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Do low salaries and marriage patterns deter men from teaching careers?

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1** Teaching especially attracts mothers—about 1 in 7 employed, college-educated women with children at home work as teachers (15%).
- 2** Pay strongly shapes men's representation: men make up 26% of teachers in the highest-paid locations versus 22% in the lowest-paid, a gap arguably driven by men's greater sensitivity to earnings as household breadwinners.
- 3** Married men face a strong penalty for teaching: male-teacher households with children earn an average of \$132,000 annually, compared with \$193,000 for households where neither spouse works as a teacher.
- 4** Shifting marriage and family patterns explain little of the observed decline in male teachers over time: Millennial men, who marry later and are less likely to be fathers, are only about 1 percentage point less represented in teaching than Gen X men at comparable career stages.
- 5** Pay, not family formation, appears to be the primary deterrent—and the more actionable policy lever.

The teaching profession has long employed more women than men. With [historical roots](#) dating back [more than a century](#), teaching has often relied on individuals' intrinsic motivations of service, caregiving, and shaping children's lives to attract people into the profession. This appeal, combined with cultural norms that viewed teaching as one of a select few respectable vocations for women, resulted in a workforce where women have historically outnumbered men.

Yet, even as new career paths for women have opened up in other occupations since the 1970s, teaching has grown to become [even more disproportionately female](#). In the 1980-81 school year, two-thirds (67%) of teachers were women. In the [2020-21 school year](#) (the most recent national data available), that figure was nearly 77%.

This gender imbalance may carry consequences for students. Nationally, [school-age boys](#) are increasingly falling behind on multiple educational outcomes including reading test scores, attendance, and graduation. As adults, hard-fought advances by women in levels of educational attainment and employment are now eclipsing those of men. For years, experts have claimed that boys' and men's declining status may be attributed, in part, to [women's overrepresentation](#) in the teacher workforce.¹

Building on this work, [Richard Reeves](#) recommends recruiting and retaining more men into what he labels HEAL professions (health, education, administration, and literacy). Though these professions have grown increasingly female in recent decades, Reeves argues they offer underappreciated benefits to men, too. These occupations offer encouraging future employment prospects, compared to male-dominated occupations that have gradually declined in the face of technological progress. Attracting more men into teaching specifically, Reeves argues, could help re-engage boys and young men in their studies and break down gender stereotypes not just for teaching but other HEAL professions, too.

If policymakers intend to reverse these long-term workforce trends, we need to understand the factors that are contributing to this. This analysis explores how two seemingly separate issues—teachers' relatively low salaries and [social shifts in marriage and household formation patterns](#)—may be combining to deter men from careers in the classroom. This paper posits that individuals select into teaching, in part, because it is seen as an easy profession to combine with family responsibilities. Moreover, we suspect men and women value the nature of teaching differently based on their expected family roles, offering a potential explanation as to why so many women—and so few men—make their careers as teachers.

Household formation patterns may therefore be an important influence on trends in the teacher workforce, even though it is only occasionally considered in education policy discussions. If one of the benefits of teaching, as we hypothesize, implicitly relies on an individual's status as a caregiving parent, then the attractiveness of a teaching career goes down as fewer individuals choose to get married and start families—a trend widely documented over recent decades. In other words, looking at the teacher workforce through the family lens could tell us something important concerning all teachers, even leaving gender aside.

Data and methods

This paper presents the results of empirical analyses utilizing nationally representative data from the [American Community Survey](#) (ACS), an annual survey administered by the U.S. Census Bureau. The survey captures information on respondents' household and marriage status, educational background, employment, and earnings. Most of the paper utilizes the five-year 2023 sample, which pools survey respondents in the five years leading to 2023 (2019-2023) and weights them proportionately with the U.S. population. This maximizes the number of teachers that we can observe among survey respondents.

Our intention is to compare teachers with employed workers in other occupations in terms of their marriage and household status. Occupations are coded by the employment sector. Teachers in our sample are preK-12 teachers who are employed by elementary and secondary schools (public and private are both included). The main analytical sample consists of all regularly employed individuals (self-employed individuals are excluded) with at least a bachelor's degree, ages 25-44, who worked at least 26 weeks in the past year. We focus on these ages as they are the prime years of fertility and childrearing, where we expect individuals' labor supply decisions will most likely be affected by household characteristics.² We impose the education and employment restrictions to maintain some degree of comparability as we explore outcomes (like earnings) for people across occupations that could require similar kinds of training.

Some analyses require further subsamples. For example, at one point we limit the sample to preK-12 teachers only. At another point, we limit the analysis to workers who are in a married heterosexual couple with at least one child under 18 in the home (and duplicate individuals within a household are dropped). Our analysis here is primarily descriptive, presenting means for different teacher subgroups in our sample and making note of statistically significant differences across groups. Other results are estimated using linear regression models, controlling for individual and geographical characteristics.

How salaries and family expectations contribute to the choice to become a teacher

Why do individuals choose to become teachers? And why do men apparently approach this choice very differently than women? Based on our reading of the literature, individuals' expectations of their future earnings as a teacher and their intentions for future household formation both appear to play a meaningful role in attracting individuals into teaching. This section explores these issues and how they interact differently in the case of men and women selecting into and out of the profession.

TEACHERS OFTEN EARN LESS MONEY

Teachers earn less money than comparably educated peers in other occupations, and that gap is growing. For example, [Sylvia Allegretto's work](#) has tracked the “teacher pay penalty” over time, estimating that it has grown from 7.1% in 1979 to 26.9% in 2024. These declines in relative earnings are evident even as [teachers' levels of graduate degree attainment](#) have increased.

We hasten to stress that these averages do not necessarily imply that all teachers are equally underpaid. Teacher earnings are quite variable across states and are associated with per-pupil spending differences, with high-spending states paying higher salaries (though this relationship has [weakened over time](#)).³ Also, individuals with degrees in STEM fields [earn significantly more outside teaching](#), leading some scholars to conclude that [STEM teachers](#) appear to drive teacher pay penalty estimates and that non-STEM teachers' pay penalty is not nearly so large. The STEM contribution is relevant here since many STEM professions attract more men than women and [teachers specializing in STEM subjects](#) are also disproportionately male. Finally, teachers' contracts typically provide long (unpaid) summer breaks, a unique working arrangement which has often featured in [debates about the comparability of teachers' compensation](#). The family-friendly nature of a teacher's working schedule could itself be a benefit to some individuals, an issue we return to below.

Regardless of the exact level of underpayment, however, the public's perception of teaching as a relatively low-paying occupation is a key factor in deterring many individuals from considering it as a career. Analyzing measures of teachers' earnings, satisfaction, and prestige over the past four

decades, [Matthew Kraft and Melissa Lyon](#) conclude higher average salaries are clearly associated with periods of greater selection into the teaching profession.

THE ROLE OF INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

With relatively low earnings, why do individuals choose to enter the classroom? Labor economics starts with the theoretical premise that [individuals choose a career path](#) based on a set of expectations about the attributes of a given career path, including earnings, working conditions, the costs associated with training and education, an individual's comparative advantage in performing the duties of the job, and personal utility derived from working in that profession. In short, individuals will choose to become a teacher if the individual's benefit-cost calculation to teaching outweighs that of alternate career choices.

The prosocial, service orientation of teaching is critical here as it can be quite influential for many entering the classroom and attracts many who derive personal satisfaction from the work, separate from earnings. Based on [prior evidence](#), [key factors](#) that attract people into teaching include both objective features of the job (like expected earnings, job stability, and summer breaks) and aspects of the job that each individual evaluates subjectively (like an intrinsic love of teaching and one's personal value of having the summer break).

This mix of objectively and subjectively valued factors is significant because school systems and education policy can more readily manipulate aspects of the former but cannot directly influence the latter. For example, schools can raise teacher pay to make the profession more attractive, but cannot readily change individuals' subjective views of how much they would enjoy spending their days with children.

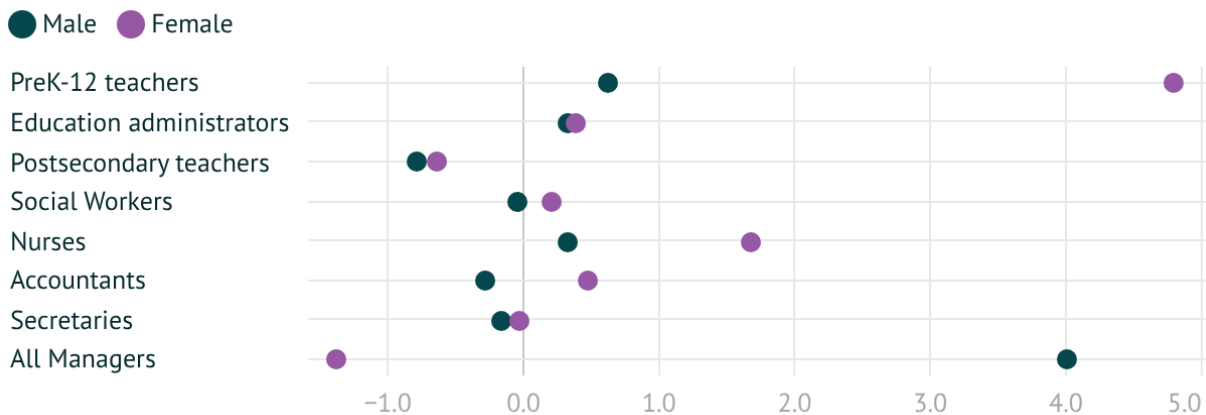
Yet there is likely an indirect substitution that happens between objective and subjective factors. For example, raising teacher salaries will attract more people into the profession through extrinsic motivations, reducing the relative importance of individuals' subjective feelings about leading children. But given the current, relatively modest level of teacher salaries, [intrinsic motivations carry significant weight](#) in attracting individuals into teaching.

WHY TEACHING MAY BE PARTICULARLY ATTRACTIVE TO PARENTS

The nature of teaching—which involves working with young people, promoting children's personal development, and developing interpersonal relationships—shares much in common with the task of parenting one's own children. Thus, it seems reasonable that many who choose

FIGURE 1

Estimated relationship between being employed in each occupation and the presence of at least one child in the home



Sample includes individuals with at least a BA degree who worked at least 26 weeks the previous year and were 25 to 44 years old. The sample excludes self-employees. School teachers include preschool, kindergarten, elementary, secondary, special ed, and other teachers.

Source: American Community Survey 2023, 5-year estimates

to become parents (or those with the desire to one day become parents) make a career in the classroom.

To empirically test this claim, we looked at different worker occupations and estimated the likelihood of working in that occupation, conditional on having a child in the household. These particular occupations were selected due to their adjacency to preK-12 teaching (i.e., education administrators and higher education teachers), their similar educational and certification requirements for entering the occupation (i.e., social workers, nurses, and accountants), or their frequency of representation by each gender (i.e., secretaries for women, managers for men).

Indeed, the ACS sample shows that the presence of at least one child in the household (any age under 18) is strongly associated with being employed as a preK-12 teacher, holding other characteristics constant (see Figure 1).⁴ This association is notably high for mothers. About one in seven employed women with children in the home work as preK-12 teachers (14.9%) in our sample, compared with 9.2% observed among women without children. Holding other individual characteristics constant, as the regression estimates in Figure 1 show, narrows the gap slightly but still results in an estimated difference of nearly 5 percentage points between women with

and without children. For comparison, this is more than twice the corresponding estimate for nursing (working women with a child are nearly 2 percentage points more likely to work as a nurse than women without children), which is the next-highest occupation most strongly associated with being a mother.

For men, the association between being a father and employment as a teacher is also positive, but not nearly as large as the magnitude observed among mothers. This is presumably due, in part, to the lower likelihood of men to select into preK-12 teaching in general, though we still see a large gap between men with children in the home working as teachers (5.2%) versus men without children (3.7%). Figure 1 shows this estimated difference shrinks to less than 1 percentage point considering all other characteristics, but remains statistically significant. The preK-12 estimate is far below that of being employed as a manager (where the estimated gap between those with and without children at home is about 4 percentage points). Interestingly, the nearest occupation to the men's preK-12 teachers' point estimate is that of education administrators, which is a common career transition that many male teachers will make (and [at far higher rates than female teachers](#)).

Education policy discussions about teachers rarely invoke their role as parents, though we are hardly the first to pay attention to it. For example, [Mary Hermann and coauthors](#) documented the complementarity (and occasional conflicts) between the roles of teacher and mother in a series of interviews with women holding both roles. [A 2024 study](#) evaluated the role of household responsibilities in mediating the efficacy of teachers' online instruction during the pandemic. A recent [teacher recruitment policy in the United Kingdom](#) explicitly appeals to mothers who left the classroom for childrearing, recruiting them back part-time to alleviate teacher shortages. And [our own work](#) has previously documented how K-12 teachers in the U.S. are not only more likely to be married than workers in other occupations, they are also more likely to be married to someone working in the same occupational sector.

Thus, teaching evidently appeals to individuals who are likely to marry and start their own families, though this appeal could diverge in important ways across genders. To understand these points of divergence, we first need to understand how mothers and fathers differentially engage in the workforce.

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN EARNINGS AND LABOR SUPPLY

Gaps in earnings on the basis of gender are [well documented across many occupations](#), including teaching. Earnings gaps are readily observed in this ACS sample. Figure 2 presents average job-related earnings (adjusted for inflation to 2023 levels) for the same occupations above, broken out separately by gender. As with Figure 1 above, the sample includes employed individuals aged 25-44 with a BA degree, regardless of their marriage or parent status.

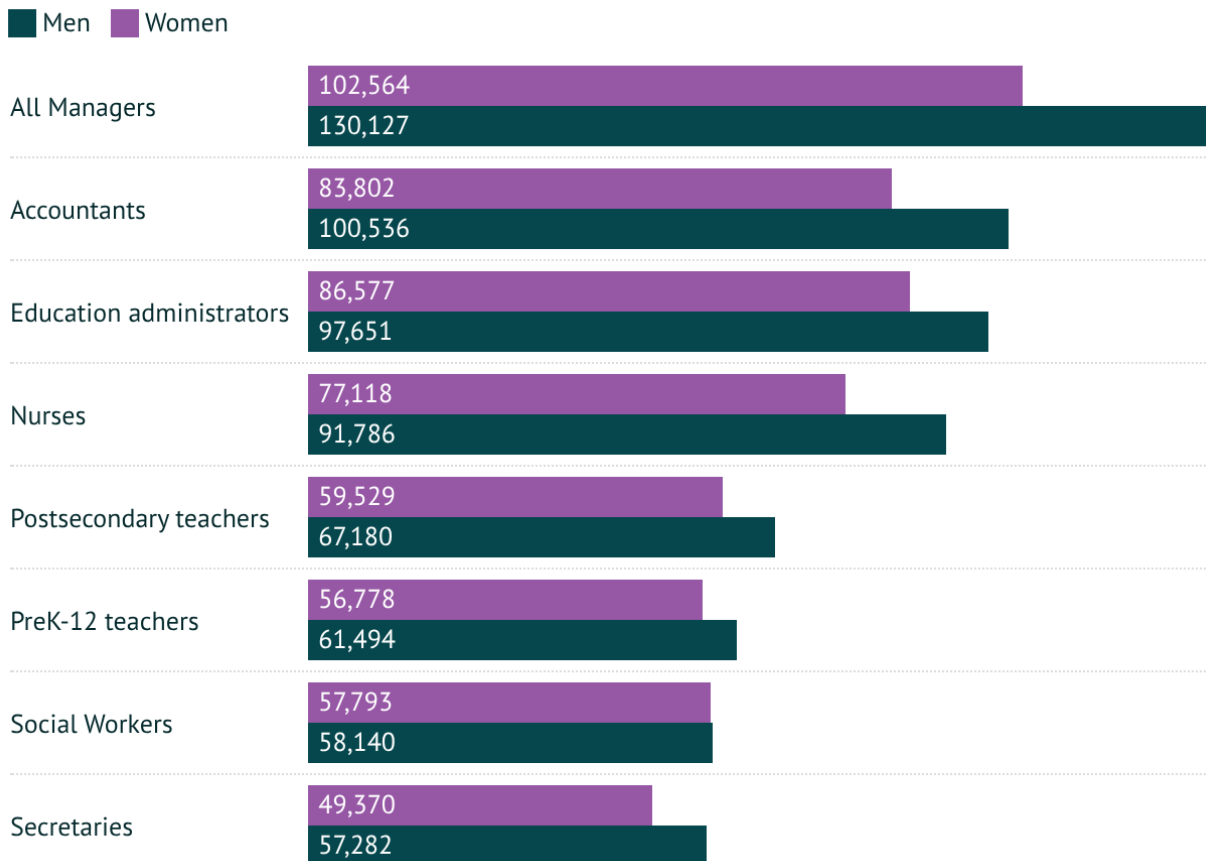
PreK-12 teachers report lower earnings than most other comparison jobs here, [as expected](#). And the estimated gender gap among teachers (women earn about 8% lower than men, on average) is on the lower end of the gender gaps observed in other occupations (women earn less than men with values ranging from <1% among social workers to 21% among managers). This comparison corroborates [our earlier study](#) looking at salary inequalities across multiple professions, including teaching, where we found gender gaps among teachers to be small in comparison to other professions.

Yet, this high-level comparison of earnings by gender also glosses over important differences in labor supply by gender: men typically report more work hours than women, too. In every occupation in the ACS sample, including teaching, men report working between 1 to 3 hours more than women each week (see Figure 3). In other words, men's higher earnings appear to be due partially to more time spent on the job.

But also note that differences in work effort alone do not fully account for the differences in earnings. For example, female teachers report 9% lower earnings but only 3% fewer work hours per week. These figures are largely in line with [our prior published work on all K-12 teachers](#) nationwide, where women reported earning approximately 7% less than otherwise similar men; these differences were primarily driven by men's higher participation in paid extracurricular responsibilities than women (e.g., coaching, leading a student club). Yet, a gender gap in earnings still remained that could not be explained by extra work alone. Overall, the pattern of gender-based earnings and work gaps observed in teaching are quite consistent with those in other occupations.

FIGURE 2

Average annual job-related earnings, by occupation and gender in 2023 dollars



Sample includes individuals with at least a BA degree who worked at least 26 weeks the previous year and were 25 to 44 years old. The sample excludes self-employees. School teachers include preschool, kindergarten, elementary, secondary, special ed, and other teachers.

Source: American Community Survey 2023, 5-year estimates

FIGURE 3

Average weekly hours worked, by occupation and gender



Sample includes individuals with at least a BA degree who worked at least 26 weeks the previous year and were 25 to 44 years old. The sample excludes self-employees. School teachers include preschool, kindergarten, elementary, secondary, special ed, and other teachers.

Source: American Community Survey 2023, 5-year estimates

Are household factors behind gender differences in the teacher workforce?

Prior scholars, including [recent Nobel laureate Claudia Goldin](#), have documented this interplay between gender and labor supply and it is often attributed to stereotypical gender roles with respect to household responsibilities: Women tend to spend fewer hours in the office to work a

second shift at home, while men tend to stay longer in the office to earn more money to support their families.

Indeed, we found suggestive evidence along these lines [in our analysis](#) of teachers' gender earnings gaps: it was only during teachers' early-career stage to age 42 where men were significantly more likely to report extra duties than women. This early-career period also coincides with the ages where households are most likely to have young kids at home.

But this logic applies beyond teachers. Many adults in their 20s and 30s [engage in household formation](#) by finding a [long-term romantic partner](#). Partnering, whether through marriage or cohabitation, enables couples to [start pooling resources and specializing in separate duties](#) to meet their household needs. Stereotypical gender roles shape the household specialization decisions of many couples, [especially when they marry](#), motivating men to focus on production outside the home and women to make home production a priority.

If the couple chooses to have children, the dynamics for [role differentiation often grow](#). A couple's potential gains to role specialization increase as [children demand more of parents' time and financial resources](#). Even if typical gender roles did not apply among the couple previously, the biological realities of pregnancy, childbearing, and breastfeeding (in the case of biological children) will also tend to [push men and women on diverging paths](#) of role specialization where mothers spend more time caregiving and [fathers specialize in external employment](#) and providing resources for the family.

We stress that these overall trends do not imply that all individuals conform to these work patterns or for the same reasons. Some women choose to work longer hours and some men work fewer. And naturally, not every worker is partnered, and if partnered, not every couple will have kids and conform to these stereotypical roles. [Gender norms](#) likely have [less influence in same-sex couples](#), too. Yet, enough people do conform for these patterns to [hold on average across the population](#) of young adults.

In fact, there is an [academic subfield](#) on [collective household production models](#) that has empirically corroborated these types of household dynamics. These studies find consistent evidence of gendered household duties and parenthood as a strong explanation for [differences in employment and earnings trajectories by gender](#).

TABLE 1
Household earnings and work measures among heterosexual married couples with at least one child present in the home

Metric	Male teacher – non-teacher	Female teacher – non-teacher	Non-teacher – non-teacher
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Total household income	\$132,415	\$155,751	\$193,052
% where husband earns more	58%	66%	67%
% single-earner households	18%	7%	25%
Number of households	10,473	39,619	326,564

Sample includes individuals with at least a BA degree who worked at least 26 weeks the previous year and were 25 to 44 years old. The sample excludes self-employees. School teachers include preschool, kindergarten, elementary, secondary, special ed, and other teachers.

Source: American Community Survey 2023, 5-year estimates

This gendered role specialization among couples—where breadwinner fathers exert more time at work and caregiving mothers prioritize spending time with their kids—offers a possible explanation for why so few men and so many women choose to become teachers.

A noteworthy aspect of teachers’ work is its alignment with kids’ schedules. Not only are teachers off during the summer but they also share similar daily schedules and vacation holidays with their kids throughout the academic year. We suspect caregiving parents (typically mothers) would especially value this schedule alignment with their kids, as such a schedule would minimize the difference between the mothers’ working hours and children’s school schedules.⁵

Conversely, breadwinner parents (typically fathers) are expected to prioritize longer work hours and more earnings. Thus, the summer break may not offer such a strong appeal to them. In fact, prior analyses show [breadwinner teachers are more likely](#) to work a second job during the school

year to supplement their incomes. Male teachers are also more likely to [work summer jobs](#) for the school, too (fatherhood was unobservable in that study).

We want to explore the interplay between choosing to be a teacher and how that is associated with differences in household outcomes. We transform the ACS individual sample we have been working with to instead look at household characteristics. We kept those individuals who are married in a heterosexual couple and have at least one child under 18 in the home, flagging key aspects of their households.⁶ Note that because we expect teaching to be differentially attractive to caregivers (wives) and breadwinners (husbands), we separate out households depending on the gender of the spouse who is working as a teacher.

In Table 1 below, we compare three types of heterosexual married couples with a child in the home:

- Male-teacher couples where the husband is a teacher and the wife is not;
- Female-teacher couples where the wife is a teacher and the husband is not; and,
- Non-Teacher couples, where neither spouse works as a teacher.

The table shows household earnings and work measures among each of these couple types. In the first row, our results show large penalties on the household incomes of teachers who are men (column 1), compared with those who are women (column 2). In husband-teacher couples, average household income is significantly lower (\$132,415) than in wife-teacher couples (\$155,751); this comparison assumes the remaining spouse is not working as a teacher.

Row two shows that within most households, husbands earn more money than their wives, a pattern that bears out across all columns (ranging from 58% in column 1 to 67% in column 3). Indeed, prior research by [Marianne Bertrand and colleagues](#) has documented the share of total household income earned by wives exhibits a sharp drop just past 50%, which they argue is evidence of the gender norm that men should earn more than their wives. The authors also go on to show that married women's labor supply and earnings near that threshold are also lower than expected, suggesting that many wives participate in the labor market in ways that avoid earning more than their husbands. Though not all couples conform to this norm, many apparently do.

For a married man choosing between teaching and another occupation, an important comparison is between the husband-teacher and non-teacher households (columns 1 and 3). The household income difference between these two columns is over \$60,000, nearly 50% higher than the total income reported in column 1. Note that this difference is much larger than what one would

expect by simply shifting one spouse's occupation to a job outside of teaching (recall the teacher pay penalty is [estimated at 26.9%](#)).

Though we do not fully explore the underlying factors for this difference, multiple reasons could explain why a hypothetical career switch could be associated with such a large difference in household income. The first, as detailed above, is that a husband earning a higher salary implicitly provides permission for his wife to also earn more money without violating the income-share gender norm. Thus, it follows that any increase in a husband's earnings is expected to increase total household income by an even greater amount. Second, gender-based earnings gaps are often higher in other occupations, as previously illustrated in Figure 2. Thus, men stand to gain more in earnings from switching to other fields than women. And third, note that households included in column 3 participate in *any* non-teaching occupation, which includes many high-paying professional occupations (not necessarily the replacement job for a teacher who chooses to exit the classroom).⁷

Finally, note that some of the differences in household earnings observed across different household types could also be due to differential labor force participation (shown in row 3) among spouses. For example, 18% of the husband-teacher couples (column 1) have a non-working spouse versus 7% of wife-teacher couples (column 2); thus, the nearly \$23,000 gap in household income between these columns may be partially due to a spouse's decision to work versus staying home to provide childcare. This decision to work is asymmetric across genders, conditional on household status. Women observed in this sample (recall these are all women in heterosexual marriages with a child in the home) are significantly less likely to be employed (83%) than men (95%).

In summary, the teaching profession offers a working contract that complements the lower-hours, lower-pay profile that caregiver mothers appear to prefer in the labor market. Breadwinner fathers choosing teaching must do so despite these same features of the work contract. Further, gender norms that wives should earn less than their husbands, combined with larger gender pay gaps in other fields, may be drawing breadwinner men out of teaching.

MEN'S LABOR SUPPLY IS MORE PRICE SENSITIVE THAN WOMEN'S

This household-based gender divergence may also explain another empirical phenomenon that has been identified in prior research: gender differences in labor supply elasticities. [Our prior analysis](#) of gender earnings gaps among teachers nationwide and [another examining teachers in Missouri](#) have documented that men's representation in the teacher workforce shifts across

different settings. When teachers are paid more, men typically account for a higher share of the workforce and vice versa. Though these prior studies have documented this relationship, it is the household collective production model that offers a theoretical foundation for these gender differences in labor supply. Because women's decisions to teach may depend not only on pay but also on how well teaching aligns with other household responsibilities, they may be less sensitive to pay than men.

Applying this collective household lens leads to another set of predictions: men's representation in the workforce will be highest in settings where teacher pay is high, and men with kids (i.e., breadwinner fathers) will be the most responsive to increases in pay. Conversely, because women with kids value the school's aligned academic working schedule more than women without kids, we predict women's representation in the workforce will increase when teacher pay is low, and women with kids (i.e., caregiver mothers) will be even more represented in the lowest-paying settings.

We examined the interplay of teachers' gender and parent status across high-paid and low-paid geographies. For this analysis, we return to the original ACS sample of all employed individuals (regardless of household status) and limit to focus just on preK-12 teachers. Average job-related earnings for all teachers (ages 25-44) are calculated at the lowest level of geography in the data, and then locations are ranked based on those average earnings and separated into five groups of equal size, referred to as quintiles.

Figure 4 below shows the results of this exercise. The x-axis represents quintiles based on average teachers' earnings, with geographic locations where teachers are paid more, on average, corresponding to higher quintile ranks. The y-axis measures the representation share of the teacher workforce within each average earnings quintile, where each segment in the stacked bar parses out representation by the teacher's gender and the presence of children in the household.

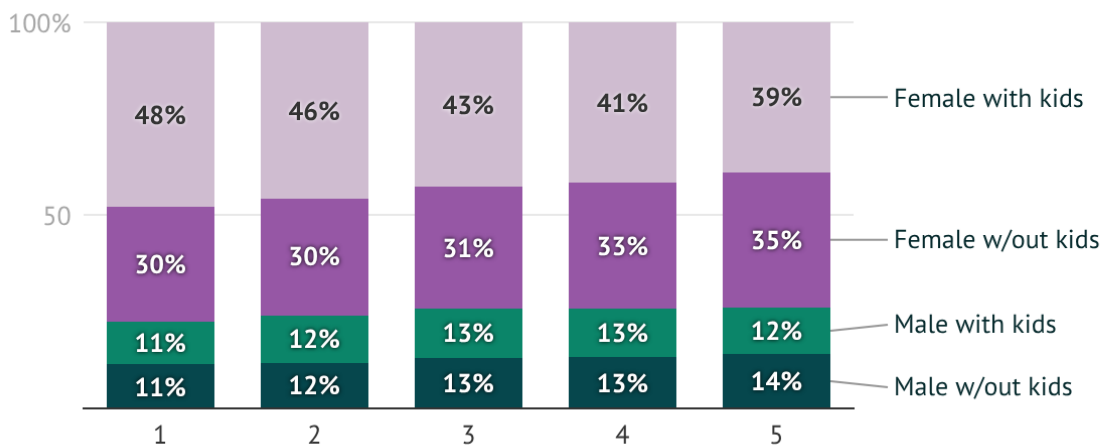
The figure shows that men, indeed, constitute a larger share of the teacher workforce in locations where teachers are paid more (26% in the highest-paid quintile versus 22% in the lowest-paid quintile). However, contrary to our prediction, we do not see any clear differences in men's labor supply response based on their status as a parent, since increases in the representation of men with and without children in the household are generally proportional in most quintiles.

Women, conversely, represent a larger share of the teacher workforce in locations with low average earnings as expected, as they appear to be less sensitive to low pay. Further, as we predicted, the share of mothers grows even more in these settings. This dynamic results in an

apparent wedge in women's representation across quintiles: women with kids outnumber women without kids 1.6:1 in the lowest-paid settings and this ratio shrinks to 1.1:1 in the highest-paid settings.⁸

FIGURE 4

Share of teachers by gender and child status, across teacher pay quintiles



Sample includes individuals with at least a BA degree who worked at least 26 weeks the previous year and were 25 to 44 years old. The sample excludes self-employees. School teachers include preschool, kindergarten, elementary, secondary, special ed, and other teachers.

Source: American Community Survey 2023, 5-year estimates

Do shifting patterns of household formation impact teacher gender representation?

Household formation patterns have been undergoing a dynamic shift over recent decades. Across the country, young adults are [now less likely to select a long-term romantic partner](#), whether through marriage or cohabitation. These shifts also impact childbearing patterns: [women are now older](#) at the time of their first child, and are having fewer children overall.

Since the choice to become a teacher is associated with parental status we wonder whether gender representation among teachers might also be shifting in response to these changes in partnering and childbearing. If all young people are less likely to get married and have children, their intrinsic motivations that overlap with parenting may also be moving away from teaching. In other words, shifting household formation patterns might be an underappreciated factor behind [long-term declines](#) in the teacher pipeline and people's interest in becoming a teacher. Thus, different cohorts may reveal differences in male representation among teachers over time.

To explore these dynamics, we examine gender representation of teachers by different birth-year cohorts over time. We used a retrospective panel of ACS surveys over time so that we could observe multiple cohorts at different ages in their careers. We identify those who belong to Gen X (born between 1965 and 1980) and those who are Millennials (born between 1981 to 1994). These generational differences correspond to [shifting dynamics](#) in [marriage and household formation behaviors](#) documented in prior research.

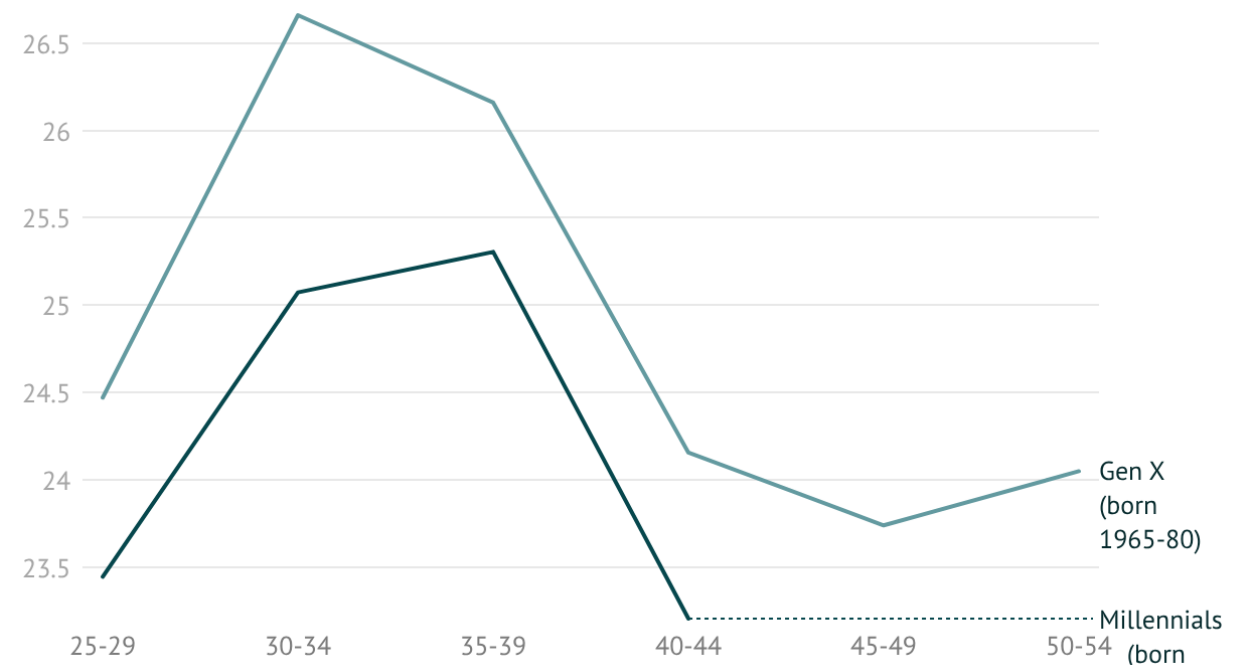
Figure 5 presents estimates of how men's representation among the teacher workforce (along the y-axis) shifts over different ages (along the x-axis) for these two cohorts. The general pattern shows that men's representation increases with age, peaking in the 30s of each cohort, before starting to decline into men's 40s and later.⁹ We suspect that early climb is likely explained by the entry pathway into teaching; [women are more likely](#) to enter through a traditional training program in their undergraduate years, men are more likely to enter through alternative certification programs after graduation. Further, the declining share of men beyond their 30s could be explained by men [moving into education leadership sooner](#) and at higher rates than women.

Looking across the birth-year cohorts we do see some evidence that the youngest cohort is about one percentage point less male at every age category (where a comparison is possible; the oldest Millennials are in their mid-40s now). This difference is consistent with the general trend of all teachers becoming [slightly more female](#) over time, though does not reveal any patterns across the age profile that appears to be unique to either cohort.

We also conducted this cohort analysis separately in relatively high-paying locations versus those in low-paying locations (see Figure 6).¹⁰ As expected, we do see clear differences in the overall share of men going into teaching depending on the setting, where men account for a greater share of the teacher workforce in high-paying locations. Generally speaking, Millennials are about 1 percentage point below the Gen X numbers at the same age, though little beyond this is associated with cohort differences. Interestingly, though, there is a striking divergence evident in

later ages by earnings level. Men in their 40s and later appear to be more likely to stay in teaching in areas where teachers earn more. Contrast this with the profile observed in low-paying locations: the share of men peaks quickly then declines, pointing to a divergence in representation over time across the two settings. Early signs among millennial teachers suggest this divergence as the cohort ages may be growing.

FIGURE 5
Share of teachers who are male across age groups

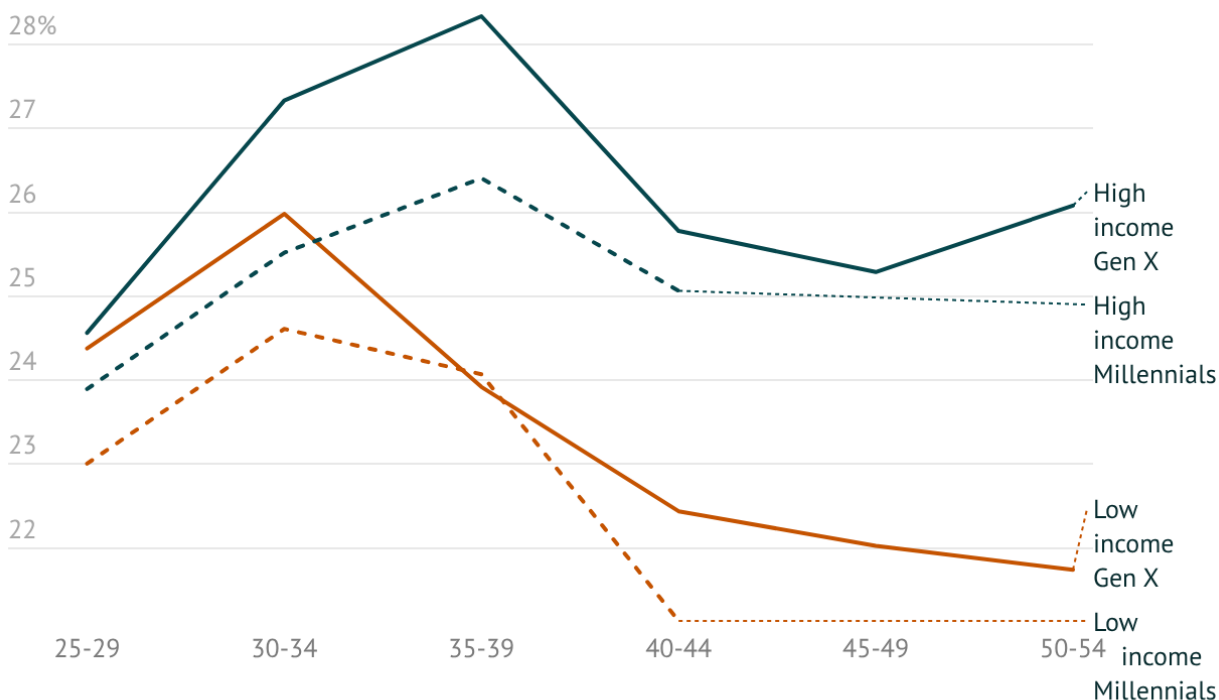


Sample includes individuals with at least a BA degree who worked at least 26 weeks the previous year and were 25 to 44 years old. The sample excludes self-employees. School teachers include preschool, kindergarten, elementary, secondary, special ed, and other teachers.

Source: American Community Survey 2023, 5-year estimates

FIGURE 6

Share of men in the teaching profession across age groups, by income's location



Sample includes individuals with at least a BA degree who worked at least 26 weeks the previous year and were 25 to 44 years old. The sample excludes self-employees. School teachers include preschool, kindergarten, elementary, secondary, special ed, and other teachers.

Source: American Community Survey 2023, 5-year estimates

Income versus household formation in explaining the status of men in teaching

We began this analysis by hypothesizing that the combination of low earnings and marriage trends may help explain the declining representation of men in the teacher workforce. Both relative wages among teachers and the frequency of household formation and childrearing among young people has been in decline over recent decades. Both of these may offer an explanation on why the male share of the teacher workforce has been decreasing.

Our results here suggest that it is low earnings that primarily deter men from teaching. The collective household literature demonstrates how breadwinner men typically prefer higher-earning occupations that may require more time (Figures 2 and 3). Yet teachers' working contracts aligned with academic calendars appear to cut against this tendency. Moreover, holding household status constant, men's household income appears to suffer a large penalty when they choose to be teachers, far more than what would be expected based on the teacher pay penalty alone (Table 1). Men's labor supply is also much more sensitive than women's in choosing a career in teaching, showing significant differences in representation across high- and low-paying locations evident within survey years (Figure 4).

Conversely, the marriage and household variables do not appear to meaningfully shift men's representation. Figure 4 shows that men's representation among the teacher workforce does not meaningfully differ by parent status, countering our predictions. We see a slight decline in men's representation across different birth cohorts as household formation patterns in the U.S. have undergone a dynamic shift (Figure 5), though the biggest differences in the cohort analysis were revealed when looking through the lens of high- and low-paying locations (Figure 6). Combined, the evidence points to teacher earnings as a more important driver of men's representation in the workforce.

Women, conversely, appear to be more sensitive to marriage and household status and less sensitive to earnings. The collective household literature documents how women's labor supply shifts around marital status and even more after having children. Mothers strongly sort into teaching compared with other occupations (Figure 1). We hypothesize that it is mothers' valuing the schedule alignment with their kids, combined with additional household earnings from a spouse, that makes teaching a relatively accommodating career for caregiving women. Further, mothers account for a disproportionate share of the teacher workforce in the lowest-paying settings (Figure 4).¹¹

We should note that this analysis does have some important limitations. Our descriptive analysis does not control for individual characteristics beyond those explicitly tied to sample selection. Beyond occupation and high- and low-income locations, the ACS survey data used here offers very limited contextual information about schools or the workplace environment and are hence omitted from this analysis. Results are indicative of associations between variables and may not necessarily indicate causal relationships. Also, our focus on income and household variables need not imply that these are the only dimensions along which teachers may exhibit different behaviors by gender. For example, teachers may experience and perceive [school safety differently](#)

[by gender](#) and schools are commonly seen as riskier in recent decades due to the [increasing incidences of school shootings](#). Gender differences on these domains could also affect individuals' willingness to teach over time.

Overall, these results offer good news for those interested in recruiting more men into teaching. Earnings—rather than household factors—appear to be stronger lures attracting more men into the profession, and earnings can be manipulated by policymakers interested in attracting men. Conversely, changes in household formation patterns do not appear to be particularly influential in deterring men from the profession, which is fortunate as policymakers likely have little leverage into these private choices.

Higher pay to attract men would also of course have the benefit of disproportionately rewarding the many women currently leading instruction in the nation's classrooms.

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Footnotes

1. The theoretical framework motivating teacher-student gender matching essentially parallels the logic of race or ethnicity-based matching. Yet, we stress that the empirical evidence on gender matching is much weaker than that of race-based matching, [based on our prior work](#). Gender-based teacher-student matching offers more promise in the case of low-income students of color, though.
2. We take the presence of a child under 5 years in the home as a key signal of household formation. Based on our calculations using the ACS sample, less than 5 percent of women aged 45-49 have a child under 5 years old in the home and less than 1 percent of all women aged 50 or over have a child under 5. Contrast this with women between ages 25-44 where the presence of a child under 5 ranges between 15% and 42%.
3. Recent studies (from [Arkansas](#) and [Washington state](#)) present empirical evidence from employment records showing that the same person will often earn more working as a public school teacher than working in an alternate profession. Weighing the full evidence on this issue is beyond the scope of this paper. For our purposes here, it is sufficient to document that teacher earnings are, if anything, slightly below other professions and their relative earnings have been declining over time on average.
4. We use a linear probability model where the dependent variable is whether an individual in our sample works in the corresponding occupation; explanatory variables include age, locale, gender, and the presence of kids in the household (interacted with gender), with state, year, and region fixed effects.

5. A [recent RAND survey](#) comparing teachers with workers in other similar occupations finds that teachers report more time spent on their job and less flexibility in their work time (e.g., taking time off, taking a personal call during the work day). We hypothesize that it is the academic calendar alignment with kids across the year, not the daily schedule alignment, that is most attractive to a caregiving mother.
6. Duplicate individuals in the same household are dropped to avoid being double counted. Observations now represent unique households, not unique individuals.
7. A careful analysis of plausible replacement jobs, their earnings, and the expected change in household earnings is beyond the scope of this paper. However, in an attempt to approximate outside opportunities, we conducted a supplemental analysis in which the non-teacher households were limited to those where at least one of the spouses was employed in one of the comparison occupations considered earlier in the report (i.e., Figures 1-3). We observed even higher mean household incomes among those couples (\$204,225). This unexpectedly higher household income appears to be a consequence of higher employment among such couples; only 16% of households in this subsample were single-earner households, compared to 25% in Table 1 column 3.
8. These sorting dynamics may also contribute to the gap in household incomes between teacher couples and non-teacher couples shown in Table 1, since those with children in the household (one of the criteria for inclusion in the Table 1 sample) are more likely to be represented in settings where teachers are paid less.
9. These declines could represent men leaving teaching or transitioning into educational administration, though exploring the underlying reasons for these changes is beyond the scope of this analysis.
10. High-paying settings here are defined as geographies in which teachers' earnings were, on average, higher than the national median earnings; these categorizations were made separately in each 5-year ACS survey sample.
11. This finding confounds teachers' family status with school contexts, which presumably extends to include community socioeconomic disadvantage. This complicates comparisons of the teacher workforce by household status. For example, a [recent RAND survey](#) explores teachers' job stress and burnout, finding that female teachers with school-age children are most likely to report high levels of both. These elevated levels may be due to the presence of children, but may also be related to disproportionate representation of mothers in socioeconomically disadvantaged settings with their associated [poor working conditions](#) and [high levels of burnout](#).