

SANTA FE BOYS

TRIENNIAL PUBLICATION ABOUT THE SITUATION OF BOYS IN SANTA FE

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Boys & Girls Learn Differently! Workshop for Teachers

Boys and girls learn differently and schools and classrooms that do not acknowledge these differences are missing opportunities to engage their students, especially boys. These were the themes of a morning in-service workshop for



Kelly King

over 100 Santa Fe teachers last month at Gonzales Elementary School.

The presenter was Kelley King, the principal of Douglass Elementary School in Boulder, Colorado. Her school began addressing the gender gap in literacy in

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Boys & Reading

What are we to make of the consistent gap in reading achievement between boys and girls reported on page 3 in this issue of *Santa Fe Boys*?

In New Mexico the gap is significant from the third grade, when testing first begins. It grows wider the longer students are in school. Furthermore, it is hardly simply a local phenomenon. According to the US Department of Education, a first semester freshman girl reads and writes as well as a second semester sophomore boy. Thomas Newkirk, professor of English at the University of New Hampshire, describes it this way: the reading gap between boys and girls in the United States is “comparable to the gap between whites and racial groups who have suffered systematic social and economic discrimination” (Smith, M. & Wilhelm, J. *Going with the flow*, 2006, p. 2).

Unfortunately, we are not talking about just any academic skill; reading and writing are the bases upon which all other learning rests. When you are not proficient in these two, as the majority of boys at almost all grades in Santa Fe schools are not, you are at a serious disadvantage just about everywhere you look in education.

What lies behind this problem? Some attribute the discrepancy to social characteristics between boys and girls and the way schools relate to the differences between the two genders. Karen Durica, writing in the

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Steps for the NM Legislators to Make Schools Better for Kids

On January 16th the New Mexico state legislators opened their 2007 session. Here are some suggested initiatives to improve boys’ educational performance in this state. All these suggestions will also aid in the education of girls, though the focus here is on boys. This is partially because most of the serious discipline problems in school are caused by boys who disrupt both their own education and that of other students. In addition, several of these legislative proposals involve teacher training in the science of gender learning differences; a teacher who understands boys’ learning styles will also be trained in, and understand better, what we know about how girls learn. Another advantage to these proposals, in addition to helping boys and girls learn, is that education which engages boys in school at an early age will reduce the tragedy of later incarceration. We know that there is a high correlation between later stays in juvenile detention centers and prison and the early disengagement of boys from school.

These three proposals are based on sound research. Acceptance of them by New Mexico would put this state in the forefront of a process of recognition that the old policy of gender neutrality in education—that boys

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Two Local Teachers Share Their Experiences with Boys and Reading:

Jim Spacht teaches GED preparation classes at the Santa Fe Community College. He has had a long career teaching young men turned off to reading—in an inner city school for African American boys kicked out of other schools, in a Texas penitentiary and now working with young Santa Feans, both men and women, who approach his classroom convinced they are too “dumb”—the message they received in the past—to learn anything. Spacht’s biggest concern is helping his students overcome their defeatism. Though they usually have more trouble with math than reading, Spacht finds that where the boys fall down is in mustering the self-discipline (and self-confidence) to force themselves to read. This is part of a more general issue, he notes, with these boys who have a problem with motivation. In part this can be overcome by encouraging them to read what they like—automotive mechanics, captions on the TV for the hearing impaired, or even comics, at least



in the beginning. Boys, says Spacht, need to find what they read interesting. They also have a lot of hurdles to overcome like notions that being studious and conscientious at school is being a sissy or the idea that incarceration is a right of passage that makes them a man. Another hurdle: the burdens of many who did not have a father to discipline them and show them how to be in the world.

“The boys in my class are afraid to write,” Spacht says. “In the past, when they started to write someone said to them, ‘That’s not the way to do it!’ They became embarrassed and discouraged.” Much of Jim Spacht’s work, though apparently about the techniques of reading, writing and math, really has to do with overcoming that early damage to self-worth.

Geron Spray grew up in Santa Fe and now teaches English classes at St. Michael’s High School. In general, he finds his boy students quite capable, but still many struggle with a lack of interest in reading and short attention spans for the activity. Spray wishes he had more leeway in the kinds of materials he assigns boys so he could tilt the balance of the curriculum demands a bit toward more male-oriented material. If he were able to do it without hurting the girls, who are more willing to read material they don’t like, he would expand on readings like *Huck Finn* and *Lord of the Flies*, which boys enjoy. However, he notes that in mixed classes it is only fair that boys have to force themselves through some material that does not excite them, just as girls do.

Spray fantasizes about teaching an all-boys class where the students would read books and write papers about football or if a student likes cars and is interested in how a piston works, he could write



about it. There would be more recess and more opportunity for the boys to move around.

Sometimes in the poetry discussions he finds that boys’ detachment from their emotions affects their creativity, and Spray wonders about the roots of this. Is it because of the material (i.e. poetry) or do Michael Gurian’s ideas—mentioned in the SFB page 1 article about reading—come into play here? Or, perhaps not writing heartfelt, soulful poetry is simply the boys’ way of protecting themselves from appearing less than manly. Are they afraid of being made fun of by the other boys? On the other hand, if the curriculum would allow Spray to spend more time on the poetry of rap, perhaps the boys would feel more comfortable expressing deeper emotions.

Geron Spray concludes by saying, “If boys were allowed to pursue their interests instead of being told what to be, they would be better readers.” **SFB**

SANTA FE BOYS

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PO Box 273

Santa Fe, NM 87504-0273

Phone: 505-988-9582

Email: santafeboys@comcast.net

www.santafeboys.com

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Gender or Ethnicity or Income?

No Child Left Behind Tests Show Gender Differences Persist in Reading While Non-Existent in Math

In the national debate over whether a “Boy Crisis” exists, some say it is not about gender, but income and ethnicity. Below *Santa Fe Boys* compares the NM Public Education Department’s data for three sets of school systems to shed light on this issue of whether the key variables for understanding boys’ poor performance are gender, income or ethnicity or combinations of the three. The three school systems are (1) all New Mexico Public Schools, (2) Santa Fe Public Schools and (3) Los Alamos Public Schools.

As presented in the data below, all New Mexico Public Schools and Santa Fe Public Schools show considerable ethnic diversity: most students in these public schools are Hispanic, Anglos or Native American. Also, in these two systems most students are from “low income” families, which is determined by whether they receive free or reduced-price lunches. Los Alamos Public School students, in contrast, do not receive free and reduced-price lunches, reflecting their relative affluence. Ethnically, 75 percent are reported as “Anglo,” according to the NM Public Education Department.

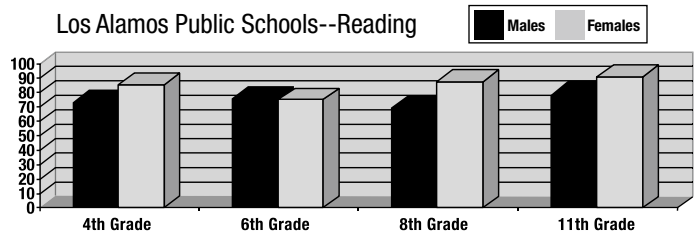
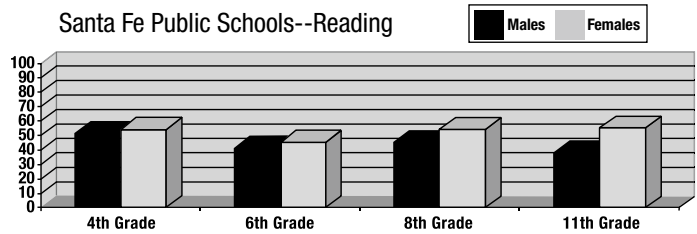
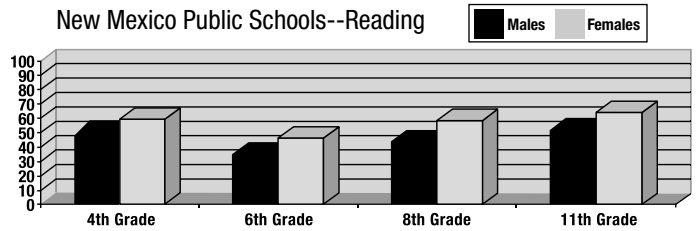
Comparison of the Three School Systems by Ethnicity of Students, 2005-2006			
Percent of Students by Ethnicity:	All NM Public Schools	Santa Fe Public Schools	Los Alamos Public Schools
Hispanic	54.0	73.2	17.9
Anglo	31.1	22.0	75.4
Native American	11.1	3.0	0.6
Black	2.5	0.7	0.5
Asian	1.3	1.2	5.7

Comparison of Three School Systems by Percent Receiving Free and Reduced-Price Lunches, 2005-2006			
	All NM Public Schools	Santa Fe Public Schools	Los Alamos Public Schools
Percent of Students Receiving Free and Reduce-Priced Lunches	52.4	57.1	0.0

Source: NM Public Education Department, Data Collection and Reporting Bureau.

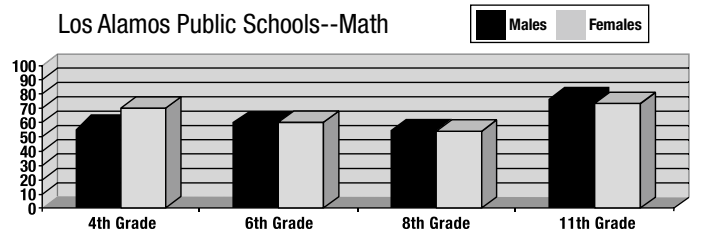
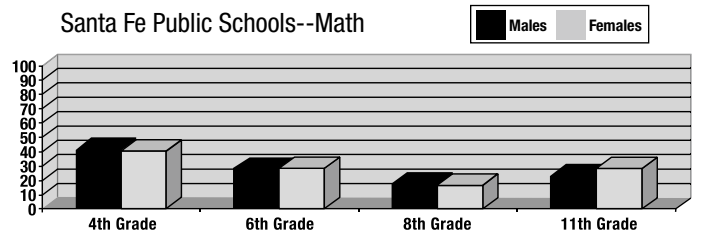
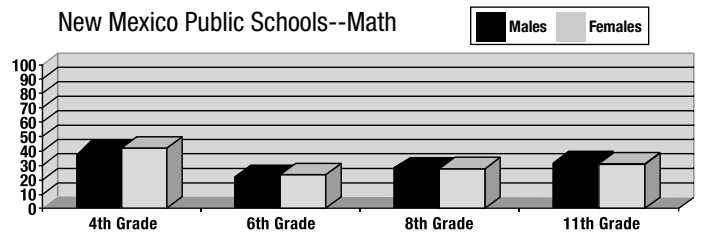
Percent of New Mexico Public School Students Performing “Proficient” and Above on the New Mexico Standards Based Assessment in READING, by Gender, 2005-2006

Comparing all three sets of public schools shows that fewer males score “proficient” in the reading part of the New Mexico Standards Based Assessment. While the percentage of students achieving the level of “proficient” is significantly higher in Los Alamos, the patterns of poorer male performance are similar there and in the other two schools systems. Hence gender, along with ethnicity and income appear to be correlated with performance on the reading part of the tests.



Percent of New Mexico Public School Students Performing “Proficient” and Above on the New Mexico Standards Based Assessment in MATH, by Gender, 2005-2006

Comparing the three sets of school systems’ performance in math, we can see the consistent absence of gender differences; however, as in reading, the level of performance is significantly higher in Los Alamos. In math, once considered a “boy subject,” gender now seems to play little role. However, differences in income and ethnicity do appear to be correlated with the fact that Los Alamos students perform much better than students in the other sets of schools.



Source: New Mexico Public Education Department.

A Conversation with Viola Florez, Dean of the UNM College of Education, on Gender Issues in New Mexico Education

Dr. Viola Florez is currently serving as Dean of the College of Education at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. As dean she has been active with legislative policy makers and key state leaders developing educational policies to address the academic needs of students from kindergarten through college.

Dr. Florez has been in higher education for the past twenty-seven years. She received her B.A. from Ft. Lewis College, Colorado (Humanities & Liberal Arts), an M.A from the University of Colorado (Education/Reading), and her doctorate from Texas A&M University (Curriculum & Instruction).

She has received many awards including in 1985 the Outstanding New Faculty Award from Texas A&M University, and in 1987 the Distinguished Teaching Award from the Texas A&M University Former Students Association. This interview took place on November 28, 2006 and was conducted by Paul Golding, editor of *Santa Fe Boys*.

SFB: In New Mexico public schools, men teachers are a rare breed. Why is that?

DR. FLOREZ: We have seen an increase of men in our college. It's small, but there has been an increase in the number of men coming into education. Now in New Mexico we have a career ladder. You can begin at \$30,000 and after you have been in the profession for 10-15 years, with a Master's Degree, you will be making at least \$50,000, if not more. Before, a teacher could be in the profession for 30 years and be making only \$30,000. Men could see that and so therefore they decided that they would love to do it, but it just wasn't enough money.

SFB: At the recent NM legislature committee meeting on gender in education, one of the representatives, Richard Vigil, who is a bus driver in his school district, talked about how hungry some of the children are for affection, for a hug. But he said that he's afraid to be seen hugging the kids. I wonder what you think about a man's susceptibility to the charge of sexual predation if he shows interest in children's welfare this way. Do you think that is much of a factor in attracting men to teaching?

DR. FLOREZ: I wish I could disagree. It's very different from what it used to be; when children came up to you could give them hugs and nobody questioned it. Now it is questioned by many. It's just a reality. We prepare our teachers to understand that. We prepare our women teachers to understand that.

SFB: But as a factor for going into the profession, do you think that is something that might be more of a "turn-off" for a man who will say to himself, "I don't want to go into that field because people will be suspicious of me."

DR. FLOREZ: Now I don't know. We deal with it in our methods courses. We deal with that, and sexual harassment, and violence in the schools, safety issues. I have never noticed that that would keep anyone out of the profession. I think if you really have a passion for teaching—a passion for really wanting to make a difference for children—then it will not make a difference. But I think it's important that new teachers are aware of it.



SFB: In NM public schools the teachers are 66 percent white and 75 percent female. The student population is 70 percent non-white and a little over 50 percent male. In your opinion do these discrepancies affect educational outcome?

DR. FLOREZ: I don't know that they totally do. I think it depends on the quality of the teaching. And that is why for me, as a dean, it makes a lot of sense to look at the quality of the product. Who are the students coming into the profession? What are their backgrounds and what is their passion for what they want to be, and then of course what is the quality of the instruction and practice, especially the internship? Having role models is really important. It would be great if we had more Hispanic and Native American and African American teachers that mirror the community, and we are working toward that.

SFB: In NM we place a lot of emphasis on being culturally competent. This means that teachers be sensitive and understand the multicultural environment within which they work so that they can meet the children from where they come into school. Is it any less important that teachers be "gender competent," that is to be educated in the different ways that boys and girls learn?

DR. FLOREZ: Yes. I think it is just like understanding the different styles of learning. It is very important. You should, as a teacher, understand. We deal with that in our teaching (at UNM); like boys want to move around a lot, but some girls do, too, like setting up your classroom in different ways. When a boy is done with work he can go somewhere, go to a center. The worst thing you can do is make children just sit and wait until everyone gets done. I hated that when I was a teacher. It is very important that children have something to do. The majority of the boys will get up. They will go to a computer. They will go to a math or science center. The majority of them will move. I think you have to prepare teachers on how to teach the different genders.

SFB: Do you have a "curriculum" for teaching "gender competency" to future teachers?

DR. FLOREZ: We don't have "curricula". And come to think of it, there are no "competencies" either. All our methods for teachers are based on "state competencies." We don't have any state competencies for gender but they are there for culture.

SFB: And what do you think about that?

DR. FLOREZ: I haven't really given that any thought. It is probably something that needs to be discussed. But I think it's something that has to be research-based. If we are going to move in that direction I think we have to look at what the research really says, and the type of research. I think that is why it took so long to do the cultural relevance piece. A long time the research was not there, but it is there now.


SFB: But we do know that boys are doing poorly and that they are more likely to drop out, for example.

DR. FLOREZ: Most of the boys who drop out do so because of the lack of success that starts way back. Reading is so critical; if boys cannot read by the time they leave the third grade, and then in the fourth and fifth grade they are really getting into technical material and into content. If you cannot read well enough by then you are going to really start lagging behind worse and worse. By the time you leave the fifth grade if you are not doing well, the chances are you will continue not to do well and when you hit sixteen you will drop out.

SFB: Isn't that an argument for training in gender competency?

DR. FLOREZ: I think that people are studying that. I was reading an article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that they are doing studies of women who graduated from all-women colleges or academies. Women that went through all-women schools chose to go into fields that women in coed situations did not, such as engineering and law school. That is telling us something. So I think that this school they have in Albuquerque (Van Buren Middle School which has recently included single-sex classrooms) might start making a difference. If it makes a difference then it tells us something.

SFB: During the legislative committee meeting on education and gender in the state, a principal from a Colorado Elementary School said that there are distinct developmental differences between boys and girls; that we need to honor the assets boys bring into the classrooms as well as those that girls bring, such as their verbal sophistication and fine motor ability. She said that currently in most universities, there is no training on gender-based differences, that teachers need that training and they need it right away and it can have an immediate effect. Do you agree?

DR. FLOREZ: Well I agree with a lot of what she said. But where I disagree is when she says that there is no training. I think there is some. But is it to the extent that it should be? Probably not. It varies. Many institutions prepare teachers in this state. We have community colleges now and we have private colleges. Are they doing it? I don't know. But I know that we at UNM do it. It is a subject we talk about. At UNM we have feminist programs and students can attend these. Then there is the whole cultural piece. If you deal with that, you will think about things like this (i.e. gender differences). So I don't agree that it is not happening. I think we do have to look at it and broaden it and enrich it and bring it up front. First of all, it needs to start with the faculty. They are the ones who actually teach. And it's bringing it to a conversation. I know that there is some work going on with regard to fatherhood and parenting. But what is happening at the other end in relation to this in a school setting? 


Boys and Girls Learn Differently, continued from page 1

August 2004 through staff training and the implementation of school-wide "boy-friendly" instructional strategies. Within one year, both girls and boys had made tremendous gains; the reading/writing gap was closed. As a result of its remarkable success, Douglass Elementary was featured on the cover of *Newsweek* magazine (January 30, 2006) and on the *Today Show*.

The statistics on student performance tell us boys' interests are more likely to be neglected in today's classroom. We can see this in the fact that boys get 70 percent of the Ds and Fs, they receive two-thirds of the learning disability diagnoses and are 90 percent of discipline referrals. Furthermore, boys comprise 80 percent of high school dropouts.

Ms King also described and organized hands-on activities in order to show the teachers ways to include more movement and activities that draw more on boys' visual-spatial skills, incorporate more topics that appeal to boys and promote more opportunities for single-gender learning environments within mixed-gender classrooms.

Many of the teachers who participated noted in their evaluations of the presentation that they wanted to learn more and that the ideas confirmed their own experience that, indeed, boys and girls learn differently. One said "I have always known that boys learn differently; now I have ways to work with this."

More information about Kelley King and her work can be found at www.douglasselementary.com and www.douglasselementary.com/gendergap.pdf. 

Boys and Reading, continued from page 1

Colorado Reading Council Journal in Spring 2004 ("An Uneveled Play Field: The Ways in Which School Culture Undermines and Undervalues Boys' Writing"), for example, sees a nexus of four aspects to the relationship between schools and boys as the main reason:

1. Boys typically come to school with interests different from their female classmates.
2. The cultures of most schools better support the interests, talents, and learning approaches of female students.
3. Boys engage in literacy, to their liking, outside of schools and frequently excel at it.
4. Boys have less tolerance than girls for activities in which they see no purpose and over which they have no control.

Complementing this view, but with a focus elsewhere, others look more narrowly to brain research. Much of this research shows that the language functions in the minds of boys are more concentrated in one part of the male brain while for girls there is more "lateralization" between hemispheres. This helps girls connect thinking to feeling. They use more neural pathways and brain centers for word production and the expression of experience, emotion, and cognition through words. Michael Gurian, writing in *The Minds of Boys; Saving our Sons from Falling Behind in School and Life* (Jossey-Bass, 2005) says that the female brain is simply better set up for personal

Boys and Reading, continued on page 6

expression and so he predicts that there will always be a reading and writing gap between boys and girls (p. 129). But this gap can be reduced with sensitivity to the way boys approach reading, writing and language arts. Both parents and schools can do much to help boys improve, Gurian urges.

In this book, Gurian says that schools should make more allowance for elementary level male writers by not giving discouraging grades when boys don't present written work with a lot of sensory detail as teachers often want and receive from girls. It simply is not in the male brain to absorb and verbalize sensory detail, he claims. Accordingly, just as we have changed math education to accommodate girls' learning styles, so we need to give boys more credit for their logic and not penalize them for a scarcity of feeling in writing. Furthermore, schools can support boys along in this kind of writing with art and graphic aids. Gurian suggests, for example, that teachers flash words on a wall or ask students to draw something and then describe its colors, speed and other characteristics. This makes connections between spatial, graphic and visual stimulants.

Middle and high school boys present different issues. With these age groups, Gurian recommends that boys be allowed more latitude in their choice of reading material. Teachers may fear that this will merely result in boys choosing easy books, but there are ways to mitigate against this by, for example, having required lists of reading and option lists that are more gender friendly. In general, Gurian notes that our "educational culture" is quite judgmental about what kids read and especially about what boys read. He says that we usually consider comic books immature reading and a waste of time (p. 137); a boy who prefers technical manuals over fiction is not well rounded, and science fiction is the sign of a geek. He suggests that schools need to give boys a choice, putting the emphasis on the activity of reading more than on what is read.

This view is partially shared in a new book by Michael Smith and Jeffrey Wilhelm, *Going with the Flow: How to Engage Boys (and Girls) in their Literacy Learning* (Heinemann, 2006). These authors also wrote *Reading Don't fix No Chevys* (Heinemann, 2002). The central argument in both books is that boys have a rich outside-of-school literacy life, including technology, but reject literacy in school. Hence, if schools wish to attract boys' interest in reading, they need to start where boys are with the subject and adapt more to boys' needs and interests.

A similar idea is expressed by Thomas Newkirk, the professor of English at the University of New Hampshire mentioned above. Newkirk argues in *Misreading Masculinity: Boys, Literacy, and Popular Culture* (Heinemann, 2002) that adults do not approach boys with enough of an open-minded "anthropological" sense of learning what boyhood is about. He urges adults to set aside their "logic" and look differently at boys. Specifically, he warns against holding a sense of false nostalgia "for the better, purer, more wholesome entertainment of our own youth" (p. 16). Also, he accuses adults of too much literalism in their understanding of young males' reaction to media. Violence in media probably does not mean the same thing as real violence and writing about it should not be prohibited.

In much the same vein, Jane Katch writes in *Under Deadman's Skin* (Beacon, 2001) that the fantasy lives of boys need to be respected and not treated as if their interest in violence will turn them

into killers. She cites the psychologist, Bruno Bettelheim, who said that playing with blocks does not mean a child will be an architect any more than playing with guns turns young boys into adult killers.

Newkirk goes as far as to suggest that teachers could use the popular media as a valuable resource. Previously reluctant and shamed young writers could be encouraged to write about media-based plots. This, he suggests, will elicit the new writers' enthusiasm much more than hackneyed themes of writing about a person they admire or a school rule they would like to change. In a recent article in the publication, *Educational Leadership* (September, 2006), Newkirk argues for using these visually mediated narratives that provide scaffolding for early attempts at story writing. Too often, scaffolding or modeling is conceived of exclusively as something that the teacher provides and then gradually releases to students. But movies like *Star Wars* can provide a set of props for hesitant writers—story types, character names, not to mention those mesmerizing light sabers. The stories that students create have the feeling of "play." They may borrow the basic conflict from a movie—such as pitting Luke Skywalker against Darth Vader—but they create their own versions. Students may involve their friends in a conflict with Darth Vader, create a new character, or borrow a character from a different movie.

Newkirk is a strong proponent of using comic books to capture a boy's interests. He notes that "rare words," i.e. those that do not usually appear in conversation, often appear in comics, and so he encourages their use. [SF](#)

Making Schools Better for Kids continued from page one

and girls learn the same way—does not serve our students well. Rather, these proposals reflect a new way of looking at the gender differences. The proposals rest on the following three principles suggested by Leonard Sax in *Why Gender Matters*;

- Recognizing that there are no differences in what boys and girls can learn, but there are differences in the best ways to teach them;
- Understanding that each child is unique and complex should not blind us to fact that gender is one of the two great organizing principles in child development, the other being age;
- Acknowledging that differences between girls and boys are natural and should be accepted and exploited for educational purposes;

The proposals and the research upon which they are based are described below.

1. Provide funding for in-service training of teachers in best practices for teaching to boys and girls. We have for some time come to accept that cultural competency is important for teaching to the diverse student population of this state. This means that teachers should understand the multicultural environment within which they work so that they can better understand and relate to children from the cultural environment they bring with them into school. Is it any less important that teachers be "gender competent," that is, be educated in the different ways that boys and girls learn? Kelley King, a principal from a Boulder, Colorado elementary school, who has instituted this training with her teachers, told the NM Legislative Education Study Committee on November 16, 2006:

There are distinct developmental differences between boys and girls and between individual students. What teachers want to recognize is not that little girls are more ready, or better or

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more mature for the classroom, but rather that they are different neurologically, physiologically and we need, within the classroom culture, to honor the assets that boys bring into the classrooms. We often value the verbal domain and sophistication and the fine motor ability that little girls bring in. We need to honor more what boys bring in so that they can see their qualities as strengths and not as problems and obstacles. Teacher training that explores our own attitudes and beliefs is very important. We need to meet the children from where they come to us. Currently in most universities, there is no training on gender-based differences. Teachers need that training and they need it right away and it can have an immediate effect.

Principal King instituted this training in her school and saw tremendous student improvement. On the Colorado State Assessment Program boys' scores went up 24 percent in reading and writing and girls' scores, already much higher than boys, went up 19 percent. Special education students' scores increased 50 percent. What did King's teaching staff do? Basically they acknowledged that their classrooms were more geared to the girls' verbal-emotive, sit-still, take-notes, listen-carefully, and multitasking styles. They also admitted that the assets that boys brought, including learning-impulsivity, single-task focus, spatial-kinesthetic learning and physical aggression, were viewed as problems. The teachers then altered their teaching styles to accommodate the more typically male assets. Girls also did better.

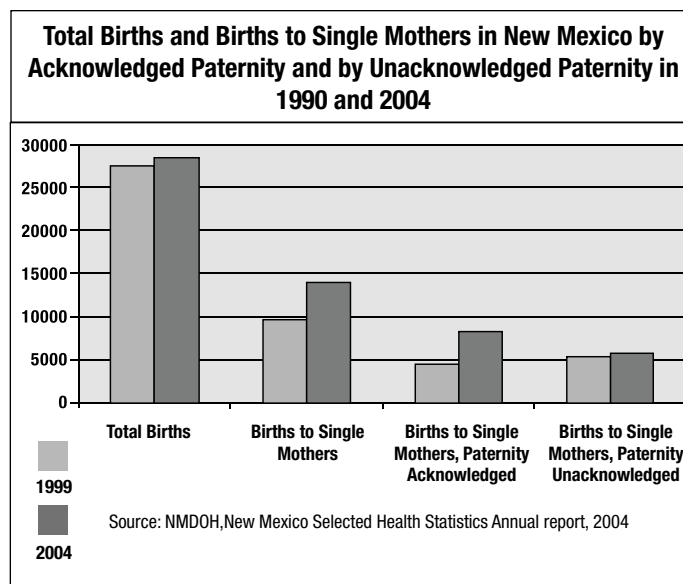
2. Make in-service training available to teachers of same sex classrooms. In the three years before the US Department of Education issued guidelines for same sex classrooms in the Fall of 2006, several hundred schools around the country have begun all-boy and all-girl classrooms. In New Mexico, at least two schools instituted same sex classes at the beginning of this school year for subjects like math and language arts: Albuquerque's Van Buren Middle School and Pojoaque's Intermediate School. Data on the success of the same sex classroom is still coming in, but one fact of the recent past experience stands out: when teachers receive proper preparation for this kind of teaching, the students do better. The reasons are fairly obvious. Teachers are taught how to gear discipline and teaching methods to the one sex they will be educating instead of having to find a middle point that works, or does not work, for both sexes. Same sex classrooms are not a panacea for New Mexico's school performance, but as a public school alternative now available to girls in Santa Fe if their parents can afford a private school, it holds out the same promise for success that it has achieved elsewhere, when teachers are prepared.

3. Support programs that bring a greater number of adequately trained men into public school teaching careers. The table below shows the imbalance of the genders of students and those of teachers in New Mexico. Research has been done on whether a teacher's gender affects a student's academic performance. Economist Thomas Dee's recent article (Fall, 2006) in *Education Next* (www.educationnext.org) uses US Department of Education data from over 21,000 eighth graders in 1988 to test whether the gender of the teacher matters. Dee's results indicated that having a teacher of the same sex increased a student's score on standardized tests significantly while having a teacher of the opposite sex decreased

scores. It is not the purpose of this proposal to imply that a boy's educational progress is hindered by the relative lack of male teachers nor is it the intent to make female teachers "scapegoats." Rather, like the other proposals above, these legislative initiatives try to make it clear that gender does matter. Indeed, Dee himself speculates that educating teachers—males and females—in different gender learning styles may be adequate to overcome this finding from 1988 data. Hence, the other proposals above may compensate for the gender differences Dee found. But, at the same time, the growing absence of fathers in New Mexico (see graph below on births to single mothers) and the decline of adult-led male groups leave boys with severe deficits in male role models. This proposal attempts to address some of those deficits.

	Students	Teachers
Male	51.4	24.8
Female	48.6	75.2
White, non-Hispanic	31.1	66.8
Hispanic	54.0	28.7
Native American	11.1	2.6
Black	2.5	1.2
Asian	1.3	0.8

Source: <http://www.ped.state.nm.us/div/ais/data/fs/13/05.06.ethnic.pdf> & <http://www.ped.state.nm.us/div/ais/data/fs/15/05.06.gender.pdf> & <http://www.ped.state.nm.us/div/ais/data/fs/23/05.06.pers.eth.gen.pdf> (retrieved, November 16, 2006).



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Ten Things Teachers Can Do to Help Boys Learn

By Peter West, University of Western Sydney, Sydney, Australia

1. TALK LESS

Boys are not terribly good listeners. Cut the words you use down to the absolute minimum. Get boys active early in the lesson. Avoid a long preamble.

2. GET BOYS DOING

Focus on what boys DO in this lesson. Most males are focused on action. It comes partly from their biology. And partly from what we expect of boys.

3. USE HUMOR

Use a joke now and then. It really helps to get boys on your side and it discourages trouble from appearing because they are bored.

4. GET HELP

Use a teacher buddy to help you watch underachievers who slide under the radar. Tell the class someone is coming in to give you a hand.

5. "CAN YOU DO IT?"

Challenge boys more. Boys say school doesn't challenge them enough.

6. COMPETITION WORKS

Get boys competing against one another, against themselves, against teachers. "I bet I can do this faster than you. . .". Many boys will do it, and enjoy proving the teacher wrong.

7. HELP WITH WRITING

Cut down writing tasks to what is absolutely necessary. Show boys how to write assessment items. Use guidelines, rubrics, models. Work on what interests the boy in front of you. And don't imagine that boys are all the same.

8. BEING A MAN MEANS. . .

Get boys talking about what it means to be male. Women have a useful role to play because they have experience of men as husbands, partners, sons' don't be afraid to give boys some help in getting on with other people. Men have a role, too. Guys, don't try to be a big he-man. Show boys by example—read books, be gracious and thoughtful to female teachers. Look at examples of men in the media and help boys question them.

9. KEEP IT CLEAR

Explain tasks simply, step by step. Put the steps up somewhere and refer boys to them.

10. BE BRIEF—BE POSITIVE—BE GONE

Go around and encourage boys with a quick word of praise. And move on to the next student. We all like some praise! Don't you?

These ideas come from Dr Peter West, the author of *What is the Matter with Boys?* (2002), Choice Books, Sydney, Australia. More of Dr. West's work may be found at his website, www.boyslearning.com.au.