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Black Male School Administrators Unbridled: Strategies to Say What Needs to Be Said

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Abstract

Black males in educational leadership positions need strategies to remain authentic, make cultural connections to staff and students, and to be free to speak to stakeholders without fear of reprimand, retaliation, demotion, and other negative perceptions associated with American stereotypes. This opinion paper will share insight on the challenges coupled with being a Black male administrator in the American public school system and provide strategies for success.

Keywords: Black Men, Black Male Administrators, Black Male Persistence, Black Lives Matter, Urban Male Administrators, Inner City Administrators.

The lived experiences of Black male school leaders are critical in understanding the complex challenges faced in implementing educational reform (Smith, 2021). However, current practices still reflect stereotypical constructs of White, heterosexual males. This concern produces an environment that makes it challenging for Black males to say what needs to be said while working in school leadership. McCluney, Durkee, Smith, Robotham, & Lee (2021) posited that code switching is a strategy used by Black men as the temporary adjustment of behaviors to make others feel more comfortable in order to achieve desired outcomes. McCluney et al., (2021) further expounded that Black leaders benefit from perceptions of professionalism by hiding authentic self-expression. Smith (2021) suggested that Black male school leaders must learn to balance the roles of protectors and defenders of the entire school village and community as well as being representatives of culture, protectors of teachers and staff, and advocates for school learners. Therefore, it is imperative that Black male school administrators obtain strategies to use authentic unbridled speech to achieve success in the workplace without losing self-expression.

Black male school administrators are an anomaly that should not be ignored, downplayed, or pacified but rather explored for strategies of resilience in an environment where their speech is regulated. Borowski & Will (2021) stated that fewer than 7 percent of teachers are Black, and just 2 percent are Black men. The Black male attrition rates are especially high in the public school system. Black men are the minority education, and as result the perception and portrayal of Black men is one of fear and ignorance (Borowski & Will, 2021). As Black begin to pursue and occupy administrative roles, it is imperative that Black men in educational administration find different strategies to approach and speak with faculty and staff members in order to address concerns.

In many instances Black men bridle conversations and speech by code-switching (Greco, 2021) in the educational arena. Black men often code-switch because of fear of negative perceptions and stereotypes that are shared globally. As a result of unconscious bias held by many educators Smith (2021), Black male administrators are challenged in addressing the concerns of faculty and staff by saying what needs to be said. Some of these concerns include addressing toxic staff cultures, poor teacher attendance, teacher morale, low expectations for students, and lack of overall professionalism. Therefore, strategies are needed to assist Black men in administrative roles in appropriately addressing faculty and staff members without fear of retaliation, rebuke, or fear of losing employment.

The Perception of Black Male Administrators

Lack of cultural understanding can negatively impact student achievement. Black male administrators are challenged to perform in the work environment because of mainstream media exposure and perception of Black men. Often Black men are viewed as being intimidating (Smith, 2021). Other perceptions include stature, skin color, aggressive portrayals of Black men, laziness, lack of discipline, and violence or criminality. This stereotyping of Black men has been accepted in the educational arena and makes it challenging to lead.

Stereotyping involves making generalizations and are given based on behaviors and psychological attributes that are commonly held beliefs about a group historically rather than an individual (McCluney et al., 2021). Additional research suggests that racial stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination reflect the human tendencies to value certain configurations of phenotypic features differently. Unfortunately, many people can recall vivid examples of racial bias and its consequences even in the public school setting. Perhaps professional development for Black male administrators is necessary for success and retention.

Strategies to Say What Needs to be Said

Americas' demographics in the K-12 student population have drastically changed and there is an uncertainty about administrator and teacher preparedness to meet the needs of diverse students and faculty. It is imperative that both administrators and teachers obtain the skills necessary for sensitivity toward racial and cultural diversity to meet the challenges of working in an environment with a culturally and gender diverse population (McCluney et al., 2021). It is equally important that Black male administrators develop strategies to say what needs to be said in the workplace.

1. Maintain A Positive Attitude

Blanchet (2022) suggests that maintaining a positive attitude goes a long way in the school environment. Teachers are more inclined to gravitate toward you instead of running away. Black male administrators should always try to maintain a positive attitude and outlook in the workplace. Because of the perception of angry Black men, administrators of color should keep a positive demeanor that presents as being inviting.

2. Confidence & Resilience in Decision Making

Resilience is the ability to survive hardship and overcome perplexing and challenging circumstances. Black male administrators should be self-driven and highly motivated to excel in every avenue of the job. When you make a decision or statement, be steadfast and confident in your abilities (Plotinsky, 2022). Maintain the internal fortitude to stay the course and overcome all obstacles in spite of frowning faces and outside chatter. Say what needs to be said as long as it is in the best interest of kids.

3. Balance & Time Management

It is imperative that Black male administrators be mindful of maintaining a life-school-work balance. Life-school-work balance is needed to decrease burnout and attrition in addition to strong time management and organizational skills (Goode & Shinkle, 2020). Attainment of these attributes minimize the amount of back talk that will occur in the school environment. In

negative environments, there will always be people looking for opportunities to tear down what you have built. Balance and organizational skills breed confidence to do the job well.

4. Transparent Leadership

Black males that are able to lead with transparency and a willingness to be vulnerable and place trust in other building leaders will achieve success. Employees should feel they can trust their leader to be honest, consistent and fair while leading (Ergün, 2020). One of the strongest ways to achieve this goal is to identify good leaders in the building to share and support the vision of the leader. This approach can provide opportunities for leaders to intervene in smaller, more intimate settings to convey messages or correct negative thinking in the work environment.

5. Be Humble and Teachable

Being comfortable in one's own skin while being humble and teachable will bring an overall sense of approachability to the school (Wen, Guo, Hu, & Wan, 2022). Teachers like leaders that are humble and smart because it makes it seem as though they can provide input that will be heard.

About the Author

Dr. Jamel A. Gibson is a principal in Suffolk Public School District, Virginia. His research interests focus on reducing male aggression in the K-12 setting, educational leadership, equity & diversity, and Black male persistence in doctoral programs. He earned a PhD in Educational Management specializing in K-12 Education at Hampton University

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