

An Examination of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Factors Influencing Men's Decisions to Teach Young Children

A Research Report by

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New York City, October 21, 2019  
The United States of America

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## Executive Summary

This report shares findings from a two-year, place-based study that sought to examine some of the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence men's decisions to pursue careers in the early childhood education (ECE) workforce. To carry out the study, we recruited a broad array of male educators, including licensed teachers, less-credentialed paraprofessionals and assistant teachers, family advocates as well as male and female program leaders who supervise the male educators. We used a variety of research tools including survey questionnaires, individual interviews, focus groups and place-based observations to collect data from 42 men in ECE programs, 19 men in upper elementary and secondary classrooms, and 14 male and female administrators who joined the study. The overarching issue in this research is whether recruiting and retaining more men can promote gender balance and equity in the ECE workforce, while also helping to enhance program quality and resulting in greater outcomes for young children.

Our data analysis reveals some key findings that may guide efforts toward increasing men's participation in the ECE workforce. Noteworthy, the vast majority of men in the study indicated that they entered the field because they wish to make a difference to the lives of young children. Most of the male educators came into the field with previous experiences supporting children in their own families, family-based child care, after-school programs, community-based organizations, enrichment and recreational programs. Also worth noting is that some of the men are career changers and others decided to join ECE after they became fathers.

The study's participants shared their *beliefs* that male educators expand both culturally and developmentally appropriate practice with children in physical play, exploration, decision-making, risk-taking, discipline and expectations. They also talked about how they model different pedagogies in their classrooms, while also providing much-needed social and emotional supports

to all children, particularly to those who do not have positive male figures at home. Additionally, some of these educators stated that they enjoyed working with their female colleagues with whom they received guidance on how to improve learning opportunities for children.

Moreover, the men in the study described their involvement in the ECE workforce as a way to *give back* to their communities, and a number of these male educators saw themselves playing important roles not only to children but also to other families in their communities. A few pointed out that they formed bonds with the fathers that came to drop off or pick up children from their schools. Furthermore, many respondents indicated that they would have liked more equitable wages, even though low salaries did not dissuade them from getting involved in the ECE field. The participants in this research reported varying pay scales across program sites for the same titles and work duties. These discrepancies signal a pay equity issue that needs to be addressed in the sector.

Lastly, on sites that had 3 or more male educators it seemed that program leaders had taken proactive steps toward recruiting and positioning male educators in their school sites. Our data show that program leaders also constituted the primary school-based supports for mentoring, coaching and encouraging the male teachers in their schools. Some school administrators indicated that they met regularly with their male educators to talk about curriculum, classroom management, and best practice while also coaching them on risk management with children in their schools. Additionally, we found that ECE program leaders served as the first line of defense responding to sexist attacks and addressing negative reactions by parents who expressed biases about men working with young children.

Taken as a whole, our study concludes that male educators can help to optimize the quality of social interactions and emotional supports for young children while also contributing to greater

gender inclusion and social justice in the ECE workforce. Based on the study's findings, we present a series of strategies for recruitment, retention and professionalization, increased gender inclusion and equity to improve men's participation in the early childhood education workforce. We encourage increased participation of men in the ECE profession as an added value and action that can be factored into gender-balanced curricular activities, staffing of ECE programs, restructuring and expansion of early learning structures to provide the greatest benefits to the greatest number of young children and families in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In all, our study's findings have led us to consider further research on how issues of gender identity, race, ethnicity, age, religion and other social constructs interplay in men's decisions to work with young children. We share our study's theoretical framework, data collection methods, analysis techniques and more detailed results in the corpus of this report.

**Acknowledgements:** It must be noted that our work is part of an ongoing research initiative funded by the Foundation for Child Development (FCD) and facilitated by the Professional Development Institute (PDI) of the City University of New York (CUNY). This initiative has led to the creation of the New York City Early Childhood Research Network through the collaboration of at least 25 founding members, including researchers from both public and private higher education institutions, and policy-makers from city agencies such as the New York City Department of Education, the New York City Agency for Children's Services, and the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. We hereby express great appreciation to our research assistants, the administrative leadership, the Teacher Education Department, the Office of Grant Funded Projects and the Office of Public Affairs at Borough of Manhattan Community College as well as the CUNY Research Foundation, MDRC and the Neimand Collaborative for supporting this work. We are thankful to all the individuals who either took part in or supported our research.

## Introduction

In October 2018, a Black man was confronted by Georgia Police, called by a White woman who saw him as he was caring for two White children (Barden, 2018). Perhaps, there would have been no incident if a woman were seen in this nurturing role. A quick examination of labor composition in the early childhood education (ECE) sector shows that young children are systematically deprived of the opportunity to experience a healthy range of ethnic and gender role models. Arguably, increasing the participation of culturally relevant male educators into the ECE workforce could enhance the quality of experiences for young children and challenge gender stereotypes, while also offering *possibilities* for young children to experience timely social advancement in their care and education.

Since gender, race, ethnicity and cultural heritage are both texts and subtexts with regard to *equity* and *inclusion* issues in all the professions of our epoch, we have taken interest in examining policy and exploring research that reflect the social, economic and political achievements of our time. The early childhood education workforce is one focus area of our research interests because it provides appropriate responses to the developmental and cultural needs of children and families at the macro, meso and micro levels of our education systems, which are fundamental apparatuses for improving our social, economic and political life. We have observed one major problem that must be addressed in the sector. Notably, men make up only 3% of the early education (EE) workforce in the United States, a statistic that has not changed since the 1970s. Our study's aim is to find out why in order to make actionable recommendations for change.

We designed and carried out a two-year study that uncovered intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence men's career trajectories in early childhood education (ECE), and we also found out

innovative ways that ECE programs might be able to recruit, develop and retain more men in the field in order to achieve a more gender-balanced and racially diverse workforce. This research report provides an in-depth comprehensive analysis to anyone seeking to understand some of the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence men's decisions to work with young children as well as some actions that can be taken to help achieve a more gender-balanced workforce in ECE. The intellectual merit of our study is that we have focused energy on seeking out solutions and exploring possibilities rather than explaining the cultural barriers hindering men from working with young children.

Despite efforts in recent years to increase the participation of men in the early childhood education (ECE) workforce, the care and education of young children (birth – 8 years) in the United States (U.S.) is primarily the professional occupation of women. The scarcity of male educators in ECE calls for change during a critical time when gender expectations are modeled. It is critical to ensure that children have exposure to and interactions with a mixed-gender workforce to model the different roles men can play in children's lives. The study's purpose is to increase understanding about intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence men's decisions to work with young children (Birth - 8 years) so as to enable stakeholders to tailor and implement related recruitment and retention efforts and policy reform to achieve gender balance and equity in the ECE workforce.

Men who work within female-dominated professions such as early childhood education (ECE) are challenged by a set of invisible factors (i.e., *glass door effect*) that become apparent only after they enter the workforce (Koch & Farquhar, 2015). We divided these workplace variables into two major categories: intrinsic or personal factors and extrinsic or social drivers. To unearth these determinants, we conducted a two-year study focusing primarily on analyzing the

narratives and experiences of male educators who worked with young children in public school sites, community-based organizations, and tuition-based programs within high, moderate and low resource areas throughout the City of New York.

Overall, this report shares our study's theoretical framework, methods, and key findings. With respect to intrinsic motivations, we found that male educators' personal aspirations have influenced their decisions to join the ECE workforce. Our data demonstrated that these men were motivated by their passion for working with young children and by the opportunity to make an impactful difference to the lives of people in their communities and to "give back." In regard to extrinsic drivers, our data showed that men's engagement in child care work is also influenced by structural factors that support male workers' aspirations within the ECE field.

For instance, male educators in this research often found themselves taking on the mantle of "role models" to young children, and many of these were accepting of this discourse although they had various interpretations of what it means to both female and male ECE educators. What's more, the men in this study benefited from unofficial coaching and mentoring by experienced female and male colleagues as well as program leaders who were supportive of their decisions once they entered this workforce. Despite these apparently positive factors influencing men's decisions to enter and stay in the field, we also found a set of both personal and external factors that discourage male educators to reconsider their career trajectories in ECE.

Our study's findings confirm previous results showing that gender stereotypes and negative social bias (Shpancer, 2019; Burn & Prat-Adams, 2015; Brownhill and Oates, 2016), suspicions of child molestation by children's parents and microaggressions by female colleagues (Cole et al., 2019; ), low pay and the professional status of child care work generally deter men from joining the ECE workforce (Koch & Emilsen, 2017; Peeters, 2007). Toward the end of this report, we will

further discuss the chief personal and societal determinants along with the most salient issues that impact the male educators' work with young children.

## **2.1. Study's theoretical framework**

Understanding how the above factors interplay with other social constructs, such as race, ethnicity, class and gender identity, can help policy makers, practitioners and other stakeholders to develop initiative for achieving relatively higher rates of gender inclusion and diversity in the ECE workforce. Foucault's (1978) work on discourses and their effects on individual and group behavior, in combination with perspectives gained from gender studies (bell hooks, 1984; Butler, 1990; Connell, 2017), provide our study with a strong theoretical framework to expose both extrinsic and intrinsic factors that influence male teachers' decisions to participate in the implementation of the PreK-For-All initiative in New York City. Foucault's theory on discourses holds that gender is socially constructed through the operation of social power. Drawing from this post-structuralist theory, we argue that the home, the school and the community are places where dominant discourse operates on a daily basis, and it probably has the greatest impact on the behavior of children, educators, parents, school administrators and other stakeholders. Put simply, Foucault's work has enabled us to heighten understanding on how hegemonic discourse shapes school culture and how school staffing reinforces normative practices of gender, which in many ways reflect the mindsets and values of parents and other stakeholders.

The fact that very few men are participating in the education of young children poses a multifaceted problem, which we have also analyzed through the lenses of gender studies. Male educators' narratives and experiences in the ECE workforce are interesting phenomena to study from the various perspectives on gender practices (Connell, 2017; Burn & Pratt-Adams, 2015).

Connell (2017) maintains that men generally benefit from their ability to perform “gendered” tasks in a patriarchal society. Burn and Pratt-Adams posit that, although male teachers may be subject to microaggressions from female colleagues during initial training, “qualified men can be advantaged in their careers due to their rarity” (2015:6) in the ECE profession. We also reviewed the literature on men’s experiences in ECE to deepen our knowledge about recruitment and retention strategies that have been effective in national and international contexts.

Both national and international studies on male educators in early childhood education have highlighted many important arguments for increasing men’s participation in the ECE workforce (Aina & Cameron, 2011; Farquhar, Cablk, Buckingham, Butler & Ballantyne, 2006; Johnson, Middleton, Nicholson, & Sandrick, 2010; Nelson & Shikwambi, 2010). The research also suggests that the educational system operates in the context of a sexist society, whereby low pay and the feminization of the workforce has shaped perceptions about ECE work as a low status profession (Drudy, 2008; Tyack, 1974). This low status has contributed to ECE teachers facing challenging working conditions, low salary scales, and poor benefits, which undermines efforts to provide high-quality experiences for many children in early education settings.

The absence of male educators in most ECE classrooms reinforces stereotypes and gendered power relationships that are harmful to both men and women (Aina & Cameron, 2011; Sargent, 2005). Gender is a social category often highlighted in learning environments, both formally and informally (Thorne, 1995), and young children come to know themselves and their world through meaningful interactions and relationships with relevant female and male adults. From this perspective, we argue that male educators can fulfill both general and specific needs within their school community, provide models of a range of masculinities that support children’s social and emotional development while also challenging gender stereotypes (Brownhill & Oates,

2016; Wood & Brownhill, 2016). A more gender-balanced workforce may enhance the diversity of voices in the ECE classroom, present opportunities for teachers to reflect on their practices, and provide young children with meaningful and authentic experiences that support non-traditional and non-stereotypical gender roles and responsibilities for men and women.

Moreover, recent studies highlight important differences in how male and female educators support and promote young children's play, social interaction, communication and meaning-making, and in their perceptions of the benefits of physical play in learning and development (Bosacki & Coplan, 2015; Cameron, 2013). Tennhoff, Nentwich & Vogt (2015) found that "gender is inscribed in the selection and arrangement of materials and spaces, as well as in the daily structures and routines" (p.341). In addition to providing a more gender-mixed early learning environment for young children, men's participation in the ECE workforce may support developmentally appropriate practice.

Furthermore, gender-balanced ECE settings may help to solve a set of complex problems for men who choose to pursue careers as classroom teachers and program administrators in the sector. Sargent (2004) maintained that ECE male educators are often treated as *classic tokens*, because their actions are highly scrutinized and they must "tread a very thin line between behaving in ways deemed 'too masculine' and 'too feminine'" (p. 174). Similarly, Mallozzi and Galman (2014) observe that a tokenized male educator within an ECE structure may be positioned as a hyper-masculine figure who is expected to fulfill the role of a protector rather than a caregiver. Hence, embracing such a role is thereby reinforcing gender practices in the field. Some researchers have also observed that the stark imbalance between male and female staff in ECE can lead to feelings of isolation among ECE men as well as increased pressure for them to prove themselves

capable of supporting young children's development and education (Cameron, 2001; Murray, 1996; Sargent, 2005; Tennhoff et al., 2015).

The under-representation of men in the ECE workforce today should be part of policy reforms at the macro, meso, and micro levels of early learning systems nationally and internationally. Reform in the early childhood workforce is a major focus area for researchers across economically advanced countries (Oberhuemer, 2015; Kagan, Kauerz & Tarrant, 2007), and the issues of male educators and professionalism within this workforce are not to be ignored (Oberhuemer, 2015; Cameron, 2006). Hence, there is a need for studies that focus on ways to improve the gender balance in care and early education staff in an effort to help develop policies to obtain, train and retain qualified men in the ECE sector. Our study suggests that it is important for policymakers, practitioners and researchers to understand the personal motivations along with the social and economic pressures that shape men's decisions to work with young children; in these regards, we proffer some actionable recommendations at the end of this report.

## **2.2. Male Educators' Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations for Working in ECE**

A confluence of both intrinsic and extrinsic factors has influenced men's decisions to become ECE educators. Some male educators have chosen to pursue careers in the field following positive experiences caring for youngsters within their own families or in ECE programs within their communities. The literature on men in ECE is filled with examples of intrinsic motivations by male educators who have defined themselves as advocates for children, and these men have also talked about their power and agency to effect change in children's lives (McQuiston, 2010; Therese & Diren, 2010; Wohlgemuth, 2015). In the same vein, there are examples of male educators who have described their involvement in ECE as an opportunity to counter gender

stereotypes and serve as positive male examples that challenge gender stereotypes in the workforce (McQuiston, 2010; Sumsion, 2000a; Tennhoff et al., 2015). In a study of ECE male educators in England, Claire Sumsion (2000b) cited a participant who shared that it was important for young children to see “that there are many different aspects of being male...I can show children that males have a sensitive side...” (p. 90).

In a study by Therese & Diren (2010), preservice male educators in early childhood teacher education programs reported that at least one significant person in their lives had encouraged them on pursuing careers in this field as those external influences had also validated their competence as future ECE educators. They noted that such affirmation was an important aspect that contributed to their retention in the field. Additionally, some men working in the field spoke about the motivation provided by opportunities for continuing education and career advancement, including the potential to move into advocacy or administrative roles (Tennhoff et al, 2015; Wohlgemuth, 2015). Overall, respondents in a number of studies about men in ECE emphasized the importance of engaging with other male educators whose personal stories and advice had encouraged them to choose ECE as a profession (McQuiston, 2010; Therese & Diren, 2010; Wohlgemuth, 2015). These research findings suggest that initiatives aiming at achieving gender balance in the ECE workforce should have a keen understanding of the intrinsic and extrinsic drivers that move men to work with young children. However, there are additional social pressures and related economic challenges that must be taken into account, as well.

### **2.3. Other related challenges about men’s career trajectories in ECE**

Research over the past two decades has documented additional determinants and related challenges faced by men who choose to enter the ECE profession. Chief among them are low

salary scales and low professional status, which are often cited as obstacles that deter men from working with young children, especially when these factors interlace with the gendered role often imposed on men as primary breadwinners for their families (Roseman, 1999; Cameron, 2001; Rolfe, 2006). Rolfe (2006) notes that the perception of ECE as a low status “women’s” profession may be “especially important to young men considering their career options,” (p.110) because it relates to personal identity and constructions of masculinity. Across the board, male educators report that they are often assigned non-teaching tasks that involve physical labor, such as lifting heavy objects, repair work and even custodial chores, which tend to reinforce gender practices within ECE structures (Sargent, 2002).

Moreover, men who choose to work with young children are often faced with suspicion about their motives, and such skepticism often arises from perceptions by children’s families and female colleagues in addition to viral news about men who engaged in reprehensible behavior toward young children. Generally, doubts about the relevance of ECE male educators have impacted employers’ willingness to recruit men into the profession, while accusations of pedophilia whether founded or not have led to the implementation of rules that regulate men’s physical contact with children (e.g., touching or hugging) and exclude men from certain tasks when working with infants and toddlers, such as changing diapers or helping them to change clothes (Cameron, 2001; Rolfe, 2006; Sargent, 2004; Sumsion, 2000b). Male educators have also faced suspicions about their sexuality and masculinity, and such prejudices are rooted in heteronormative tropes and the traditional gender order (Warin, 2018; Farquhar et al., 2006; Sargent, 2004).

Warin (2018) notes that ‘gender-transformative men’ might intentionally choose to “challenge gender stereotypes in their own behavior and interactions with children” as they

perform traditionally coded female activities (p. 5). By the same token, male educators in early childcare settings often report feelings of marginalization or exclusion (Cameron, 2013), which can be interpreted as experiences of alterity (Hazell, 2009). In the preface of his book focusing on *the experience of the other*, Clive Hazell maintains that alterity is a key concept—as can be seen in the works of the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1999)—that should be taken into account when analyzing the disposition and the behavior of others. This notion is tied to a host of philosophical principles and associated psychological concepts such as autonomy, prejudice, scapegoating, projective identification and gender bias that emerge in the analysis of the participants’ narratives (interview data). Arguably, male educators must effectively negotiate the intersubjective space as they push against gender stereotypes and transcend feelings of marginalization while positioning themselves as *bona fide* early education and care professionals in a female dominated workforce.

Yet, another related phenomenon that ECE male educators must grapple with is the “glass escalator” effect (Williams, 1992) wherein men in a non-traditional occupation such as ECE enjoy certain social benefits. For instance, they tend to be taken out of the classroom and rapidly advanced into administrative and leadership positions (Cameron, 2001; Sargent, 2004; Mallozzi & Galman, 2014). According to Cameron (2001), men’s increased visibility, as well as their own and their colleagues’ expectations, advantage male educators over their female colleagues in ECE settings. It is also important to bear in mind that notions of masculinity intersect with other aspects of alterity such as race, social class, religion, sexual orientation, age among others that impact the career trajectories of men in the ECE workforce.

#### **2.4. Intersections of masculinity, race and social class in ECE**

When examining the career trajectories of men in ECE, it is important to note that intersections of gender, race and social class drastically impact male representation in the field. Acker (2006) argues that social and economic inequality in the U.S. is created “in the daily activities of working” (p. 441) and explores the complex and myriad processes by which gender, class, and racial inequalities in work settings may be either mutually reinforcing or contradictory. She defines inequality regimes as “systematic disparities between participants in power and control” (p. 443) in the workplace over factors such as goals and outcomes, resources, decision-making, and opportunities for promotion. This understanding has also provided our research team with an intersectional lens to uncover those aspects of power and inequality as we attempted to interpret the demographic data and the narratives of an ethnically and culturally diverse group of male participants in our research.

Despite the insights drawn from a growing body of national and international research on the experiences and concerns of male educators in ECE settings, there are few studies that explore effective strategies for how to remedy the absence of men in the ECE workforce. What makes our study unique is that it seeks to address this information gap in the literature. Armed with this theoretical framework, we designed and applied a qualitative methodology along with a robust set of data collection protocols to capture and analyze the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of the ECE male educators in our study.

### **3.1. Methodology and data collection protocols**

The above theoretical framework has provided our study with the tools for developing and implementing a research methodology and data collection protocols that capture much-needed data to understand how intrinsic and extrinsic motivations have positively impacted the decisions of a

diverse group of male teachers and assistant teachers to work with young children in the New York City education system. Our study explored three guiding questions:

- What are the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence men’s decisions to work with young children?
- How do male educators perceive their experiences within the field of early childhood education?
- How are male educators recruited, retained and supported in early learning settings in New York City?

To answer the above research questions, we utilized a variety of qualitative instruments to capture information about the career trajectories of the male educators in the study, including descriptive statistics (i.e., race, ethnicity, role, site types, years of service) and we collected compelling narratives about these men’s personal experiences in the field. In the first phase of data collection, we gathered 46 responses from a lengthy questionnaire that we administered to 82 men working in ECE program sites within low, medium and high resourced school districts in New York City. A copy of this questionnaire is found in Appendix I at the end of this report. For the sake of comparison, we distributed a nearly identical survey with language specific to a relatively smaller sample of 28 men working in upper elementary and secondary grades, and we received 19 responses from this pool of participants. We created both paper and electronic versions of the questionnaires. In this phase of data collection, we recruited participants from 19 public schools, 19 community-based organizations, and 3 tuition-based programs that provide ECE services in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens.

In the second phase of data collection, we conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews with 16 male educators (10 lead/co-teachers, 5 assistant teachers/paraprofessionals, and 1 instructional coordinator from the New York City Department of Education). *Figure 1* shows a breakdown of the school/site types where these ECE male educators worked.

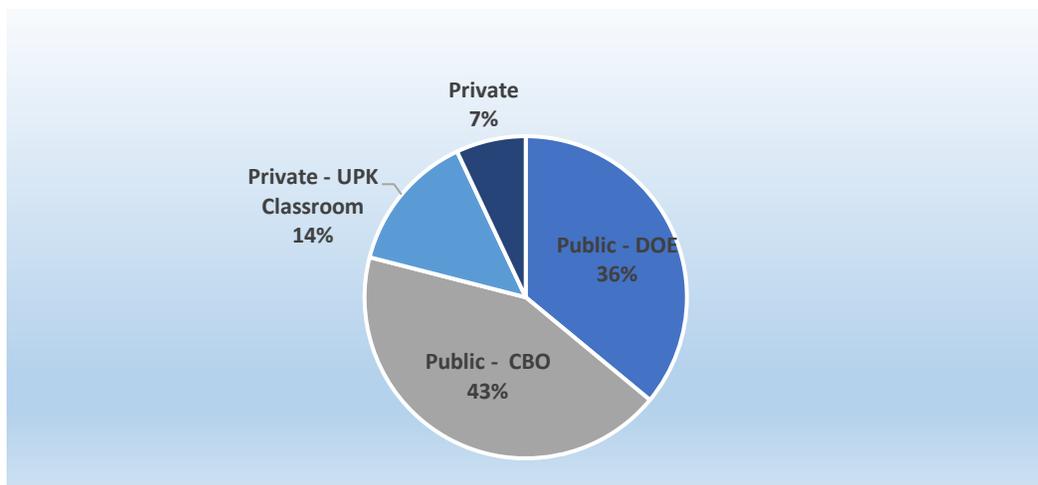


Figure 1: Site Type of ECE Male Educators Interviewed (N=16)

Additionally, we carried out 14 individual interviews with program administrators (7 male and 7 female) who were in charge of supervising these men’s work. Interviewing program leaders who supervise the work of the male educators was an innovation that added to the strength of our study’s methodology. Notably, our approach is quite uncommon (perhaps unique) and it has enabled us to collect data on the intentionality of key decision-makers with respect to the recruitment, support, and retention of men into the ECE workforce. Also, it is important to gain

Copies of the prompts used for guiding these semi-structured interviews are shown in Appendix II. We concluded data collection in this phase with unstructured interviews with two focus groups. In the first focus group, we gathered information on the formation and activities of a men’s support group comprising of 2 lead teachers, 2 assistant teachers, 2 family advocates and 1 administrator in ECE. Our objective was to find out what members of this male affinity group considered to be the benefits of joining this structure. In the second focus, we presented preliminary results and held a discussion with 6 ECE program leaders (4 male and 2 female), who provided feedback us on the study’s key findings and recommendations for policy and practice.

The average one-on-one interview lasted over one hour and each focus group ran for about two hours of randomized turn-takings, active listening, and deep reflections about issues impacting men's participation in ECE. Immediately after completing each interview or focus group, we wrote fieldnotes to describe the characteristics of the participant's program site, the biographical profile of the interviewee, and the most salient issues or themes that emerged in the interview or focus group. This technique helped us to draw contextual understandings that we later applied in our data analysis. Next, we transcribed the audiotapes of the semi-structured interviews and the focus groups to accurately represent the voices of participants in textural-structural descriptions while also maintaining the authenticity of the spoken word. We used code names such as *Teacher 1* or *Administrator 12* on the transcribed materials to anonymize our participants. We kept a codebook and identifying materials in a vault under lock and key in the Principal Investigator's office and kept a log to document whenever our research associates accessed these materials. Overall, we applied APA ethical principles and code of conduct (2017) to ensure confidentiality and the protection of human subjects in our research.

### **3.2. Study's understanding of gender**

Before providing demographic information about the participants in our study, we deem it important to share first and foremost our philosophical stance on gender. From a post-structuralist standpoint, we reject the binary notion of gender in favor of a more encompassing and flexible view of how this concept comes to bear on the different types of masculinities (Connell, 2017), personal narratives and individual work experiences of the men who took part in our study. We have deliberately used the term "male educator" only as a general signifier with reference to the participants who self-identified as men in this study but we have remained opened to and were

accepting of the possible participation of cis- and transgendered men and women in our research. Since our study narrowly focuses on self-described/self-identified male educators, there were no participants who did not identify by the dichotomous terms of “male” or “female,” though we recognize that these binary categories do not adequately describe all people’s identities.

### **3.3. Characteristics of the study’s participants**

The descriptive statistics that follow pertain to the program sites and the characteristics of the male ECE educators who completed the questionnaire, not including the demographics of the ECE administrators interviewed for this study. We started our recruitment efforts by reaching out to 82 ECE program sites in low, medium and high districts in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan in Queens. This effort resulted into 43 program sites participating in the study, including 19 public schools, 19 community-based organizations (CBOs), and 3 tuition-based children centers in moderate and high resource areas. We contacted a total of 81 ECE male educators, and 46 of them returned to us fully completed survey questionnaires. Our survey questionnaires were designed to capture descriptive statistics (i.e., race, ethnicity, role, site type, years of service) and information about respondents’ career pathways, professional development experiences, mentoring, and challenges to men in the field among other factors.

From the pool of 46 participants who completed our survey questionnaires, 16 volunteered to participate in individual semi-structured interviews with our research team. Of those, 10 were lead teachers or co-teachers, 5 served as paraprofessionals or assistant teachers, and one worked as an instructional coordinator with the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE). Eight of the participants that interviewed with the study worked in publicly-funded CBOs, 3 served in NYC DOE sites, 2 were affiliated with DOE funded classrooms in private schools, and 2 labored

in tuition-based programs. It is important to note that we conducted some of the interviews within the participants' workplaces and carried out others in nonwork-related settings. Additionally, we conducted onsite interviews with 7 male and 7 female program administrators who were directly in charge of supervising the work of the male educators in the study. Furthermore, we held two group interviews. The first group interview was carried out with a support group comprised of 3 teachers, 2 family advocates and 1 administrator in ECE settings, and our goal was to find out why this male-affinity group was created, how it operated and what kinds of supports came out of it. In the other group interview, we invited 6 ECE administrators (4 male and 2 female) to review the study's recommendations for policy and practice as well as informed feedback for refining our analysis of the study's findings.

Our male educator sample reflected a broad range of diversity with respect to race, ethnicity, age, years of service, education level, professional status and pay scale in the ECE workforce. For instance, the participants ranged in age from 18 to 64 years old, with the largest percentage (41%) aged between 25 and 34—as shown in *Figure 2* below.

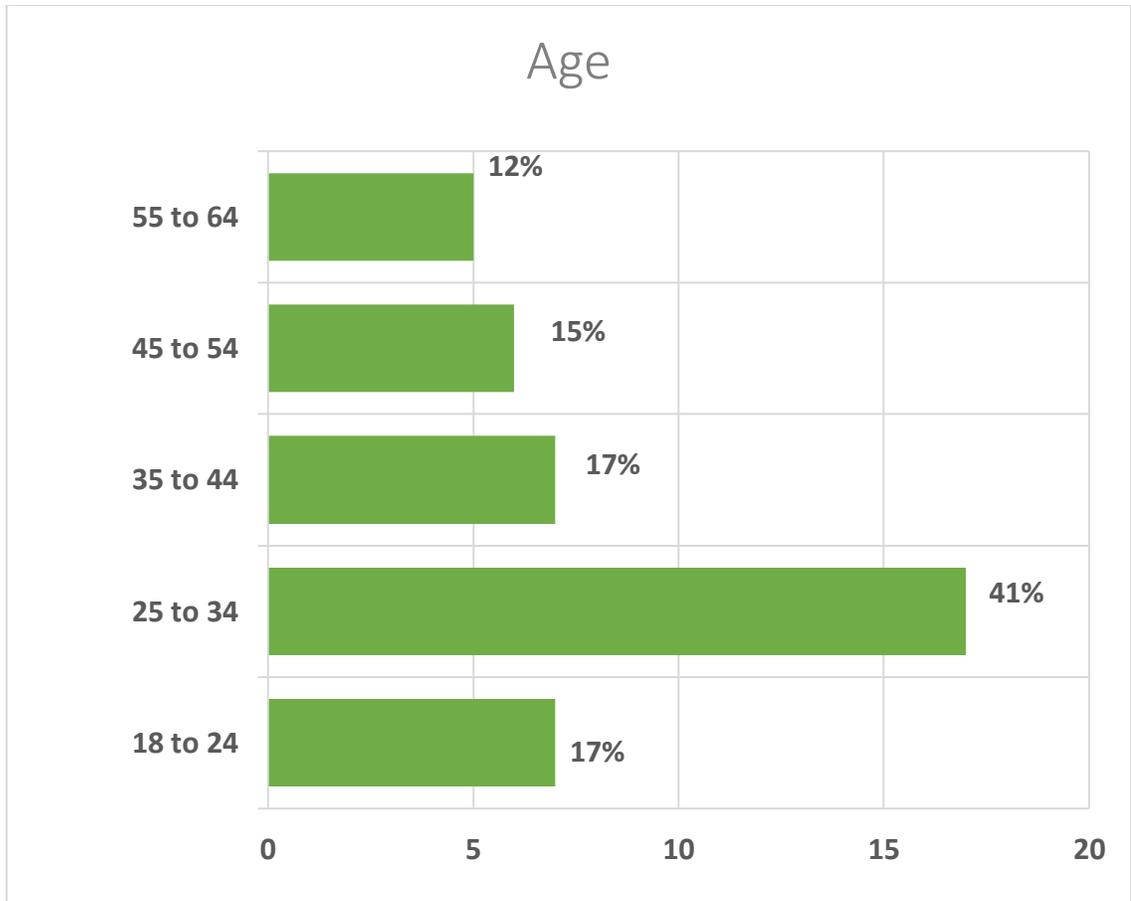


Figure 2: Age Ranges of Participants (N = 42)

In describing their race and ethnicity on the survey questionnaires, the participants were offered the option of selecting more than one category. Of the race/ethnicity options, 19 self-identified as Black or African American, 15 identified themselves as White, 11 selected Hispanic or Latino, 4 checked off Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1 selected Middle Eastern or Northern African. They were also given a set of options regarding their educational levels and degree held. We saw some interesting trends in the demographic data that we cross-tabulated from the survey, especially the relationships between educational attainment levels, professional status, salary scales, and the types of programs where the participants worked. *Figure 3* features one such scenario in regard to participants' race or ethnicity and their levels of education. Needless to say, these trends signal

a systemic problem that summons the attention of research, policy and practice in the early education workforce as a focus for innovation and reform.

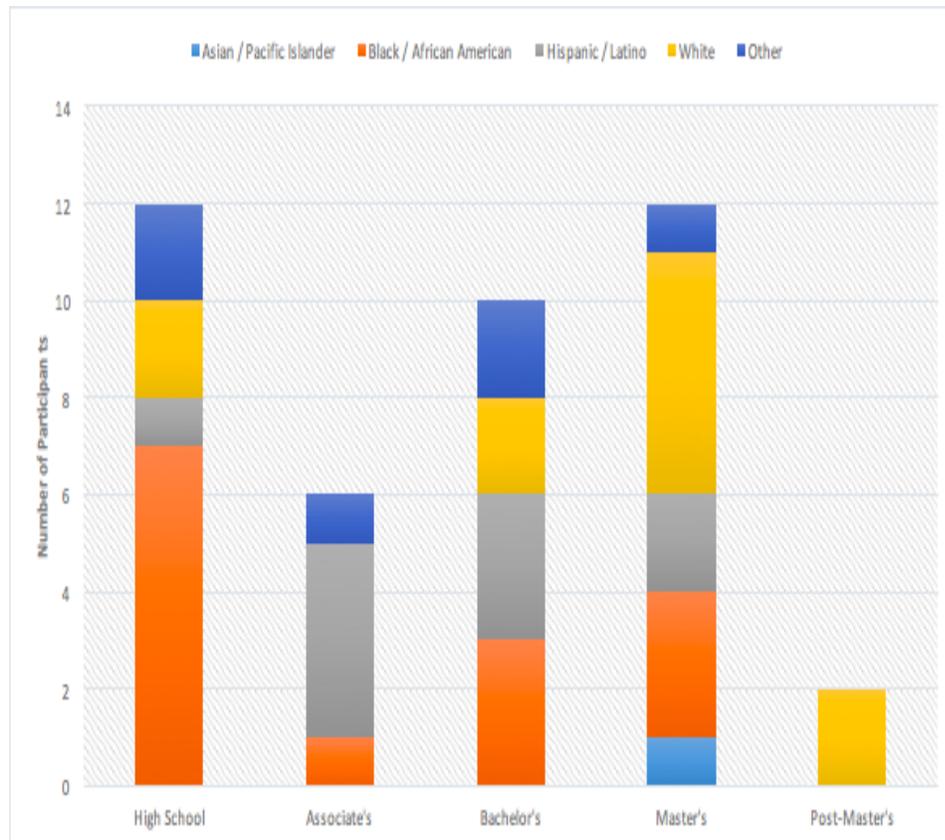


Figure 3: Self-Reported Race/Ethnicity and Education of Male ECE Educators (N=42)

In terms of positions held in the teaching profession, 55% were employed as assistant teachers or paraprofessionals and 45% described their position as lead or co-teachers. Furthermore, 55% of respondents were affiliated with a teachers' union. *Figure 4* reflects the race, ethnicity and teaching roles of the male educators in the study.

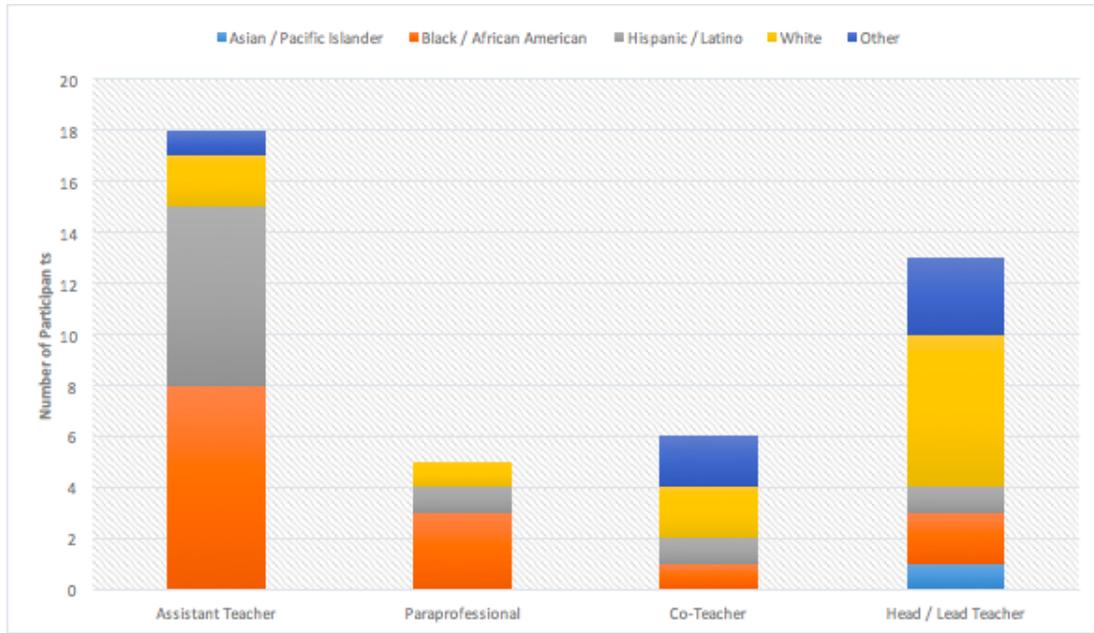


Figure 4: Self-Reported Race/Ethnicity and Teaching Role of ECE Male Educators (N=42)

Among the 38 respondents who shared information about their annual earnings, there were stark differences in terms of salary scales and program types. These remarkable trends as depicted in Figure 5 signal a pay equity issue in the ECE workforce.

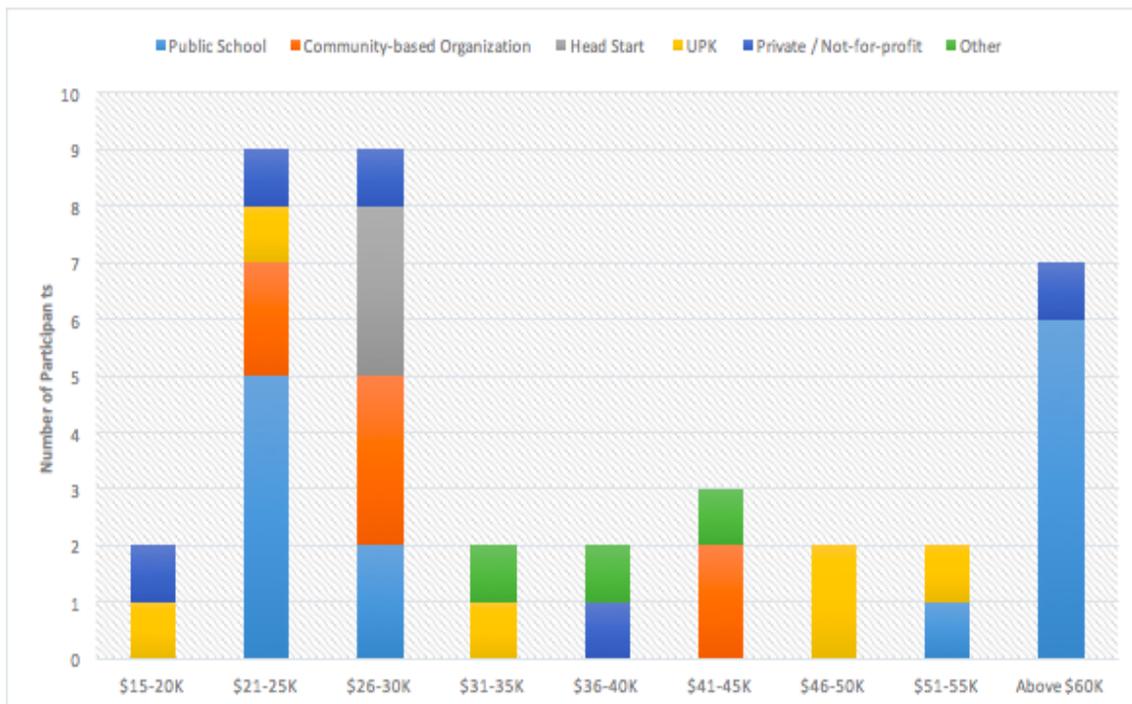


Figure 5: Self-Reported Annual Salary and Program Types of Male ECE Educators (N=38)

It is important to note that 4 male educators who were in the field for less than 3 years, and they were paid on an hourly basis at a rate no higher than \$20 USD. Across the board, the relatively novice educators who were in the field for 3 years or less, none reported annual salaries exceeding \$30,000 USD. At issue is that the 2016 New York City Government poverty threshold was \$34,402 USD for a family of four compared to \$24,339 in the Federal Poverty threshold. Arguably, it is highly probable that ECE workers who are in the field for 3 years of less are not earning family-sustaining incomes to meet the cost of living in New York City, and this reality has not changed at the time of writing this report. Thus, there are implications for pay equity policies in the ECE workforce. Salary issues are important recruitment and retention drivers that will be further discussed in the analysis of interview data from the male educators and program administrators whose perspectives are included among the study's key findings.

### **3.4. Data analysis technique**

We used grounded theory elaborated by Charmaz (2006) to organize our data and identify emergent patterns in our analyses of the semi-structured interviews and the two focus groups in order to identify recurrent themes in the participants' narratives. We narrowly focus our analysis on two overarching categories of intrinsic and external factors that influence men's decisions to work with young children. Using *NVivo 11* software to facilitate our thematic analysis, we created a set of codes that pertained to recruitment, retention, masculinity, gender practice, societal expectations, policy recommendations that we identified as primary themes that emerged from preliminary analyses of the interview data.

In analyzing the interview transcripts, we used textural-structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994) to capture and report how the participants make sense of their experiences in the field, how

they challenge gender stereotypes and normative masculine behaviors as well as the ways they construct and express varied forms of masculine identities. We also utilized a co-constructed reflexivity check (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009) whereby investigators and their research assistants in the study referred to their fieldnotes when reviewing transcribed materials. This approach enabled us to keep into perspective the different program types and the diverse demographic landscapes where we collected data for this research. Our fieldnotes and co-constructed reflexivity method also helped us to pay attention to the intersectionality of gender, race ethnicity, cultural identity, age, marital status, professional status and other social categories that are implicated in our study's key findings.

#### **4.1. The study's key findings**

In the above sections, we have presented the descriptive information gathered from the survey questionnaires that we administered in the first phase of data collection for the study. We have identified some troubling trends about race, ethnicity, education attainment, professional status and program sites when we compared and cross-tabulated the study's demographic data. Based on these comparative analyses, we identified a visible opportunity gap by race/ethnicity among the male educators in the study. This preliminary analysis is important to help contextualize the intrinsic and extrinsic factors along with the salient themes that emerged from the qualitative data we gathered from the semi-structured interviews. While the ECE workforce is 97% female and is a low status profession that does not offer high financial compensation, clearly many men were drawn to this work and they have decided to pursue careers in the sector.

One of the questions that we asked the male ECE educators was, '*What first drew you to the field of education?*' The respondents provided responses that could be categorized along the

lines of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors that in. One quarter of the respondents cited volunteer or paid work experience in their youth, such as working at summer camps or afterschool programs, providing tutoring to elementary school-aged children, or teaching Sunday School in their local places of worship provided them with the impetus for considering careers in the ECE workforce. At least 10 of the respondents attributed their involvement in ECE to the initial experiences that had afforded them the opportunity to assess their own capacity for doing this work. It is important to note that intrinsic and extrinsic factors oftentimes overlap in the participants' responses, making it difficult to isolate each determinant in our analysis. This is probably a good problem to have, because it invites further exploration and reinterpretation of the study's data. In the sections that follows, we will present and discuss perspectives from the participants in an effort to uncover some of the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence their decisions to join this workforce.

#### **4.2. Intrinsic factors influencing men's career choices in ECE**

In our analysis of the interview data, we found that 22 of the respondents recalled experiencing satisfaction in caring for younger family members such as cousins, nieces, or nephews. One respondent described it thus:

I first started working with children as a counselor in training for a Boy Scout camp when I was fourteen years old. The thrill I got from successfully teaching a six-year-old who was struggling to tie a knot stuck with me.

Additionally, in talking about their reasons for entering and staying in ECE, some of the respondents stated that they were needed in the field to support the social and emotional needs of young children. One participant said that it was important for him to join this workforce in order to provide young children with access to male figures, and he grounded his decision on *'the fact*

*that there were young children without any male representation in their household.*' He seemed to feel a sense of personal fulfillment from seeing a need in the field and responding to it. This response was also iterated by five other respondents who described how becoming fathers and grandfathers themselves had aroused their passion for working with young children. One participant, who was freshly minted as an assistant teacher after years of staying home with his own children put it in these terms:

I believe it was my experience with my now eight-year-old triplet boys [that motivated me]. Having to be a stay-at-home father throughout that process from birth, through the countless hours of therapy and center-based programs; witnessing, basically being a part of something that helped with their overall development, changed their lives and mine forever. Again, it made me want to give back, helping guide others through those trying times by sharing my experience.

Despite acknowledging the formidable challenges facing men in ECE, some respondents, who were not parents themselves, seemed motivated by the opportunity to play different roles and make a difference to the lives of people within their local communities. One participant explained:

Every day you have to build up a certain amount of stamina and know that it's going to be difficult. But something keeps pulling me back to wanting to work with people in this local neighborhood of mine. It seems to be a place that I love to serve. And then you keep coming back, because you love it. I feel fulfilled. And I feel happy. And I know I'm doing something right.

In his narrative, the above participant expressed a heightened sense of autonomy and self-motivating capability as well as a remarkable drive for serving and connecting with people in his community through his work with young children. Some of the men engaged in the field with a high level of emotionality, as stated by this one who changed career after 9/11:

The driving force that made me become an educator was 9/11. When you watch a plane go through a building, and I still get emotional when I say that, you want to give something back. You have to make a difference. So, my mission has always been that what I plan to teach will come from (the) heart.

Along the same line, others came in with a clear sense of mission, seeking to tackle issues of poverty and educational inequality through their service. Another reflected on the transformative impact of his work with young children and families, sharing his pride and satisfaction upon seeing how children in his classroom were developing a sense of social justice and equity:

It's so satisfying when my kids are socially equitable, you know, and they're fair to each other. And they care about other people's cultures. And they're praising these different cultures and they're praising women and men and girls and boys. Just makes me proud of them. Just, like, I'm working with the families to make that happen.

When discussing their beliefs and pedagogical approaches as motivating factors in their decisions to stay in the field, several male educators referred to the ways they helped young children to develop independence. A first-grade teacher explained, *'I'm real. I don't believe in fantasy in school. I have real conversations in my class.'* Another said that he fostered a culture of accountability in which children in his classroom *'understand sometimes there's responsibilities that we don't necessarily like to do or want to do, but we have to do them to become better people.'* Another participant stated that he gave young children authentic choices, because *'if they don't have a choice, they're going to hate school. And I really feel like they should have a voice in what they're doing.'* Another male educator, who was in charge of three-year-old children, described how he created a culture of collaboration in his classroom, *'I tell the children that this is our classroom, so we have to respect the classroom together. We clean the classroom together; we organize the areas together. We can even plan ideas together, if you want to; we can share ideas together, we can work on the classroom together.'*

Some of the male educators viewed their roles more broadly as men who were guiding young children on their journey through life. A respondent said, *'The bottom line is, how many children can you help? The work I do now will forever affect the children. You can't say that about*

*most other professions.*’ Another participant stated that early childhood education is ‘*the most important job*’ in society.

Some proudly shared stories of former students and parents coming back to thank them year after year—and that is a factor reinforcing their personal commitment to the field. Many reflected proudly on their own capacity to nurture children’s growth and learning as well as the personal fulfillment derived this work. A Pre-K teacher noted that he would not use ‘sugarcoating’ words when talking with the children in his classroom because doing so would be inauthentic. He likened his whole group meetings to a college seminar where children chime in to the discussion without having to raise their hands and waiting for their turns to speak.

Taken as a whole, the different perspectives gathered the male educators suggest their previous experiences working with young children, their clear sense of mission and abilities to make a difference in their communities, and their personal commitment to ECE work incentivized them to join and stay in this workforce. While the field may not offer high levels of financial compensation, our data suggest that men who work in this sector highly value the intrinsic rewards that this work brings, though they also need some extrinsic motivations to enter and persist in ECE.

#### **4.3. Extrinsic factors motivating men to join ECE**

When we asked the male educators to describe whether and how their family members and friends influenced their decisions to enter and stay in the ECE profession, they offered a broad array of responses. We noted that 10 of the respondents reflected on a family connection to the field of ECE as a strong influence on their decisions to join the sector. Five male educators described how they had assisted their mothers who worked in the field—either as a nanny or preschool teacher—and they reflected on those prior experiences as key factors that incentivized

their decisions to work with young children. Over two thirds of the respondents stated that friends and family members were supportive of their work in ECE. One of the respondents said, *‘[My family and friends] are proud that I’m a male in this job, as you’re hard pressed to find [men in this field]. They also know that’s it’s a great fit for me as I thrive when working with kids.’*

It must be noted that 20% of the respondents received neutral or mixed endorsements from friends and family about their work. One of the respondents reported that family members considered his work, *‘A thankless job that doesn’t pay enough.’* Echoing this sentiment, another pointed out, *‘There are some people that have a very ignorant view towards [early childhood] education, and [they] think that I am a glorified babysitter.’* One of the participants recalled, *‘Friends [would] say, ‘Why not become a police officer?’*

While support from family members combined with encouragement from friends seem influential in the male educators’ initial decisions to work in ECE, it appears that the acceptance and endorsement of female colleagues and program administrators also boost these men’s motivations to pursue careers in the sector. One of the male educators described how positive rapport with female colleagues in the workplace bolsters his decision to stay in ECE, stating, *‘They are very proud of my decision to work in this field, as they know there are not many males teaching early childhood.’*

Across the sites that participated in our study, male educators described a collaborative and welcoming environment characterized by professionalism, friendship and support from female colleagues and from administrators. They reminisced on ways their female colleagues shared with them resources and effective teaching strategies, involved them in curriculum planning, provided them with guidance and informal mentoring to carry out the work. A majority of respondents shared that their ideas are *‘welcomed as well as valued’* and that they are *‘given tremendous*

*support, encouragement and trust in designing curriculum and lessons*’ for children. Participants also described regularly scheduled staff meetings where *‘everyone’s opinion is heard’* and that they were able to *‘share ideas with one another’* and *‘made decisions as equals’* to their female colleagues.

The men in our study described female colleagues at their sites as *‘open-minded’* and some pointed out that their colleagues seemed cognizant that the ECE environment can be isolating for men. Additionally, they reported that program administrators generally supported their decisions to work with young children and provided them with encouragement to stay in the field. Such assertions were corroborated throughout the semi-structured interviews with program administrators who took part in the study. One male administrator spoke about the importance of achieving gender balance in the staff as well as creating an atmosphere of mutual respect and agency among female and male colleagues at his school:

I think it’s respect. I don’t like to think that we treat anybody differently in the building. I just think that we try to create a level of respect for teachers and expect a level of interaction between them. I think that being able to have a voice, being able to control your own environment is important. We empower teachers that this is your environment.

When administrators were queried about outreach strategies to increase men’s participation in ECE and the hiring process, one Head Start administrator noted that children’s parents play an active role in the hiring process at Head Start in particular has led to the hiring of male educators. She recalled, *‘We have one, in particular, gentleman who was the chairperson of the personnel committee, and he’s been instrumental in the process of making decisions on hiring. And one of the things that they always said, ‘We need more men!’*”

One respondent working at a site with more than one male educator noted, *‘I’m not sure anyone thinks about [the need for more men in the school]. We are all just there together. There is a sense of shared understanding about the importance and enjoyment of the work that we do.’*

This suggests that the need for more men is not a major issue in schools that already have a significant male representation in their staff. What's more, the perspectives, discussed thus far, suggest that a gender-mixed staff along with synergy among female and male educators in ECE settings is a key motivating factor for men who decide to stay in the ECE workforce.

#### **4.4. Societal barriers hindering men's participation in ECE**

Even in cases where male educators' career choices were supported by parents, friends, female colleagues and program administrators, participants related various types of societal barriers or different kinds of cultural resistance to men entering and staying in the ECE workforce. One of the male administrators signaled the persistence of '*a social agenda that boys don't do certain things and men don't do certain things and girls are the caregivers.*' Although the male educators in our study described the positive relationships they have developed with the families of children in their care, they recalled some parents' initial surprise, skepticism or concern about their interactions with young children. Others also spoke about the micro-aggressions and micro-invalidations that they face in ECE environments, such as when parents assume that they are not the teacher, or when they are advised by their colleagues or administrators not to hug children. They were oftentimes excluded from performing certain tasks with the children, such as changing diapers. One male administrator shared the following anecdote:

So, a male teacher had been in the classroom for six weeks before a parent said, 'Hey, when's the teacher coming in?' And every day, right? He had to explain, 'No, I am a teacher. I am the teacher.'

Other administrators documented parents' concerns about male educators or their misconceptions about what having a male in the classroom would bring. A number of program leaders described the need for male educators in ECE settings to think more carefully than their female colleagues

about their tone of voice as well as about the classroom management strategies and techniques that they use, so as not to appear threatening to children and their female colleagues.

With reference to the gender essentialist trope that men are ‘not capable of doing female work’ (Burn & Pratt-Adams, 2015), some of the male educators in the study reported instances of microaggressions from some children’s parents and their female colleagues in the field. Four of the male educators reported that they faced open, negative judgment from parents about their decisions to work with young children. Although this number may not seem significant, it is important to bear in mind that negative perceptions about men working with young children are much more widespread. What’s more, men who choose to enter the field of ECE often face a particular kind of scrutiny due to the rigidity and stratification of gender roles in the United States and other advanced economies in various parts the world. These perceptions have implications for recruitment and retention of men the ECE workforce. Societal barriers to men entering the field are deeply entrenched in the patriarchal structure of a sexist society that limits possibilities for both men and women.

Moreover, it is important not to lose sight that sexism and related gender practices oftentimes devalue women’s contributions to society, and men who choose to venture into the so-called ‘female dominated field’ usually do not receive adequate public support to pursue careers in ECE. We have previously argued that men’s involvement in a low status profession like ECE is complex and complicated while it is not adequately esteemed in American society (Cole et al, 2019). To this point, an ECE program leader lamented, *‘Teaching will never get the value that it needs, because people go, ‘Oh, anybody could do that. It’s just something that women do, like, something simple,’ not understanding the real work that happens.’* This devaluation of the work

of ECE professionals is directly tied to low rates of compensation, which is discussed in the section that follows.

#### **4.5. Pay equity and working conditions as motivating factors to men in ECE**

Though the men in our study have already faced and, to some extent, surmounted a variety of societal challenges and obstacles, including the widely-held perception that working with young children is a low-status profession suited only for women. It is important to note that 77% of these male educators reported that they planned on staying in the ECE workforce. Interestingly, data gathered from survey questionnaires showed that 73% of these men cited increased salary and/or benefits and 51% indicated that opportunities for career advancement would be key motivating factors for them to continue working in the sector for the long-term. To this point, one male educator working in a Head Start program in the Bronx succinctly articulated the problem as *'It's easy to get [men] to enter the field, but it's hard to get them to stay, given the salary.'*

When asked about what would draw and keep men working in the field, most of the program administrators and the male educators in our study expressed concerns about the lack of competitive pay and benefits. We did explore with the respondents whether and how salaries impacted men's personal commitment to the field, their levels of solidarity with children or any symbolic gratification they got for doing this work. Nonetheless, program leaders and male educators signaled that equitable pay, benefits, good working conditions and professional development are key incentives for attracting, supporting and retaining more men into early education and care environments.

#### **4.6. Professional development and men's support group**

Continuing education is another key finding that emerged from the data. Both program leaders and male educators emphasized the importance of providing professional development opportunities that support men's retention and career advancement in ECE. Many of the men spoke strongly about a desire to continue their education and about the positive impact it would have on their work with children. Professional development experiences that allow teachers to engage in meaningful reflection upon how their gendered identities shape their teaching practice, drawing upon the knowledge and experiences of both male and female educators, might help to address these issues.

An important initiative that emerged from interviews with administrators, and one that has policy implications for retaining men in the ECE workforce, is that of the cohort model for mentoring and support. Program leaders spoke to the benefits of assigning male mentors to novice male educators as a strategy to help them navigate the issues that are specific to men in early education settings. One male administrator described the formation of a male affinity group that he helped to create as an initiative toward supporting men in the field. This male support included two head teachers, two assistant teachers, two family advocates and the founder. They met on a monthly basis and utilized the time allocated for their professional development. Participants indicated that this structure provided them a safe space to talk about their issues in the field without judgment.

A Latino educator in the group asserted, *'Since this field is mostly devoted toward women, they can't really relate to men's issues [in ECE]. When we get into a group like that we sit down and talk to each other and relate.'* This educator also reflected on a situation where a parent was upset and made unfounded allegations of sexual abuse against him because he took a little girl to the bathroom. He said, *'Because of that [incident], the policy changed. Only females can take kids*

*to the bathroom. It made me feel bad that it was my fault.*’ Other members of the group stated that they had gone through similar problems in their respective ECEC settings. A Black male teacher explained:

Being able to have a place where we could at least talk about these things. If we had these kinds of conversations with my co-workers, it seems more like complaining. We’re not gravitated toward having these conversations with our supervisors or co-workers, especially the females.

Our data suggests that creating safe environments for male educators to unwind and talk about their issues may encourage them to stay in ECE. Overall, the male educators in our study described a number of external drivers that encouraged to continue working in the field of early childhood education. They valued the support that they received from school leaders, female colleagues, and the parents who appreciated their contributions. They were also thrilled to see the transformative effect of their work on children’s learning and behavior in their classrooms. While low salaries, poor benefits and lack of respect for the profession oftentimes adversely impact both the morale and livelihood of ECE professionals, the men in our study expressed a strong commitment to working with young children.

### **5.1. Summary of the findings**

The male educators in our study seemed proud of the multiple roles that they play in young children’s lives: challenging stereotypical views of masculinity, exploring different discipline modalities with young children, and guiding children’s behavior among others. Their clear sense of mission in tandem their desire to “give back” to their communities motivated them to seek careers in ECE. For some of these men, previous experiences working with young children in summer camps, teaching Sunday school in their local places of worship, helping family members to care for young children, or spending with young children of their own was a key motivating

factor in their decision to join the workforce. The low status of the profession, the lack of public support for men doing this work, and low salaries did not seem to quell their zeal or lower commitment to working with young children. It seems that their resolve to push back against gender stereotypes and their determination to play important roles in the lives of children and families defy the dominant discourses and other forces that have historically diminished teachers' morale in the teaching profession as a whole (Benabou & Tirole, 2003; Shrifur, Lopez Turley & Heard, 2017) and ECE educators' autonomy and professionalism in particular.

Throughout their narratives, the male educators in our study conveyed their thoughts about how their participation was helping to change the "female-centric" culture of early childhood education for the benefits of young children. They reflected on that critical aspect of their roles with regard to reshaping the classroom environment and curricular activities to provide boys and girls with opportunities to experience non-traditional and non-stereotypical roles that women and men can play in the classroom. One male educator asserted that it would be '*an injustice to the kids*' if they only had experience with female educators and caregivers in the early childhood settings. Some participants also described how they explicitly addressed issues of gender bias and inequality, assuring that boys and girls feel comfortable engaging in all activities within the curriculum.

A number of the men shared stories of how they enabled children to explore gender roles, allowing these youngsters to bring into the classroom their own experiences or societal norms that they might have absorbed through various interactions outside of the school environment. Moreover, these men also articulated how they made conscious choices in the books that they used, the people that they talked about, the games that they facilitated with the children, and the curricular themes they that explored in their classrooms. They conveyed how they teach about how

women can be police officers and men can be teachers, how both men and women are strong and nurturing. One participant reasoned, *‘the world has gender roles, [and if] you leave the gender, you take out the bias.’* Both administrators and male educators in our study identified specific challenges faced by men in early childhood education as they denounced societal constructs about appropriate gender roles for men and women—particularly the idea that the care and education of young children is more suited to women. Most of the male educators in our study seemed to be mindful of societal barriers or had, at one time or another, encountered misperceptions, sometimes experienced unfounded suspicion about their decisions to work with young children.

One administrator recounted telling a male educator to *‘be mindful of your body and space and how you use your voice’* so as not to appear threatening around children and female colleagues. When asked what advice he would give to men who are thinking about working in early childhood education, another administrator replied, *‘A good hip turn is always the best thing to do, right? Because a child can hug a woman in any way, but (for a man) a good hip turn is always good. So, as the kid’s ready to hug, it’s a hip turn.’*

Furthermore, these men spoke about receiving advice from administrators and female colleagues about never being alone with children, avoid changing diapers or taking a child to the bathroom in order to protect themselves from serious allegations of abuse. Equally important, most of the men in our study shared compellingly stories about their positive relationships with female colleagues and the strong support and mentoring they received from women in their workplaces.

Lastly, throughout the interviews, male educators described what they perceived to be relatively different pedagogical philosophies in the ways they supported children’s social and emotional needs, the ways they engaged children with developmentally appropriate activities, and the techniques that they used to create a culture of accountability in their classrooms. Some male

educators emphasized how they provided even the youngest children in their care with relatively greater freedom to explore freely and engage in relatively more physical activity.

### **6.1. Implications for research, policy and practice**

Taken as a whole, the information we have shared in this report signals a need for heightened attention on teacher education, professionalization of ECE staff, and long-term economic policy in ECE. These findings also suggest that income gaps are not only problematic between program types, but they also highlight workforce issues that could be construed as stark social inequalities that adversely impact career opportunities in ECE for both women and men. Such discrepancies may also make the recruitment and retention of qualified staff relatively more difficult across ECE settings in general but in program types within low and moderate resource areas in particular. If left unchecked, discrepancies like these may have demoralizing and deprecating effects on early childhood educators who barely earn family-sustaining income to raise their own children.

Our study points to a range of both intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence men's participation in the ECE field. It seems that men's under-representation in the field is not only linked to low wages and the lack of respect for ECE educators, but it also appears to be tied to traditional recruitment approaches that do not address the gender imbalance in the field. This is an area for further research and policy consideration. What's more, our data show variations in pay scales across program sites and these types of discrepancies may be obstacles to recruiting, supporting and retaining men in the field. Within some settings, program leaders and decision-makers already seem to be making intentional efforts to customize strategies and focus recruitment efforts to address the need for gender inclusion and racial balance at their sites. There seems to be

a need for policy on gender balance in the field so as to encourage greater participation of diverse men in the ECE workforce.

We are well-aware that research alone is not sufficient to effectuate education reform, so we subscribe to the advice of Tseng & Nutley (2015) of the William T. Grant Foundation, who warn “...if we are committed to using research to enrich problem framing, decision making, and individual and organization learning in education, the next decade should focus on building trust, capacity, strong relationships, and the conditions for productive evidence integration.” We take this advice to heart as we look forward to conducting further research exploring how these themes play out on a longitudinal study related to the experiences of male educators at the macro, meso and micro levels of ECE systems within and outside of the United States.

## **7.1. Conclusion**

We have concluded that any concerted efforts toward attracting qualified, culturally diverse men in the field of ECE must focus resources and energies on developing a male teacher pipeline. While intentional efforts seem to yield positive outcomes in diversifying the staff of certain ECE programs, we recognize that gender-flexible efforts and race-conscious strategies may be less impactful if they are not backed by sentient community support, public policies and coherent institutional philosophies to keep men in the field. We advocate for reflective measures that will bridge the gender gap, reduce male teacher turnover, and promote racial balance in the ECE workforce within and beyond local, regional and national contexts. One of the limitations of our study is that it only shares viewpoints from those who have persisted as educators and program leaders in the ECE field. We understand that the voices of the male educators in the study do not adequately provide critical and holistic perspectives on the experiences of other men in the field

nor do they reflect the experiences and insights of men who left the sector. Further research is therefore needed to integrate the voices of men who left the field. Conversely, one of the strengths of our study is that it focuses on examining timely changes and challenges in the field so as to inform policy and practice rather than exploring decades-old issues and barriers that impede gender inclusion and diversity in the ECE workforce.

### **8.1. Recommendations**

Based on our study's findings and conclusion, we proffer a set of recommendations for policy and practice in the subsections that follow.

#### 8.2. Recruitment

- Conduct analyses of PreK program and elementary school staff composition across demographics (e.g., gender, ethnicity, social class...) to guide discourse among stakeholders (i.e., program leaders, teachers, parents, policymakers, and labor representatives) on reducing the dearth of male educators in the ECEC workforce, especially the under-representation of Asian, Black and Latino lead teachers.
- Create a recruitment pipeline through targeted outreach that enables young men to experience working with young children via high school internships, community service, volunteer programs and more.
- Expand and sustain recruitment efforts on men contemplating career change, especially fathers.
- Upscale outreach through existing programs such as NYC Men Teach and Teaching Fellows to include ECE field.

#### 8.3. Retention and professionalization

- Provide targeted mentoring and professional development experiences for male educators and program leaders who supervise men in ECE and elementary classroom settings.
- Create affinity/support groups of male ECE educators.
- Design teacher education curricula that are relatively more inclusive of male educators.
- Achieve pay equity across ECE program sites.
- Achieve pay equity for ECE field v. elementary/secondary education

#### 8.4. Increased gender inclusion and equity

- Develop outreach materials that include images of men working in the ECE field.
- Include images of men in nurturing roles within early learning settings.

- Include men in the composition of PreK-12 advisory bodies
- Implement intensive, ongoing professional development for all educators on gender bias, societal challenges, culturally mediated behaviors, and inclusive teaching practices for all male and female preschool caregivers and educators.
- Develop citywide and/or statewide plans to increase the recruitment and retention of preK-12 male educators in low-income and moderate resource communities and monitor the effectiveness of these initiatives over time.

It is our understanding that the recruitment, professional development and retention of men in the ECE workforce are added values and actions that can be factored into the curricula, staffing, restructuring and expansion of early learning structures to provide the greatest benefits to the diverse groups of young children growing within various kinds of family structures in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We observed that African American and Latino male educators hold fewer Lead/Head Teacher positions, and our data show that they do not reach the same levels of educational attainment as White and Asian/Pacific Islander peers in this workforce. This troubling trend clearly suggests a need for policies and practices that would provide specific funding and other supports for African American and Latino male educators in their career trajectories in ECE. The salary scales shown in *Figure 5* reflect concerning income gaps in terms of the program sites where the male educators worked during the time the study was being conducted. This information is also corroborated by program administrators and male educators who took part in the semi-structured interviews, and both groups of participants call for policy and resources that will help to foster greater inclusion and equity in the ECE workforce.

***Acknowledgments:*** We thank our colleague, Professor Meghan Fitzgerald-Raimundo, and our research assistants, Mengying Bi and Stacey Christopher, for assistance with this research. Institutional support was provided by Borough of Manhattan Community College, the Research Foundation of the City University of New York (RF-CUNY), the New York City Early Childhood Research Network, the Professional Development Institute (PDI) at CUNY, and MDRC.

***Funding:*** This study was made possible through the generous support of the Foundation for Child Development.

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**Appendix I:**  
Questionnaire Administered to ECE Male Educators

***(Background info)***

When we report on our findings for this research it is helpful for us to be able to describe our participants in demographic terms that reflect how they identify themselves.

How do you describe yourself in terms of categories like race, ethnicity, languages spoken, gender identity, etc...?

If you completed our questionnaire you were asked to provide an identifier that would preserve your confidentiality but would also allow us to compare the information you provided there with your interview.

Your identifier would be made up of your birth month, birth date, and first and middle initials. *For example: If your birthday is Feb. 15 and your name is Sam Frank Jones your identifier would be 0215SF.*

Please provide us with some background information about your current position. Pretend that we're meeting for the first time and you're telling me about your work.

How do you describe your role in education?

How do you describe your work setting and any important circumstances of your work?

***(Professional trajectory)***

Tell us about your career pathway:

How did you decide to become an early childhood educator?

Tell us about the steps in your journey that have gotten you to where you are now.

How have your friends and family responded to your decision to work in early childhood education?

What are your beliefs about young children and how they learn and grow? How did you come to those beliefs?

***(ECE work experience)***

What are your long-term plans for your career?

Does your worksite support these plans/goals?

If so, how?

If not can you describe what an employer could do to support the growth of your career?

Has there ever been a time that you were moved to work with a new classroom/age group/role?

If so, can you tell us the story of what happened? (e.g. Why was this change made? How was it explained to you? How did you feel about the change? What impact do you think this change had on you, the children, the classroom?)

***(Professional Development supports)***

Can you describe one key learning experience (a training, a PD, etc...) that has impacted how you work with children? What about this learning experience was most memorable/impactful?

Can you describe a time in your work where a PD experience changed your beliefs and thinking (e.g. about children, teaching, curriculum, etc.)?

OPTIONAL FOLLOW-UP (Especially if participant followed a non-traditional or alternative pathway) Can you describe any skills or perspectives you take from your prior work experiences that you draw on in your teaching?

If you have experienced PD that has not contributed positively to your growth as an educator, what needs to change about those PDs? In your opinion, what could be done differently to make PD more meaningful for you?

OPTIONAL FOLLOW-UP (Depending on role) As a [para/assistant teacher/other] are you included in PD at your site? Why or why not? How does this impact the way you think about your work and your role at the school/site? Can you describe any particular types of PD that would be especially helpful for you in your particular role?

***(Mentoring supports)***

Who do you turn to for advice or support in your work as an early childhood educator? What role do they play at your site (e.g. administrator, head teacher, coach, P.D. trainer, union rep, etc...)? Why did you seek out this person(s) for support?

Describe one instance when the mentoring you received from this person(s) had an impact on your work.

When you have questions about your career trajectory where do you go for answers? (If prompting is needed offer: e.g. other teachers, administrators, union, etc.)

***(In-depth questions about current work circumstances)***

What strengths and skills do you personally bring to your work?

Specifically as a male educator, what strengths and skills do you bring to your work?

Can you describe a time when you felt that being a male in the field of ECE shaped how people thought about you and your work?

What aspects of your current work situation are most satisfying?

What aspects of your current work situation are most challenging?

How do you think being a male educator influences these satisfying and challenging aspects of your work?

What could your program do differently to support you and your growth as a teacher?

If you are a member of a union, what role do you feel your union plays in supporting your work?

***(Implications for the field)***

*(setting context) Because men are so under-represented in the field of ECE we are doing this research in part to understand how more men can be encouraged to enter and remain in the field. It will help us to understand how you think about your role as a male educator. We know that the following questions may feel very personal, and we appreciate your responding to them to the best of your abilities:*

- What does it mean to you to be a man working in the field of ECE?
- What does it mean to you to be a man in the world/society?
- Thinking about how you understand your role as a man in society *and* your role as a man in the field of ECE, how do you think these identities impact your work? (e.g. your own choices as a teacher, the children, the classroom, your co-workers, the families of children in the classroom)
  - FOLLOW UPS, if answer to above is brief:
    - In your own words, can you talk about how your relationships with children are shaped by you being a male educator?
    - In your own words, can you talk about how your relationships with families are shaped by you being a male educator?
    - In your own words, can you talk about how your relationships with colleagues are shaped by you being a male educator?
  - What impact do you think that having male educators in the classroom has on young children's growth and learning?
    - FOLLOW-UP: What impact do male educators have specifically on young boys' development?

If you could influence or change the field of early childhood education for male educators, what would you recommend?

Is there anything else you think we should have asked you or anything else you'd like to share with us as a male early childhood educator?

## **Appendix II:**

### **Guiding Prompts for Semi-structured Interviews with Program Leaders**

*The interview with the program leaders/administrators focuses primarily on the recruitment, retention and the professional development of male educators.*

#### **Can you tell us about the trajectory of your own career in the field? For example:**

- How long have you worked in the field of early childhood education?
- How long have you worked for your current employer?
- How long have you worked in your current leadership position?

#### **Next, can you tell us a little bit more about your current role?**

- What are your responsibilities related to hiring, supervising, and promoting staff in your school/program?
- How many male teachers/staff members does your school/program employ? What roles/positions do they hold?

#### **(Recruitment questions)**

##### **Now we have some questions about how you recruit educators to work at your site.**

- How many male educators has your school/program hired in the past ten years?
- What positions/roles have they played or do they currently play in your school/program?
- Did you hire any of the male educator(s) in your school/program?
  - (IF YES, FOLLOW UP) If so, what made that particular candidate(s) stand out?
- What are the qualifications you look for when you advertise a teaching position in your program?
  - (FOLLOW UP) Later we may ask if you are able to provide copies of the job descriptions you use to advertise these positions.
- What method(s) do you or your employer use to recruit educators for your program?
- Do you and your school/program have plans to recruit more male educators in the future?
  - (IF YES, FOLLOW UP) Can you describe how you plan to achieve this?
- What, if any, special characteristics and/or skills do you look for in your male ECE educator(s)?
- From your perspective as an administrator working with male early childhood educator(s), why do you think men are underrepresented in the field of early childhood education?

**(Retention questions)**

***Next we're going to ask you some questions about retention of male educators at your school/program:***

- Can you give an example of an interaction you have had with one of the male educators at your program that illustrates the kind of relationship/rapport you try to build with your male educators?
- Can you give an example of something that you do to promote positive relationships among the female and male educators in your school/program?
- If you would institute any provisions or policies that would support the retention of male educators, what would this be?
- What does your school/program do to ensure that the needs (i.e., social, emotional, professional and financial) of the male educator(s) are supported?
- Can you share an example of a time that a male educator came to you with a problem they were facing related to their work? Please describe how the issue was addressed.
- What is your overall impression of the job satisfaction of the male educator(s) in your school/program with regard to their work and compensation?

**(Professional development of male educators)**

***These next questions will gather information about how professional development works at your school/program:***

- Please describe the structure of PD at your school/program. If relevant, address the following:
  - Are the educators attending sessions individually or as a team?
  - Who decides what the PD needs are of your staff?
  - Do any of sessions address the specific needs of male educators?
  - What publicly funded professional development opportunities are available for ECE male educators?
- Do you have specific supports in place, such as a mentor, for the male educators in your school/program?
  - (FOLLOW UP) Are there particular considerations you make when assigning mentors to your male educators?
  - Does that vary depending on the role/position they play (e.g. paraprofessional, specialist, lead teacher)?

**(School Culture/Climate)**

***This last set of questions are going to ask you to think about your school culture and climate.***

- What opportunities/spaces do educators at your site have to share their beliefs, cultures, and ideas about childrearing practices?
  - Can you recall some specific contributions that male educators have made to these conversations?

- What impact do you think that having male educators in the classroom has on young children's growth and learning?
  - FOLLOW-UP: What impact do male educators have specifically on young boys' development?
- When you are putting together teams of educators each year, what are your considerations, particularly when thinking about classroom placements of male educators?
  - FOLLOW-UP: Can you share an example to illustrate your thinking when making these placements?
- Can you recall a time that families or staff responded **positively** to the presence of male educators at your site? What happened and how did you respond?
- Can you recall a time that families or staff responded **negatively** to the presence of male educators at your site? What happened and how did you respond?
- What do you think are the challenges, issues, and concerns that impact the participation and retention of male educators in your school/program?
- How has your school/program attempted to address those challenges, issues, and concerns?
- In what ways are male teachers involved in decision-making in your school/program?
- What advice would you give to men who are thinking about working in the early childhood field?
- Looking forward, what are some recommendations you would make that could be implemented to increase men's participation in the early childhood field (for example, by higher educational institutions, government agencies, unions, school directors or principals)?

**Concluding remarks.** *Thank the administrators for their participation.*

*Notify them that, if they are willing and interested, we plan to follow up with them to review our findings so that we can get their feedback about our recommendations for policy and practice.*

*Emphasize that their perspective on these implications will be invaluable.*

*Inquire if the researchers may contact them to request any or all of the following: job descriptions, program mission, parent handbooks, employee handbooks, outreach materials.*