

# Boys' Literacy Matters

**“ I believe (and research does not bear pit) that boys will learn best when...we select “boy-appropriate” materials and find hyper-masculine male models (e.g. football players) to promote what amounts to very traditional conceptions of literacy, i.e., reading and writing...we must move our understandings of both gender and literacy into the 21st century world.”**

—Kathy Sanford, 2007



Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic  
District School Board

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## Reality Check on the Gender Gap

Boys' underachievement in schooling, specifically in areas of literacy, has been a hot topic for both educators and parents. Most research-based literature shows that boys don't like school, don't like to read and often don't read and write very well.



While this information is alarming, it might not be

telling the whole story. Dr. Wayne Martino, in his article, *Boys' Under-*

*achievement: Which Boys Are We Talking About?*, suggests that we stop paint-

ing all boys with the same brush and that we start addressing the question of

**which** boys require help in becoming literate. In his article, Dr. Martino points out

that a “which boys/which girls” approach is more effective in determining the

most productive kinds of intervention for all struggling readers and at-risk stu-

dents. The calls for more male teachers or for a boy-friendly curriculum are

examples of “one-size-fits-all approaches to improving boys' underachievement.

Some of the strategies that Dr. Martino suggests would be beneficial for raising

girls' and boys' achievement include:

- Relevant, intellectually demanding and engaging curriculum
- Teacher capacity to develop respectful relationships
- Creating a safe classroom learning environment in which gender, racial and ethnic diversity is acknowledged and incorporated into the curriculum
- Developing a critical literacy approach that encourages boys and girls to question taken-for-granted notions of stereotypes (e.g., the high-achieving student as nerd or geek that is a pervasive image in the media,; the idea that boys need to be “tough” or to act “cool” )

Dr. Martino's article is available through The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat at [www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/whatWorks.html](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/whatWorks.html).