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Local view: Dads can do more, but not through this program

By [David Beard](#) on Dec 17, 2016 at 11:00 p.m.

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Recently, a friend showed me an announcement for an All-Pro Dad meeting at her Duluth public school. What are we communicating to our children (and to our daddies) with this program?



David Beard

“All-Pro Dad is the fatherhood program of Family First, a national nonprofit,” its website explained. Family First also operated iMom, which was a parallel organization for mothers. Until 2014, both All-Pro Dad and iMom offered breakfast meetings for dads (All-Pro Dad’s Day) and moms (“iMom Morning”). Attendance at iMom Morning was weak nationally, however, so that program was discontinued. All-Pro Dad is still going strong with 28 chapters in Minnesota.

The goal of All-Pro Dad is to provide an “opportunity for dads to spend quality time with their children that will strengthen their relationship as well as benefiting the child’s school and the entire community,” according to its online explanation. Showing up for one breakfast once a month in your child’s life apparently is transformative for our whole community.

But is it right for our schools? I’m anxious that All-Pro Dad fosters sexist values that are troubling. Bottom line: Are the values of All-Pro Dad good for our children?

All-Pro Dad seems to believe in a sharp gender division. All-Pro Dad takes as its starting point the John Gray book, “Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus.” According to All-Pro Dad, “We look different, we are wired different, our anatomy is different, and we communicate differently.” All-Pro Dad teaches children (and parents) that understanding those gender divisions is essential to getting along, as it advises dads in “5 Steps to Loving Your Wife Fully.”

iMom advises women to tell husbands they are loved by stroking very traditional masculine norms: “Does he take great pride in providing for his family? Thank him profusely. ... If he’s the rock you depend on, give an example of a time that quality was evident.” iMom suggests that you can romance your husband by letting him talk without interrupting, cooking his favorite dinner, making sure his favorite clothes are clean and ready to wear, and watching the whole game with him.

There seems no room for the mom who curls or plays football or the dad who does laundry.

All-Pro Dad presumes that marriage is a very traditional union of a man and a woman. All-Pro Dad quotes John Wooden, the legendary basketball coach, to claim that, "The best thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother." It's a claim that seems harmless until you remember that some families are built with two fathers.

All-Pro Dad and iMom founder Mark Merrill has complained that, "Homosexuality is learned behavior and morally wrong," so this bias is unsurprising. All-Pro Dad prioritizes heterosexual parenting relationships in ways that may make some children feel like their families are not normal.

No event should be held in our public schools that makes any child feel abnormal.

I was brainstorming with my friend about alternatives. She's a single mom (as my mom was a single mom). There is no more iMom's breakfast (and even if there was, I'm not sure that breakfast would appeal), so a separate but equal breakfast is not a solution.

My mom would have showed up for All-Pro Dad's Day, frankly, and insisted that single moms were both mom and dad, a brave gesture I would have admired, but which would have played right into my other anxiety. Nothing should be held in our public schools that makes any child feel abnormal, and a mom on All-Pro Dad's Day might make me feel like that, as a child.

I reflect on my friend, remembering why I care so much. Having an All-Pro Dad's Day is just a way for a beautiful 5-year-old boy I care about to remember, once a month, that he has no daddy.

My friend suggested "Family Day," but we laughed a little before we fell into sadness. "Family Day," we figured, soon would become "Mommy Day," a day attended mostly by mothers. We agree with All-Pro Dad on this: Bringing dads into school with their children once a month will change lives and communities, because so few dads, even today, are invested in their children's schooling and development. It's still a mom's work; many dads just "pitch in."

Is the only way we can get some men to participate in raising their children by appealing to their ego? Give them a special day, once a month, for their All-Pro Daddy time? For making this small gesture, we will stroke Daddy's ego, cook his favorite dinner and make sure his favorite clothes are clean and ready to wear, affirming that his minimal participation is a pearl of great price.

There has to be another way.

David Beard is a writer and writing instructor in Duluth.



David Beard

David Beard is associate professor of rhetoric and director of the Master of Liberal Studies program at the University of Minnesota Duluth.

dbeard@d.umn.edu

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