



Washington State Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

“The Practitioner’s Best Friend”
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Can we solve today’s educational issues without training teachers in how to teach boys effectively?

At the annual WSASCD-OSPI-WAEYC conference in Spokane (October 2010), I had the honor of delivering the keynote address on increasing teacher effectiveness with both boys and girls. Throughout the conference, many people asked me various forms of today’s critical question. Teachers, principals, district level administrators who have disaggregated data in their districts for gender have discovered what is going on all over the country: *boys are significantly behind girls, especially in classes that involve reading, writing, and language arts, in Washington State.*

The latest comprehensive state-by-state study out of Washington D.C.’s Educational Policy Institute (2010) shows boys behind girls in 4th, 8th, and/or 11th grade in all states, including Washington. When high school dropout rates are added in, boys’ lag is amplified--with significantly more boys than girls dropping out of school, and significantly more girls attending and finishing college.

If you go into your own school district’s database, you’ll see that boys receive around two-thirds of the Ds and Fs in your classes. You’ll also see them behind, on average, on standardized testing (this average will even include the science/math scores in which boys, on average, do better than girls).

In your annual school-wide data, you’ll notice that boys comprise between 80 and 90 percent of the discipline referrals to the principal. When you ask your colleagues, “Who are we having the most instructional and behavioral problems with, boys or girls?” you’ll find most of your colleagues saying, “Boys.” In general, teachers have more questions about how to teach boys effectively than they do girls. Some girls aren’t doing well, and some boys are doing quite well, but still, in most of our schools, it is mainly boys who are 1) underperforming or failing tests, 2), not doing homework, 3) zoning out in class, not following directions, 4) acting out against students, teachers and others, 5) becoming unmotivated (even and especially when they are gifted), 6) filling up special education classes, 7) receiving medication for ADD/ADHD and other similar disorders, and 8) pulling down schools and district’s achievement and performance scores.

In the last two decades of research, and in fourteen years of helping more than 50,000 teachers in more than 2,000 schools and districts, my training team and I (www.gurianinstitute.com) have discovered a multi-faceted reason for boys’ achievement dilemmas in schools: most teachers instinctively teach toward verbal learning (words, reading, writing, worksheets), as well as a “sit still, do your work” approach—which favors, on average, more girls than boys. Simultaneously, most teachers have not been trained in how to teach the kinds of learning many boys need in order to do well, i.e. graphic and kinesthetic learning, physical movement and project-based lessons, and competitive learning and leadership strategies.

As a result, we find about a 20 - 25% loss of males—it shows up gradually and incrementally, from pre-school onward. In a classroom of twenty five learners, for instance, five or more boys will have learning

and performance difficulties of varied degrees (some slight, some quite obvious). Many of these issues will begin in pre-school, and most will grow to negative performance by the time the boys enter middle school. You know these boys by their tacit or spoken feeling in your classes, hallways, and homes: "I hate school."

Standardized testing has produced some difficult issues, and many educators don't like it, for many good reasons. One positive thing it has done: it allows schools and districts to disaggregate for gender, and thus gain a lens into how to raise district-wide test scores, improve student performance at all levels, retain more students in high school, and send more students to college. Because I live in the state of Washington, I hope districts and schools in Washington will join districts and schools around the country that using gender initiatives to fulfill performance standards and grow better schools. You can learn about many of them on www.gurianinstitute.com/success, in November's *CLOSING OPPORTUNITY GAPS* edition of *EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP* (see the article "Gender Friendly Schools"), and I'll mention two districts and one school here:

Under the direction of Superintendent Ken Dragseth, Edina Public Schools, just outside Minneapolis, implemented a gender initiative over a three year period that closed achievement gaps and improved overall education for its students. Dr. Dragseth wrote, "The gender-friendly instructional theory and techniques have helped us to significantly improve student achievement and meet the individual needs of both genders."

The Avoca School District 37 in Wilmette, IL, did the same. After discovering that the MAP testing in the District showed an average gender gap among its 3rd to 8th grade classes of 2.35 RIT points, the district employed a gender initiative. At the end of that year, the District retested and saw the gender gap shrink to only 0.92 RIT points in the same population of students.

Wamsley Elementary School in Rifle, Colorado was put on the state academic watch list. Its principal, Diane Bierbaum and staff, decided to utilize a gender initiative over a one year period. Following the program, the school became one of only eight schools statewide that were removed from the state watch list.

Can we solve today's educational issues without training teachers in how to teach boys effectively? My team and I do not believe we can. And why should we try? Every teacher can become trained in how to teach each subject and curriculum effectively to both boys and girls. This kind of gender initiative fits most or all school improvement goals because it cuts right to the heart of what is going on in schools—the hidden elephant: teachers are not as comfortable teaching boys most subjects as girls, and teaching girls math/science as boys. Training and coaching teachers in gender-friendly teacher strategies not only raises test scores and grades, thus satisfying statewide and national educational goals, it also helps each teacher as a person and each learner as a boy or girl love school the way we want them all to do.

By Michael Gurian, co-author of *THE MINDS OF BOYS, THE WONDER OF GIRLS*, and *STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING BOYS AND GIRLS*.

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Sources

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National Center for Education Statistics, Table A-28-1. *Number and percentage of students who were suspended and expelled from public elementary and secondary schools, by sex and race/ethnicity: 2002, 2004, and 2006*,

NCES High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 2007. U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), October 2007. Table 6.—*Status dropout rates and number and distribution of dropouts of 16- through 24-year-olds*. Table 6.

Diplomas Count 2008. Washington, D.C.: Editorial Projects in Education. Education Week. 27(40) 2008, June 5.

Digest of Education Statistics, 2008. Table 226. *Total fall enrollment in degree-granting institutions, by race/ethnicity, sex, attendance status, and level of student: Selected years, 1976 through 2007*.

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