



How to Meaningfully Implement and Maintain Staff Diversity

By Educator Barnes – May 30, 2020

Recently, I wrote two pieces addressing diversity in education. The first in the series, "[If You Want to Keep Educators Like Me, You Need to Think Beyond Your Diversity Quota](#)" addressed why school and district leaders have to do more than just hire diverse teachers; they have to support them. When this was shared, an interesting theme developed. Many Black female educators commented that the worse administrator they ever had was a Black female. This led

me to write, "If You Want to Keep Diverse Educators Like Me, Make Sure a Diverse Leader Does Not Push Me Out the Door." As much as I identified with the words of other Black female educators, all my non-white principals were not Black. Furthermore, the issues I faced from non-white administrators did not come only from the Black administrators. This is why I chose the word diverse and not Black. It is not enough to only share the problem; we need solutions.

I know I don't have all of the answers; however, I am also a school administrator now. As a leader, I have to be part of the solution. Here are my recommendations on how school districts should support non-white educators as diversity hiring initiatives are pushed forward.

1. **Acknowledge and plan for changes to the district because the staff is becoming more diverse.**

If a district makes a goal to increase the number of Black teachers in the district, the district should expect those Black teachers to bring ideas the district has not had. These ideas might not align with the district's current vision. If the initiative is to hire more Black teachers because most of the students are Black, the ideas of Black educators are vital and need to be implemented or these Black educators will leave a find a more supportive district.

2. **Do not ask more of diverse teachers than their white counterparts.**

I have spoken to many Latinx educators who shared frustration about administrators assuming they would translate documents or be an interpreter at meetings because they are bilingual. Some teaching positions have bilingualism as a requirement for the position. If being bilingual is not part of the job description, the teacher should not be expected to translate or interpret. The educator should be able to say no. If the bilingual educator says yes, the educator should be paid to translate documents or interpret. Let's get real; if there were no bilingual staff at the school, the district would pay an outside company to do this work.

3. **Talk to all staff about the diversity initiative and staff expectations.**

During my career, I have been the only Black librarian/media specialist in a district, the only Black English as a new language teacher in the district, and the only Black English teacher in a department. The worse part of being the only Black person is the assumption that the only reason you were hired was because of your skin color, not because you are actually qualified. It should be clear that any new hire is competent and the district is looking at culture, race,

and qualifications instead of just skin color. Furthermore, it should be clear if teachers aren't on board with the initiative or make it difficult for new hires to succeed, they will be disciplined and shown the door.

4. Make sure leaders are anti-racist and will address issues.

It is easy to hire a non-white teacher and then make that teacher's life a living hell. I have heard too many stories of how principals have made inappropriate comments or brushed off complaints. I even had a principal tell me I was "very articulate." No, the principal did not understand why that was offensive. I just filed that comment with, "you talk like a white person." Students notice how their teachers are treated. Letting racism fester, not only hurts staff, but it hurts students too.

5. Provide mentors.

When I became a school administrator this school year, I knew I had to have a safe place. I knew I did not want to treat other teachers the way I had been treated. I didn't want to become the Black female leader that terrorized other Black teachers. In my circle, I have other Black school leaders who lift me up, help me reflect on my actions, and give me suggestions on how I can do better. I cannot believe that some educators made it up the ranks for the sole purpose of hurting other educators that look like them. Mentorship is crucial. The microaggressions and racism teachers face in the classroom follow teachers as they climb into the ranks of leadership. Diverse leaders need support as they climb the leadership ranks.

6. Apologize and restore relationships.

Even with the best intentions, leaders get it wrong. If a school leader gets it wrong and hurts an educator by action or inaction, that leader should name it, address it, and identify what will change in the future. I'm not holding my breath, but there are some leaders I know who owe me an apology. On the other hand, there are school leaders who have apologized to me, so there is still hope.

This is not an all-inclusive list, but it is a start. The key is that we start somewhere. It can no longer be acceptable to not take action. Trust and believe, those educators will take action. Your diversity initiative will walk right out the door.