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Case Story

Desperate Measures: How Teacher Preparation Programs Can Engage and Retain Black Male Teacher Candidates

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Abstract

Black male teachers are less than two percent of all current teachers in the United States. However, there has been an effort to recruit and retain Black men into the teaching profession for a number of reasons. All students benefit when they have a Black male teacher. Black boys, in particular, have markedly higher test scores and improved discipline when they have a Black male teacher. Black male adults in educational settings is essential for enhancing Black boys' academic and social development. There is a need for Black male teachers in education. Even with nationwide recruitment efforts like My Brother's Keeper, the numbers of Black male teacher remain small. Additionally, Black male teachers leave the profession at a higher rate than other subgroups. This paper will examine one teacher preparation program's effort to increase retention of Black males in the teacher preparation program and the teaching profession.

There are a myriad of social implications involved with being Black and male in the American educational system. The intersection of Blackness and maleness creates a construct in education that is informed by more than race alone (Hicks Tafari, 2018). Bianco et al. (2011) explained the complexity of being Black and male in education and the impact on the teaching profession as follows:

The history and experiences of discrimination, segregation, and exclusion of many African American males in public schools helps provide context for understanding their potential resistance to enter the teaching field and, therefore, may create one more challenge for

teacher recruitment. In order to disrupt the educational inequities faced by African American males, the need for well-prepared, culturally responsive teachers, regardless of race or gender, is great; however, the need for well-prepared, culturally responsive African American male teachers is desperate. (p. 369)

Currently, only two percent of all U.S. teachers are Black males (Kena et al., 2016). This leads to the overburden or expected subsequent roles of Black male teachers. There is a need for Black male teachers, but there are few resources and even fewer opportunities exist to support them.

While an abundance of research exists on the need for Black male teachers, there remains a

void of information on how to support them. The demand for Black male teachers remains great, while the supply remains low. This demand makes a strong case for recruitment of Black males, but the lack of support for Black male teachers does little for retention. This creates an opportunity for increased recruitment and support of Black men into the teaching profession. There is a need, but there is also a desire. Black male teachers have stated a desire to teach because of their commitment to impact the lives of Black children (Goings & Bianco, 2016; Lewis, 2006; Lynn, 2006). Programs like Black Male Educators for Social Justice and Call Me Mister inspire and recruit Black men into the teaching profession. These programs have garnered successful media coverage and increased numbers. However, Black male teachers are still more likely to leave their schools at higher rate than other subgroups (Bristol, 2018). So, Black male teachers remain underrepresented in the teacher workforce (Milner, 2016).

Perception of Black Males as Teachers

Black male teachers often face the same stereotyped behavior that Black male students face at the school site. Black male teachers may enter hostile work environments and encounter colleagues who will both covertly and overtly treat them as social outcasts (Goings, 2015). Black male teachers face a cacophony of discrimination, not only because they are Black and male in America, but also because their career of choice is dominated by White middle-class women (Ferguson 2001; Howard & Reynolds 2013; Lewis & Toldson 2013). The practice of designating the Black male teacher into the box of disciplinarian and role model without the development of engaging teaching practices offers the Black male teacher with few pedagogical skills to teach children and an inability to access those needed skills.

Teacher quality matters more than curriculum and more than physical environment. Most teacher preparation programs prepare teacher candidates for teaching jobs in schools that differ greatly in terms of resources, student demographics,

climate, leadership, and teacher community (Kuriloff et al., 2019). Black teachers are significantly more likely to be placed in schools with large populations of children of color and children in poverty or schools characterized as struggling (D'amico et al., 2017). There is not a differentiated curriculum in teacher education that prepares teacher candidates for employment in different types of schools or districts. In order to adequately prepare candidates, teacher preparation programs, must deviate from traditional mono-cultural approaches to teaching that reinforces Westernized models of teaching. (Utley et al., 2014). In essence, most teacher preparation programs do little to prepare teacher candidates for the type of environment where many Black male teachers find employment. It is in these environments that the Black male teachers often act as a father figure, disciplinarian and role model. However, there is little in teacher preparation coursework that prepares them for the reality of the classroom. The reality manifests itself in an ability to gain employment, but not being sufficiently prepared to teach students (Pabon, 2014). It is unfair to expect Black male teachers to take on the responsibility of "saving" an educational system that is deeply fractured, flawed, and dysfunctional (Milner, 2016). The "saving" becomes an expectation that the Black male teacher has not been effectively prepared to be successful.

The saving mantra continues to play a role in the Black male teacher's effectiveness, but it also plays a role in their retention. Black male teachers find themselves in perpetual negotiation as they seek to reconcile their own individual lived experiences with prescribed societal expectations and limitations (Howard & Reynolds, 2013). Race plays a major role in our educational system and influences our teacher preparation programs (Green & Jor'dan, 2018). Faculty expectations can have a significant impact on the educational achievement of Black college students (Bowden, 2014). These expectations play a role in the success of the Black male teacher candidate. In order to be successful in a teacher preparation

program, some Black male teacher candidates feel that they had to culturally assimilate to the dominant groups' culture, language, behaviors and norms within the classroom (Green & Martin, 2018). There has been little research devoted to where minority teachers tend to be employed, what happens to minority teachers once they are employed, or to the role of the employing organizations in teacher staffing problems (Ingersoll et al., 2019). What does persist, however, is that the Black male teacher must master all of these other duties, but he is reviewed using the same rubrics that are applied to other teachers. Black male teachers get less support and are typecast into nonacademic roles. Many of Black male teachers speak of feeling isolated. When administrators and colleagues did engage them, they only wanted to discuss disciplinary enforcement (Griffin & Tackie, 2016). Therein, lies the discrepancy of what it expected for Black male teachers versus what is required to be successful as a Black male teacher.

A prevalent discourse among educational stakeholders has suggested that Black male teachers are the key to helping Black male students in urban schools and, in particular, develop skills to succeed by acting as role models (Brown, 2012). This is the foundation of "saving" an educational system. The belief is that the presence of Black male teachers can erase education inequities that exist in schools and school districts. This rhetoric suggests that by standing in for absentee Black fathers and acting as exemplars of Black manhood, Black male youth will adopt the resilience, grit, and determination to achieve in school (Pabon, 2016). This rhetoric has emerged without regard to persistent racial inequality in urban public schools that creates challenging conditions for teaching and learning (Pabon, 2016). The racial inequity continues with the hiring process. When Black candidates are hired, they were disproportionately placed in schools with large populations of children of color or children in poverty (D'amico et al., 2017). However, when the racial inequities persist, the Black male teacher is thought of as ineffective as a role model

and disciplinarian, and therefore, ineffective as a teacher if there is not a change in the academic achievement of the Black male youth. The Black male teacher, hired to close the opportunity gap for Black children, is thought ineffective if those opportunity gaps remain.

Black Males and Other Duties as Assigned

Currently, two percent of America's public school teachers are black men (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). In spite of this, Black male teachers perform multiple roles at the school site. Each subsequent role is in addition to their identified role as classroom teacher. However, each subsequent role often takes precedent and immediate importance over the identified role. For example, there is a higher priority placed on the Black male teacher's ability to discipline students than developing his understanding of pedagogical abilities or teaching practices (Bristol, 2018). Black male teachers often navigate the roles of father figures, disciplinarians and role models for all students, but in particular, Black boys (Brockenbrough, 2015). These subsequent roles very quickly become part of the job description for Black male teachers. They are part of the "other duties as assigned." However, these duties are not part of the teacher contract, but become a part of the Black male teacher experience.

There is no training or preparation for the subsequent roles that many Black male teachers find themselves participating at their respective school sites. While teacher preparation programs provide teacher candidates with foundational skills and pedagogy to reach the majority of school-aged children, many new teachers struggle with classroom management (Headden, 2014). Teachers often need support to implement comprehensive classroom management plans consistently (Fallon et al., 2019). Often coursework in the teacher preparation program lacks relevancy to the urban school context in which many Black male teachers are employed (Pabon, 2016). Black male teachers and teacher candidates have a great deal of extended duties when it comes to being a disciplinarian and role

model for students. However, little has been done to create curriculum or provide training to give Black male teachers the tools to be immediately successful in their subsequent roles as father figures, disciplinarians and role models or their primary role as classroom teacher. For the Black male teacher, there is the added responsibilities of mentoring and dealing with discipline for many of the students at the school site. Both new and experienced Black male teachers struggle to adopt the authoritarian disciplinary personas that others expected of them based on the perception that Black male teachers are well-suited disciplinarians for predominately Black urban schools (Brockenbrough, 2015).

Program Details

The program, CalStateTEACH, is a system-wide online multiple subject teacher preparation program that is part of the California State University system. The program has students in rural and remote parts of the state and densely populated urban areas. The program is not housed on one particular campus. Instead, there are two regional centers on two separate university campuses and a central center located in the administrative offices of the California State University system. Because much of the coursework is delivering online, the program is categorized as an alternative certification program. Minorities are represented in the teaching force to a greater extent in states with genuine alternative certification than in other states (Peterson & Nadler, 2009). The program is no exception. For the fall 2019 term, approximately 30% of enrolled students identified as minority (American Indian, Asian, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino). While the program boasts a sizable minority population, only 20 out of 893 preliminary credential students identified as Black/African American. For the fall 2019 term, there were only four Black/African American male students enrolled. In comparison, approximately 45% of all enrolled teacher candidates in the State of California for the 2017-18 academic year identified as minority. However, only 1,170

identified as Black/African American with less than 2% of that population being Black/African American male students (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2019).

The administrative staff of the program noticed low application numbers, enrollment and retention with Black male teacher candidates. Originally, the administrative staff sought to provide additional resources including mentorship to Black male teacher candidates. However, many of the faculty resisted this change and requested that all men be including in the project. As a result, the program created a "Men in Teaching" panel during the Teacher Excellence Institute, a one-day professional development opportunity for program faculty, staff and students, in the fall of 2017 to offer additional support to male candidates and better understand their experience in the program. All enrolled men were invited regardless of ethnicity. At the "Men in Teaching" panel, male faculty offered ways to fully engage in the profession including offering ways to navigate a system that is white female dominated.

Men in Teaching

Following the "Men in Teaching" panel it became evident there was an interest (and need) among candidates to continue the conversation among male teacher candidates regarding their role in the classroom. In response to the need, male faculty members created a monthly meeting of male teacher candidates where participants could ask questions, receive advice and interact with other professional male educators. The participants in the Men in Teaching group were a mix of first- and second-year teacher candidates. All the participants were either student teachers or interns. Student teachers are volunteering in the classroom to complete required clinical hours while interns are teachers of record, hired by the school district, but have not yet earned a teaching credential. The meetings provided an opportunity for the men in the program to interact with their other male colleagues and establish a support network as the candidates navigated the teaching

profession and furthered their educational endeavors. An additional purpose of the meetings was to provide a relationship between the program and male students to retain them as teacher candidates and increase the number of male teachers in the education profession. Over time, we found that the group became a monthly safe space for male candidates to discuss their challenges, exchange ideas, share best practices and learn from veteran male educators. Each meeting was, at minimum, one hour. However, the one hour time period was often exceeded when there was continued conversation on a particular topic.

In Year One (2017), approximately 10 participants met monthly online using video conferencing for an hour each month. During the initial year of the group, all participants were men. The participants changed with each meeting. However, there were several participants who participated in every meeting. In general, the group consisted of 3 white men and 5-7 men of color; 2-3 African American and 4-7 Latinx. The group discussed topics such as lesson planning, classroom management, career planning and financial management. We discovered through participant's conversations, suggestions, and surveys that in addition to the professional development and pedagogical support provided, the participants desired the mentorship and peer conversation as much, if not more, than the academic support. It became evident early on, that participants were eager to talk and wanted a forum to freely dissect their experiences as pre-service candidates. Through dialogue with the teacher candidates, a few key observations were noted. They were:

1. Discipline. Not all men are disciplinarians. Most of the men in the group complained regularly about being the go to person for discipline problems on their campuses. Many of the men, especially the first-year teachers and interns, struggled with classroom management but were routinely either given challenging students or expected to discipline students, especially the boys.

2. Money. Money was a big concern, all of the men expressed angst regarding the ability to care for themselves and their families on a teacher's salary. Many requested support identifying more advanced career paths or other opportunities in education. Several of the teacher candidates had second jobs while they were working or pursuing their careers as teachers.

3. Peer group. One of the most important aspects of the group was the camaraderie and support among the group participants. The participants in the group spoke frequently about the importance of having a space to interact with other male educators who either related to their challenges or shared the same experience.

4. Role Models. Introducing the group to other successful, veteran male educators helped eased fears about the ability to have professionally fulfilling and financially stable careers. The participants, also appreciated knowing that there was a blueprint for their success, which they could access.

Based on a survey of the participants from 2017, all of the men in the group found the group beneficial and all Year One participants indicated they would participate in the group in Year Two. While no additional students were added for Year Two, 100% of Year One participants returned to the program in Year Two.

Opportunities for Additional Support

In addition to the retention and engagement strategy we implemented in our program, we also acknowledge additional engagement strategies for recruitment and retention of Black male teacher candidates. Some of those strategies are:

- Establish a career pathway and planning guide/sheet for teachers
- Establish mentorship and support groups throughout the school district
- Encourage other male teachers to promote the school/district at university events and career fairs
- Provide professional development opportunities for candidates

- Identify opportunities for supplemental income and host a spring job fair to make candidates aware of potential summer jobs
- Partner with local businesses/universities to identify seasonal (especially summer job opportunities) for teachers
- Identify networking events for candidates to attend
- Suggest professional education organizations for candidates to join

Conclusion

More male educators are needed to further diversify the education workforce. Additionally, there is an even greater need for Black male educators in today's classroom. Lewis (2006) indicates that,

> The need for African American male teachers is clear and urgent. By representing only 2% of the national teaching force chances are that most students will never have an African American male teacher at any point in their 13 years in the public-school system. Their presence in classrooms is critically needed not only for African American young men and women but also for all students." (as cited in Bianco et al., 2011, p. 368)

In order to create classrooms that are more reflective and fully equipped with the cultural competency required to support all the students that we serve, we must first engage and retain male educators of color.

While the strategies employed in our program were developed to support all male candidates in the program, there are implications from our work that can be utilized to more effectively retain and support Black male teachers and teacher candidates. As previously mentioned, due to such small numbers in the profession and an overburden of the expected subsequent roles, Black male teachers possess a great need for support and few resources exists dedicated to their support. Based on our program, support tools such as mentorship programs, peer groups and career pathways are effective strategies

however they may require additional research to determine their effectiveness with this population. In an effort to better understand this population and increase our ability to recruit and retain them in our program, we are currently gathering data through surveys and focus groups from current and past CalStateTEACH students. The goal is to gain more insight on their experience as students and teachers to inform our practices and increase our ability to attract and retain Black men in the teaching profession. Our initial efforts to support our candidates revealed an even greater need among our students and the research we are currently conducting is our attempt to address that need.

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