Chapter 9

Preservice Teacher Voices on Increasing the Numbers and Retention of Black Teachers to Improve Student Educational Opportunity in Public Schools

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ABSTRACT

Research has shown that Black teachers are instrumental in improved Black student achievement and assist immensely in mitigating the rising exclusionary tendencies Black students find themselves in in public schools. Yet, the percentage of Black teachers in public schools is either not improving or remains stagnant at about 7%. The purpose of this study therefore was to find out why we have a very low percentage of Black teachers in public K-12 school environments and what can be done to increase the percentage of Black teachers in public K-12 environments. Forty-six pre-service teachers completed questions related to the three areas. The study found that issues of teacher salaries, Black students not completing college, and poor working conditions were some of the reasons for the low percentage of Black teachers in public education. As policy makers explore strategies to bringing more minority individuals into teaching, this research offers some insights on what needs to be done to increase the numbers.

INTRODUCTION

All students benefit from being taught by a highly motivated and effective teacher. Evans and Leonard (2013) pointed out that before Brown vs Board of Education, about 50% of all Black professionals in the United States were teachers. After 1954 Brown vs Board of Education the percentage has been decreasing to the current 7 percent (p. 1).

Research shows there is a strong relationship between teacher quality and student achievement (Kraft, 2019; Whitehurst, 2002). Blazar and Kraft (2017) pointed out that "quality teachers are thought and expected not only to raise test scores but also to provide emotionally supportive environments that contribute to students' social and emotional development, manage classroom behaviors, deliver accurate content, and support critical thinking" (p. 146). Their research concluded that "teachers can and do help develop attitudes and behaviors among their students that are important for success in life" (p.146). Heck (2009) indicated that teachers are central to the school's aim of improving student success and there are levels of differences in each teacher's ability to improve student achievement. Ladd (2013) in summarizing some of the research pointed out that:

1.   Experienced teachers are on average more effective in raising student achievement than their less experienced counterparts.
2.   Teachers do better as they gain experience.
3.   Experienced teachers also strengthen education in other ways beyond improving test scores. Our research in progress suggests that, as North Carolina middle school teachers gain experience, they become increasingly adept at doing other important things – like reducing student absences and encouraging students to read for recreational purposes outside of the classroom.

Students are regularly taught by a variety of teachers- by qualification, experience, quality of instruction, dispositions, empathy level, race, and gender etc. As pointed out by Adnot, Dee, Katz, and Wyckoff (2016), "Having an effective teacher can dramatically alter students' educational and economic outcomes. Yet, we know there are…increasing evidence that in some urban areas less effective teachers are often concentrated in lower-performing schools serving disadvantaged students" (p. 1).

The composition by race of students in public schools is dramatically shifting from predominantly white to more Hispanic and Black. Table 1 shows the Racial/Ethnic enrolment in public schools for the 2009 and 2019 school years.

Table 1. Racial/ethnic enrolment in public schools 2009 and 2019

Race/Ethnic Group	2009	2019
White	54	47
Black	17	15
Hispanic	22	27
Asian	5	5

Source: National Center for Education Statistics (2021b). Racial/Ethnic Enrolment in Public Schools. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cge Retrieved October 9, 2021.

Table 1 showed that the percent of White student population is decreasing while student population for Hispanics is increasing. In parallel to the student population of Whites decreasing and the percentage of Hispanic students increasing, a 2021 study based on a comparison of 1999 and 2017 characteristics of public school teachers showed that the percentage of teachers by race were as follows- White- 84 percent in 1999 and 79 percent in 2017, Black- 7 percent in 1999 and 6 percent in 2017, and Hispanic 5 percent in 1999 and 9 percent in 2017-2018. Thus, the percentage of minority teachers was less than

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