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**LACK OF AFRICAN AMERICAN TEACHERS IN SCHOOLS AND WHAT CAN
BE DONE TO ENCOURAGE AND RETAIN THOSE
TEACHERS**

**A MASTER'S THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF BETHEL UNIVERSITY**

**BY
MARC N. BROWN**

**IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS**

MAY, 2019

**LACK OF AFRICAN AMERICAN TEACHERS IN SCHOOLS AND WHAT CAN
BE DONE TO ENCOURAGE AND RETAIN THOSE
TEACHERS**

MARC N. BROWN

MAY 2019

APPROVED

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Abstract

This researcher has been a teacher in special education for almost four years and this is the first year working as a Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) teacher. However, most of the work has been as an Emotional Behavioral Disability (EBD) teacher. Becoming a special education teacher is an important step in supporting young African American students in the United States. African American boys are over represented in this country for special education services. As an African American male it holds great impact and influence for students to see someone that looks themselves. Further this researcher mainly has worked in setting III programs and have dealt with some highly behavioral students. The biggest and most alarming factor is the students on my caseloads were predominantly African American boys no matter what the school or district. This researcher has also worked in inner city schools but mostly suburban schools and the same result happened with African American students receiving services at the schools even if the school was predominantly European American students.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Personal Story

My path to becoming a special education teacher started with my experiences when I was in junior high and high school receiving special education services myself. I would have been able to graduate high school if I had an IEP, but I fell through the cracks some how and an IEP was never written for me and I received services from kindergarten thru high school and struggled the most in high school. These experiences helped shift me into becoming a special education teacher so that I can help make sure this problem does not happen to another student receiving services in special education. But as my struggle with academics and learning continued I found a love that not only changed my life, it made me want to go to college. I fell in love with track and field my 8th grade year and although I was never eligible because of my grades, I was still able to play sports because of my special education services. As a result I wasn't able to graduate high school.

After high school and as years progressed I stopped running track and worked two or three jobs to help my mother financially, but eventually my mom and I were evicted from our residence and I went to live with friends, family, and ended up living with my coach from high school. As life went on I worked and then decided to complete my General Education Diploma (GED). One important thing happened at this point, I decided to attend college. I enrolled in a junior college, North Dakota State College of Science and then transferred to Minnesota State University Moorhead, in Moorhead, MN, and graduated in December of 2004. It took me about five years to complete my Bachelor's Degree. After graduating my first job I

worked for Meritcare now none as Sanford and I worked as an Orthotic technician for a few months and was fired because I was not good at building the orthotics. After this I worked odd jobs including at a residential treatment program for people who had significant emotional/behavior needs. I also worked at a Native American Boarding School in Wahpeton, North Dakota as a Child Protection Officer (CPO). As my life went on I wanted to go to grad school so I did and worked as a graduate assistant in the special education department at Minot State University and chose Special Education as my field of study. Since that time I've attended St. Thomas Graduate School program in Special Education and now Bethel University. The first four and half years I worked at a paraprofessional with high school students before I started teaching.

In summary, my life has been filled with influential experiences that has lead me to the current point in my life and has helped me to identify my work. It has also motivated me to research why there are so few African American teachers in schools. I have had only about one of African American teacher in graduate school and that was at Bethel University, none at St. Thomas, or NDSCS, and one at Highland Park Senior High, and one at Highland Junior High School. In elementary I was blessed with two African American teachers for my 4th and 6th grade classes at Galtier Magnet School in St. Paul, Minnesota.

History of Special Education

According to the author (Scanlon) in The National Disability Authority publication (2012), wrote in the publication concerning the history of how special education came to be. In

this publication Scanlon referenced the Brown vs. Board of Education case in Topeka, Kansas. The case was about a young third grade girl named Linda Brown who was segregated from her peers whom were white. From this case it was determined that Linda Brown had the right not to be segregated from her peers in schools.

Scanlon further pointed out that this case was a significant hallmark in the special education law and policies of today in this country. Scanlon said, “After a multi-year struggle to prepare a bill, the congress finally agreed upon an immense education ACT known as the “Education For All Handicapped Children Act” (EHA), that would be passed into law by President Ford in 1975” (p.4). In 1990, the law was revised to meet the needs of millions of students with disabilities. The revision had some basic tenants:

Non-discriminatory identification and evaluation

Zero reject (meaning none can be denied special education due to hardship in providing that education or the pedagogic difficulty of the task)

Free and Appropriate Public Education

The least Restrictive Environment as the place where the special education is provided (meaning the physical location feasibly closest to the classroom in which the child might be placed were there no disability, including that very classroom to the extent possible).

Due process rights for parents, including right to parental notification, consent, and confidentiality, and

Parent and Student participation in the individualized special education planning process (p.4-5)

Dr. Umar Johnson (2013) gives a different historical narrative to how special education started in the United States of America. Dr. Johnson explained in his article that special education was the solution to angry European American parents that did not want their children going to school with African American children. This desegregation had not only southern European Americans angry but also northern European Americans as well. What gave birth to the special education program was the fact that the legislative or executive branches did not want to tell the European American parents that they will have their (white) children sitting next to the (black) children; they wanted to assure the parents that they really wouldn't be integrating the schools. So..." in the late '60s and early '70s, white schools were able to get away with "cosmetic integration" policies that forced Black children, who rode in on cheese buses, to remain together for the entire school day" (Johnson, 2013 p. 1). Now to the public it appeared to be diverse schools, but in reality as they implemented the special education programs into the school it segregated to schools because it identified African American children with having a specific learning disability. This gave way to allowing schools to separate students from the general education classroom and isolate African American students and placed them into what was called "Forced Segregation" in the public school system. Dr. Johnson gave a brief explanation to how this system is specifically targeting African American males "Yes, children with true disabilities, like blindness & autism, would have had to receive the services they needed. Nonetheless, the use and abuse of the "Specific Learning Disability" classification, disproportionately applied to Black learners, wouldn't be half the problem that it is today for

Black parents” (Johnson, 2013, p. 1). Dr. Johnson also went on to state how the Emotional Behavioral Disability (EBD) classification was geared toward African American males that were viewed as aggressive; ...” In fact, the “Emotional & Behavioral Disturbance” classification, created specifically to castigate Black boys who refused to accept White Rule, would have never been manufactured out of thin air” (Johnson, 2013, p. 1). In retrospect, this country has gone through great lengths to ensure the destruction and genocide of African American people and for the past 40 - 50 years the miseducation of African American children has grown it seems ever since special education has been put into place. It is very hard to overlook the correlation of African American males in special education being overrepresented and the number of African American males in prisons today. Special education has been revamped to support the students whom actually can benefit from the services such as students with cognitive delays and autism, but Emotional Behavioral Disability, Other Health Disability, and Specific Learning Disabilities creating a crutch for a lot of students; and in some cases enabling parents to get money from the government. Dr. Umar Johnson expresses a very important topic and the argument behind this thesis... “The most interesting fact of the so-called school desegregation process is that it only focused on the desegregation of student populations, it never address desegregation of the teaching ranks. That’s right, Black children today, as was the case in the ’60s & ’70s, are still almost exclusively taught by white educators”. (Johnson, 2013. p.1). Dr. Umar Johnson feels if black students are expected to be taught by white teachers in hostile environments then there should be at least some teachers that look like them, or the fact that if black students are taught by white students why can’t white students be taught by black teachers. A huge factor and

systematic issue is the fact that most public schools are populated by European American women and they control the majority of teachers which gives rank to senior in schools and the hierarchy in districts from the superintendent to the administrators, and down to the teachers. Once you add in factors like job security because of the protection of unions, some teachers do not worry about losing their job because of poor work performance, when they're tenured and even have the option of moving districts; these factors will continue to plague African American students and students of color.

Lack of African American Teachers

According to (Foster, 2018), who works at the University of Louisville, wrote about the lack of diversity of educators in schools. She described the history of why there is a lack of African American educators in public schools today. Because of desegregation many African American teachers lost their jobs throughout more recent decades. Foster stated, "By the late 1960s, when courts and policy makers finally noticed, upwards of 35,00 African American teachers had lost their jobs" (p.1).

Further in a publication Dr. LaRon A. Scott (2016), serves as an assistant professor and Director of the M in his writing stated, "...means that Black male children receiving special education have limited engagement with black male teachers. In light of this disparity, Black male children must navigate learning, behavioral, and social issues without culturally experienced minority role models" (p.1).

King, (1993) wrote an interesting article about the lack of African American Teachers in schools; at that time Sabrina King was a professor at the University of Chicago. One of her focuses in the article was to explain the importance of having African American teachers in faculties. She felt that it was very important for African American teacher to be in schools and be exemplary role models for African American students. King went on to explain that there is a decline of African American teachers in schools which began the first year after World War II, and has steadily dropped from that point on.

Thesis Questions

Based on this researcher's information the following thesis questions will be addressed in this project:

1. Why is there a lack of African American teachers in education?
2. What can be done to encourage and retain African American people to be teachers?

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview of the Research Process

This researcher used ERIC, CLIC, and Google search to retrieve empirical studies and articles for this thesis project. Also further information was gleaned from first hand practitioners in education. Their information will be quoted as text in the thesis in this chapter. Their names will be used in text but will not appear in the reference section.

Personal Story In Review and Reason for Thesis Topic

Based on this researcher's life experiences it has guided the topic for this thesis. Personally observing the lack of African American teachers in education has been an influence as well. As this researcher reflects on education it has been noted that there have been very few African American teachers experienced. In high school there was only one African American teacher, Dr. Grays, who taught African American History. In junior high school there was only one influential African American teacher, Ms. Simmons. In elementary school the 4th and 6th teachers at Galtier Magnet School were African American, Ms. Zachery and Mr. Carr.

In college there have been a limited number of African American professors, basically one or two. Therefore, this topic is warranted to be studied. While these were the only African American teachers the researchers has had, there were other support staff, administration, and staff members that may have been of African American descent.

Reasons for Lack of African American Teachers

Toppo and Nichols (2017), wrote an article in the USA TODAY NETWORK, with some interesting information about the lack of African American educators. They indicated that in 24 states more than 90% of the teacher were white in 2011-2012 (p.2); of those 24 states it was indicated that 17 of those states about 95% or more were white. It was also indicated that non-white student population increased in most of those states (p.2).

In an article (2016) found in <http://littlebird.hr/2018/07/09/african-american-teachers/> some of the main reasons why there is a lack of African American teachers it was noted that they were dissatisfied with administration, accountability and testing, discipline problems and lack of influence and autonomy (p.3). Other reasons were that of work conditions, classroom intrusions, poor salary and benefits, teaching assignments and class size (p. 3).

In another article (2012) by Vera Lee, a public school teacher reviewed reasons for why there is a lack of African American and other teachers of color. The primary reasons noted in the article are as follows:

1. Only about 16.9% of teachers of color represent the total number of teachers in the United States,
2. Another key factor is that they felt they needed to be like European American teachers,
3. They faced indirect and direct forms of prejudice in the schools,
4. Isolation was felt by the African American teachers along with feeling like tokens representing their race or ethnicity.

This study by Lee (2012) was completed by surveying or interviewing a number of teachers of color in two high schools in Taft and Roosevelt High School in a large suburban area.

This study was expanded by gathering more information from other sources over an expanded length of time.

Another author who studied lack of African American teachers in schools, (King, 1993) who was a professor at the University of Chicago pointed out that the lack was due to a multitude of reasons. One of the most significant reasons was the fact numbers of African American and other teachers of color is diminishing. She seemed to stress the point of a wide variety of cultures is important for the success of schools. King eluded to the fact that there was more emphasis on other professions for people of color rather than being a teacher.

In another work by Partelow, Spong, Brown, and Johnson (2017) as written in the *Center for American Progress*, spoke to the need for more teachers of African descent. They stated: “teachers of color tend to provide more culturally relevant teaching and better understand the situations that students of color may face” (p. 4). Therefore, it seems that schools need to attract and maintain African American teachers in schools. Also the influence of African American teachers on their students is very important as measured by standardized test scores. They cited a large, comprehensive study completed in Florida covering 3 million students and 92,000 teachers. It was found that students of color demonstrated positive test scores in reading and math. They attributed these results to the fact they were taught by African American teachers. A similar study was completed in North Carolina with some special results related to students who stayed in school and did not drop out because they had had an African American teacher as elementary students.

Another critical outcome of this study was that because a number of African American males of low income families were less likely to drop out of school when they had been taught by an African American teacher.

(Bell, 2011) article noted that there is about 2% African American male teachers out of a total of 4 million in the United States which equates to 80,000.

Maintaining African American Teachers

Maintaining African American teachers is very important. (Johnson, 2001), University of Dayton, in an article about maintaining African American teachers in schools wrote about the importance of having African American Teachers in the general education classrooms, special education, and gifted and talented classroom settings. The widespread debate that has been going-on for decades is the prejudices and bias in the public school system across the country when dealing with students of other races that are not European American. The harsh reality is the fact that this country is becoming more and more diverse, but the number of teachers that are in the public schools whom educate these students, are homogenous in school demographics. As reported by Nettles and Perna, (1997) African Americans make-up 6.8% of elementary and 9.6% of secondary special education teachers in this country, and African American student account for 18.4% of students receiving services in special education. With the ever growing public school demographic in this country, the number of teachers that can and will be able to relate to the diverse body of students is scarce. Teachers that are being hired, recruited, and trained to educate students from a variety of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds are still have prevalent numbers of European American teachers; “ The literature supports that the

scarcity of African American teachers in special education limits opportunities for these individuals to know and communicate in more than one culture” (Johnson, 2001, p.2).

In an article by Moule and Higgins (2007) the authors described the importance of having African American teachers as mentors to help develop skills of European White teachers in working with African American students. They said, ...”evidence is shown that African American mentor teachers are critical in helping to produce culturally competent and successful teachers of African American children” (p.609). They completed this study through the Oregon State University and worked in a large school in that area.

Why America Needs More African American Teachers

This thesis has focused on the lack of African American teachers in schools. This section will discuss the reasons for encouraging more African American teachers to stay in teaching as a professions for the long term.

(Bell, et al, 2011) wrote about the lack of African American male teachers in schools. He indicated that there are only about 2% of the total number of the four million teachers are of African American culture/heritage. (Wilson, 2015) a New York City school teacher seemed to validate these numbers as well.

It seems that having more African American teachers in school is a definite benefit to students, staff and schools in general. Milner (2006), an adjunct Professor of Education and Human Development, expressed this thinking in as article written about the benefits of having more African American teachers in schools. Some of the beneficial reasons were that African American teachers are excellent role models, can relate well to African American students, and relate culturally.

Milner further discussed the benefit of being able to demonstrate excellent ability to educate students, and therefore, need to be recruited and retained in schools. (Foster, 2018), Professor at the University of Louisville, also wrote about this topic recently. She made some salient points about recruiting and retaining African American to become educators when she wrote:

Hiring more African American educators for faculty positions at universities – especially in colleges of education.

Creating pathways for African Americans to enter teaching – by developing programs with community colleges to recruit and prepare underrepresented teachers, establishing programs that encourage teacher aides to pursue the education required to become certified teachers, and identifying excellent public schools that could serve professional development sites for underrepresented teachers.

Modifying the curriculum and teaching tactics. Coursework should build on student and community strengths. Teacher candidates should receive training on how to draw on the resources actually available to specific sets of students’ and their local communities – a tactic that has been shown to create positive learning outcomes students.

Developing and funding programs that provide forgivable loans to teachers who work for a specified period in minority or high-poverty schools.

Ending the practices that isolate African American teachers and treat them as tokens of diversity. Teachers from underrepresented backgrounds should be encouraged with

good assignments and extra resources, not given the most difficult teaching assignments, assigned the least prestigious courses, and sent to the least-resourced classrooms and school (p. 1-2).

Survey Responses for Lack of African American Teachers

(In this section of Chapter II, this researcher has provided first hand survey results and personal interviews of special education teachers, administrators in regular and special education).

Kelly Gaston, an African American, is a special education teacher in the Transition program for students ages 18 - 21 in the Osseo Public Schools, in Osseo, Minnesota.

1) Why did you enter the area of special education and/or education as a teacher?

I got into education because it was my way to give back to my community. How I got into Special Education was the fact that a disproportionate number of young Black Males were being diagnosed with EBD (Emotional Behavior Disorder) and I know that they were in need of someone that would really cares for them as a whole and I feel that I could provide them what they were missing in their homes and classrooms.

2) Why do you think there is a limited number of African American people in special education and/or education today?

The reward from teaching is not monetary, and like everyone else in the world African Americans want to be rewarded monetarily. Also, many African American people have had negative school experiences, but at the same time the educational system was not designed for the success of people of color.

3) In your opinion, how can we attract more African American people to enter the area of special education and general education as teachers?

That is a hard question to answer because many African Americans believe that achieving real success also includes moving away from their own and assimilating themselves into the dominant culture and teaching does not provide the income to this. This would explain why most African Americans gravitate towards Administration.

4) In your opinion, how important is it to attract more African American people to become special education or general education teachers?

It is very important! Our society needs to learn to be able to see things from different perspectives. Plus all teachers bring their personal experiences into their classrooms, and children of color need to have someone that they relate to in the classrooms, but they also need someone that looks like them so they can see that it is possible.

Dr. Tyrone Brookins, an African American, is the Principal at Roseville Middle School, in the Roseville Area School District, in Roseville, Minnesota.

1) Why did you enter the area of special education and/or education as a teacher?

To save the lives of marginalized groups of students (Black and Brown).

Research shows that students with high school diplomas and college degrees live longer than students without. The research also shows a higher standard of living and quality of life.

To give back and reach out and pull others up – based on my experience my friends did not have the same opportunities that I had and I want to change that.

2) Why do you think there is a limited number of African American people in special education and/or education today?

Assuming that mean in the teacher rank – personal and generational experiences contribute to AA people not going into education and even fewer going into SPED. I also think that the stereotype of SPED plays a role into this. People feel a certain way about SPED.

3) In your opinion, how can we attract more African American people to enter the area of special education and general education as teachers?

Intentionally recruit (HBCUs) and college programs

Grow your own – connect with current high school students and expose them to education – possibly giving them practical experience through internships

4) In your opinion, how important is it to attract more African American people to become special education or general education teachers?

Critical – students need to see adults that look like them.

Fhonda Contreras is an African American, and the Director of Special Education for the Hopkins Public School District, in Hopkins, Minnesota.

1) Why did you enter the area of special education and/or education as a teacher?

I worked in Human Services for close to 10 years and decided I wanted to work more closely with children instead of adults. I began teaching general education with some children that had challenging behaviors and/or disabilities.

It came naturally for me to work with and support them, so I added my special education license to my file.

2) Why do you think there is a limited number of African American people in special education and/or education today?

I can only speak for myself not all African Americans, however there are historical and current school traumas that many black students/families face such as segregation, isolation, exclusion, over representation in special education, under-representation in IB/advanced classes, disproportionate behavioral outcomes for out-of-class referrals; dismissals and suspensions. In addition to the above, when you add low pay and the licensing requirements for teachers, it may not be that alluring of a field.

3) In your opinion, how can we attract more African American people to enter the area of special education and general education as teachers?

Create positive experiences for students K-12 that plant the seed for students to give back and teach as adults.

Change systemic inequities that I listed above in answer #2 and provide support for teachers of color. Support could include, but is not limited to a mentor teacher and also an affinity group connection so teachers of color don't feel isolated.

Make intentional recruitment and retention efforts.

4) In your opinion, how important is it to attract more African American people to become special education or general education teachers?

All students benefit from seeing adults in education and other fields that look like themselves.

Rochelle Cox, is a European American, and the Director of Special Education in the Minneapolis Public Schools, in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

1) Why did you enter the area of special education and/or education as a teacher?

I had an uncle with cerebral palsy. My grandparents were told to put him in an institution and to forget about him. Instead, they kept him at home where he led a full life, surrounded by family. As a child, I couldn't understand why he couldn't go to school and do all the things I got to. Access to education became an important mission in my life.

2) Why do you think there is a limited number of African American people in special education and/or education today?

I believe the root of this is due to the systematic racism that is both historical and current. African Americans have been disproportionately labeled as needing special education services, adding more trauma and stigma to the service. The intersection between race and special education is real and complicated. I believe we are just beginning to unravel it. That being said, we need and value teachers of color.

3) In your opinion, how can we attract more African American people to enter the area of special education and general education as teachers?

I think the more we talk about it as a social justice issue, the more people of color might want to engage in the conversation. We need to be pathways from our high schools to teacher education programs. Students need to see teachers and staff of color in their schools – this mentorship and modeling is essential. I also believe we need to redefine special education services as services, not programs or places that we put students to segregate them from their peers. We also have a residency program where we facilitate support staff who have a desire to

become a teacher, assisting them financially, accelerating their coursework and providing a longer student teaching experience.

3) In your opinion, how important is it to attract more African American people to become special education or general education teachers?

One of my top priorities.

I also interviewed Rochelle Cox in a face to face interview that I recorded. The questions that I asked her were:

Do you know what the demographics for teachers in the Minneapolis School District and for special education as well?

Ms. Cox explained that there is about 6% teachers of color across the board for each license and 5% teachers of color in special education. Ms. Cox expressed that the district has an equity diversity impact assessment that is implemented through their human resources department that looks at not only recruiting but the district has a huge retention issue for their teachers who are of color and are experiencing micro aggression, racial bias, and bullying in their school. The retention rate is really, really bad and they do exit interviews and she said she has a pile of interviews for the last six months, and she reads them and have them pull out the special ed ones and look and see what they can do better from a department standpoint and at the same time there is some ownership at the colleague level. There's accountability for principals that their building has a cultural of understanding that teachers of color are important as well in front of the students, and at the district level she expressed how she has accountability of setting a culture in the special education department; that is welcoming to teachers of color and they feel and know we appreciate them and make sure they are successful in the district. A couple new

things they've done in the district is create a new program call soup with special education which targets the new teachers that are not yet tenured (their first three years) and they are invited to meet with the SPED department and district SPED team and allow them to ask questions and give feedback or if they have suggestions, and if they want to talk to somebody. Just a way to make connects whether it's with Ms. Cox or another team member and so forth to make that connect. Another thing they have done is created a residency program for the special education assistants (SEA) where they provide them with grants so they can go to school in an accelerated way, have a student teacher experience all year as well as get paid as if they were still in their position.

Do you know the student demographics for students receiving services in special education for the Minneapolis School District?

Demographics for Minneapolis Public Schools enrollment is as followed: African American - 12,847 (37.3%), European American - 12, 391 (36%), Hispanic American - 5,954 (17.3%), Asian American - 2,000 (5.8%), Native American - 1,194 (3.5%), and a total of 34,444 students in the MPS district.

What are your plans for minimizing the over-representation of African American males receiving special education services and also your views on the disproportionality in Minnesota?

Ms. Cox, explained the districts relative risk ratios and what relative risk ratios are how Minnesota looks at our African American students who are over identified and labeled as EBD. Back in 2013, if you were a Black student you were 4.5% more likely to

be identified as EBD then a White student, and now the district is down to 3.07%, and they are making some progress. When she first started the position as Director of Special Education about five years ago, Ms. Cox received a letter three weeks after she started that talked about how the MPS was disproportionate and what was she going to do about it, the state department was asking because they could get fined for being disproportionate. She said she could remember sitting wide awake at night thinking, first of all why did I ever take this job, I can't do it, but then second of all how am I as a White woman gonna take this national issue and try to solve something. So what she did was asked her student account manager to print out every student evaluation report on every African American student that was labeled as EBD last year and she thought that there would be 10-15 reports; there were 80 reports. So she sat down and read every one of those 80 reports because she needed to know what the stories were and she could already see the themes. But Ms. Cox needed her staff to see the themes and she needed families to teach them, so she set up a task force with staff and families and she invited families in and told everyone we're going to look through these reports and we're going to figure out what's the issue, why are they over identifying kids. They went through one report (The reports were redacted) and families would say why would you write this and the families started going after the staff and the staff got super defensive and respond with "well that's the way we have to do that", so Ms. Cox said she had to time out, and took her staff in the other room and told them that you're going to have to lose the defensiveness, you need to really sit and listen. After that the families and staff had such amazing conversations and ended up going through about 20 reports between community

members, staff, and families and from that, they developed, and the staff were more critical about the reports by the end than the families were and it was interesting to see the roles change. From that they developed some themes and those themes turned into big trainings called Stand Up and Speak Out and look at why are we over identifying students and what leads to that, and what they found is that the student has a big behavioral event and suddenly in the records it would show how the parents would request an evaluation. As the Director of Special Education she felt that was very peculiar, so they did a lot of work and a lot of training with families about what an EBD evaluation really is and what that label means and the fact that they do over identify as a school district and she also did massive training with her staff to say and let families know that they see the problem and it's not gonna fly anymore. So they identified that a student will have a major event or the student will have issues with this teacher but doesn't have a behavior with another teacher in their class, so Ms. Cox stated that she doesn't believe that's a disability (I totally agree) that's someone who doesn't know how to teach African American males. So they've done a lot of trainings in the district for staff and Ms. Cox joked about how she has teacher friends in the district and so the word on the street is "Rochelle says we can't make any kids who are Black special education" and Ms. Cox laughed and said that could be bit far but she's glad that there's some message getting out now. Ms. Cox expressed how she feels they're clear now, and they can talk the talk and beginning to walk the walk, and how their numbers are showing some good progress and she doesn't think they're there yet and have a lot of concerns about it and many of the concerns are about what really happening in general education,

because by the time it gets to us she feels the train is going so far down the road; and other thing she's thought about, but they haven't done it is do they have separate evaluation teams. Because it's really hard if you and I are in the same school and you're the special ed teacher and they're like *I can't wait until you get so and so out of my classroom, I can't wait until so and so is in special ed*, you're in the lunchroom having these types of conversations and having that kind of pressure on the special education staff to make students eligible that she thinks it's real and Ms. Cox worries about that. Ms. Cox has seen some school districts who were part of a thing called the Urban Collaborative (Ms. Cox suggested I look that up) and you get to sit down with larger urban districts, and she couldn't remember what school district it was, but before any student was labeled EBD they would have to go before a committee that would tear apart the evaluation to see if it was equitable. Ms. Cox thinks it gets down to A- what's happened before the evaluation, what is happening in general education, what are the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) pieces in play, and really the evaluation process. Ms. Cox tries to assume the best of people (that's kinda of one of her montras) so she feels that for many general education teachers don't know what to do, so they see special education as the place that's going to help kids, and she genuinely believes that's what they believe. So we have to help them strengthen their tool box to be able to deal with challenging behaviors and those types of pieces and Ms. Cox believes when they do the interventions, people are trying to catapult through the interventions to get too special ed right, like if I can jump through all these hoops. And in the child study teams Ms. Cox was disappointed that all these interventions didn't work rather than elated that we're

moving faster towards special ed, so she talks a lot to principals to look at the mood of your team and talk about the expectations because that would talk a lot about your special education population and how many evals you're going to have.

Why is there a lack of African American teachers in Minneapolis and the State of Minnesota?

Ms. Cox thinks that schools are a really interesting beings, she feels that they're one of the few institutions that have evolved and so when you think about a school, you can go to one of our schools and it probably looks the same as a school that she went to and that her dad went too. So she feels that there is this historical piece where you don't have much diversity in the schools especially in Minnesota, that continues to be perpetuated over time and she believes in Minneapolis, they have identified that there is racism in their schools, they have bias in their schools, they have micro aggressions happening in their schools and that doesn't sound like a safe or fun place I'd like to work if I were a teacher of color. So that's an issue, so she thinks reputations happen that way, and she thinks there's a lot of White women that want to save the world, so there's the savior complex that happens so they go into teaching. So there's a lot of people who are drawn to urban districts who are like, I'm going to save everybody and Ms. Cox thinks that's the piece that they need to help people with and their boundaries and that's really back because they have to think about why they're becoming a teacher and the roles you want to play in a school district. Ms. Cox thinks the teaching profession is still evolving, she doesn't know if it's a place where people go and if you do not have a love or passion for kids, but it's not a career where you go and say " I'm gonna become a teacher because

I'm gonna make a boat load of money and it's going to be amazing. Ms. Cox thinks the career field in teaching needs to probably go through a big huge evolution, so she doesn't know if teachers of color get everything they need from it and there's a downside to it and once they get here, she thinks the system is really hard to get into. So when you look at the continuum of our teachers, the ones that have seniority and have been here for 25 years, you know they've been in the system, they're white women, they own the system, they get to teach in the schools they want too because seniority lets them do that, the unions are predominantly White in Minneapolis, and all those pieces play an affect. So when you're a new teacher of color, they do not have as much choice of the schools they go to or the choice of what school they want to go to, and you can go well everyone has the choice to interview and select, not really true there's a lot of white privilege that happens in our interview and select process because they have to take the four most teachers with the most seniority so the white women get in right. So you have all those little pieces that you like have to really take the time and Ms. Cox said she's still crawling equity journey but when she stops and makes herself think about it, there are so many pieces that are discriminatory in our system that we just have to fix and know. So for the staff at the Davis center, they're going through a whole IDI and equity training for leadership so after day one the other director and Ms. Cox looked at each other and said we need to figure out how to do this for our staff, so the whole district office and the department in special education are going to go through it. Because we're not gonna change the system if we're not brave enough to call it out and aren't able to see it, because I don't know what I don't know isn't an excuse.

What are you doing to increase the number of African American teachers?

Ms. Cox believes the residency program is one of their big levers and they're looking at recruiting and an intern that is going pursuing her director's license in special education is recruiting for the district at Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's) and Ms. Cox stated that students in the district are going on college trips to HBCU's and so DECA is looking to see which colleges have teaching programs so that the district can offer to chaperone and go down and do some recruiting while their there. Ms. Cox stated they need to do some more recruiting because they can't just say we have a position opened and I hope they all come right, so they have to do some intentional recruiting and set up the residency programs and they have to look at once they start how do we support the teachers, so that they come in and they want to stay. Because I can recruit all I want but if they're not gonna stay, I'm just causing churn in the district. So we do a new teacher orientation but we're actually looking into developing a program in the summer to bring our new special education teachers in for a week, kind of a week bootcamp and pay them extra come and figure out our IEP system and a chance to look at their caseload and do some things that give you time to get ready. Because the more we can prepare them, and Ms. Cox isn't sure if you can ever prepare someone for their first year of teaching, but if we can like make it the much easier for them. Ms. Cox believes it's building networks and that they see staff of color in the department is really important too Ms. Cox, because there has been African American staff members who aren't paraprofessionals go into a school and people assume they are paraprofessional and not a teacher, cultural liaison, or part of an administrative team. It's also really important that

African Americans and people of color are recruited for administrative positions as well, so that there's more diversity in the department because we don't need another white women leading the department. Ms. Cox realizes her limitations of doing her job effectively.

Do you feel African American teachers make a difference with students that look like them in the school they work in?

Yes, yes, yes, absolutely. I don't think you have to be African American to be a good teacher and to reach all students, and I think they really make a difference and they can help us and teach us a lot and we're just all better together when we're all proportionate.

In summary this chapter has outlined the importance of having African American Teachers represented in the public schools. Further in this chapter, this writer has provided an overview of the research process and shared a personal story about the reasons for writing this thesis project. Chapter II has discussed and reviewed literature for some of the reasons there is a lack of African American Teachers and maintaining African American Teachers. In addition, this chapter has discussed why America needs more African American Teachers. The chapter was concluded with educators who were surveyed concerning the continuing lack of African American Teachers.

Summary of Literature

In this thesis I have attempted to discuss the need for more African American people to be involved as teachers and educators. The lack of representation in school is staggering from my own experiences as a student and now as a special education teacher. Statistically there are a very limited number of the teaching workforce represented by African American people.

I have also discussed the many benefits of having African Americans as teachers in schools. Namely, they provide a way to relate to African American students and others well. They are able to connect culturally and provide teaching strategies to help African American students be more successful in schools.

Limitations of Research

While there is much information about the lack of African American teachers in schools, there needs to be more researched concerning the recruitment and retention of African American people as teachers. More work or programmatic thinking such as written by Foster, 2018 suggested from the recruiting of African American people in colleges/universities, training opportunities, and ideas in helping to retain African American teachers in their careers.

Implications for Future Research

It seems that more research needs to be around the training opportunities for African American people by colleges and universities. In addition, offering more incentives to work in

schools and be valued as important contributing educators. Researching and utilizing mentoring programs for students in university education programs, seems critical to success of retention of African American people.

Professional Application

I had wanted to become a special education teacher during my junior year in college. One direct reason for this interest is because of my own learning challenges through the years. In addition, I have experienced struggles in being an effective teacher which has motivated me to develop more effective teaching strategies and exposing myself to as much training such as attending Graduate School and other staff development opportunities.

Therefore, continuing to hone my teaching skills, since as an African American teacher, I am under a microscope so to speak as I work with students. I need to be very productive in helping students succeed academically. I look at myself as a very important influence to encourage others to become teachers of the African American culture. This includes students, staff and others in my school and community.

Conclusions

Through this thesis I have learned about the need for more African Americans to become teachers in schools. I have learned that African American culture is not very well represented in schools as teachers. Starting with universities and colleges, teacher training programs need to be developed to recruit students to become trained as teachers, be placed in school to help teach and relate African American culture to students. Further, additional opportunities to help assimilate

African American teachers in schools and help develop and recognize their skills as teachers. They are to be valued.

Finally, it is my hope that I, as a special education teacher, can be a positive influence to my students and others I work with as an African American individual.

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