



## Black Teachers Should Matter Even When It Isn't Black History Month

By Educator Barnes – February 4, 2021

The protests and activism that took place last year had an impact on schools. School districts are adding diversity, equity, and inclusion roles and stating what their commitments will be to

ensure all students and staff matter. These actions are a step in the right direction, but only if it lends itself to meaningful change.

Now that Black History Month is in full swing, some districts have been highlighting Black teachers and administrators across their social media accounts. The post is typically a picture of the employee that would be found in the school yearbook, a brief background about the employee, and praise for the employee being part of the school. I wonder if the smile the employee has would still be present if the employee was asked if he or she is valued at a Black educator in the school district.

If Black employees were shocked by statements of racial equity and change their district has shared this school year, these Black History Month posts featuring Black employees are nothing more than performative. No employee wants praise on social media and then has to survive a tumultuous work environment. Keeping up appearances on social media is easy, but changing the environment for Black employees is harder. Even though it is hard, it is the necessary work.

When Black teachers raise concerns about racism, harassment, and bullying, the school district should investigate and provide support for the teachers. Many times, speaking up about difficulties in the work environment can result in the Black teacher feeling isolated and targeted with retaliation. The main retaliation tactic is to block opportunities for the Black teacher or to add comments to their evaluation such as not being a team player. Even worse, the school could dismiss concerns completely by stating it is just that teacher's perception or all in that teacher's head.

James Brown was known for singing, "Say it loud! I'm Black, and I'm proud." Will employees say they are Black and proud to be associated with their school, the school that posted them on social media during Black History Month? To create an environment where Black teachers can be proud, administrators need to ask those teachers to be candid with them about the work environment. Administrators and district leadership should enter those conversations prepared to hear statements that may make them uncomfortable. Last, they should ask for recommendations on what can be done. Let me make this clear. It is not Black educators' jobs to fix broken systems. They may not have a solution or want to offer one. Yes, being solution oriented is a buzz phrase in schools, but trying to solve the problem they can face instead of having the school be the driver can be exhausting and potentially create more issues.

If a school district says that Black History Month and Black lives are a priority, but the Black teachers are not happy or proud of the school, then that school district has a lot of work to do.