RESEARCH BRIEF

Supporting the Retention of Black Teachers

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Introduction

Research has shown that when Black students are taught by Black teachers, they receive positive outcomes that range from cultural affirmation to increased academic achievement (Cherng & Halpin, 2016; Dee, 2004; Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2015; Yarnell & Bohrnstedt, 2018). Accordingly, it is critical that Black teachers remain in the profession in order to develop their skills and foster consistent high achievement among their Black students. Thus, the aim of this brief is to recommend improvements to teacher training and retention in order to ultimately improve the academic success of Black students. This brief will first review the literature regarding the impacts of race and ethnicity matching between students and teachers on student outcomes. Considering the trends in the literature, recommendations will then be made for policymakers and K-12 school administrators to better support and retain Black teachers.

Literature Review

Black students made up 15.7 percent of enrollment in public schools in 2012 (National Center of Education Statistics [NCES], 2016), yet Black teachers made up only 6.8 percent (NCES, 2013). This disproportionality often leads to lowered academic performance among Black students due to factors such as negative teacher perceptions and interactions (Dee, 2005; Egalite et al., 2015). Therefore, the cultural connection between racially matched teachers and students has the potential to help close the achievement gap between Black and White students (Cherng & Halpin, 2016; Egalite et al., 2015). However, the mere presence of Black educators is not enough. Beyond matching the races of teachers and students, teachers must also be effectively trained and supported to meet the academic needs of their Black students.

Racial Matching

Several studies have found positive student outcomes between race/ethnicity matching and student outcomes. In his seminal study, Dee (2005) used data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 to analyze whether teachers' evaluation of students' behavior and academic performance is influenced by whether or not the student was of the same race/ethnicity or gender as the teacher. Dee found that when teachers did not match their students' race/ethnicity, they were 36 percent more likely to view their Black and Hispanic students as disruptive, 33 percent more likely to view them as inattentive, and 22 percent more likely to report that they rarely complete their homework. With these results, Dee (2005) concluded that it is necessary to recruit more underrepresented teachers, but only if policies are also implemented that improve the effectiveness of all teachers.

Similarly, Cherng and Halpin (2016) assessed sixth through ninth grade students' perceptions of their teachers using seven categories (7Cs): challenge, classroom management, care, confer, captivate, clarify, and consolidate. Cherng and Halpin's findings show that, across the board, students perceived Black and Latino teachers more favorably than White teachers on all 7Cs measures. Further, this study also presented evidence that the student perceptions may be shaped by factors such as their performance, teacher characteristics, teaching conditions, and teacher efficacy (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). Cultivating these concepts has also been what the national organization called the Black Teacher Project has done to support, develop, and sustain Black educators across the country (Mosely, 2018).

Teacher Retention

Mosely (2018) founded the Black Teacher Project with the vision that "all students will have access to a well-prepared, well-supported Black teaching force that reflects the diversity and excellence of Black people in this country" (p. 268). This undertaking began due to a trend Mosely found, which was that Black teachers were being hired to meet the documented need for more Black educators, but they were not being provided the necessary training and support to sustain all of their responsibilities. These missing supports, which include principal leadership, mentoring and professional development, are part of what is causing a high number of Black teachers to leave the classroom, either via migration or attrition (Kraft & Papay, 2014; Sun, 2018).

This teacher turnover, which is typically higher in schools serving low-income students of Color, has shown negative implications for student achievement, particularly among Black students (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). A study conducted by Ronfeldt et al. (2013) assessed the direct effects that teacher turnover has on student achievement. After analyzing data collected over eight academic years for fourth and fifth-grade New York City students, the researchers found that teacher turnover has a significant negative impact on student achievement in math and English. Moreover, they found that schools with large populations of Black students received particularly negative repercussions of teacher turnover.

Thus, Black students need Black teachers, and Black teachers need the necessary training and support in order to remain in the profession to make lasting, significant impacts on Black students. Therefore, several efforts need to be made by multiple stakeholders in order to ensure the success and longevity of Black teachers, and subsequent success of Black students. Recommendations for these efforts are outlined below.

Recommendations Professional Development Opportunities

Referencing Mosely's (2018) positive findings from her Black Teacher Project, it is recommended that K-12 school administrators give their Black teachers affinity "safe spaces" to (a) practice and receive feedback from other teachers, (b) sustain their holistic health and wellbeing, and (c) engage in activities surrounding a relevant book study. By adopting these types of professional development opportunities, schools will foster more positive cultures, as this is a direct affirmation to the presence of its Black educators. Additionally, with the added support, Black teachers will be given the tools and guidance necessary to foster academic growth and achievement among their students.

Induction Programs

It has also been found that well-executed induction programs may make a positive impact on teacher retention (Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017). Therefore, the second recommendation is for policies to be set in place to promote effective and sustaining new teacher induction programs, particularly within schools where the teachers will likely need greater support (i.e. urban schools). Ways that administration can provide these induction supports include clear and consistent communication from school leadership, mentorship programs, and seminars for beginning teachers. With these supports teachers will be less likely to leave schools via migration or attrition (Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017).

Mentorship

A particular focus of induction programs for Black teachers needs to be on more effective mentoring. As mentioned, school supports have been shown to have a positive association with Black teacher retention (Sun, 2018). One specific support that should be underscored since it has consistently been shown to encourage teacher retention is mentorship (Ghosh & Reio, 2013; Scandura & Williams, 2004; Sun, 2018). If beginning Black teachers were given access to consistent and holistic support from mentors, the accompanying positive outcomes include increased career success, commitment to teaching, job performance, and job satisfaction (Ghosh & Reio, 2013; Scandura & Williams, 2004).

By making the suggested low stakes adjustments, policy makers and school administrators have the capacity to greatly influence the success of Black educators. This is a necessary task, since ensuring the success of America's Black educators will in turn ensure the success of America's Black students. Even further, by ensuring the success of America's Black students, our education system will become one step closer to closing the achievement gap and establishing educational equity.

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