

Where are the Male African-American Teachers?

Robert Rader
Executive Director, CABE

In preparing Connecticut students for the 21st Century, *all* districts have an interest in ensuring cultural competence and appropriate sensitivity for the increased diversity that they will face. Demographic change will affect all districts no matter their current racial, ethnic or religious mix, so all Boards and Superintendents should be considering how to prepare their students for the world they will soon enter.

Diversity, of course, affects student achievement. Research has long told us of the difficulties many African-American students have in school. For example, in 2014, the overall percent of high school seniors who met the career and college readiness standard, according to the College Board, was 44.7 percent. The Black or African American percentage was 13.4%.

Overall, the Connecticut four-year graduation rate in 2014 was 87 percent. The Black/African American rate was 78.6%.

Yes, we’ve made some progress, but not even close to enough.

Among the many reasons reported for the poor showings by Black/African American students is the lack of suitable role models for Black students. Black male role models are particularly lacking in our schools.

How do we help male black students, in particular, to succeed in school and help set them up for a lifetime of success?

Education Week recently published an article entitled, *Black, Male Teachers: A Dwindling Demographic*. The author reports that nationally, “black males represent roughly two percent of all public school teachers.” Black men, the article continues,

“are the most underrepresented demographic in the teaching ranks. And surveys and anecdotal information show that teachers of color can feel



the sting of bias in schools as easily as minority students in mostly white educational environments.”

A 2015 report discussed in the article says that “nonwhite teachers are being hired at a higher proportional rate than other teachers, but they’re also leaving the profession at a higher rate.”

An article from last September in *Education Daily* quoted *Ivory Toldson*, Associate Professor at Howard University and Deputy Director of the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities, as saying that his research showed that black men represent 5.5% of the overall U.S. adult population and that only 16% of black men complete a bachelor’s degree so the numbers of black males to draw from starts out small. Even if black males would like to teach they are often unable to do so because they cannot sustain funding for education or certification examinations or they don’t pass the Praxis Exam.

He went on to say, however, once out of college and in the k-12 workforce, “Teaching is actually a very upward mobile profession for black men.” According to the article, his research also showed that teaching is the top occupation among black men with a bachelor’s degree.

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While not only concerned with black male teachers, action is being taken to create more diversity in our teaching ranks.

Connecticut Minority Teacher Recruitment Activities

Last fall, the Federal Department of Education approved SDE's Access to Excellent Educators Plan, which, among other things, encourages the recruiting of people of color to work in our schools.

I asked SDE Bureau Chief for Leadership Development **Ann McKernan** about activities that are being done to support minority recruitment. She stated that ten districts had applied for planning grants of up to \$25,000 "to assist in developing, coordinating and strengthening strategies to increase the racial, ethnic and linguistic diversity of their local educator workforce".

The following eight districts were awarded grants: **Area Cooperative Educational Services (ACES)**, a regional partnership including ACES, **Hamden, Meriden, New Haven and Norwalk**, **Bridgeport**, the **Capitol Region Education Council (CREC)**, **Danbury, Hartford, New London, Waterbury and Windham**. The money is being used to, among other things, work with various groups on these issues, such as the NAACP; provide financial assistance to minority candidates for teaching positions; and, encouraging middle and high school students to join the profession.

"Diversity in our teaching force is important so that students have educational experiences with people from different racial and cultural backgrounds who bring multiple perspectives to the classroom," Education Commissioner **Dianna R. Wentzell** said. "We at the State Department of Education are committed to supporting districts in their efforts to recruit and retain more minority teachers."

In addition to the action being taken by SDE, the Legislature has established a task force to "study and develop strategies to increase and improve the recruitment, preparation and retention of minority teachers... in public schools in the state. Such study shall include, but need not be limited to, an examination of current state-wide and school district demographics and a review of best practices."

There is a bill currently before the Legislature that sets up a teacher pathways pilot program for high school students, to "encourage and recruit minority students to pursue a career in education."

MTR Planning Grant Awardees

Area Cooperative Educational Services (ACES)

(regional partnership with ACES schools, Hamden, Meriden, New Haven and Norwalk)

Creates pathways for non-certified staff, including para-professionals, to become a certified teacher and expands the Pathways to Teaching program focused on middle and high school students.

Bridgeport

Creates pathways for non-certified staff, with a focus on existing staff who hold PA and BS degrees, including para-professionals.

Capitol Region Education Council (CREC)

Develops a talent pool of interested students to work in partnership with Central Connecticut State University towards entry into an educator preparation program at the Medical professional and Teacher preparation Academy magnet school.

Danbury

Expands the Pathways to Teaching program with a focus on high school students working in partnership with Western Connecticut State University.

Hartford

Creates pathways for non-certified staff, with a focus on existing staff who hold BA and BS degrees, including para-professionals and kindergarten aides.

New London

Attracts middle and high school students to the profession, provides scholarships to individuals who are seeking to enter an education preparation program, and facilitates dialogue among district leaders around race and education.

Waterbury

Expands student exposure to education as a profession by developing courses, clubs and community partnerships necessary for students to pursue education as a career. Augments current dual credit offerings from institutions of higher education.

Windham

Expands Pathways to Teaching through a partnership with LEARN MTR and Eastern Connecticut State University Education Club.

East Hartford Takes Action

For information on how an individual district is tackling this issue, I spoke to Superintendent **Nathan Quesnel (East Hartford)**. Here are some of the initiatives going forward in that district:

- Conducting bi-monthly Minority Teacher Task Force meetings.
 - Facilitating the development of a mission statement and diversity action plan for the District.
- Attending the Historically Black Colleges and Universities college fair.
- Coordinating a plan for offering professional development to staff on cultural competency and awareness.
- Working with the Executive Director of Teacher Education Programs at UConn to develop a partnership on Minority Teacher Recruitment (MTR) efforts.
 - Collaborating with EHHS Future Teachers Club to visit UConn and meet with students of color in the Neag School of Education to receive a tour of the campus, meet with admissions officers, attend a panel discussion, etc.
 - Establishing a mentorship program for EHPS teachers of color to mentor UConn students of color in the teacher education preparation program.
- Actively facilitating targeted recruiting of students of color in UConn student cohort.

CABE Board Is Concerned

The CABE Board of Directors has requested that the Association examine diversity issues in public education. A committee, chaired by **Donald Harris** (Chair, **Bloomfield** and CABE Vice President for Government Relations), to focus on this has just started meeting. Its charge is to:

- A. Work to ensure that there is diversity (in particular, people of color) and sensitivity to diversity in all of CABE's work.
- B. Encourage boards of education, school and district leaders, as well as State Government to continue to consider the importance of diversity and multiculturalism in public education.

While we expect the committee to provide recommendations that districts may consider as it moves forward, certainly Boards and Superintendents should

begin to think about how they can best ensure that leadership, the staff and even the Board are sensitive to the needs of all students.

As the work of the committee goes forward, we will keep you informed. Should your district have plans, such as those of **East Hartford**, we encourage you to send a synopsis to us.

References: [The Condition of Education in Connecticut : 2013-2014](#), Connecticut State Department of Education; [Education Week](#), February 17, 2016; [Education Daily](#), September 29, 2014. For more information on the plans districts adopted for the grants, see to <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2762&Q=335756>.

Diversity in Corporate Leadership

Certainly a lack of African-Americans in leadership roles is not unique to education. For example, *Fortune Magazine's* February issue had an article entitled, "Leading While Black". It stated, "For much of corporate America, racial diversity continues to be at best a challenge – and at worst a flat out fiction – particularly in the executive ranks..."

There have been only 15 black CEOs in the history of the Fortune 500, of whom five are currently in that role. (**Ursula Burns**, CEO of [Connecticut based] Xerox is the only woman...) In addition, black men and women account for a mere 4.7% of executive team members in the top 100 U.S. companies by revenue... Even at smaller companies, African-Americans hold an estimated 6.7% of the nation's 16.2 million 'management' jobs."

The article goes on to say that many black leaders in corporate America speak "of having to constantly calibrate their public miens: striving to appear focused at the office, but not too aggressive; hungry but not threatening; well dressed but not showy; talented but not too damn talented." This constant balancing for these leaders sound much like those experienced by women as they try to break the glass ceiling.

So, how do companies deal with the lack of blacks in the upper echelons? Here are "Three Diversity Strategies That Work":

- Develop talent through long-term mentorship – sponsors can help employees navigate corporate culture.
- "Get people talking. 'Candid bias-training workshops give employees a common language to identify hidden beliefs without judgment.'
- Make inclusion the CEO's job. The company will follow the boss's lead – and that will make developing a truly diverse workforce everybody's goal".

