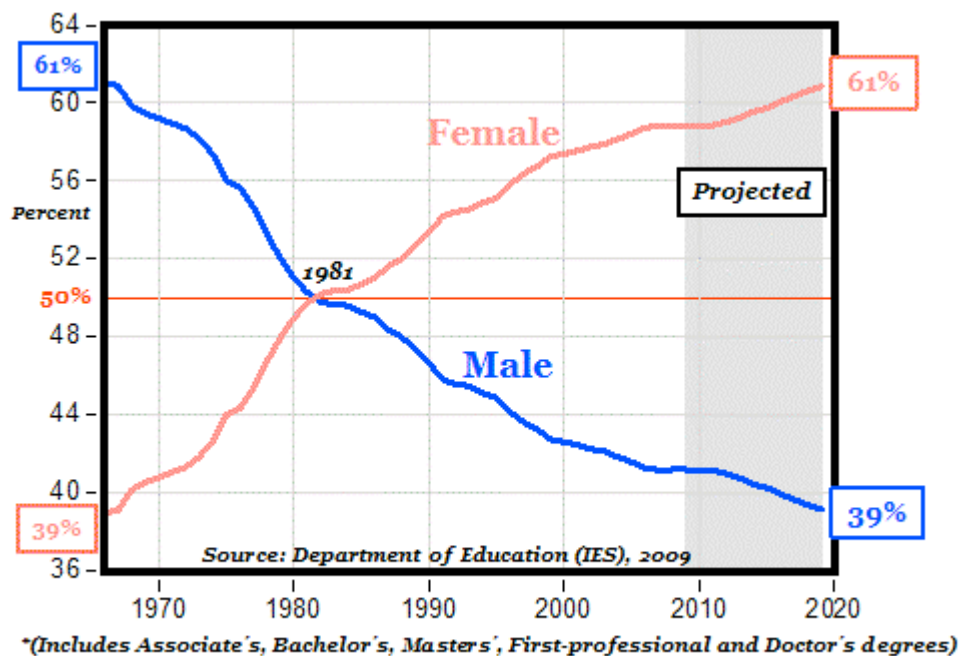

Component 1: The Education of our Sons

“There is a lot of scientific evidence that the status quo doesn’t work.”

—Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education²

American children are falling behind most G-20 nations in educational achievement,³ and U.S. boys are falling well behind girls.^{4 5} Higher educational achievements of boys and men has been a given for so long, it has been easy to miss the reversal of this trend over the last thirty years. This graph makes that reversal clear.⁶...

Percent of All College Degrees* Female vs. Male, 1966–2019



The Decline of Boys' School Performance: A Statistical Snapshot

Fortunately, teacher training and efforts on behalf of girls have helped girls in almost every area—including teachers being aware of when they were catering to more assertive hand-raising by boys. Unfortunately, we have been unaware of the pendulum's swing: even a decade ago, only 19% of girls felt teachers do not listen to them—versus 31% of boys.⁷

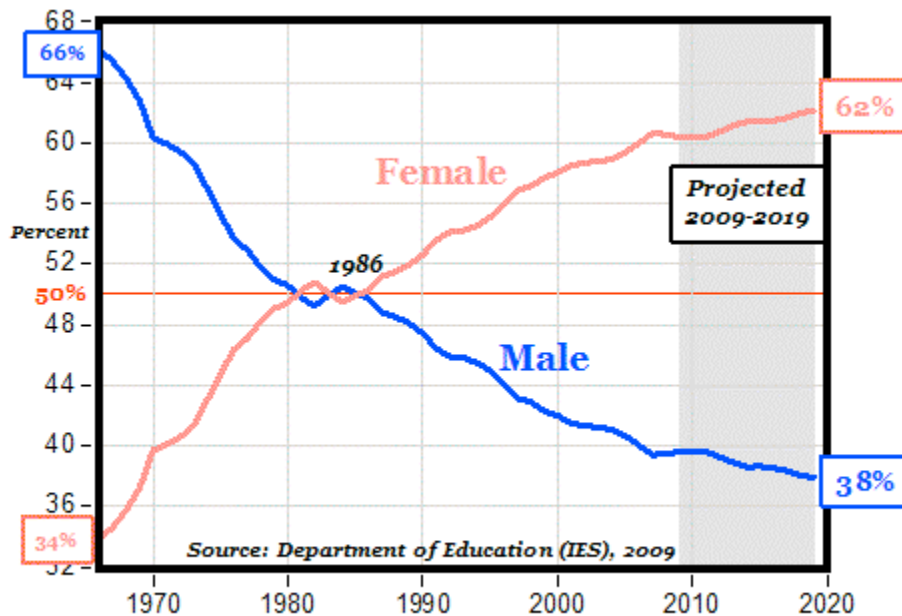
Boys increasingly face problems in reading and writing^{8,9}, motivation to be in school¹⁰, motivation to do homework after school,¹¹ grades, standardized test scores^{12,13}, violence, and criminal activity.^{14 15} More boys are dropouts,¹⁶ in special education,¹⁷ and expelled,¹⁸ despite being more medicated to mitigate those problems. Perhaps as a result of all of the above, female

college students¹⁹ and female college graduates^{20 21} now far outnumber their male counterparts—a trend that shows no sign of leveling off.

Here's the evidence...

- By the eighth grade, 41% of girls are at least “proficient” in writing; **only 20% of boys are proficient in writing.**²² In reading, 34% of girls are at least proficient, compared with 24% of boys.²³
- The number of boys who said they **didn't like school** increased by 71% since 1980, according to a University of Michigan study.²⁴
- 10% of boys **drop out** of school each year, compared to 8% of girls.²⁵
- In neighborhoods where fathers are most scarce, more than half of boys don't finish high school.²⁶
- By age 12, boys are 60% more likely than girls to have **repeated at least one grade.**²⁷
- Boys are **expelled** from school **three times** as often as girls.²⁸ Three- and four-year old boys are now being expelled from pre-school programs²⁹ (for what many experts view as normal boy behavior).³⁰
- At least twice as many boys are diagnosed with **ADHD.**³¹
- Girls are 57% of college students; boys 43%.^{32 33}
- Girls are 58% of college graduates; boys 42%.³⁴
- In the Class of 2010, boys received only **39% of the Masters' degrees.** Here is the trend³⁵...

Masters' Degrees by Gender 1966–2019



- Boys have an **82% greater risk of developing learning disabilities** compared to girls.³⁶ Reading disability (e.g., dyslexia) comprises 80-90% of these learning disabilities.³⁷
- Boys receive the majority of **D's and F's** and a minority of **A's.**^{38 39}
- Only **half** as many boys are members of the **National Honor Society.**⁴⁰
- **Boys are much less likely to participate in** student government, academic clubs, music

- The **delinquency** rate of boys is almost **three** times that of girls.⁴³

Minority Boys' School Performance

- Item.** Among Hispanic boys, 25% drop out of high school (versus 18% of girls).^{44,45}
- Item.** African-American girls are twice as likely to be in college as African-American boys.⁴⁶

The Impact of Boys' Poor Educational Achievement

- Item.** The African-American boy who drops out of high school has a 72% chance of being jobless by the time he reaches his 20's.⁴⁷
- Item.** By his mid-30's, the African-American boy who drops out of high school has a 60% chance of having spent time in prison.^{48, 49}

Boys without a high school diploma have experienced a 38% decline in income over the last three decades.⁵⁰ Why? For example, in the past, boys who had not graduated high school could get jobs in manufacturing or agriculture, but in the last half century, the number of employees in manufacturing dropped from 27% of all jobs to 11%;⁵¹ the number in agriculture shrank from 15% of all jobs to less than 2%. The future looks worse: half of the new jobs in the next eight years will be professional occupations requiring a post-secondary education. The exceptions are largely low-pay service jobs.⁵²

This impacts everything from our nation's daughters⁵³ to our nation's debt. For example, when boys are interested in learning, they behave better in classrooms and thus are less likely to interrupt girls' learning.⁵⁴ When young men succeed, they are more attractive to women as husbands and future dads. They give mothers options to raise money, raise children, or do some combination, rather than forcing women to raise money lest the children suffer.

It impacts our national debt because less-successful boys are likely to become less-successful men who are less likely to pay taxes, and to become instead unmarried dads⁵⁵ whose children and their mothers are more likely to be supported by taxes others pay.

And it impacts our national debt because unless boys close their achievement deficit in math, science, and literacy compared with other developed countries,^{56, 57} our education dependency will look more like our oil dependency.

How a White House Council on Boys to Men Can Improve Boys' Education

The U.S. has been a world leader in addressing girls' needs.⁵⁸ A complementary effort on behalf of boys can be achieved by a White House Council on Boys to Men identifying solutions that merit broader implementation:

More male teachers. Many inner-city boys spend their early lives going from female-run homes to female-run elementary schools with mostly female teachers. Without a positive male role model they are vulnerable to being seduced by gangs' offer of a false male identity.

Especially in communities with high percentages of fatherlessness, the Council might examine the best ways to provide boys with consistent positive leadership:

- recruit male teachers;
- have some male teachers certified to become “long-term teachers”—that is, teachers assigned to a boy (especially a fatherless boy) for multi-year periods;
- bring men working in traditional male occupations into the classroom;
- have male teachers' most positive values (e.g., responsible competitiveness) and methods (physically active, interactive, project-oriented approaches to learning) be integrated into K-12 teacher training even as male teachers are learning about the positive values of female teachers.

Boy-friendly Testing. Design tests that use methods of evaluating that are outgrowths of boys' methods of learning (interactive, physically active, project-oriented, the incorporation of competitive games...).

Updated teacher education. The Council would identify teacher trainings that would help boys. For example, a study by the University of Missouri-Kansas City has codified practical strategies that work “to create boy-friendly classrooms that also help girls.”⁵⁹

Teachers need to know which teaching styles, teacher characteristics, and programs have proven most effective for boys with varying challenges. For example, which programs are most effective in areas such as communication skill training, and creative ways of recruiting of male teachers (e.g., exchanges with business)? How can schools best establish mentoring and reading programs? Have cooperative ventures with the Boys' Clubs and other boy-supportive but non-sexist organizations been effective? For example, if the findings prove valid that experience with the Boy Scouts increases performance in science, reading, and math, and goal-setting,⁶⁰ then how can teachers learn from their methods?

Improved communication skills. The Achilles' heel of humans is our inability to handle personal criticism without becoming defensive. The commerce of male adolescence—the trading of wit-covered put-downs—masks our sons' pain with laughter when they are put-down. The resulting isolation is doubtless a contributor to boys' increasing suicide rate in comparison to girls each year of adolescence.

The Council needs to review the best existing school programs developing boys' communication and listening skills prior to early adolescence, when boys' raging sexual hormones and poor communication combine to leave boys feeling rejected and girls feeling

objectified. Various forms of active listening need to become as comfortable as a boys' native language prior to adolescence. When boys increase their ability to listen and be heard by their peers, the security blanket provided by a listening-functional school such as Summit Prep, (a Charter School in Redwood City, California that has a substantial percentage of students from disadvantaged backgrounds), can create emotional health even among boys coming from dysfunctional homes. Listening-functional schools must extend their training to parents so its students are not learning functional listening in school and dysfunctional listening at home.⁶¹

Boy-focused reading programs. When the U.S. discovered girls were doing worse in math and science, we re-examined everything in our math and science programs, from teachers' styles to the degree to which math problems might be worded in more girl-friendly ways. The province of Ontario, Canada is beginning to do that for boys: developing a special reading program for boys due to boys' special challenges with reading.⁶² In the U.S., a Guys Read program in Alaska features men reading funny, boy-friendly books to fourth grade boys during the lunch hour. The result? Boys otherwise known for behavior problems were writing their own children's books, and competing to read them and bragging about them.⁶³ Interactive video games that require reading skills to win are another boy-friendly approach. Outcome studies of these programs should be conducted so the most effective of them can be expanded to the communities that most need them.

Spread the lessons of charter schools. A number of charter schools are working to close gender gaps and black/white achievement gaps. Examples include the Promise Academy Charter Schools in Harlem⁶⁴ and the Eagle Academy, an early-childhood school in Washington DC.⁶⁵ The Council would review evaluations of school systems like those in Milwaukee and Washington, D.C. that offer school choice.⁶⁶ When findings are reported, such as those of the school choice program in Milwaukee for disadvantaged families, (that with half the per-student public funding there is more than a 50% higher graduation rate than in even more-advantaged public schools in Milwaukee,⁶⁷) the Council would see if those findings are accurate and applicable to schools in other cities.

Single-Sex Education. Under what conditions—and with which children during which developmental stages—does single-sex and mixed-sex education work? At least 540 public schools now use single-sex classrooms.⁶⁸ In public education, the most popular application of this option is gender-separate core classes (math, science, and language arts) in combination with other classes being gender-integrated.⁶⁹ Three key populations have shown improvement: girls in math and science, boys in behavioral areas, and boys in core classes. A recent study by Fryer and Levitt found that girls do not lag behind boys in math in countries with same-sex schooling.⁷⁰ The goal of the Council is to investigate what creates win-win education environments for both sexes, and under what conditions.

Drugs-as-Baby Sitter vs. Drugs When All Else Fails The White House Council can examine the most-likely-to-succeed options prior to prescribing Ritalin and other drugs on our sons: diet; interactive games; physical activities; projects involving building or doing; mentorship; same-sex classrooms; male teachers; training teachers in boys' psychosocial development.

Developing Evidence-Based Practices. Use research from entities such as the University of Pennsylvania's Center for the Study of Boys' and Girls' Lives⁷¹, which assesses the best educational practices, and create hybrid school/home/community projects such as the one coordinated by the Even Start Family Literacy Program in Prince George's County, Maryland⁷².

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- ² Arne Duncan, fielding questions at the offices of *Education Week*, Bethesda, Maryland, November 30, 2009.
- ³ Alliance for Excellent Education. "How Does the United States Stack Up? International Comparisons of Academic Achievement" Fact Sheet, March 2008. "Today, the United States' high school graduation rate ranks near the bottom among developed nations belonging to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). And on virtually every international assessment of academic proficiency, American secondary school students' performance varies from mediocre to poor."
- ⁴ Judith Kleinfeld, "The State of American Boyhood." *Gender Issues* 26:2. June, 2009: 113–129.
- ⁵ Michael Gurian and Kathy Stevens, *The Minds Of Boys: Saving Our Sons from Falling Behind in School and Life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005.
- ⁶ Department of Education: 2009 Tables and Figures
http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/2009menu_tables.asp.
Table 268. Degrees conferred by degree-granting institutions, by level of degree and sex of student: Selected years, 1869–70 through 2018–19
http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d09/tables/dt09_268.asp.
See also http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/2000menu_tables.asp.
Table 248. Earned degrees conferred by degree-granting institutions, by level of degree and sex of student: 1869–70 to 2009–10.
<http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d00/dt248.asp>
The graph and the calculation for total degrees were done by Mark Perry, professor of finance and business economics at the University of Michigan's Flint campus.
- ⁷ Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, *The American Teacher 1997: Examining Gender Issues in Public Schools*, p. 3. Cited in Christina Hoff Sommers, *The War Against Boys: How Misguided Feminism Is Harming Our Young Men*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000, p. 36.
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- ⁹ Richard Whitmire, *Why Boys Fail: Saving Our Sons from an Educational System That's Leaving Them Behind*. New York: AMACOM, 2010
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- ¹¹ Leonard Sax, *Boys Adrift: The Five Factors Driving the Growing Epidemic of Unmotivated Boys and Underachieving Young Men*. New York: Basic Books, 2007.
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<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/>
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- 14 Walter S. Gilliam, "Pre-kindergarteners Left Behind: Expulsion Rates In Prekindergarten Programs." Foundation for Child Development Brief Series No. 3, 2005. New York.
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<http://www2.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/osep/2003/index.html>.
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- 27 Peg Tyre, “The Trouble with Boys.” *Newsweek*, January 30, 2006. Data from U.S. Department of Education.
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