

The Unspoken Reason Men Turn Away From Careers as Early Educators

By [Elizabeth Heubeck](#) — June 03, 2026



Teacher Greg Burris works with 1st grader Joshua at Munger Elementary-Middle School on May 7, 2026, in Detroit. Data show that there are too few male early educators, and when boys don't see male teachers, they may be less likely to consider a career in teaching, perpetuating the cycle of too few male teachers. Paul Sancya via AP

When developmental psychologist [Susan Engel](#) traveled across the United States a few years ago to observe kindergarten classrooms as research for a book, she noticed something missing from most of them: male teachers.

Women led all but one of the 26 classrooms. Two male assistant teachers rounded out the remainder of the male educators Engel saw. These numbers, though low, exceed the national average for male early educators. [Fewer than 3% of all preschool and kindergarten teachers are male](#), a figure that has remained largely unchanged for decades.

There are many reasons why this matters. As [single females head up nearly 20% of all U.S. family households](#), school becomes, for many children, their only opportunity to be regularly exposed to male role models. And when boys don't see male teachers, they may be less likely to consider a career in teaching, in turn, perpetuating the cycle of too few male teachers.



Calvin Moore Jr., chief executive officer of the Council for Professional Recognition. Photo courtesy of Calvin Moore, Jr.

It's an issue that Calvin Moore Jr. has been wrestling with for years. Moore, a nationally recognized early-childhood education expert, attended Head Start in Alabama in 1969, as both of his parents worked in a Head Start program. He later served as a regional program manager in Atlanta for the Office of Head Start within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. He's now the chief executive officer of the [Council for Professional Recognition](#), a nonprofit credentialing organization for early-childhood education that, to date, has issued over 1 million Child Development Associate (CDA) credentials worldwide.

EdWeek recently caught up with Moore to get his take on why the persistent shortage of male early educators continues and what can work to attract and retain men in the profession. Among his insights, Moore directly addressed one glaring reason he believes

keeps men from pursuing careers as early educators—but that too few in the profession are willing to confront head on.

This interview has been lightly edited for length and clarity.

Too few male early educators is not a new problem. Is it getting worse?

I don't know if it's becoming a bigger problem, as I've been looking at this for over 30 years. It's just a stubborn problem. We haven't made any headway on it. It seems like we throw the kitchen sink at the issue, but males still make up just 2% to 3% of early educators across the nation.

How big of a factor is pay?

Compensation is a problem for every early educator, not just men.

“I think the more we talk about this issue, the better things will be for men and early-childhood education.” Calvin Moore Jr., chief executive officer of the Council for Professional Recognition

What else keeps men from becoming early educators?

What I hear from men is that society views early education, birth to 5, as a woman's job.

And until we turn the tide on this being a bona fide profession, I don't think the statistics will change, even though we know that having a gender-balanced workforce is best for young children.

If society sees early education as “women's work,” how are male educators perceived?

There's a notion that there must be something wrong with men who are interested in working with young children. We, as a society, have this idea that men in this profession are going to abuse children. Male teachers in some school programs are prohibited from working with infants and toddlers because of diaper changing.

That's not the case with other professions, like nursing. You wouldn't carve out a particular aspect of their job because of their gender. Same with fathers. I have two daughters. My wife would hit the ceiling if she thought I wasn't able to change diapers when they were babies. So I don't think you can have a two-gender staff rule about certain aspects of early educators' jobs. I think the more we talk about this issue, the better things will be for men and early- childhood education.

We've talked about what's keeping men out. Are there any positive recruitment signs?

One of the things that we can do to attract men is to think about apprenticeship models and to think about capturing their imagination earlier. That's why we focus on CDA [Child Development Associate Credential] programs in high schools. If we can get young men early in high school interested in these careers, we may not get them into classrooms for a few years, but it's better than not getting them at all.

Are there some states where these programs are growing?

We've seen a growth in career tech education programs across the country. What's happening in Florida and Michigan is really exciting. These states have [education] apprenticeship models that start in high school. Other states are really interested in growing the apprenticeship model, too, and I believe that will attract more young men into the field.

Can you point to a specific district that's really doing a good job of this?

Yes, Miami Dade County's [Hialeah Gardens High School](#) has a thriving CDA program. [In] some years, the male students in that program outnumber the female students.

Any other strategies to help recruit and retain men?

It seems like if a program can reach critical mass, you'll draw more men. And critical mass looks different for each program. For some, if you can get three male teachers in the building, that's critical mass—and you'll draw more men. It doesn't have to be teachers. In some programs, if there's a male cook, a male family advocate, a male bus driver, and a couple of male teachers, you reach critical mass, and you hold on to men longer.

It seems like if programs are really interested in intentionally recruiting men and they reach critical mass, whatever that threshold is, then men will persist. We're finding that men beget men. If the place is welcoming to men, even fathers will show up more, participate, and be engaged.