

The Paucity of K-12 African American Administrators

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## LACK OF K-12 AFRICAN AMERICAN ADMINISTRATORS

As school districts across the country are becoming increasingly diverse, there is a dearth of K-12 principals of color. Administrators of color, particularly African American administrators, face a variety of challenges before even being considered for the principalship, the most pressing being a lack of candidates (Lomotey, 1993; Young & Brooks, 2008)

### *Race Matters*

Research has shown that African Americans, because of race, have historically been marginalized in the United States. In today's society, African American principals are an important focus because they have integral roles in educational leadership and empowerment for all educational settings. A particular study (Tyson, R., 2016) identified and developed an understanding of the perceived implications that race has on the effective communication, supervision of staff, and parental interaction of African American principals in Georgia. Using a basic qualitative design, African American principals were interviewed to determine their perception of how race impacts their leadership of their school. The findings of the study determined that African American principals in Georgia overwhelmingly felt that race adversely impacts their leadership. It was also noted by some participants that in certain situations when dealing with African American staff, students, and parents race could enhance their leadership.

### *Shortage of Applicants of Color*

The pool of applicants of color to the principalship is limited. The concern is grave, particularly for the African American population. As the United States becomes more diverse, the demographics of the educators in leadership positions have failed to reflect the student population and still remain majority White (NEA, 2015).

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### *Need for African American Principals*

Most principals come from the teaching ranks and fewer African Americans are entering the teaching profession (Dantley, 2008). Negative perceptions of careers in education, inequities in testing and admission into teacher education, and the incongruence of preservice teachers' experiences with traditional teacher-education curricula are a few other barriers to certifying more African American teachers (Gordon, 2002). Once teachers of color have their credentials, they face discrimination in employment practices, culturally discontinuous school climates and taboos about raising issues of racism, lack of promotion opportunities, and failure of others to recognize their leadership skills (Azzam, 2005; Brown, 2005). The limited pool of administrators of color begins with the ostensible lack of candidates of color (Lomotey, 1993; Young & Brooks, 2008). Brown (2005) argued that interest in becoming an educational administrator begins with the attraction to the field at the K–12 level. Students must first enter their postsecondary education with the intent of becoming an educator. Tillman (2004b, 2007) explains that African American educators are the most precious resource in the struggle to educate African American children, as they were prior to desegregation of public schooling. She defined three important areas vital in creating and sustaining valued African American leaders in the pipeline: (a) recruiting, selecting, and training; (b) mentoring African Americans for the principalship; and (c) retaining African American principals.

Therefore, aspiring African American school leaders should be encouraged to participate in professional development activities, such as leadership academies, to increase their competitiveness in the job market (Brown, 2005). The lack of people of color in educational leadership programs is a mirror to, as well as a consequence of, the struggles that people of color have endured in education over the years. Even after the decision of *Brown v. Board of*

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Education (1954, 1955) was declared, educational equality and equity were not immediately adopted traits of the public education system. Despite this decision and concerted attempts to create equality, the achievement gap between racial and ethnic groups and their White counterparts is still present today (Saddler, 2015). These practices are of the utmost importance in relation to increasing the pool of African American candidates (Jackson, 2012).

### *Barriers to School Leadership*

Candidates who aspire to the position are burdened by student loans or other types of debt, as well as family obligations, that present possible roadblocks to their aspirations. However, there are programs that have taken proactive measures to support able and willing participants (Sanchez et al., 2008).

There are many reasons for educators of color are not achieving or attaining the principal position; however, the following have been listed throughout the literature, according to Sanchez et al. (2008):

- (a) lower career aspirations result if minorities perceive that the values of the educational system are ignoring or conflicting with their community;
- (b) high percentages of minorities major in education, but their aspirations are not encouraged by the educational environment;
- (c) minorities need more support for aspirations but often receive less;
- (d) minorities aspiring for the principalship face conscious or unconscious resistance from the educational system;
- (e) few role models and mentors exist;
- (f) negative stereotypes continue; and
- (g) a lack of research on minority principals and their career aspirations.

Sanchez et al. wrote, “A review of the current status of public education suggests that barriers common in the past decades are still present. A critical review of these obstacles can provide

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focal points needed to increase minority leaders in education”. In an evaluation of the impact of Investing in Diversity (Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010), participants were asked to identify what obstacles they perceived were most prevalent in hindering their career success, and all referred to racism as the one main obstacle they faced. The extent and frequency in which they encountered racism might have varied but was still the primary barrier.

### *Women*

Although current employment statistics paint a promising picture for women in general, they fail to address both the multitude of challenges women face in their attempt to secure leadership positions or in their ability to gain and maintain support from their female colleagues. African American women experience the principalship differently from their colleagues. Research on African American women in the principalship supports the notion that they encounter a different set of struggles. Many of the experiences of African American women principals involve racism and/or sexism. African American women principals have an awareness of negative perceptions about them due to their race and gender and that they rely on a strong sense of identity to combat the discrimination they experience. Brown (2016) studied the emotional effect of experiencing racism and sexism and found that it stimulated a sense of strength in the research participants and coupled with encouragement that was both internal and external they were able to push through and do the job at hand. The second theme posits that African American women principals have characteristics that drive them to be successful. Having a strong assurance of their ability coupled with personality traits that correlate to effective leadership, African American women are prepared for the role of principal. The driving force behind them is a desire for their students to be successful. Inspired to set a positive example for students, African American women principals do not allow discrimination of any

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form to prohibit their success. (Brown, C., 2016). There is, however, a dark side. Black women, in particular, tend to be torn between their fabled image to others in the organization and their official duties and responsibilities at work. This can result in implications of professional sabotage coming from members of the same minority group. In this specific case, Black female educational leaders. (Martin-Ogburn, 2012).

There is limited research surrounding the lived experiences of African American female principals with little emphasis on middle- and late-career females. (Ingram, 2016) explored factors associated with the persistence of middle- and late-career African American female principals. In addition to the central focus, this study also sought to determine what roles race and gender, identity shifts, psychological contracts and role definition played in the persistence of these principals. Once interview and document data were collected, several themes emerged: (a) Personal characteristics, (b) Servant leadership, and (c) Spiritual Guidance.

### *Men*

Most principals come from the teaching ranks and fewer African Americans are entering the teaching profession (Dantley, 2008). According to the NCES (as cited in Echols, 2009), fewer than 2% of the nation's nearly 3 million public school teachers are African American males.

African American male teachers are the nation's most academically credentialed and professionally experienced teachers. Though less than 2 percent of the nation's teachers are African American males, these teachers are more likely than their White male and female peers to hold a master's or doctorate degree. Additionally, African American male teachers who become principals assume the position with more years of experience as a PK-12 classroom teacher than their White peers. And, those who leave the principalship to become

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superintendents have more years of experience as a PK-12 principal than similarly situated White peers. African American males are underrepresented in critical school district policy and leadership posts such as the principalship and superintendency while lesser credentialed and experienced White males hold these posts in percentages that exceed their representation in the teacher workforce. (Fenwick, L., & Akua, C., 2013).

Many large urban school districts contend with many of the same challenges. Such districts are required to address (a) the needs of disproportionately more students from low-income families, (b) low student achievement, (c) high staff mobility rates, (d) fewer resources, and (e) significantly more accountability. Despite those challenges, a large percentage of the African American male principals in this study elected to remain in this large suburban/urban school district. Therefore, studying the reason why they remain is important. According to Lortie (2009), there are significant benefits to researching the role of the principal given that the principal's position is central to the functioning of a school. Another study (Cramer, T., 2016), was conducted to understand why African-American male principals with five or more years of experience and who earn effective or highly effective evaluations have elected to remain in the role of principal in their school districts. Given the lack of males of color in the field of education, it is important to understanding the motivating factors causing these principals to stay. This knowledge is helpful in possibly replicating the results elsewhere.

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