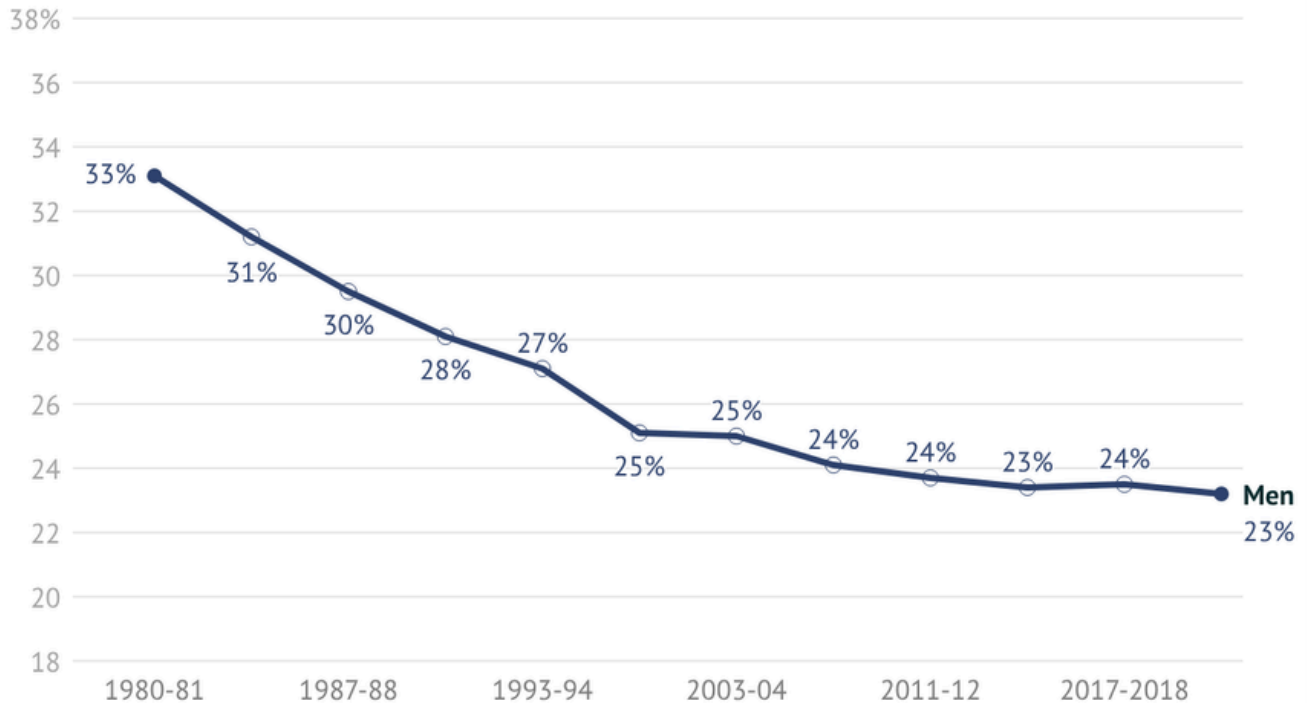
# The Problem

The United States is facing a teacher shortage. This is being widely discussed. But there is another related, deeper, and largely unaddressed problem: the share of men has been declining in the teaching profession for decades. Until now there has been no coordinated, national effort to bring them back.

In the early 1980s, men made up 33% public school teachers. Today that share has fallen to just 23%—a four-decade decline that shows no sign of reversing.

## Male teacher share on the decline

Male share of public school teachers (1980-2021)



Source: NCES & Seven Trends: The Transformation of the Teaching Force

The decline is both pervasive and concentrated:

- Men account for just 11% of public elementary teachers and fewer than 3% of preschool and kindergarten teachers.
- At the secondary level, the male share has dropped from 48% to 36%.
- In career and technical education—once 75% male—men are now a minority.
- Only 6% of all teachers are men of color, while 26% of students are boys of color.
- Just 17% of education bachelor's degrees go to men.

The teaching workforce is drawing from roughly half the talent pool. At a time when schools are struggling to fill classrooms, the most underrepresented group in education is also the largest untapped source of potential teachers.

## Why It Matters

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We care about male teachers for a lot of reasons, not just student academic achievement. A more representative teaching workforce also matters for what it signals, for how it shapes young people's sense of possibility, and for the quality of the profession itself. Here is what the research shows:

- **Belonging and Identity.** Many boys spend years in classrooms without seeing men in teaching roles. For the roughly one-quarter of U.S. boys growing up without a father present, a teacher may be one of the few consistent adult male figures in their daily life.
- **Mentorship.** Male school personnel are more likely to be identified as mentors by students—but female students are more likely to report having a mentor in school at all, possibly because there aren't enough adult men in school buildings.

- **Teacher Expectations.** Teachers rate same-gender students as more attentive, and less disruptive, and male teachers are more likely than female teachers to perceive boys as capable.
- **Achievement.** The evidence on academic outcomes is mixed, though several studies point in a positive direction. One study estimates the gender gap in middle school English would shrink by roughly a third if half of English teachers were men. The 9th-grade math grade gap is smaller in classes taught by a man. A quasi-experimental study in Finland found that male teachers improved long-run outcomes for both boys and girls. And an evaluation of a targeted curriculum anchored by Black male instructors found dropout rates fell 43% for Black male students. However, other studies find smaller or no effects.
- **Occupational Norms.** It is almost certainly harder to persuade boys that teaching is a profession for men when most of their own teachers have been women. Over decades, that imbalance shapes the norms of the profession itself—how classrooms operate, what the job looks like, and who sees themselves in it.

More research is needed here. But the case for a more representative workforce does not rest solely on what we can measure in short-run test scores. It is grounded in evidence, in the principle that a diverse profession better serves a diverse student body, and in the straightforward belief that a teaching workforce that reflects the students it serves matters on its own terms.

## What MEN Will Do

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The Male Educator Network & Policy Institute (MEN) is the first organization dedicated solely to building a national coalition, trusted community, and unifying voice for men in education. MEN is part think tank, part fraternity—combining rigorous research and bold policy with the community that male educators need to enter and stay in the profession.

MEN works across five key functions—and will be producing dedicated resources on each:

- **Research & Knowledge.** The definitive evidence base on male teacher recruitment and retention, including an annual national scorecard and regular polling of members
- **Policy & Programs.** Pathway mapping, state playbooks, and direct advising to governors and legislators.
- **Community & Network.** Affinity groups, college chapters, mentorship, and national convenings.
- **Awareness & Storytelling.** National campaigns and media to shift public perception of men in education.
- **Investing in the Future.** Scholarships, organizational support, and research fellowships.

## Promising Solutions

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There is no single fix for bringing more men into education. But the emerging evidence, along with the design of the most serious existing efforts, points in a few clear directions. Four strategies stand out: spurring an interest in education early, building pathways to meet men where they are, calling men in, and building community to retain. MEN will work to advance each through policy, research, and field-building.

### Spur an Interest in Education Early

By adolescence, the idea that teaching is not for them may have already taken hold. Among 9th graders, 40% of girls expect to go into education, health or social services, but only 11% of boys; and about 3% of male college freshmen report an interest in teaching.

If we wait, we are recruiting against a stereotype that has already hardened. The case for starting earlier is straightforward: reach boys before the identity forms, not after.

- **ProTeams.** A middle school program designed to spark interest in education through hands-on activities and exposure to the profession. The program has served more than 22,000 students, and is approximately 40% male.
- **Perkins V and Education CTE.** Federal career and technical education law already includes a lever for addressing gender imbalance in occupations where one sex is underrepresented. Because boys generally make up less than one-quarter of education CTE concentrators in 41 states, states and districts could use Perkins' nontraditional participation provisions to encourage boys' interest in teaching.

Other early-stage levers might include career advising, guidance counselor training, dual-enrollment coursework, and teaching-focused career academies.

## Build Pathways to Meet Men Where They Are

Men are less likely than women to arrive through the traditional four-year education degree. The traditional four-year education degree—where only 17% of graduates are men—is one of the most female-skewing entry points. Effective pathways match how men actually arrive at the profession. Men are more likely to hold alternative certifications (26% vs. 18%).

- **Career Changers.** One in four male teachers switched from a non-education career, compared to one in seven women. According to one study in Michigan, the mid-career pool is more male than the early-career pool, at ~35% of those certified between ages 30 and 49.

- **Veterans.** Many returning veterans—a population that is 80% male—want to teach. The Federal program Troops to Teachers placed ~7,700 veterans in classrooms 2014. Today it places zero—while it has been authorized through 2029, it did not receive funds required to run the program. States like West Virginia (SB 765) have created alternative certification for veterans.
- **Former Athletes.** Coaching and extracurricular leadership are among the few school-connected roles that are majority male. Paying this work properly—and making the combination of teaching and coaching a deliberate selling point for recruitment—could draw more men into the profession.
- **Substitute Teachers.** Substitutes skew more male than the full-time teacher workforce—studies across some districts find men make up roughly 28–40% of substitute teachers, compared to ~23% of full-time teachers. Roughly a third of substitutes report aspiring to teach full-time—likely tens of thousands of men already in schools who could move into the profession with the right supports.
- **Rethink the Traditional Pathway for Men.** Men are less likely to enter teaching through the four-year education degree and education master's programs, but that is not a reason to abandon the route. Schools of education should be part of the solution to ensure their programs are welcoming, credible, and legible to men.

Newer pathways also create openings, but they will not diversify the profession automatically. Teacher apprenticeships and Grow Your Own programs are expanding rapidly; which creates a significant opportunity. But teacher apprenticeships are still only about 15% male, perhaps because they recruit from paraprofessional pools that are overwhelmingly female. Some alternative certification models have shown what is possible: programs such as the Arizona Teacher Residency are half male. But without intentional outreach where men are more likely to be found, new programs may simply reproduce the existing gender imbalance.

## Intentionally Call Men In

Men are not currently being told that the teaching profession needs them, or that classrooms are better when they're in them. Pathways alone do not solve this—we need to help them feel the profession is theirs. The affirmative case has to be made: programs and messaging that signal men belong.

### Invest in male-dedicated programs and outreach

Many of the best-known male-focused initiatives pair recruitment with support - cohort models, financial assistance, and structures that reduce isolation and affirm men's place in education.

- **Call Me MISTER**. Founded in 2000 at Clemson University, the longest-running program of its kind. Combines tuition assistance, a residential cohort, and summer leadership institutes. Now operates across over 40 institutions in eleven states.
- **Illinois Diverse Male Teacher Initiative (DMTI)**. A state-funded scholarship program launched in 2022, administered by Grow Your Own-IL. In addition to scholarships, it provides advising and cohort mentorship for men at community colleges to complete the prerequisites for teacher credentialing.
- **NYC Men Teach**. Launched in 2015 by the NYC Department of Education, CUNY, and the Mayor's Office and focused on supporting men throughout their teaching journey. It has added over 4,000 male teachers of color into the teaching pipeline over eight years.
- **Dallas ISD Male Residency Program**. A paid, male-targeted residency pathway designed to men into teaching, showing how districts can pair intentional recruitment with a structured route into the classroom.

A growing ecosystem of organizations also help build interest and community, coaching, and leadership pathways for men already in the

field, including the National Fellowship for Black and Latino Male Educators (NFBLME), Profound Gentlemen, and BLOC KC.

### **Name men as a priority in funding and legislation**

States have direct resources explicitly toward male teacher recruitment, particularly for minority men thus far, either through legislation or existing grant dollars.

- Maryland's 2025 Teacher Quality and Diversity Program and 2026 Grow Your Own grant program prioritized male recruitment and awarded grants to institutions and districts focused on male teacher preparation, certification, outreach, affinity groups and events. These models could be replicated in other states and with other teacher pathways.
- There have been several bills funding minority male teacher programs, including Illinois (HB 2170, 2021), New Jersey (S-703, 2019) and Minnesota (HF 2497, 2023).
- Other proposed initiatives focused on men teaching include Connecticut's HB 5511 (2025), and New Jersey's S 2204 (2025) would establish a Male Teachers of Color Mentorship Pilot Program. California's AB 520 (2021) would have established a \$15M diversifying-the-teacher-workforce grant program emphasizing male teachers of color.

### **Get the messaging and delivery right**

Research shows that providing men with accurate information about teaching's actual pay, satisfaction, and benefits increases their interest in education majors—but adding “you're needed as a male role model” messaging actually dampens the effect relative to women. Messages like that might make men feel like they don't belong or won't find community. Lead with what teaching offers and provide affirmative calls to men.

## Build Community to Retain

Recruitment without retention is a revolving door. Men who leave teaching are three times more likely than women to move into administration (the “glass escalator”). Over a third leave for another career entirely.

Many of the routes to retention—strong school leadership, generous compensation, and manageable workload—are effective for male and female teachers alike. But male teachers also face unique challenges related to their identity, and isolation can be a difficult challenge. Building community and support systems is an important lever for retaining male teachers.

- **Convenings.** The Black Men in Education Convening (BMEC) draws 1,000+ attendees annually. Participants cite elimination of isolation as the primary benefit.
- **Teacher Leadership.** Models like Teach Plus and Leading Educators offer advancement without leaving the classroom—keeping experienced men where they’re needed most.
- **Cohort Models.** Cohort-based supports—where teachers train, learn, and grow alongside peers—help men find community. MEN will serve as national hub for.

## A Note on Pay

Compensation is a major barrier to teaching for both men and women, and pay concerns arise at every stage of the pipeline. Nearly Two-thirds of ACT test-takers in 2017-2018 cited low pay as a top reason for not considering teaching. Fewer than 1 in 5 Americans would encourage a young person to become a teacher, with low pay the most cited reason.

Higher pay helps with recruitment and retention. Higher salaries reduce teachers' odds of leaving the profession; in hard-to-staff schools, financial incentives are the only intervention with consistent

causal evidence, and only when paired with service commitments; loan forgiveness shows particular promise for recruitment. However, pay is also misunderstood. Prospective teachers systematically underestimate what teachers actually earn, and correcting that misperception raises reported interest in teaching careers. Information is a cheap, underused lever.

But the compensation challenge is not uniquely about men. For most of the twentieth century, teaching could rely on a steady supply of educated women with limited access to other professional opportunities. That arrangement was neither fair nor sustainable. Teaching now has to compete for talent the way other professions do. The gender gap sits on top of that broader compensation challenge, not in place of it.

## The Path Forward

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The case for more men in education is clear, the strategies are within reach, and the political moment is open. What has been missing is a coordinated effort—a place where research, policy, and field practice come together with the urgency the issue deserves.

That is what MEN exists to do. We will not solve this alone. But the absence of men in classrooms is not inevitable, and reversing it is not optional if we are serious about the boys and men who pass through American schools.

**MEN**

**Male Educator  
Network & Policy  
Institute**