The GENDER DIVIDE
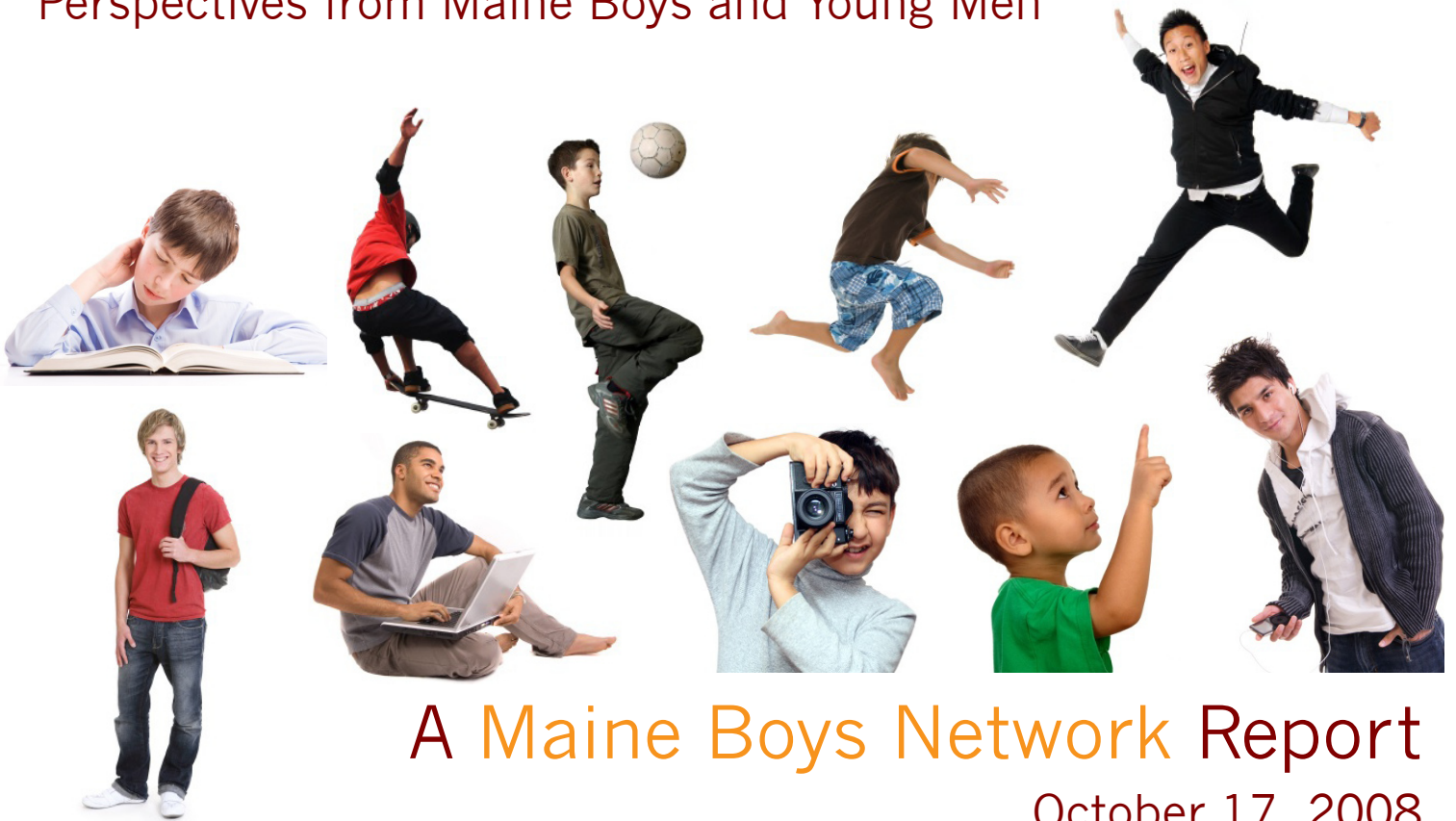## in Academic Engagement
Perspectives from Maine Boys and Young Men

A Maine Boys Network Report
October 17, 2008

THE NEW GENDER DIVIDE

The new gender divide in education is complex and multidimensional. In elementary, middle, and high school, girls earn higher grades than boys in the major subjects (Duckworth & Seligman, 2006), but boys outperform girls on standardized tests, such as the NAEP and the SAT (AAUW Educational Foundation, 2008). Using more accurate measures of the high school graduation rate than have been used before, Heckman and LaFontaine (2007) report that the decline in high school graduation rate is greater for boys than girls, which accounts in part for the differential growth in college attendance for girls. They also report that the gap in college attendance between boys and girls today is 10%.

The complexity of the issue becomes apparent when other factors are considered, such as socioeconomic status and race/ethnicity. The AAUW report (AAUW Educational Foundation, 2008), for example, shows that gender differences on standardized tests differ according to family income level. Curiously, the report notes that a male advantage on the verbal portion of the SAT is consistently shown only among boys from low-income families. On the other hand, in their wide-ranging study of disconnected young men, Edelman, Holzer, and Offner (2006) present data showing that postsecondary enrollment rates are now higher among women in each racial/ethnic group studied in the Current Population Survey. Clearly, there is still much to learn about the inequalities in education that result from the intersection of gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, to name just a few of the important factors.

In Maine, the Report of the Governor's Task Force on Gender Equity (Maine Department of Education, 2007) looked at the intersection of gender and socioeconomic status in understanding achievement data in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics. The Report concluded that "the differences between low-SES students and those that were not are at least as significant as the differences between the genders" (p. 23). In other words, gender matters, but so does socioeconomic status.

The present project explored Maine boys' and young men's perspectives on gender and schooling. Focus groups with over 500 boys and young men across the state at the elementary, middle school, high school, and college levels took place during the 2007–2008 academic year. In this report, we document the development of the project and the results obtained.

METHOD

Members of the Maine Boys Network, a group of activists and educators from around the state who are dedicated to promoting the school success of all boys in Maine, initiated this project. As our discussions of boys academic achievement continued over the last several years, we were struck by the absence of real boys' voices, both in national and state-level reports and conversations. Thus our primary goal in undertaking this project was to listen to boys in Maine as they talked about their experience in school. Specifically, we wanted to understand what factors were contributing to boys' success or disengagement with school. We wanted to understand more of the reasons boys perceived themselves as achieving or underachieving in order to help explain the overarching statistics related to male academic underachievement nationally.

Our goal of giving boys and young men a voice drove our choice of methodology and required the participation of many members of the Network. Although three member scholars from institutions of higher education conducted the initial analyses, as described below, all members of the network contributed to the final outcome.

Focus group methodology began as a tool of marketing researchers, but has become increasingly popular as a form of data collection in the social and behavioral sciences and in evaluation research. Although there is no evidence that focus groups produce better data, either in the number of quality of ideas generated, there is evidence that participants find them more stimulating than other methods of data collection: participants typically

negotiate, confront, antagonize, or directly criticize or commiserate with one another during focus group discussions (Kidd & Parsall, 2000), and our groups were no exception.

A total of 72 focus group interviews with 541 boys and young men were conducted in elementary, middle, and high schools, as well as colleges throughout the state. Fourteen of Maine's 16 counties were represented. Boys in elementary, middle, and high schools were chosen by guidance counselors or principals as representative members of their school communities. At the different colleges, young men volunteered for participation after being solicited by instructors or friends. Groups ranged in size from 3 to 17 participants. In most cases, two moderators from the Maine Boys Network attended each group, although in some cases, only one moderator was available. Approximately one-quarter of the groups were moderated by pairs of male and female college students enrolled in a course on boys' development and education at Colby. Where necessary, parental permission and IRB approval were first obtained

In each focus group, one moderator asked the ten questions developed by the Maine Boys Network. With slight variations to make them age-appropriate, the questions were the same at each grade level. For example, the set of questions for high school boys appears below:

1. What do you like about school now?

2. What do you not like about school now?

3. Think back to middle school. What did you like about going to school there?

4. What do you think is the purpose of going to school?

5. Why do you think some students don't care about school?

6. How is school different for boys and girls?

7. Please describe one of your favorite classes since you started high school. What do you like about it? Now describe one of your least favorite classes. What do you dislike about it?

8. Are there adults in the building who understand you? What do they have in common?

9. If you could create the ideal school, what would it be like?

10. What do you think makes a teacher effective?

In most focus groups, there was a second moderator who took notes. In addition to the notes, digital or analog recordings were made of nearly every session and a question-by-question summary of answers was prepared by one of the moderators. From the recordings, full transcriptions of some of the sessions were prepared.

Data analysis followed the steps outlined by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) in their book on handling qualitative data. Three members of the Maine Boys Network, two psychology professors and one education professor, conducted the analysis. It began with treatment of the 50 focus groups that one of the three had been involved in, either directly or as instructor of the student researchers who moderated the group. Following analysis of the data from the first 50 groups, data from the remaining 22 groups was examined to assess the stability of the findings. One of the three analysts worked with the data analysis software NVivo, and the other two worked by hand. No differences emerged as a result of these two approaches.

Analysis began with identification of repeating ideas in each analyst's cases, resulting in three lists of 20–25 ideas each. The lists were compared, differences in wording and ideas were discussed, and through consensus, a list of 23 repeating ideas was settled upon. Before further analysis of summaries was done, full transcripts of 5 focus groups were analyzed for repeating ideas. The resulting repeating ideas were compared to the repeating ideas generated by the summaries, to ensure that valuable information was not lost by working with the summaries. Slight differences in emphasis within two repeating ideas were identified and resolved through consensus.

The next step was to organize this information into themes and subthemes by grouping repeating ideas into coherent categories. This began with each analyst working independently to organize the repeating ideas in their own focus groups. Their work was then compared,

differences discussed, and through consensus, a set of themes and subthemes identified. On completion of this step, three members of the Maine Boys Network served as auditors. They reviewed the work and asked questions that prompted further examination of the data.

To determine the stability of the themes and subthemes, the remaining 22 summaries were coded. No substantial changes in the results occurred with the addition of these cases, and thus we concluded that the results were stable.

RESULTS

We present the results for the whole sample first. The quotations we provide are labeled simply younger (elementary/middle school) or older (high school/college) because later, we use these groupings in order to highlight some developmental trends in the data. Four major themes emerged. In the tables that follow, subthemes and repeating ideas for each major theme are listed with corresponding figures for the proportion of groups that expressed each repeating idea. Within each theme, repeating ideas are presented in order from most to least frequent.

OVERALL TRENDS

Table 1 shows the theme related to school's purpose. As one might expect, boys understood school as a place for both cognitive and social growth. Under the subtheme of school as an agent of cognitive growth, almost all groups included discussion of the importance of learning, especially for their futures, but even for the present. One older participant said simply, "High school prepares you for college; college prepares you for the real world." A younger participant said he goes to school "to get a better job." Younger boys expressed worries about being able to only get what they called "McJobs" if they did not continue in their schooling. But the younger boys also acknowledged that the benefits of school are too far in the future to make a difference now. Some boys, especially but not exclusively the older ones, questioned the need for a college education. As one said, "A lot of people don't even need a high school education. Like lobster fisherman, they can go out and make

more than a lot of people."

Emphasis on the future was not the only idea that came up about cognitive development. Some participants in high school and college thought that unlike the lower grades, college was a time for learning for learning's sake. Not all the young men agreed, however. Among these older participants were some who thought that higher education had become more about credentialing than about learning.

Under the subtheme of school as a socializing agent, most groups were very animated in their discussion of the importance of school to their social development. In fact, this point almost always preceded discussion of school as a place for cognitive growth and occasioned very lively discussion. In nearly two-thirds of the groups, boys and young men expressed the view that seeing friends was the most positive aspect of school. But discussion revolved around more than friends; boys seemed to think that the purpose of school was to prepare them to live in the world. One older participant said, "Well, it's supposed to teach you about the world around you...teach you how to interact socially." Another said, "It's probably the social part that is helping you the most." A little less than one-third of the groups talked about the sense of community they wanted in their schools, and a smaller proportion talked about the bullying behaviors and cliques that detracted from that sense of community.

Table 2 shows the theme about boys' and young men's commitment to school. It was very clear that the supports came from people rather than activities, such as sports. More than three-quarters of the groups discussed the qualities they sought in their teachers, with caring behaviors receiving a large proportion of the discussion. A younger boy had this to say, "I could tell him anything that I wanted, and he would just be like, 'Okay, we can work this out.' I mean, he, he really helped me out with preparing for 6th grade." Almost two-thirds of the groups made it clear that their love of a class had much to do with the teacher.

One older participant remarked, "If you get a teacher that loves teaching, you'll do good in their class. If you get a teacher that it's just another job to them, you usually don't do good."

Parents also came up as supports. Some boys expressed an appreciation of the value of parental involvement in school and school work. But some of the older boys questioned the relentless pressure to go to college that came from their parents.

> *Like a lot of people probably could be extremely happy doing a job that doesn't require a college degree and really the only reason they're here is because their parents specifically made them or because like it's just like the next step after high school. They don't really consider doing a job that doesn't require a degree, even though they probably would be happy with it.*
>
> —Older Participant

Table 2 also shows the obstacles to commitment faced by the boys and young men. There were many. The first we called the regulatory actions of school; nearly two-thirds of the groups commented on these actions, which included disciplinary and grading systems as well as homework. Speaking of the disciplinary actions of teachers, one younger boy said, "I'm telling you, it's just mockery. That's what it feels like. They tell us not to bring Halloween candy to school…they are eating their candy and everything." What was particularly troubling to many of the boys about homework was having to complete it without the support of their teachers.

Almost two-thirds of the groups also spoke of mean and insensitive teachers as a deterrent to their commitment. One younger participant said simply, "The teachers can be so cruel." Older participants thought the lack of coordination between teachers was insensitive:

> Participant 1: *Sometimes a lot of projects get piled on at the same time in our classes.*
>
> Participant 2: *It seems unorganized, and it's very confusing and stressful.*
>
> —Older Participants

Nearly half the groups talked about the irrelevant and useless information, often packaged as busywork, that had an impact on their commitment to school. An older participant said of a biology class, "It was nothing but arts and crafts loosely based around biology, with no true foundation of biology. There was nothing you could pull out of it. It was a coloring class." Finally, nearly half of the groups spoke about difficult academic work as detracting from the commitment to school. Older participants talked about being "beaten to death [with work] in high school." Some of the younger participants spoke about the time limits involved in some exercises, such as "Mad Minutes" in math, as very stressful.

Table 3 captures the theme related to gender and other social differences. Most participants saw schools as environments marked by gender. Nearly three-quarters of the groups talked about girls' behavior as different from boys' in school. Both academic and social behaviors were different, according to participants. An older participant summarized the differences in academic behaviors this way:

> *I think girls…care more about having their homework done, making a good impression, getting good grades…most all of my friends… really don't care either way, as long as it's passing, we're fine with it.*

Many other older participants agreed with this sentiment: "It seems that girls have more initiative to do stuff." Although some of the younger participants said they noticed no differences in behavior, many others did. "Boys have a harder time in school than girls," a younger participant said.

Socially, younger participants remarked about how girls were "quite a bit bossy" and enjoyed playing what boys called "the gossip game." They also noted that girls like "it when it's all, like, in control, boys like it when it's wild and out of control." Older participants talked about gossip, too, referring to "the drama thing." "With girls, there's just so much drama," an older participant remarked.

Nearly two-thirds of the groups thought girls received different treatment in school. One younger boy offered an interesting analysis of how this worked: "Most of the time, they have better work habits, so teachers seem to enjoy their company in class more, but, it seems, they seem to play favorites." Other boys agreed. Younger and older boys agreed that the level of tolerance for misbehavior differed for boys and girls. The same behavior was disciplined

more harshly if a boy did it than if a girl did. "If a boy shoves a boy, it's detention, but not for girls," one younger boy said. Another offered this assessment, "Boys get treated like a rotten pumpkin sitting on a porch for 10 years." Older participants also raised concerns about how some male teachers seemed to favor female students who are attractive. One participant attempted to sum up this concern by saying: "We can't come to school in a miniskirt." The older participants thought this form of favoritism pervasive among the male teachers in their schools.

In addition to gender, social class was marked as a critical social difference in a little more than one-quarter of the groups. This marking took several forms, the predominant one being concern about the lack of resources in their schools. "We're a poor town," one younger participant remarked. Older participants tended to talk about the specific resources that were lacking, and in particular, ones related to intramural sports and fitness rooms for those who did not want to participate in varsity sports. A small minority of the college-aged participants described the class privilege that allowed some of their peers to attend the private colleges they did:

> *Some people come with enough security in their life. They feel like they don't need to care about it in some sense. And that's sort of a probably small, entitled group who at least feel that way, but there definitely is some of that, especially at some of these schools where, you know, it costs a lot just to go there.*
>
> —Older Participant

A tiny percentage of our groups included exclusively boys and young men of color. Although they received the same questions as the other groups, their answers returned to the issue of racism again and again. Racism of school staff, not students dominated these discussions, probably because so many of our questions had to do with teachers and other adults in the school. In response to the question about their ideal school, all the participants in one group responded immediately that their ideal school would include "no racism."

Table 4 includes the theme of what boys want of their schools. This theme was not divided into subthemes, but four repeating ideas emerged. In over two-thirds of the groups, freedom was the strong message boys and young men conveyed. The word covered much ground. For younger boys, one area of concern was the laptop program. Although many boys liked the program, they were upset that their teachers had the capacity to see what was on the boys' screens from their computers. Younger boys also wanted more freedom of movement. One boy said, "I don't like being cooped up in a building all day. I want to be outside more." Another said, "I like being able to change classes, not being stuck in the same place all day." Another said, "I can't be told to sit in one place and do something for an hour. That just doesn't work for me." Older participants expressed similar sentiments about required courses. "If you force them to take it, that's what makes people not interested," one participant said.

In over two-thirds of the groups, the desire for an adaptive, challenging, hands-on, and relevant curriculum was expressed. One of the older boys explained what he meant by adaptive:

> *He asked us, he actually asked us before he started teaching us what we wanted to learn. And, he took what we wrote down on the paper and created our whole year, and we've got everything that we asked to learn on it. That was, that was big.*
>
> —Older Participant

The desire for a challenging curriculum was especially strong in the college-aged participants. One young man said, "I like the fact that college forces you to think about what you're given instead of just regurgitating material." The wish for more hands-on work was expressed by participants of all ages. A younger boy mused,

> *That would be cool, like, if we just set up… we took our chairs, we took our books, and we went outside, and he just taught from there… Like if we were studying, like, minerals and stuff, and he didn't have to describe the rock. We'd have to go find it.*
>
> —Younger Participant

Along similar lines, an older participant said this:

"We're building a house right now...you feel like you're actually accomplishing something instead of sitting in a classroom doing paperwork." Older and younger participants were appreciative of teachers who make the curriculum relevant, although some of the older participants said that repeated assurances that "you're going to need this someday" were not enough.

Nearly half the groups talked about teachers who adapt their teaching styles to different students and create a positive atmosphere in their classrooms. By far, the most frequent adjective that expressed this notion of a positive atmosphere was "fun." Younger and older participants alike appreciated teachers who made learning fun. "Life's like not all about work. You have to have some fun," one younger participant said plaintively. Math teachers who taught students how to solve problems in multiple ways were singled out for praise by some older participants. Others concurred that they were grateful when teachers see that students don't understand and they change "their point of view."

Just over one-third of the groups discussed a desire for either more male teachers or teachers with whom they had something in common. Younger boys used this very language; teachers were more effective if students "have a lot in common with them." To the older boys, age was sometimes a deterrent to effective teaching: "Some of our teachers act like they never did anything bad when they were younger." Older boys loved to discover that they shared a hobby with a teacher, male or female. Turkey hunting, bass fishing, guitar playing, sports were among the many interests mentioned. Boys loved sharing these passions with their teachers, but especially loved it when teachers initiated discussions of their mutual interests.

DEVELOPMENTAL TRENDS

Because our data analytic approach began by identifying repeating ideas, ideas that were common to only one grade grouping (older or younger participants) were unlikely to be recorded. But we did examine the repeating ideas to see whether a greater proportion of the older or younger groups contributed to its inclusion in the data. This examination yielded several developmental trends. For the theme about the purpose of school, older participants contributed more to all of the repeating ideas about school as an agent of cognitive growth and development. Although the younger participants recognized cognitive growth and development as a purpose of school, their contributions were in a smaller proportion than the older boys. As for school as a socializing agent, the younger boys spoke of friends and bullying in greater proportions than the older participants. Not surprisingly, the older participants were more likely than younger ones to make statements consistent with the more abstract repeating ideas, i.e., the ones about social development, sense of community, and stagnant social circles.

For the theme of commitment to school, the older and younger participants spoke in roughly equal proportions about the qualities of an effective teacher, but the younger participants had more to say about parental support and the older participants about teachers' caring behaviors and the way a teacher affects their love of a class. When it came to obstacles to commitment, however, the younger participants contributed in greater proportion to all the repeating ideas, except for the one about the learning of irrelevant and useless information.

The theme of social positions had many repeating ideas dominated by the voices of the younger participants. It was these participants who, in greater proportions, thought girls behaved differently and received different treatment in school, and it tended to be these participants who thought it wasn't cool to do well in school. The only repeating idea under the gender subtheme that the older participants expressed in a greater proportion was the one about boys' laziness. It was younger boys as well who raised concerns about school resources in a greater proportion than older participants. The numbers about racism were too small to warrant further examination of developmental trends.

For the theme of what boys want, the older and younger participants split the repeating ideas. Younger participants dominated the ideas about the curriculum and role models, whereas older participants had more to say about freedom and teachers.

DISCUSSION

The voices of boys and young men add an important dimension to the discussion of the gender divide in academic engagement. Boys and young men have internalized the message that school is an important agent of cognitive growth and development. Nevertheless, as they grow older, many question this message and begin to evince skepticism about higher education in particular. Why is that? To be sure, the answer will not come from our study, but we can look for clues here. Schools are highly social environments marked by gender, according to our participants. Not only do girls behave in ways that suggest greater academic engagement, but in part as a result of those behaviors, they receive different treatment from teachers. Our data suggest that teachers are extremely important players in boys' lives. When one considers the widely held idea that boys are typically socialized to steer clear of emotional expressiveness and sensitivity (Kindlon & Thompson, 1999), it was striking to hear boys and young men use the language of care and caring in discussing teachers; they want teachers to care about them. But they feel under scrutiny from many teachers; they are watched and disciplined for the tiniest of missteps. And even though some boys and young men spoke of a desire for more male teachers, just as many spoke about the way male teachers favor female students who are attractive. Given our participants' understanding of school as critical to their social development, it is discouraging to think about what they learn about gender relations from these observations. Similar findings have been reported from research on student perspectives in schools in Great Britain (Myhill & Jones, 2006).

Schools are also marked by other social differences that play a role in boys' and young men's academic engagement. The young boys who spoke about their fathers who lobster or engage in other forms of physical labor that make them a living wage seemed genuinely confused as they spoke about their educational futures. It was as if they had received the message that they were nobody unless they continued their educations, but they found this message hard to reconcile with the fact that the most important people in their lives had not finished high school. Some of the younger participants retreated into talk of a division of labor, with the smart jobs reserved for women and the physical ones for men. This kind of talk suggests that messages about higher education, while reaching boys and young men, are striking a note of discord. Moreover, as these boys look around at their under resourced schools, they wonder if they can really compete for places in institutions of higher education.

Boys' concerns about discipline and freedom also play a role in their academic engagement. Although the younger boys, especially the ones from low-income areas, praised the laptop program, they also put it at the center of a fledgling grievance about scrutiny of their behavior. In our older participants, this grievance grew into a long list of freedoms they wished for in their schools. Although scholars today have focused their concerns about school surveillance on the "school to prison pipeline" that students of color experience (Meiners, 2007), we hope that schools consider the peril that comes from putting boys under such scrutiny as they endeavor to safeguard boys and young men.

In the end, it seems that boys want the same kind of schooling we want for them. They want an engaging curriculum delivered by caring teachers who have faith in them, behave fairly, and adapt their teaching to the different styles of their students. Boys do not like being watched; sitting still for long periods; doing busywork/"paperwork"; and feeling time limits/time pressure. Boys do like having input into the curricula in their classes; participating in kinesthetic, hands-on, and/or investigative activities; and seeing connections between what they are learning and their lives outside of school. Boys also value a positive, fun, laid-back atmosphere in the classroom, and the opportunity to try multiple approaches to solving problems. If Maine truly hopes to improve academic achievement and boost student aspirations, our findings point to the importance of listening to what boys have to say about their educational experiences, as a first step toward making schools more engaging and empowering for all students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Boys long for and need caring and sincere relationships with adults. Make it a point to ensure that every student in your school is known well by at least one teacher.

2. Boys pay very close attention to the behavior of adults around them. Always make a point of modeling appropriate and respectful behaviors in every relationship, particularly in your interactions with students and members of the opposite sex.

3. Boys feel valued when teachers take an expressed interest in what matters to them inside and outside of the classroom. Make every effort to find creative ways to make learning relevant, meaningful, and engaging.

4. Boys yearn for more variety and freedom in school. To the extent possible, provide choices in your classroom and in your school.

5. Boys love to share their experiences and perspectives about school. Create opportunities for safe, open dialogues among small groups of male students.

6. Boys had different experiences of school according to their social position. Gather and analyze data from a variety of sources (achievement, attendance, discipline, graduation, etc.) to inform ongoing conversations about how boys are experiencing school.

7. Boys deeply value fairness. Examine your practices inside and outside the classroom. Observe one another's classrooms with an eye toward uncovering potential differences in the way male and female students learn and are treated.

8. Finally, in order to effectively implement the above recommendations, a necessary first step is to develop a school-wide culture of accountability characterized by trust, acceptance, and support, so that educators are responsible for and comfortable with talking about these issues with each other and with students in meaningful and powerful ways.

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TABLE 1.

THEME: How Do Boys and Young Men Understand the Purpose of School?

Subthemes and Repeating Ideas	Proportion of Groups
Boys understand the importance of school as an agent of cognitive growth and development.	
Some boys stressed the present (learning for learning's sake in college), whereas others stressed the future, as in future careers, jobs, or education.	.86
School is important to intellectual development.	.53
The benefits of school are too far in the future for many boys.	.36
Among boys who stressed the future, some were skeptical about whether higher education was necessary for economic stability and others were skeptical about whether higher education was about learning rather than credentialing ("here to receive a diploma, not an education").	.20
Boys understand school as a socializing agent.	
Seeing friends was the most positive aspect of school.	.65
Boys thought that school was extremely important to their social development now and in the future.	.62
Boys were interested in a sense of community in conjunction with more diversity.	.29
Boys disliked cliques and stagnant social circles.	.22
Boys disliked bullying.	.19

TABLE 2.

THEME: What Keeps Boys and Young Men Committed to School?

Subthemes and Repeating Ideas	Proportion of Groups
The supports come from people in boys' lives.	
Boys value all the qualities that educators say are important in a teacher: inspiring, passionate, intelligent, fair, organized, responsible, demanding, respectful, humorous, and caring.	.80
Boys had much to say about the caring behaviors of a teacher (approachable, listening, empathetic, connecting, etc.).	.71
Boys were quite clear that their love of a class had everything to do with the teacher.	.64
Parents instill in boys a commitment to school, but they also add pressure that detracts from the enjoyment of learning.	.49
The obstacles come from within and without.	
Boys disliked many of the regulatory actions of schools, such as tests, disciplinary systems, grading systems, and homework that must be completed without the support system of teachers.	.65
Boys disliked mean and insensitive teachers, especially those who piled on assignments, predominately lectured, etc.	.65
Boys disliked learning irrelevant and useless information, especially if packaged as busywork.	.43
Boys disliked academic work that was too hard.	.40

TABLE 3.

THEME: How Do Boys and Young Men See School as Different for Students Occupying Differing Social Positions?

Subthemes and Repeating Ideas	Proportion of Groups
Boys see schools as environments marked by gender.	
Boys thought that girls behaved differently in school: they tried harder, created more drama, seemed to feel superior, worked more effectively in groups, and had different interests (with boys' interest in sports especially notable).	.72
Boys thought girls received different treatment in school; as a result of sexism and favoritism, girls got away with more, but boys recognized that teachers responded to girls' positive efforts.	.61
It's not cool to do well in school.	.15
Boys are lazy.	.15
Gender is not the only marker of social position boys noticed.	
Boys raised concerns about the resources available in their schools.	.28
Boys of color raised concerns about racism among staff in their schools.	.06

TABLE 4.

THEME: What Do Boys and Young Men Want of Their Schools?

Repeating Ideas	Proportion of Groups
The supports come from people in boys' lives.	
Freedom was especially important to boys (freedom from prison-like atmosphere, freedom to go outside, freedom to choose classes, freedom to use computers, freedom from racism, freedom to experiment).	.69
Boys want a curriculum that is adaptive, challenging (but not too challenging), hands-on, physical, and relevant.	.68
Boys want teachers who create a positive learning environment and can adapt their teaching styles.	.47
Boys wished for more male role models or teachers with whom they had something in common.	.36

The Maine Boys Network is a partnership between Bates College, Bowdoin College, Boys to Men, Bridgton Academy, Colby College, the Great Schools Partnership, the Mitchell Institute, Portland Public Schools, Unity College and the University of Maine at Farmington and is committed to promoting the health and successful development of all boys from pre-adolescence through young adulthood by supporting their success in academic settings. We provide a range of educational trainings, workshops, forums and conferences throughout the state of Maine. Our educational programs are intended to give educators and parents the "best practice" skills and strategies they need to increase boys' academic achievement, and to encourage school systems to evaluate how they effectively and ineffectively relate to and connect with boys. Our statewide conferences and school-based workshops supply educators and parents with vital information about boys' development and also highlight some of the social pressures and cultural messages that prevent boys from striving towards and achieving academic excellence. To date, the network has spearheaded a number of exceptionally successful projects intended to spotlight the issue of boys' academic under achievement and provide effective home and school-based strategies for addressing it. Please contact the Maine Boys Network at boystomen@maine.rr.com for more information.

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